

**Minister of Public Works
Ms S Sigcau
29 November 2001**

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Delta Training Certificate Ceremony

Master of Ceremonies
Distinguished guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

An occasion such as today avails us of the opportunity to reflect on our own as well on our country's development, esteem, contributions, aspirations and challenges.

This we need to do with perspective. Perspective means that we know that from the top of the mountain things will look different than from the bottom. On the other side there may be a beautiful valley, a spectacular view. But we first have to climb the mountain in order to personally experience and appreciate that scene.

We measure perspective by the height of our ideals, the depth of our sympathy, the extent of our convictions and the length of our patience. It means that all of us have our own perspective, and collectively, as a community or as a country, we also need to develop a particular perspective, more importantly on how we want to meet the future.

Whatever we do, we do within a particular context that gives us perspective - to study, to search for a job, to find a partner, to believe, to change our careers, to support a political party, to care for our environment and ultimately for any relationship that we enter into.

We have to know who we are, where we are coming from and where we want to go. It is within this context that we care. Care about ourselves, care about each other and care about the circumstances we are able to influence in order to ensure a better life.

Let us remind ourselves that what really counts are not our noble intentions only, but even more our actions, our efforts and contributions, our achievements and service.

Before 1994 we were made to believe, almost to a point of accepting, that it was natural for our people to be poor. Successive colonial governments including the apartheid National Party government which ruled for nearly 50 years, perpetuated poverty through racist laws and racially discriminatory social planning systems which compounded poverty and entrenched hopelessness. The consequences of apartheid colonialism and patriarchy burdened women with triple exploitation. Essentially women were oppressed as women, as blacks and as employees.

Women in South Africa and particularly black women have borne the brunt of discrimination not only on a racial basis but also in gender discrimination. There is growing evidence nationally and abroad that empowerment of women has a direct bearing to addressing issues of malnutrition in children, more social security at home and in society in general.

Since 1994 South Africans have shown commitment to reversing the hardship caused by apartheid. Today South Africa has become one of the beacons of Peace and Democracy in Africa and internationally where human rights and human dignity of all its people are protected and promoted.

Our presence here today is an indication of our unwavering collective resolve to uproot poverty and work towards a better life for all.

As government we have the will to improve quality of life. In you we have the power to do it successfully.

It is indeed an honour and a privilege for me to be part of this occasion. Today we are celebrating effort and dedication to improvement, we acknowledge the acquisition of new skills imparted to women to better equip them in their various roles.

Women are continuously involved in the reconstruction and development of our country. It is important that we recognise the full contribution of women, not only that done from public office, but the daily effort of all women to keep the house and family coherent, to excel in whatever occupation they have chosen - be it in an office, a

market stall, a hospital, a school, a construction site or any other vocation.

We are celebrating your advancement. I do want to believe that we are proud of all the women who have demonstrated their ability and in particular of those who are receiving certificates today.

Let us continue on this path of success to reach even greater heights, to ensure that technology and new information, networking and resource sharing are part of our operation modes. Let us acknowledge leading role models and strive for best practice.

Women throughout the world need to join hands in the improvement of their working life. As the greater mobility of working life and possible absence from home may render women more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS and related diseases, I appeal to you all to take an immediate initiative in promoting AIDS awareness programmes.

History beckons women to be in the forefront of the struggle against unemployment, lack of housing, inadequate social services and HIV/AIDS.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic affects women in very particular ways - and it means women should respond in a united manner to this crisis.

Some of the reasons why HIV/AIDS impacts particularly heavily on the lives of women include that:

- Women are at greater risk of HIV infection through sexual intercourse
- Women are more exposed to rape and sexual violence
- Women form the majority of South Africa's poor - poverty, poor nutrition and exposure to disease are major contributing factors in the development of AIDS related illnesses
- The transmission of the HIV virus from mother to child during pregnancy, at birth and through breast feeding have profound implications for the care, treatment and behaviour of pregnant women
- Women tend to shoulder greater responsibility for the care of children, the aged and sick within a family and a community. They are therefore being required to commit more of their energy, time and resources to care giving
- The under-representation of women in the economy means that women have less access to health care and other resources needed to treat AIDS related illnesses.

