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Internet Article

Women must dominate water industry - Minister Mokonyane

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The Minister of Water and Sanitation, Nomvula Mokonyane, has called for a radical transformation of the water industry through the empowerment of women owned companies. Time for women to be associated with carrying buckets to fetch water for their families was over.

Addressing about 1000 delegates at the Women in Water Consultative Conference, in Pretoria yesterday, Mokonyane said it was about time that the government empowered women by accelerating the growth and success of entrepreneurial companies through an array of business support resources and services.

She said her department was mooting the idea of building a dam in South Africa that would be designed, managed and completed by women owned companies. None of the existing dams were built by women yet they were in the forefront of water users, she said.

Mokonyane said the move to build the dam would serve as a game changer to the monopoly of men-owned companies that have dominated the construction of dams for many years.

The envisaged construction of the dam would include but not be limited to physical space, capital coaching, common services and networking connections.

Minister Mokonyane convened the one day conference to review the role of women in effective and equitable management of this scarce resource through being involved in making collective decisions, developing technologies and benefitting as water entrepreneurs.

"In my view for far too long we have been talking about women empowerment and doing very little to end the male monopoly in economic development. For far too long women are the face of poverty and inequality in this country. We must move away from the notion of women carrying buckets of water from the rivers," Mokonyane said.

The objective of the women empowerment programme is to identify and address the key gaps between the current scenario and expected future scenario for the participation of women owned businesses in the water sector. The programme would among others, target women-owned companies in science and engineering, innovation, construction, local community initiatives and other women owned businesses based on merit.

At community level, those doing the hard work to transport, re-route, or clean water resources were usually women, while management and distribution decision-making was often within the male sphere of influence.

Mokonyane said the beneficiaries of this programme can be categorised into three, namely:

*Beginners (women-owned enterprises in business however with no sustainable growth)
Intermediates (women-owned enterprises in business however not as established as big enterprises)
Established women-owned enterprises at intermediate stages that function as*



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fully-fledged businesses but that require additional help to take their business to the next level of operation and compete nationally and globally.

The Minister also announced that her department would launch a three-year women in water programme that comprised mentorship, women in water business incubator and a Women in Water Forum

She introduced to the delegate four women who own a successful construction company that is involved in building houses in Gauteng and other provinces. The women were groomed by her during her days as the MEC for Housing in Gauteng

The consultative conference was chaired by Deputy Minister Pam Tshwete who echoed the Minister's call for women to "break the monopoly of men" in the water industry.

"This is a clarion call to women to stand up and be counted in the water industry. Our role should not be that of carry heavy buckets of water anymore. We refuse to stand by with folded arms while men are enriching themselves with water projects," said the Deputy Minister.

By Themba Khumalo