

**Women Celebrating a Decade of Freedom on the Path to total Emancipation:
Women, Land and Water
Ms BP Sonjica, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry participating in Women's
Debate
Parliament
17 August 2004**

Madam Speaker
Colleagues and Comrades

The significance of this debate today, Madam Speaker, is that it is a celebration of a successful first 10 years of the ANC-led democratic rule in South Africa. Again, as we recount the achievements of the past 10 years we salute the women of this country for their countless contribution to the country's development and well-being; for achievements in business and sport; and for the quiet, behind-the-scenes role they play every day, as workers, as wives and as mothers.

Kule nyanga yamakhosikazi yomnyaka weshumi sixhamla inkululelo, kumele sikhangele umgama esele siwuhambile singurhulumente we democracy kwinkalo zonke ezichaphazela ubomi babantu kwilizwe lethu. Nanjengoko zonke ezinkalo zobomi zazityhefwe yinkqubo ye apartheid. Eankile yayo yayilucalucalulo ngokwebala, itheth' ukuthi ke loonto abantu ababelugcudwana lobandlululo babanamalungelo abhetele kunabantwana bomthonyama. Isihloko sam ke sizakugxininisa kumcimbi wamanzi nomhlaba ezisesanzulwini sobutyebi kweli lizwe lethu nakwi lizwekazi laseAfrika. Kodwa ke phambi kokuba ndigene kuloo mba mandikhe ndilande imvelaphi ekhokelele kwimeko sentlupheko ezihlula ubutyebi belizwe lethu ntlandlu mbini – le nto umongameli athi yiFrist and Second economy. Ndivumeleni ke ndiwuzobe lo mfanekiso ngesilungu.

[Translation]

As we celebrate ten years of freedom, we evaluate progress made in various aspects of life in our country. I would like to do this in the context of women having access to Land and Water - the two key productive natural resources. But before I do so I would like to sketch the scenario before 1994.

The 1913 Land Act as we all know, dispossessed the indigenous people of their major capital asset, the land – a situation whose consequences the present government is dealing with to date. Realising the importance of water to ensure productivity of the land, the colonial powers instituted the Water law in 1936, which gave Water rights to land owners – what was known as the riparian rights.

This effectively meant that while the people were tilling the land for the enrichment of the minority colonists, they had to get permission to use water for their own consumption and obviously they would not be getting much from the harvest they toiled for which was the produce of the land which originally belonged to them.

The frustration of losing agricultural land can be understood in the following expression by Tsitsi Dangaremba, a Zimbabwean woman writer who says about land dispossession – *“wizards well versed in treachery and black magic came from the South and forced the people from the land. On donkey, on foot, on horse, on ox-cart the people looked for the place to live. But the wizards were avaricious and grasping; there was less and less land for the people. At last the people came upon the grey sandy soil of the homestead, so stony and barren that the wizards would not use it”.*

President Mkapa, expressing the same frustration only yesterday at the SADC summit in Mauritius, he said, and I quote –

“let the outside world understand that to us Africans land is much more than a means of production - we are spiritually anchored in the lands of our ancestors”.

The situation I have described above was a double-edged sword for women who suffered both class and gender discrimination. Indeed they suffered as a consequence of the poverty of blackness on one and the weight of womanhood on the other.

The legacy that the ANC government found as a consequence of these discriminatory laws, mainly the Land Act of 1913 and the Water Act of 1936 impoverished women the most. Hence they are the majority of those who are affected by the asset capital poverty. On the other hand lack of access to clean water, which is a major tool for protecting human capital, subjected women to social asset poverty.

In a nutshell, Madam Speaker, this was the situation when the ANC took over governance in this country in 1994.

At the time of taking over government, the ANC had been ready to govern. In 1955 the Freedom Charter already outlined a broad policy framework, which was the basis for taking our country forward. At the core of the Freedom Charter is the element of non-sexism and non-racialism.

The Reconstruction and Development Programme that followed, provided some practical steps towards achieving a non-sexist and a non-racial South Africa through the principle of nation building and building the economy through redistribution. As the ANC, we declared that 30% of agricultural land would be given back to previously disadvantaged communities. This was a double-benefit for the black women of this country as it addressed their discrimination along class and gender lines.

