



**TECHNOLOGY FOR WOMEN IN BUSINESS  
WELCOME ADDRESS BY MEC MXOLISI DUKWANA  
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VENUE: PHILIP SANDARES RESORT**

Deputy Minister,  
Delegates to the Seminar  
Distinguished Guests  
Ladies and Gentlemen  
Officials of the dti and DETEA  
Members of the media present

Deputy Minister it is just few days ago, to be precise it is 15 days ago when we welcomed you in the Free State once again bringing much needed services to the people of South Africa. On that occasion you brought a message of encouragement to the often overlooked section of this business fraternity, the SMME. Your central message was that in everything we do, we should “propel SMME support as an engine for growth and employment”.

Today your focus is on yet another vulnerable section of our society, women. This time your call to women enterprises is to ‘use technology to create sustainable enterprises for job creation’. Consistent message throughout remains ‘job creation and employment’ which are the pillars of creating sustainable livelihoods in our country

There is growing voice in the South African society that after seventeen years of democracy, South Africa should not be preoccupied with what they term ‘protection and advancement of women’. Whilst on face value, the cynics might be right, the reality is that more successful women in business is not a feminist issue so much as it is a business imperative.

The establishment of Technology Women in Business (TWIVB) in 1998 was yet another bold step by the ANC led government to ensure that women entrepreneurs are linked with relevant science and technology business solutions that will encourage their business activities to contribute towards the South African broader economic objectives, which are about creating jobs, growing the South African economy and reducing inequalities. This includes exposing them to both local and international best practices that will assist them to diversify and modify their products and services by using cutting edge technology to meet ever-changing business demands.

Available body of research indicates that there are very few women in senior management roles or owning successful businesses in all industries. Yet the same studies indicate that gender diversity is good for business. What we have not come to terms with as South Africans is that women entrepreneurs are a formidable force and a special ingredient in South African business landscape. Programme Director, women are a special breed and are critical to business success as they possess multitasking and nurturing skills.

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It is for this purpose that Government is doing all in its power to make sure that women are recognised for the power house they are by implementing policies that make companies, private or government recognises the potential of women. According to Business Women`s Association of South African Women in Leadership Census 2011, of the 25 largest JSE-listed companies by market capitalisation, only 2 companies have 25% or more director positions held by women. This show that we still have much to do as South Africans to change the way we think and do things so that we can have impact on this kind of situations.

Turning to use of technology in women business, there is no arguing that women posses inherent flair for use of technology in their everyday life. That being the case, what begs the question is why are women not increasingly using technology to create competitive edge for their businesses? Most entrepreneurs, particularly women have all the technical skills and experience needed to make their companies successful but they fail to appreciate that success will not just come on its own. Women have to embrace the use of modern technology and success will be inevitable.

There are a growing number of women entrepreneurs in construction, transport, hospitality, retail and property who could be benefiting as much as their counterparts in communication and knowledge management for example. Fear of the unknown and affinity to things we are comfortable of, remain the barriers in engaging technology and innovation in our businesses.

Programme Director there is a wide open new mobile world ready for use out there and people do not realize that. Technological applications particularly mobile applications have taken Africa by storm. As mobile phone penetration rates increase, technologist and software developers are scrambling to provide bigger and better services to the ever growing consumer base.

There is undoubtedly a very ambitious generation coming up. If they can take advantage of the mobile phone, we can experience unprecedented innovation in business that can translate into success.

Whilst African could be at the early stages of technology, it does have competitive advantage compared to many countries in the world on mobile applications. Given that every one of the people in here has one or two cell phones, there is no reason why people cannot leverage sms which is already popular as a means of advertising and communication for their businesses.

It is indeed a matter of time and a little effort of having few success stories and seeing some of these ideas flourish before we can really say technology is a critical enabler for successful business in our country.

Information Communication Technology has been identified as the key economic driver by the Free State Provincial Government, hence the launch of a Regional Innovation Centre in partnership with Central University of Technology, which will be a platform for strategic thinking and planning to put forward solutions to our development challenges.

There are also other government programmes that provincial government is looking at to empower the people of the Free State in general and women in particular. These include, Broadband roll out, Digital migration roll out and E-skills drive. In the nearest future we will make announcements on how these opportunities can benefit Free State entrepreneurs.

Since government is introducing programmes to empower women, the only thing that can hinder their progress is lack of participation by women in these programmes and their inability to think creatively.

Whilst government is doing its part to support women, it is also the responsibility of other successful women/ companies to provide guidance to the upcoming ones. A woman who is excellent at sewing will not be necessarily great at running her own company. She needs to be taught business basic and managerial skills, fostering a transfer of knowledge, coaching and mentorship to move someone from hands on operator to a successful business owner.

With conferences like this one, the government can identify the technological needs of women in business; linking women in business with technology service providers; identifying suitable educators in the field of science and technology; and exposing women to international trends in science and technology.

Women need to stop undermining their capabilities. No matter how small their idea is, if nurtured well, great things can come of it. Many women thought when talking about TWIB, it is all about big technology ideas or something they can never think about. What they do not get is every big idea today or every successful company today started small. All we need to do is to believe in ourselves and our ideas and be proud South Africans.

I therefore take this opportunity to welcome everyone of you here and wish you productive and successful deliberations. Please feel at home as you center yourself in the heart of South Africa, the Free State.

**I THANK YOU.**