Some of the areas around which women should unite to fight HIV/AIDS include:

- The empowerment of women to take decisions about their own sexual health, by fighting gender inequality and educating women about the options available to them, including abstinence, faithfulness to a single partner and the use of male or female condoms
- Encouraging safer sexual practices in society. As the primary care givers to children, women can have a significant impact on sexual behaviour and awareness among young people
- Working with men to fight rape and sexual violence in society
- Encouraging people to take greater responsibility for their own health by going for voluntary HIV testing and counselling
- Working with government, NGOs and other sectors to address the transmission of HIV from mother to child. This includes education and awareness raising, the availability and proper administration of affordable drugs which can lower rates of HIV transmission, and a practical, integrated response to HIV transmission through breast feeding
- Promote the economic empowerment and education of South African women to address material inequality in society, access to health care and other resources - and generally enable women to assume greater control over their lives
- Form a visible, vocal and substantial part of a vigorous national programme of action to combat AIDS. South African women have before demonstrated their capacity to bring about dramatic change, not only for women, but for society as a whole. South African women need to unite and use their collective strength in leading the fight against AIDS.

Make sure that you inform yourselves of the various government programmes and support provided at different levels. Please allow me to ensure you of the full encouragement and support of the Ministry and

Department of Public Works.

In conclusion, let me address myself to the women contractors gathered here today. The horizons of women have widened. You women, have struggled to make it so. As women we hold a tremendous potential to make a difference to this country. For as someone once said "when you teach a man, you teach an individual; when you teach a woman you teach a family". Let me confidently add that, when you empower women you empowering a nation.

We are further challenged by other national developmental needs and accelerated delivery of public services. We will need to mobilise our wealth of resources - finance, technology, human and intellectual.

Ladies and gentlemen, in conclusion, allow me to thank you once again for this opportunity to share our progress. I would also like to assure you of our commitment to take on board new ideas and the experience and concerns of stakeholders as we move forward - in the spirit of Batho Pele. I invite you to share these with us and to find your own way to join in meeting the many daunting but exciting challenges so that we can together create a just, peaceful and prosperous society for all South Africans.

I invite you to pause for a moment and reflect on the historical significance of this day. South African freedom fighters recognised that the struggle for the emancipation of women is an integral part of national liberation. Let us spare no effort in ensuring that South African women will write a glorious chapter in the Millennium African Recovery Programme. The victory of women's emancipation is a triumph for all humanity.

Progressive democrats fought side by side with women for the emancipation of women. Women have been in the forefront of the struggle for national and social emancipation. Outstanding women such as Lillian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph, Ruth First, and many unsung heroines, have left an indelible imprint on our struggle for freedom. We all remember the words they sang on 9 August 1956 on the march against the then pass laws: "Wathint abafazi, wathint imbokodo. Uzokufa". Our presence here today signifies our resolve to emulate their service to the nation.

The post apartheid democratisation ushered in by the 27 April 1994 democratic breakthrough has invigorated the women's struggle for genuine equality.

Under the leadership of former president Mandela, women were included in the executive and legislative bodies to drive transformation. President Mbeki has deepened the transformation programme by involving even more women in his administration. Currently 30% of Members of Parliament; 24% of Cabinet Ministers and more than half of the Deputy Ministers are women. Furthermore, the Commission on Gender Equality, a Parliamentary Committee on the Quality of Life and Status of Women and the Office on the Status of Women in the Office of the President have been created.

Political equality has opened new frontiers of struggle. The struggle for gender equality and economic emancipation has become a focal point. Let us recall some of the milestones we have already accomplished:

Our democratic constitution espouses explicit values, which include:

- Human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms.
- Non-racialism and non-sexism.

We have various specific pieces of legislation that seek to give meaning to equality, with equality between women and men being identified as one of the key objectives. These include:

- The promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act, No.4 of 2000.
- The Employment Equity Act, No.55 of 1998.
- The Preferential Procurement Policy Act, No. 5 of 2000.
- The Commission on Gender Equality Act, No.39 of 1996.

Reporting on the recent mid-year Cabinet Lekgotla, President Mbeki indicated that he was pleased " ... that this review showed that progress has been made in all areas of work. Including rural development, urban renewal, water and sanitation, skills development, higher rates of economic growth, black economic empowerment, the restructuring of state assets and the African Renaissance."

