
**ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS AND INFRASTRUCTURE SIHLE ZIKALALA
DURING THE ERWIC GALA DINNER AND AWARDS, INDABA HOTEL, 24 AUGUST 2023**

Acting Director-General of the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure, Ms Nyeleti Makhubele;
CEO of the Council for the Built Environment, Dr Msizi Myeza;
CEO for the Construction Industry Development Board (cidb), Mr Bongani Dladla;

Leadership of all our entities;

Senior Government Officials;

Leaders of industry bodies;

Social Partners;

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen;

Dumelang! Lotjhani! Goeie naand! Malibongwe!

***“You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I’ll rise.***

***Out of the huts of history’s shame
I rise
Up from a past that’s rooted in pain
I rise
I’m a black ocean, leaping and wide...
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise.”***

Allow me to dedicate these words from Maya Angelou’s poem, **“Still I Rise”** to all the phenomenal women in this room who are breaking barriers, conquering stereotypes, and defying odds in the construction industry by writing new chapters of hope to inspire us.

It is indeed my singular honour and joy to address you all as we recognise and celebrate the remarkable women who are reaching for the stars in the construction sector.

In crossing the deep valleys, rising, and climbing the tall mountains, you have reminded us that the future is female.

Ladies, mothers, sisters, daughters, colleagues - you are the pride of the industry and role models to women in construction.

Your success is something for others to emulate and multiply.

We applaud our entity, the cidb, for the awards initiative as they have a potential to lead industry on gender transformation and empowerment, and to encourage relevant conversation to take place in the industry.

Since inception, the Empowerment and Recognition of Women in Construction Awards – ERWIC – have become the premier event that brings the construction sector together to bequeath accolades to individuals and companies that are transforming the face of construction to reflect the gender dividend in an industry that is male dominated.

Women's Month which this year is commemorated under the theme, **"Women's Socio-Economic Rights and Empowerment: Building Back Better for Women's Improved Resilience"** reminds us that we stand on the shoulders of liberation giants who confronted and defeated the demon of racialism and apartheid-colonialism.

We cannot claim to be free as long as the women of this country remain the face of poverty.

It is patriarchy and sexism that invents gender stereotypes, fuels violence against women's bodies, and justifies their economic exclusion as if they are second class citizens.

To ignore and marginalise half of our population can only mean that we are frustrating and stifling half of our country's potential.

It is for this reason that the Constitution enjoins all of us to ***"improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person"***.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is crucial that we work together to improve the representation of women in construction.

While women make up half the population of the country, sadly the numbers in the industry do not reflect this demographic.

They are 37% represented on the cidb Register of Contractors.

Of these only 19% of grade 9s are women-owned, 25% of grades 7 to 8 are women-owned and 34% of grades 2 to 4 are women-owned.

Currently, about 25% of Built Environment professional service providers are women owned and the picture is not much different among ECSA registered women engineers.

We need to improve this picture and raising awareness of these gender disparities through programmes such as ERWIC is essential.

There's no doubt that change is happening, and we applaud all patriots who are supporting it. But the wheels are turning too slow.

Support from all stakeholders is required to speed up gender transformation. Please rest assured that you have a dependable ally in the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure to advance women empowerment and fulfil the wishes of the architects of our Constitution.

It is encouraging that the awards categories look closely at encouraging active and tangible industry support for women empowerment.

However, what is particularly concerning is that the **Client of the Year Award** had to be removed from the categories due to lack of response from the industry.

This is a telling message, particularly for government infrastructure and construction clients.

We say this knowing that Government accounts for at least 40% of overall infrastructure investment in the country.

The total MTEF Expenditure for CPM in our Department is R10.1 billion.

This figure comes from R3-Billion in the 2022/23 Financial Year (FY), R4.1-Billion during 2021/2022FY; and R3-Billion in 2020/2021FY.

To not have a single client to pinpoint, who is contributing to gender empowerment in an observable, recognisable manner is a serious indictment to the construction industry as a whole. It calls on all of us to introspect and ask ourselves, are we doing enough? And the answer is a big NO!

