

**KEY-NOTE ADDRESS BY MINISTER OF WATER AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS, MRS EDNA MOLEWA, AT THE WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATIONS WITH THE BAKWENA BA MOGOPA AT BETHANIE, BRITS**

**08 August 2013**

**His Excellency, Kgosisigolo TRM Mamogale**

**Mmakgosi KC Mamogale**

**Dikgosana and the entire Kgoro ya Bakwena**

**Distinguished guests**

**Ladies and gentlemen**

I want to thank Kgosisigolo and Mmakgosi, and indeed all of you present here for inviting me to be with you to celebrate this important day on the calendar of our country. It is indeed an honour for me to be standing here today to share my thoughts of this occasion with you.

The month of August was adopted by government as Women's Month since the inception of our democracy, to pay tribute to and honour the participants of the 09 August 1956 women's march to the Union Buildings. In addition, 09 August was declared as an annual public holiday. But more importantly, through women's month we commemorate women as equal partners in the struggle for a non-sexist South Africa. We also celebrate the strides that government has made since the dawn of democracy in

empowering South African women in the political, public, educational and many other spheres.

The theme for this year is: **“A centenary of working towards sustainable women empowerment and gender equality”**. Our celebrations across the country focus on things such as constitutional democracy where gender equality is a constitutional imperative; the advancement of women in our society; and the respect of basic human rights and our Constitution. The National Celebration will take place at Thulamahashe Stadium, in Bushbuckridge, Mpumalanga tomorrow and I’m happy we have this event today because I must be at the national event tomorrow.

Ladies and gentlemen, active involvement of grassroots community members in finding sustainable solutions to women empowerment is crucial. However, it is necessary to build a common understanding, among local interest groups, of the current state of women empowerment first. It is for this reason that I congratulate Kgosigolo and Mmakgosi and all your communities for embarking on the initiative of not only empowering your people but for targeting women, among others, as primary beneficiaries of your programmes.

I must admit right from the onset that, Kgosigolo, I am aware that you are overseeing a difficult territory that spreads across three District Municipalities and three Local Municipalities which experiences some water challenges. I am also aware that your community is heavily reliant upon

agricultural land which you own, manage, use and control. This therefore means your prime activities as a community are agriculture and mining. Both these activities require adequate water supply and effective and efficient support from several of our environmental programmes. Therefore, government must ensure that you get support in both these areas and we will work with you to ensure this support is availed.

Research across the world reveals that when women are empowered and can claim their rights and access to land, leadership, opportunities and choices, economies grow, food security is enhanced and prospects are improved for current and future generations.

Women are central to the development of rural areas and to national economies. Often working longer hours than men, rural women are also the caregivers who look after children, the elderly, and the sick. In addition, many rural women are small business entrepreneurs and investors who dedicate most of their earnings to the well-being of their families and societies.

Despite some progress, most rural women and girls are still struggling. They typically face more obstacles than men in gaining access to public services, social protection, decent employment opportunities and markets and other institutions.

Research suggests that if women had the same access to resources as men, they could increase production drastically. In our own country, we have realized, and we have proof, that when women are empowered,

economically and socially, they become leaders and agents of change for economic growth, social progress and sustainable development.

The rate of unemployment in South Africa is 25%. More worrying is that at least 28,3% of women in South Africa are unemployed compared to 23,4% of men, meaning employment opportunities still favour men in our country, albeit slightly. But statistics shows that women live longer than men which indeed tell us that we must empower women enough to be able to reduce their hardships in their lifetime.

This is the reason, therefore, that gender equality and rural women's empowerment are central to the efforts our government is making to create a better life for all. Our government works with communities and other partners to better the lives of rural populations. With support such as the one we are witnessing in this community, several communities could benefit from our collective efforts.

Research conducted by the United Nations suggests that there are many practical steps that can reduce inequalities based on gender, inequalities that constrain the potential to reduce poverty and achieve high levels of well-being in societies around the world. There are also many positive actions that can be taken to empower women. Because gender inequality is deeply rooted in entrenched attitudes, societal institutions, and market forces, political commitment at the highest international and national levels is essential to institute the policies that can trigger social change and to

allocate the resources necessary to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment.

A focus on poor women is justified for several reasons. Gender inequalities exist among the rich and the poor, but they tend to be greater among the poor, especially for inequalities in capabilities and opportunities. Moreover, the wellbeing and survival of poor households depend on the productive and reproductive contributions of their female members. Also, an increasing number of poor households are headed or maintained by women. A focus on poor women is therefore central to reducing poverty.

Investing in the health, education, safety, and economic well-being of adolescents, especially adolescent girls, must also be a priority. Adolescence is a formative period between childhood and adulthood. It is a time when interventions can dramatically alter subsequent life outcomes.

Women's work, both paid and unpaid, is critical to the survival and security of poor households and an important route through which households escape poverty. Moreover, paid employment is critical to women's empowerment. In settings where women's mobility is restricted, increased employment opportunities can improve women's mobility and enable women to seek and access reproductive health care. It can also expose them to new ideas and knowledge and broaden the community with which they engage.

Gender equality and women's empowerment have been at the core of our government's efforts to reduce rural poverty and improve the lives of our people, especially in rural areas since the inception of democracy in our country in 1994.

I am aware of the scarcity of water in many of your communities and I appreciate the efforts you have been making to resolve the problem. Through the Department of Water Affairs and the Water Boards operating in these areas, we must strive for speedy resolve to this challenge and I am encouraged by the Local Municipalities which have already come with some initiatives to this effect. I want to commit my department to work hand in glove with you and the Municipalities to ensure that you have adequate, clean and portable water. We all know that when there is a challenge of water, it is women who will suffer most and we must react to this challenge knowing very well that it is part of empowering our women by relieving them of the burden of having to struggle to have access to water. We are also mindful that once you have access to water, many other opportunities will avail themselves to you and you will definitely be better off than now.

Through the Department of Environmental Affairs, we also offer a variety of opportunities which you, as a community, can tap in and uplift yourselves. We have programmes that are aimed at improving the socio-economic benefits within the environmental sector by creating work opportunities at our targeted designated groups such women, youth and people living with

disabilities. We have an amount of R2.39 billion from the Expanded Public Works Programme for our Environmental Programmes in this financial year alone. At the same time, we aim to spend over R1.13 billion on the Working for Water and associated programmes, whilst Working on Fire has R406 million. We also have R817 million for the Environmental Protection and Infrastructure Programme which could assist many communities like yours to reduce poverty.

Lastly, ladies and gentlemen, I will be failing in my duty if I don't raise with you the importance of combating violence against girls and women. Violence against women has serious health and development impacts and is a gross violation of women's rights. Its continued existence is thus fundamentally inconsistent with our democratic principles and development goals. However, violence against women is prevalent in epidemic proportions in many countries around the world. In our country we know we have to deal with intimate partner violence and sexual violence or abuse by nonrelatives or strangers within the wider community. Yet, in the past decade evidence has shown that violence against women is an important development constraint.

Once more I want to thank you for inviting me to this occasion and I wish you well in all your endeavours.

I thank you