"Having carried out a comprehensive review of work done to implement our programmes, the Cabinet lekgotla confirmed the obligation for the Government to persist in the struggle for a better life for all. It emphasized the need to ensure the success of our people's efforts to build a new South Africa that is nonracial, nonsexist, peaceful and prosperous. The Cabinet emphasized the need for us to build a spirit of initiative and self-reliance among our people." (Sowetan, Monday July 30 2001, p13.)

In conclusion, let me address myself to the women awarded with certificates today. The horizons of women have widened. Your struggles and sacrifices have not been in vain. As women we hold a tremendous potential to make a difference to this country. For as someone once said: "When you teach a man, you teach an individual; when you teach a woman you teach a family". Let me confidently add that, when you empower women you are empowering a nation.

The key to turning this tide of poverty around lies in education and economic empowerment, particularly for women. As long as women are neither well educated or trained, gender oppression and sexism will continue, and women will never be able to take control of their lives, especially their sexual lives.

We must therefore concentrate all our efforts in strengthening the position of women in the economy by creating sustainable income generating projects for women. We must also guarantee quality education for our girls. We must include life skills, HIV/AIDS education and gender awareness programmes in our school curriculum for both boys and girls.

The ANC is leading in the fight against the spread of HIV/AIDS.

To date, the ANC government has signed the following conventions:

- CEDAW (UN Convention) on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women.
- UN Convention on the rights of the child.
- International Convention on Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination
- International Convention on Civil and Political Rights and other Human Rights Conventions.

By applying the Affirmative Procurement Principles, Public Works ensures that women in communities actively participate in the construction of their own facilities. By involving those previously discriminated against, the black people, women and the disabled, we ensure that the community's needs and interests are taken into consideration. Not only are jobs created that supply income to households, but training further equips participants for future employment and the democratisation of the construction industry is embellished. All our contracts make provision for participation by women.

Our Community Based Public Works Programme targets mainly women, youth and the disabled for employment. We have on average achieved a 40% participation by women, 38 % by youth and 1% by the disabled. Some projects, of which the Clean and Green are prime examples, employ even more than 50% women. Participants are trained on construction related jobs as well as maintenance, management and operation of the facilities created to ensure sustainable economic activity and income generating assets.

Mapopi Agnes Ndimande was a member of the committee that organised the 1956 march. She was quoted in the Women's Week supplement of the Sowetan, saying: " (It) ... is a reminder that when women are united, they are like a solid rock".

Her voice is an echo of what Robert P Downes wrote in the book *Woman: Her Charm and Power*, published in October 1900: "How wonderful and irresistible is the power of woman! Fluent and changeful as the wave, she is yet mighty as the sea. Gentle and yielding as the air, she is yet potent and prevailing as the hurricane."

The contribution of women in all walks of life is today being recognised. According to the October Household Survey of 1995, overall, nearly two-thirds (63%) of men aged 15 years and above were classified as economically active, compared to under half (46%) of women. This gender difference was largely accounted for by those women who defined themselves or were defined by household respondents as housewives. Many of these women, and particularly African women in non-urban areas, may have been engaged in subsistence agriculture in addition to their household tasks, but the extent of these activities is unknown.

Celia Burleigh, quoted in the same book, *Woman: Her Charm and Power*, that I referred to earlier on, said: "I protest against the unfair distribution of the world's work, which can be only well done when every man and

woman is fitted to work, left free to choose the field in which to work, and condemned by public opinion if they refused to work."

For woman to achieve her rightful rights, education and access to information are essential. This must be passed on to her children, and applied in her daily life. She needs to be positive about her own influence on her environment, and be equipped to take informed decisions. It is in this respect that we work hand in hand with the media, print and electronic, to reach other women and to provide support on as wide a range as possible of women related issues.

Woman has the right to be proud of her contribution, at whichever level. She has the right to be respected for her person, her opinion and her intrinsic quality. It is up to all women to ensure recognition of this. Every day, every small victory in rising to an occasion, every obstacle overcome, every support given to a fellow woman, represents another step in the triumphant march towards the new millennium.