Ladies and Gentlemen, our Bill of Rights expressed the imperative of redressing historical and socio-economic inequalities.

In this regard, Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) is a policy that was created in 2003 with the intention of eliminating inequality and maximizing the potential of all South Africans.

We will continue to criticise attempts aimed at undermining black economic empowerment, the deracialising of the economy, and risking our democratic project.

On the eve of 30 years since our democratic breakthrough, the majority of the poor who are in the main black, rural, young, and female are beginning to cast doubts as they languish in poverty and lack of economic opportunities.

Our government has placed the construction sector and infrastructure development at the centre of economic recovery and equitable development. Our vision of turning South Africa into a construction site to grow the economy and create jobs remains hampered by attempts to arrest the pace of transformation.

The **Procurement Bill** that has now gone into public consultation holds promise that public sector clients will now be empowered to be deliberate in targeting women for opportunities and empowerment.

His Excellency President Cyril Ramaphosa has recently reiterated government's commitment to seeing **40% of government procurement** budget go to opportunities targeted at women.

In support of governments economic empowerment initiatives, the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure (DPWI) will leverage its procurement spend to empower and advance SMME's and designated groups.

The Department should do more to maximise mechanisms within the Preferential Procurement Regulations to create economic opportunities for women.

Ladies and Gentlemen, to finance infrastructure at the scale required, government must work with the private sector to deliver priority infrastructure projects.

To reach the National Development Plan goal of **investing 30% of GDP in infrastructure by 2030**, public and private sector investment would need to increase significantly.

The Strategic Integrated Projects (SIPs) that have been gazetted provide a platform to revive the construction industry.

An increased focus is on preparing attractive projects for private sector investment, building capability for infrastructure delivery within the state, containing costs after project commencement, and developing appropriate models for blended finance.

The **Infrastructure Fund (IF)** will provide **R100 billion** in blended finance over the next decade, leveraging as much as R1 trillion in new investment for strategic infrastructure projects.

It is imperative that all parties in the infrastructure process operate in an environment of transparency. This creates confidence in the investors that their financial resources will be optimally applied in an environment of good governance.

Compatriots, we are aware that no industry can flourish on a project-by-project basis.

To thrive, the construction industry requires a minimum **baseload of work to expand**, as necessary.

While the government sector is usually the lead financier of infrastructure development, the private sector will have to play a critical role in raising loans and finance, given the limited public sector capacity.

The Strategic Integrated Projects (SIPs) have the potential for significant development of the construction industry with a number of projects in implementation stage and other projects at feasibility stage.

We call on the industry to eliminate the growing practice of **tender cancellations**. Tender cancellations may lead to corruption within the industry with contractors reporting that this practice is used to “test the market” to pass on market information to preferred bidders. This affects confidence in the industry.

Clients are the principal initiators of tender cancellations. Most of the tender cancellation occurs at the bid adjudication phase.

The impact of tender cancellations on infrastructure clients results in poor service delivery, breakdown in governance, infrastructure backlogs, and loss of public trust.

It is imperative that the Department, with the support of our entities continue capacitating industry stakeholders to improve the rate and quality of infrastructure development.

This will require a structured approach to improve the performance of infrastructure client departments, professional service providers and contractors.

The Department continues to improve the **payment of service providers** on time, and we encourage contractors to report undue delays which may be emanating from corrupt officials in government.

Equally, we encourage women contractors and all emerging contractors to fight the practice of **fronting**.

As we **fight corruption** in the public sector, we also appeal to the private sector to be **ethical** and not participate in corrupt practices like **collusion and price fixing**, making government to pay more for infrastructure.

When we lead by example, we will also be able to work together to effectively tackle the challenge brought about by the so-called **construction mafias** who stall projects and demand extortions.

We must refuse to be blackmailed or to pay bribes. Only when we work as a collective with the support of communities and law-enforcement, will be able to end this practice which is sabotaging our economy.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the sector still has a long way to go towards an inclusive industry.

