

OPPORTUNITIES & INVESTMENTS FOR WOMEN

Address Mr. Neo Masithela

Venue: Vulamasango High School

Date: 06 July 2008

Programme Director

Chairperson of Agriculture, Safety and Security

In the Legislature

Me Suzan Mnumzana, and other

Members of the Executive Council present here

Members of the Legislature

Honoured Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Programme Director, I should start by saying I am honored to have been invited to address not just women but women who are striving so hard to access opportunities, Women who understand exactly what they want in their lives. Women who plan today so that tomorrow they are in a position to execute what they have planned.

I take my hat off to every woman sitting here today, because you have the courage to knock from door to door, to say, "How can I be of service to you today so that tomorrow I can put bread on the table for my children?" How can you begin to respond to the emerging challenges, posed by the rocketing costs of food and fuel?

Ladies and Gentlemen, you will agree with me when I say life has become unbearably expensive for the ordinary men and women. South Africans will soon be paying on average 27.5% more for their electricity bills. Last Wednesday, fuel prices have just gone through the roof, hitting the most vulnerable citizens of the country, and food prices on the shelves are just a nightmare.

Today I am addressing people who can advise me better on how much they spend for a 2liter of a cooking oil / or a 2kg of a washing powder.

Programme Director, the African National Congress, at its 52nd National Conference held in December 2007 in Polokwane, noted that:

“Gender equality must be a critical ingredient and important outcome of all our programmes of rural development, land reform and agrarian change. Correcting the injustices of the past requires that women increasingly become the beneficiaries and decision-makers in respect of strategies to overcome poverty in rural areas”.

It is significant to mention that this function coincides with the national conference for the ANCWL, which started four days ago here in Mangaung. As we are gathered here to deliberate on how we can better our lives and those of our people, we salute all women from all corners of our beloved country, who have left the comfort of their homes, who have joined not only their hands together but their minds as well, to ensure that no stone is left unturned in addressing transformation of our society, economic development, safety and security and poverty eradication.

Honoured guests, there is a view that women are the driving force of the African Economy. Yet as true as it may be, it remains a daunting challenge that despite the fact that women-owned enterprises are increasing steadily, women remain under-represented in formal sector enterprises and are more concentrated in micro enterprises and the informal sector.

However, there are also encouraging stories of women who are moving away from traditional hawking into more value-adding business opportunities, such as printing, travel agencies and property development, construction, mining as well as agricultural industry. I know that the next question will be “ Where do we get financial or other assistance to kick start those businesses?”

Programme Director, many surveys, conducted by, among others, GCIS, FinScope and Labour Force, widely acknowledge that Black Women's use of financial services is dominated by informal savings, such as funeral and burial schemes, with little or else very expensive credit reaching their enterprises. Research has also shown that women have better credit repayment records than men, yet find it harder to raise finance than men.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the FSGDS has identified tourism as uniquely positioned to create unlimited opportunities for SMMEs, which would assist in addressing challenges faced by the second economy.

Programme Director, allow us to share with women gathered here today that our department has presented women and other groups with opportunities to venture in tourism businesses like to mention few Guest houses, B&B, Tour guides, accommodation and crafting. Training and proper guidance has also been provided to build capacity and maintain sustainability. The Free State has identified different markets in regions such the Middle East, Scandinavian countries, US and UK and regularly we take missions in collaboration with FDC and DTI to exchange ideas. The purpose of these missions is to afford women with a platform to learn more about international markets. Over and above that, the department is on regular basis holding export development workshops which are intended to help women understand how the export market operates.

Last year my department had presented 20 SMME's, mostly women from the Free State, with a lifetime opportunity to participate in the Accenta Trade Fair in Belgium. Their role was to exhibit and showcase their products to international market.

It is important for women to register on our database so that their project can be identified when we are taking these missions. The department advertises annually on the media for any export ready products businesses to register on our database to be identified. Visitations or follow up phone calls are done to those businesses that are already on the data base to check if there are any changes.

I am very proud today to announce that Khanya Creations, a jewellery manufacturing company based in Virginia, has secured an order from a foreign company as a result of their participation in the Accenta Trade Fair.

Programme Director, I would be failing in my duties by talking about the economy without drawing your attention to the results of the newly released Free State Socio-economic review which paints a worrying picture that indicates a growing rate of unemployment and the low levels of economic growth. These results simply call upon us to take matters into our own hands to change the status quo.

Ladies and Gentlemen, lots of business opportunities are being lined up in our beautiful province during October month. These include Annual SMME Week which coincides with the Asia Expo and Investment Conference 2008, to be hosted by the Free State, and the Premier's Business Awards which is intended to recognize and acknowledge excellence in business processes. Asia Expo is a platform for the promotion of trade, tourism and cultural between South Africa, Middle East and Asia companies and is intended to facilitate the development of import and export investment opportunities between participating companies.