Challenges

Yes - we have challenges. Yes - there is a road ahead.

The past five years have shown us that paper guarantees are not enough. Legislated equality does not automatically translate into substantive equality. For this reason, the focus must move increasingly towards overcoming the structural barriers that are preventing the attainment of gender equality. Strategic interventions need to encompass:

- Developing strong policies and institutional mechanisms to give substance to gender equality
- Doing away with sexist attitudes and stereotypes
- Systematically tackling and redressing both the blatant and hidden forms of legal discrimination against women
- Recognising women's rights as human rights, especially violence against women
- Exposing and redressing the obstacles confronting women in the economic sector (government, labour and business)
- Ensuring quantitative and qualitative representation of women in decision making, at all possible levels and instances
- Upholding accountability to obligations for ensuring the full attainment of gender equality.

Let us reflect on these challenges. Let us ask ourselves as Joyce Piliso-Seroke, the Chairperson of the Commission on Gender Equality has asked:

" What would those gallant women who marched in 1956 think of us now? If they could confront the entire apartheid machinery with nothing more than their belief in justice, is it beyond us to tackle head on the scourges of violence against women and of AIDS? Are we really so helpless?"

I trust that you join me in response to her question by saying: "Yes, we can do it. Women, united in our strive for equality, peace and development, can and will make a significant contribution in the triumphant march towards the new millennium."

Society may be likened to an orchestra in which every instrument must take part if the music is to be complete. And I am strongly of the opinion that society has suffered greatly in the past because woman has not been permitted to take her proper place in it - an opinion that I trust you share.

To achieve more than we have achieved by now, my call on women is to stand together, work together, walk together, master the technological challenges collectively, share together and ensure a better life for all.

You have walked the road thus far in transforming towards meeting the socio-economic objectives set by government. Do not falter now - continue to make your positive contribution by attending to each and every task with the diligence required to excel.

As a team, we can only deliver when each participant adheres to his or her clearly defined responsibility and deadline. Make sure that you understand the full import of your individual role, because no task is too small to halt the process if it is not well executed. Pay attention to what your team members are expecting of you -

afford them the same courtesy in the work environment that you would expect for yourself. Our motto should be to be sure that we are doing the right thing at the right time, and that we do it right!

In this way we will not waste resources of either time, money or effort, and we will be sure to improve on our service delivery.

We should not allow prejudices, be that racial, sexual, religious or otherwise, to interfere in judgement, conduct, dedication or any act that would inhibit top performance.

It is important that we assess not only individual performance, but also that of teams working together, or sometimes competing against each other. We must ensure that we ourselves maintain a healthy working environment in which our best contributions may be collectively realised.

Representivity, diversity of culture, tradition and belief - all these are factors that should stimulate our minds, open up new solutions to existing problems - it is up to us to integrate these diversities and learn from each other, not to abstain or reject simply because we have not engaged with other opinions or views than that of our own group.

May I close by saying: Yes, we will respond. Yes we will accelerate delivery - and we will do this together, as a team, and serve our country as a team.

- To encourage self - sustainability
- To assist/facilitate the creation of jobs
- To participate in the economic transformation dialogue
- To fast track the growth of SME's
- To build capacity of surviving NGOs / CBOs
- To gather learning from existing programmes
- To link up with other funding institutions in similar development areas.
- To activate the participation of Government, Private sector & civil society in the execution of our mandate

CUTS:

On 17 October, South Africa will join the rest of the world in commemorating the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. In 1983 the United Nations, representing a family of nations of the world, set aside the day to remind the world that despite advances in technology and wealth creation, poverty remains a stumbling block in many parts of the world.

Poverty manifests itself in many ways. Significantly poverty is characterized by:

- Lack of choices
- Lack of access to services
- Lack of infrastructure
- Lack of resources to change those conditions responsible for poverty in the first place.

Even South Africa with its well documented economic prosperity under apartheid, systematically continued to breed ever-increasing pockets of poverty in the country.

Many rural areas and many urban black townships still experience these syndromes of poverty as listed above. Hunger, unemployment, illiteracy, homelessness, diseases including HIV/Aids and Tuberculosis persist to ravage our children, youth and the elderly who are the repositories of African culture and good moral values.