Transformation is possible where there is access to work and projects.

It is this crucial that we accelerate getting projects off the drawing board and onto the construction sites.

We encourage stakeholders to invest in construction technology.

Projects need to be more standardised, modular, and connected to the Internet of Things (IoT), leveraging technologies such as Building Information Modelling (BIM), Digital Twinning, Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR).

It is time the industry moved toward **data-driven decision-making through Artificial Intelligence (AI)** and big data analytics to aid decision-makers.

As you would know, the Department has established a **Centre of Excellence** with the University of Johannesburg to strengthen construction industry research and to support post-graduate students doing their master and doctoral degrees.

We call on the industry to partner with government to address **technical capacity in government departments**.

The erosion of municipal engineering capacity has contributed to service delivery failures.

The Department, support by the cidb, is **capacitating infrastructure clients** on best practice standards for infrastructure delivery.

Over the past year, 80 infrastructure client departments were capacitated on the cidb prescripts, the cidb Standard for Uniformity (SFU), the Framework for Infrastructure Delivery and Procurement Management (FIDPM) and the cidb B.U.I.L.D Programme.

Our department is moving away from the traditional model on infrastructure delivery and moving towards a **turnkey type** of approach for more effective infrastructure delivery.

Compatriots, the cidb B.U.I.L.D Programme drives the development of the construction industry through infrastructure projects and capacitation. The Enterprise Development Standard and the Skills Development Standard has been implemented in terms of the B.U.I.L.D Programme.

Commitment and compliance of infrastructure clients will enable the realisation of the targets for the B.U.I.L.D Programme, which will be incrementally built up over a five-year period.

This will provide for **R8 billion worth of contracts** to be directed to developing enterprises together with developmental support.

Around **1 000 contractors will receive development support** per year and **R450-million** will be spent on workplace training per year; **10 000 learning** opportunities will be provided per year to FET learners or artisans; and **1 500 learning opportunities** will be provided to candidates per year.

Friends and Compatriots, we doff our hats to the cidb for prioritising women in the implementation of the Construction Management Systems (CMSs), enabled by the B.U.I.L.D Fund.

At least **250 women have started undergoing training on CSMs** around the country. The CMSs are part of the long-term goal to professionalise the industry, and what better way to go about this than to start with women-owned businesses. This will improve their chances of success in the highly competitive construction industry that is male dominated.

We congratulate the community of ERWIC awards and women who are taking on the challenge of professionalising their businesses by collaborating to share knowledge, experiences, and good practices.

We are heartened to learn that you held a successful conference earlier in the day at Montecasino Hotel, where **MEC Lebogang Maile** of the Department of Infrastructure Development in Gauteng, was a guest speaker.

We also thank the industry for willingly and generously participating at the ERWIC conference to build the capacity of women by sharing knowledge with them. This is the 2nd ERWIC conference in a row and the success of the conference is testimony to the hunger that women have for knowledge and success.

The partnership with industry in building such knowledge is commendable and encouraged. It is important to celebrate success and achievements in the awards, but more importantly, we must encourage **high performance as the only recipe for sustainability**.

As a department, we take immense pride at the categories in the awards.

One of them is the **Rural Project of the Year**.

Many of our rural communities are still lacking in basic infrastructure. Successfully implementing projects to in these communities and extending infrastructure under the most difficult and inhospitable circumstances for contractors is something to celebrate – particularly when those achievements are made by women.

Rural infrastructure empowers government to extend essential service delivery to these communities.

We look to you as women to take a lead in ensuring that the industry plays its role in **mitigating climate change** in the manner in which we design and deliver construction projects.

Climate change is real and South Africa continues to show how it is vulnerable due to this threat. We have confidence that women in construction will embrace environmentally friendly construction methods and make use of cleaner sources of energy to reduce the carbon footprint.

Remember again that you remain, as Maya Angelou says, the dream and hope of our ancestors; and so keep on rising in honour of the many women who came before you so that we may say their sacrifices were not in vain.

South Africa Works Because of Public Works!

I thank you!