These principles were later integrated into the new Constitution and were in the last ten years translated into a legislative framework that is deliberately biased to women and their rights.

Today we have the Land Restitution Act and all other laws that create an enabling environment. Of about eight hundred pieces of legislation since the birth of democracy in 1994 the National Water Act and the Land Restitution Act are some of those have been instrumental in facilitating gender mainstreaming of our socio-economic development programmes especially in the rural areas.

We have programmes such as Female Farmers under which the project that Minister is launching in Ngadini today, which is benefiting about twelve families, the majority of which are headed by women and these families get about 124 hectares. The Department of Water Affairs and Forestry also has a Poor Resource Farmers support programme from which women can benefit. This programme will help to ensure that women have access to water for their crop.

Madam Speaker, one of the most important features in the achievements of the first decade of democracy is that we have supplied water to about 10 million people of our country and this is a fact known the world over. The beneficiaries have mainly been women and girls who both have to walk long distances to carry water. It is also women who always care for children and the aged who fall ill as a result of using impure water.

Madam Speaker, we have also that even the poorest members of our society have access to basic services through the provision of free basic water and electricity.

I would want to mention one woman who understands fully the inter-relatedness between water and soil for poverty alleviation, MaTshepo Khumbane. She trains women in efficient water use, crop production and business management. MaTshepo's integrated approach to the utilisation of land for poverty alleviation and wealth creation is a good and practical model for the realisation of government's integrated approach to socio-economic development.

In the area of forestry, which has previously been predominantly male and pale, about 60% of the beneficiaries of the out growers' scheme in Northern KwaZulu-Natal have been women.

As we celebrate 10 years of women's contribution to democracy, we also take this as an opportunity to identify the gaps and challenges that will feed into the future programmes of our service delivery that will be understood in the context of –

- The targets for the current financial year as reflected in the State of the Nation Address to Parliament this year;
- Our own 2014 vision as South Africans, and
- Our contribution to the Millennium Development Goals.

Somlomo, noxa sele umde umgama esiwuhambileyo ukuphucula intlalo yabantu nokuvula amathuba, ndifuna ukukhumbuza le ndlu ukuba sisenoxanduvaolukhulu singoomama kwanoootata. Sisenoxanduva lokuqinisekisa okokuba -

- uluntu ingakumbi omama bayazifumana iinkcukacha ngeenkonzo zikarhulumente
- siyaqhubekeke ngeemfundiso ngamalungelo omama ingakumbi kumakhosikazi asemaphandleni kwaye nokubakhuthaza ukuba bawalwele amalungelo abo ngalo lonke ixesha.
- Siwakhuthaze amakhosikazi asebenzisane ukuze siyilwe iphele qgibelele indlala

Konke oku kuzakuqinisekisa ukuba indlala siyayigweba saye siqinisekisa ukuba amakhosikazi jikelele ayaxhamla kubutyebi belizwe lethu.

[Translation]

Madam Speaker, although an enabling environment has been created and opportunities made available, all of us, men and women, have a challenge of –

- Making information accessible to women
- Educating especially rural women about their rights, and encouraging them to fight for their socio-economic rights to
- Continuing with a bias towards women in general and rural women in particular
- Encourage women to form cooperatives for sustainable development
- Encourage women to use water for food security.

All the above could contribute towards poverty alleviation and the improvement of the second economy.

I would like to urge the women to put into use the words of the President during his address at the National Women's event at Witbank when he said "do not be afraid to stand up against the strongest for the right thing".

Amakhosikazi anamandla okuguqula nayiphi na imeko. Kwaye anawo namalungelo aze nenkululeko.

In conclusion, I wish to read the following drawn from the words of women at a women's Resource Access Programme (RAP) workshop in India –

Land is might, land is right
Land is water, land is shelter
Land is dignity, land is honour
Land is our mother, let us promise each other
That it will not be for barter,
Let us unite to save it from exploiters.
Women need forests; women need water,
Access to education and to power,
Freedom from bondage
Freedom from hunger,
Let us bring them "the honour"
Land to women is actually revolution,
As it saves children from malnutrition

And it makes families function.

(Source: International Land Coalition)

I Thank you.