It was this stark reality of the other side of South African life that confronted our new government in 1994. It is the very same reality today that undermines our democracy and threatens our new-found freedoms.

One of the ways to fight poverty is to build infrastructure where none existed before. Our strategy includes bringing services, information and help closer to the people. As government, we are doing it. Others are dreaming it. Delivery for a better life remains deeply entrenched on our strategy of Integrated and Sustainable Rural Development.

It is indeed my pleasure and honour to share in today's certificate awarding ceremony with you.

Since the introduction of the Reconstruction and Development Programme in 1994, government in South Africa has made great strides in improving the livelihood of our citizens, in particular those previously disadvantaged. Many policies and programmes are currently being implemented in redress of the inequalities inherited from the apartheid regime, including the provision of basic infrastructure in an integrated development manner.

The construction industry, which we regard as a national asset, has a pivotal role to play in infrastructure delivery to meet the needs of ordinary South Africans.

The construction industry's development must be geared to rolling back the enormous legacy of an inadequate infrastructure, its inequitable distribution, and the underdevelopment of locally based physical and human resources.

At Public Works, we have specifically focused on the construction industry's contribution to job creation, women empowerment, skills development and elevation of contractor capacity. As a major procurer of goods and services in this industry, Public Works is ideally suited to influence policy and practice in construction.

The Community Based Public Works Programme (CBPWP) is a government initiative driven by the national Department of Public Works. The CBPWP is based on the principles of job creation, poverty alleviation and the creation of productive and sustainable community assets. The programme relies strongly on inter-governmental alliances as well as partnerships with local authorities, line function departments, non-governmental organisations and the private sector. This programme focuses on rural areas.

of clustered productive assets, apart from also building capacity in the planning and steering of the projects, as well as the operation and management of the completed infrastructure.

Training on the Ownership, Operation, Management and Maintenance of community assets is provided to enable communities, especially women, to sustain their operations.

I am glad to have been told of the Masakhisizwe Women Empowerment Trust's achievements to date. You have indeed indicated that local mobilisation of women power leads to successful job creation, training and construction of infrastructure. The challenge now remains to enhance the acquired skills, to extend the skills base and to operate and manage the facilities created in a productive manner.

Ladies and Gentlemen this initiative must be seen within the broader context of government overall strategy for equitable development of our country and its people. And like all other government's initiatives we still have a long way to go before we can say that we have broken the back of the legacy of apartheid

The reason for this is easy to understand.

The Sowetan of 30. July 2001. I quote "First of all, this legacy is deeply entrenched and pervasive. It is the result of a policy pursued over a long time deliberately to impoverish especially the African Majority. The result of all this was the creation of an African Majority that was landless, propertyless, had low educational skills level, was desperately poor and was victim to the many diseases of poverty." Women were more on the receiving side of this legacy

The construction industry has traditionally been a male domination industry. The association of General Contractor (AGC), the Building Industries Federation of South African (BIFSA) the South African Federation of Civil Engineering Contractors (SAFSEC) and the Black Construction Council (BCC) are all run almost exclusively by men. This situation is further compounded by the family and community held attitudes towards women's appropriate place in society. It is the way it always has been but this is not the way it should be. This is about to change.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the launch of the initiative is just the beginning of a difficult journey ahead of us. It is also a demonstration of our commitment to accelerate the participation of women in mainstream economic activities.

I therefore, call on all women to prove all the sceptics wrong, and also call on all key industry stakeholders to

support the initiative.

It is well worth mentioning that one of the empowerment beneficiaries in the Louis Trichardt concession contract is a group of South Africa women.

Generally speaking, the construction industry - which is white male dominated - needs to do more to empower women, emerging contractors and professionals.

Established industry can accelerate empowerment through genuine and sustainable joint ventures with emerging black business that promote win-win benefits. Emerging black business should benefit from skill and technology transfer as well as access to finance. Established business benefits from exposure and access to untapped markets and from the entrepreneurial potential of those black and women owned businesses that are emerging despite the odds.

CONCLUSION

As an industry, the construction industry is rating the third highest in the incidence of HIV/Aids in South Africa - indeed a challenge to our women to contribute towards improved health and safety within this industry.

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