The targeted potential investors emerge from sectors as agro-processing, capital goods, real estate, tourism product development, infrastructure development, information and communications technologies, business process outsourcing and off shoring, bio fuels and renewable energy, jewellery, beneficiation, petrochemicals amongst others to participate in the event. All these events are primarily focused on the development and promotion of small enterprises in the province, and all efforts will be made to ensure that SMMEs from district and local municipalities are given platforms to exhibit their products to international consumers.

On the trade missions that I have been on and in the trade agreements that South Africa has signed with many countries, I have observed that there are excellent opportunities that our entrepreneurs can tap into.

Ladies, I challenge you, and say what are you waiting for? This is the right time, for you to get the right information from the right people". Officials in my department are working around the clock to make it possible for you to take full advantage of these opportunities. It is your right, you deserve it. Tell the person sitting just next to you that If you can I can.

The Free State Development Corporation (FDC) has embarked on SMME workshops in all five districts.

The purpose of these workshops is to identify and assist businesses whose plans are viable, through the Enablis Business Plan Competition. Enablis is a non-profit organization that aims to empower entrepreneurs through a combination of networking, funding, business development services and business support that is provided to its members. You are allowed to enter the competition as an individual, or as a group of up to three people. You do not have to have a registered business or company to enter. However, only Free State residents can enter this provincial competition and I am certain that our dedicated FDC staff would be very pleased to give more information regarding this competition. The winners will be fast-tracked through the FDC's funding processes for business loans to set up their businesses.

Honoured guests, Women of Motheo have already benefited from this workshop as it has started here in Bloemfontein and later extended to the other districts on dates advertised in the media.

Still on the opportunities offered by FDC, I will be failing in my duties if I don't remind women gathered here that FDC has entered into a partnership with Umsobomvu Youth Fund to enhance access to funding for the youth and women to enable them to join the mainstream economy.

On the 24 June 2008, my department in collaboration with Mangaung Municipality and DTI hosted a Free State Young Women Entrepreneurship workshop. The DTI national draft Strategic Framework on Gender Women's Economic Empowerment proposed the establishment of the Isivande Women's Fund (IWF) as one major intervention in

addressing the marginalization of women in business and other previously disadvantaged. On that occasion one of the speakers from DTI addressed Free State women on the establishment of this Fund (IWF). It is one attempt to improve women's access to formal finance in the absence of personal savings and gender bias existing institutions.

Let me call upon women gathered here today that, they should grab these opportunities with both hands, banish those negative thoughts that it is not meant for you hence the Information Sharing Workshops on the fund have been conducted in all the provinces.

I must therefore thank everyone involved in this process for the support and enthusiastic encouragement to the realization of this initiative.

Ladies and gentlemen, government has established a support framework to assist businesses to take advantage of the many opportunities that I have mentioned to you today in our growing and dynamic economy.

We have among others identified the following economic drivers to help us achieve what we have set for ourselves;

- Harrismith Transport Logistic
- Business Outsourcing and Off shoring
- Chemical down streaming.
- N8 Development Corridor
- Commercialization of resorts
- Opportunities in the gaming industry
- Opportunities in waste management
- Film industry
- Opportunities presented by 2010 FIFA world cup

Just to signal our commitment to empowerment of SMME's in the province, the Executive Council has laid down a policy directing that 70% of state procurement should go to SMME's in the Free State. It is also important to highlight the fact that the Free State government has identified 15 most procured goods in the province, so it is upon

women to make sure that they approach government departments to familiarize themselves with those identified goods.

Allow me therefore, Programme Director, to challenge women to roll up their sleeves and aggressively continue to occupy sectors which were previously dominated by male.

The Department of Agriculture is running an annual programme of the “**Female Farmer of the Year**” in each province, to promote active participation of women in commercial agriculture. In this programme we have seen small producers who are producing poultry, vegetables and other livelihood crops, we have seen women pushing wheelbarrows full of vegetables to be sold in our communities.

We need more women to come into this sector to fight poverty, hunger and unemployment

In conclusion, I wish to make use of this platform to invite everyone sitting here to continue to fight against HIV/AIDS. The abuse of women and children, still remains a daunting challenge facing our country. Let us continue to report any form of abuse crime at our nearest SAPS.

Let us all remember that the International Africa day theme for this year is “ **Investing in Women and Girls Development**”, and that the South African theme for the same celebration is titled “**WAR AGAINST POVERTY:**

Building a partnership for investing in Women and Girls to eradicate Poverty”.

Bearing this in mind, the many challenges facing women in present-day South Africa can be overcome if they are approached with the same commitment as displayed by women during the struggle for freedom.

I thank you