



basic education
Department:
Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Address by the Minister of Basic Education Angie Motshekga at Women in Education Leadership Conference organised by the Mathew Goniwe School of Leadership and Governance

Friday 27th August 2021

MC and Conference Facilitator: Ayanda Allie

Fellow speakers: Prof Puleng LeNkabula

Adv. Thulani Makhubela

Dr Lindiwe Ginya

Prof Juliet Perumal

Ms Jenny Naidoo

MS. Cheryl Hlabane

Dr Claudine Hengston

Ms Yoliswa Makhasi

Dr Judy Dlamini

Ms Slindo Shamase

It is my singular honour and privilege to be asked to say a few words on the occasion of the Women in Education Leadership Conference organised by the Mathew Goniwe School of Leadership and Governance.

As you know, under the leadership of the ANC-led Government, we celebrate the month of August as Women's Month every year.

We dedicate a whole month to the immense contribution made by women (past and present) to the country's socio-political development.

This conference seeks to highlight the women leaders in basic education leadership and beyond.

I acknowledge that the teaching profession primarily comprises women teachers, yet fewer are presented in the principalship.

Thousands of women teachers go beyond the call of duty in assisting our system of basic education to respond better to the various needs of our learners.

These teachers are our unsung heroines who play the triple role of mothers, role models and educators.

Daily, women teachers stand in front of learners from different backgrounds, presenting various challenges and mould them to be better citizens.

It is, therefore, fair that at least once a year, we pause and celebrate women in the basic education leadership and beyond.

When we celebrate women leaders, we note their motherhood (life-giving capabilities), resilience (managing homes and careers) and sheer awesomeness of being a woman.

In any event, all women are the first teachers of kids in their homes.

Thus teaching is ingrained in us as women.

Sadly, every year we must remind the gatekeepers of patriarchy that we are simply the better teachers as women.

I am happy to report that the Heads of Education Department Committee (HEDCOM) has at long last achieved a women majority for the first time, with five Heads of Department out of nine being women.

The following provinces are led by iMbokodo: Eastern Cape, Northern Cape, Limpopo, Mpumalanga and North West).

Though we have made these meaningful strides in advancing women's leadership, we are equally aware of the persisting challenges regarding women's leadership at the principalship level.

While the teacher workforce is predominantly women, as I said earlier, most school principals and district directors are still men.

The gender parity in these positions has improved over time, but it is not good enough.

Compounding the crisis is that when a woman in a senior position vacates/retires, no law or regulation reserves the post for another woman.

Oftentimes these "women" posts are periodically filled by a man, thus weakening the outgoing woman's legacy.

Programme Director; the theme for this conference is "Women in Education Leadership: Navigating the Glass Ceiling."

It is an appropriate theme in that we converge today in the 150th year since the birth of a trailblazer woman, our original Mother of the Nation: uMama Charlotte Maxeke.

As you know, 2021 has been declared as the year “Year of Charlotte Mannya Maxeke”.

Mama Maxeke didn’t negotiate her life with the proverbial glass ceiling in mind.

She broke through the glass door and took up space.

As we know, she was a woman of many “firsts”.

She was the first black woman to graduate and obtain a BSc Degree in Southern Africa in 1901.

She was also the first woman to participate in the King’s Court under King Sabata Dalindyebo of AbaThembu.

She founded a school under this Royal Family, and for all her efforts, she was given the name Nogazo as a salutation of honour.

She later established another school in Evaton, Gauteng, in 1908 (Wilberforce Institute), inspired by her experience at Wilberforce in Ohio.

It is thus appropriate that women in leadership today must emulate her exemplary conduct, resilience and tenacity.

As women in leadership, we must ever negotiate with the gatekeepers of patriarchy.

We do not owe our existence to men.

We do not recognise male privilege.

In fact, it is an aberration to even demand that we, as human beings in our own right, must even remotely acknowledge male privilege.

We fight against toxic masculinities.

We reject toxic feminism masquerading as radicalism.

As this current generation, we stand on the broad shoulders of the giants of yesteryears, like uMama Charlotte Maxeke.

As women in leadership in 2021, we must exhibit the trailblazing attributes of uMama Maxeke, the tenacity of Mama Albertina Sisulu and the fierceness of Mama Winnie Madikizela-Mandela.

It is possible to combine home and career, boardroom and ploughing fields.

Programme Director; every year, we mourn because statistics show that women lag behind in occupying various high positions in our society.

But today I have some good news.

The good news is that South Africa's push for female empowerment has led to outperformance against emerging-market peers when measured by gender diversity in listed company boards.

There's now a realisation that much more needs to be done to pursue equality because more than enhancing diversity, women add value and impact the bottom line positively.

According to figures from Sustainable Stock Exchanges, the Johannesburg Stock Exchange is the only exchange from a developing country to beat the G-20 average for female representation among directors of companies traded on the bourse.

As of April 2021, women hold 29% of the board seats in the top 100 listed companies in South Africa.

That compares with an average of 20% on major G20 exchanges and figures of 12% in Japan, 10% for the Shanghai bourse and 7.4% in South Korea.

South African women chair 11% of the companies, beating the G20 average of 5.5%.

Women hold almost 30% of board seats at listed South African companies.

According to the Johannesburg Stock Exchange, the “overnight success” has been in the making since 1994.

It is owed to the various industry-specific transformation charters that set down the targets for women empowerment.

As Government, we are not doing shabbily.

According to the 2020 University of Stellenbosch Business School report, women hold 41.2% of all directorships in State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs).

In a nutshell, the report concludes that all SOEs have at least two female directors.

In conclusion, we owe Mama Maxeke and many women freedom fighters and intellectuals of their generation a massive debt of gratitude.

We salute them for their selfless contribution to the liberation of our country from the yoke of the apartheid pariah regime.

Mama Maxeke emptied herself to improve the human condition through education and her unyielding commitment to fundamental social change and gender equality.

With her passing, more than a century of struggle went with her.

It is our duty as the present mandarins to keep her memory alive.

I urge this current cohort of women in leadership to take up the baton and lead us into a brighter future.

The future is female.

I thank you.