

ADDRESS BY THE MEC FOR HUMAN SETTLEMENTS &

PUBLIC WORKS

MS MAGGIE GOVENDER AT THE CIDB

WOMEN IN CONSTRUCTION EXCELLENCE AWARDS

31 JULY 2009

- Programme Directors;
- His Worship Deputy Mayor of EtheKwini Municipality-Councilor Logie Naidoo;
- CIDB Executive Board Member-Mr Gavin Strydom;
- Chief Executive, CIBD- Mr Ronnie Khoza;
- SAWIC Exco Member-Ms Molly Ntsaluba;
- Leaders in government and business; and
- Ladies and gentlemen;

I greet you all

I am pleased to be able to address this function, The Excellence in Construction Awards, that recognises the achievements of women contractors in self empowerment as well as the outstanding contribution by established contractors to gender empowerment in the construction sector.

The national and provincial governments have identified poverty eradication, rural development, building infrastructure, skills development, social cohesion, good governance and nation building as critical goals towards a truly non-racial, non-sexist and economically vibrant South Africa.

We are however in the grip of a severe economic recession. Our economy shed 267 000 jobs in the second quarter while the recession has forced another three hundred and two thousand people already jobless to stop seeking work, out of sheer hopelessness. According to recent economic indicators the economy is expected to experience a further 2% contraction this year. This happens while the economy has shrunk by 6.4% in the first quarter, its steepest fall since 1984 and the job figures back evidence that it contracted sharply again in the second quarter. Government and its social partners have had to devise interventions to minimize the impact of this crisis. These interventions include continued public investments and employment creation. Failure to address this economic crisis will precipitate a series of social crises.

Construction plays a vital role in South Africa's economic and social development. It provides the physical infrastructure and backbone for economic activity and is also a large-scale provider of employment. It also accounts for about ten percent of the global economy and provides much needed employment and dignity to millions of people around the world. That is why it cannot be right that over half of our society is excluded from this sector of our economy.

It is estimated that women head about 52% of households in South Africa. Women raise children and also take care of other family members usually with very scant resources. In addition, it is estimated that women generate a third or more of all household income in this country. Despite this contribution to our society, women continue to operate on the periphery of the economy.

The legacy of uneven development and under-development in Africa and elsewhere in post-colonial societies is well known. It continues to inhibit our capacity to deliver infrastructure that supports the full participation of developing societies in global economic endeavour. For our democracy and economy to flourish it is important that broaden the skills base available, particularly around the crucial area of management and leadership.

Over the past few years we have worked relentlessly to facilitate an enabling framework for industry growth and transformation. Giving practical expression to this determination, we have directed public procurement towards the empowerment of historically marginalised population groups and the creation of productive employment.

The government's strategy in making the construction industry accessible to women is premised on the understanding that the construction industry is one of the critical industries that can be used to optimise the contribution of women in promoting national social and economic development while simultaneously deepening democracy and popular participation. Government seeks to provide skills, assist women to access working capital and also use our procurement process to help women.

Our aim is to provide women with both the tools and the ongoing support they need to become successful economic participants, decision makers, and established contractors and developers. These constitute part of our effort to empower women in the fields of housing and construction.

As we all know, the second decade of democracy is characterised by strengthening the first economy and building the second economy. As government, we have gone further to provide a legal framework and a mechanism for all to operationalise this and other government programmes in the form of the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) Charter.

The Department of Public Works seeks to support and empower women-owned construction enterprises through its existing contractor development programmes. Since the inception of the procurement reform process in 1995, the Department has been actively involved in conceptualising and implementing programmes to promote emerging contractors in the built environment. These programmes included Targeted Procurement and the Emerging Contractor Development Programme (ECDP).

A further programme that is aimed at improving the lot of women contractors is the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP). The EPWP is a national government initiative aimed at drawing a significant number of the unemployed people into productive work.

As one of government's key strategies contributing to the alleviation of poverty and unemployment, the EPWP creates work opportunities coupled to training to ensure that workers gain skills while they work, and increase their capacity to earn an income in the future.

EPWP targets 40% women beneficiaries for every project. An increasing number of black and women-owned companies are now competing effectively in this sector of the

economy. The established industry has also responded positively to this aspect of transformation and has signed the Construction Charter, which commits the industry to concrete targets in terms of Black Economic Empowerment. I am pleased to say that most of the major companies have made progress towards these targets encouraging us to believe that together we can address many outstanding challenges.

The CIDB is a critical and important role player in the construction industry as it is entrusted with the responsibility to provide strategic direction and development of effective partnerships for growth.

I must also applaud CIDB for bringing the Construction Contact Centre in KwaZulu-Natal. Contractors used to encounter difficulties in accessing the CIDB and others ended up losing interest. I was pleased to learn that 24 185 contractors have been registered of which 2665 are women and 8466 are youth. This bears testimony that this centre has encouraged people to engage in construction related business. I am optimistic that these contractors will be future employers and key role players in the construction industry. We need to ensure that these contractors are empowered and given support so that they move up to the next grades.

Building on the commitments of the Construction Charter the CIDBs focus on the development of registered black and women contractors provides a framework for targeted interventions to gear finance, training, mentoring and appropriate information and management tools.

Contractor registration is already opening doors to support by banks and financial service providers as the industry moves into a more regulated environment. For example, National Urban Reconstruction and Housing Agency (NURCHA) now offers finance to all registered contractors on public sector projects provided the tender is viable. I therefore wish to call to on unregistered women contractors to register with the CIDB so as not to miss on opportunities for development.

The challenge facing us is to ensure that the partnership agreements are implemented and that emerging contractors realise the benefits of these agreements. We will in due course engage the banks to evaluate the effectiveness of their support programmes.

It is clear that there are significant opportunities available to women in the sector and that it is necessary for us to influence women to enter the construction-related professions and to link women with the increasing number of opportunities available in the sector.

We must challenge the stereotypes about women as the biologically weaker sex and therefore unsuited for construction work. Apart from the glaring proof of women as successful builders in informal and rural areas, women in the formal construction sector have demonstrated that they can and will excel as builders and owners of companies. They have proven that they are exceptional coordinators and managers in the public, private and NGO sectors.

We have achieved a lot in the last 12 years and this hand in hand with the private sector through a partnership. As government we appreciate the positive co-operation we get from business and other private sector partners, we say thank you for lending a hand in the fight against poverty and other challenges for a better life.

In conclusion let me congratulate those who will be receiving their awards this evening. We are proud of you. You have proven that women can succeed. I am optimistic that you will keep on growing until you compete with the giants in the construction industry. Please don't forget to look back and assist other emerging women contractors. When your companies provide sub-contracting opportunities please give priority to women and you must also train them and give them skills.

Finally let me quote former President Nelson Mandela where he said, "Freedom cannot be achieved unless women have been emancipated from all forms of oppression."

Thank you.