

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN THE AGE OF HOPE

REPORT DELIVERED BY EXECUTIVE MAYOR MATHABO MOKAPO AT A SPECIAL COUNCIL MEETING TO REVIEW THE EMPOWERMENT OF MATJHABENG WOMEN IN THE PAST FIVE YEARS

28 AUGUST 2006

MATJHABENG LOCAL MUNICIPALITY

The notion of gender discrimination in our societies dates back from time immemorial. Gender is broadly defined as a set of values, attitudes and attributes that have been acquired through the process of socialization. This, by implication means that gender is a social construct, as opposed to being a physical attribute.

In our societies, there have always been two broad distinctions: i.e. the domain of politics and family/domestic life. However, this distinction has been criticized because it is misleading.

An in depth reflection on the history of our country shows that South Africa has been shaped by injustice, oppression, discrimination and exploitation. The nature of colonialism in our country, brought about patriarchy, i.e. the system of domination of women by men, and male control at all levels of society.

In our country, though there is the overarching system of patriarchy, different women experience different forms of male domination and oppression according to their class, status, religion, race and even ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

While apartheid has been dislodged, the struggle against its ramifications continues. The system of class, race and gender oppression in our country still needs to be fundamentally transformed.

The advent of democracy ushered in a new era in our country. South Africans under the democratic government have already started on the path of the transformation process. Constitutional, legislative, institutional frameworks and mechanisms have been put in place.

These, include among others:

- Domestic Violence Act of 1998

This Act seeks to improve the protection of women in particular from physical or emotional violence and creates an obligation on the criminal justice system to ensure that victims of domestic violence receive adequate protection from further abuse.

- Maintenance Act of 1998

This Act allows for women to have the power to take fathers responsible for their children's welfare to court.

- Unemployment Insurance Contributions Act of 2003

The purpose of the Unemployment Insurance Fund is to provide for unemployment, illness, maternity, adoption and dependants benefits to employees.

At the primary health care level, reproductive health services have been expanded to include family planning, counseling and free access to contraception.

The Integrated Nutrition Programme assists pregnant women to maintain good levels of nutrition. Primary health care is free for pregnant women and children under six at state clinics and hospitals.

Institutions are amongst others:

- The Commission on Gender Equality which is a statutory organ for overseeing the implementation of programmes on gender equality.
- Institutional arrangements in the form of the Office on the Status of women that is meant to redress imbalances with regard to issues of gender equity in the workplace.

Policies amongst others are:

- Employment Equity Provisions

The progressive affirmative action programme introduced by the ANC-led government has also created opportunities for women in the working environment. Since 1994 black women made the fastest moves, increasing their number at executive level by 60% and seizing 20 000 new machine operator and assembly line jobs.

In terms of women in the public service, all women now qualify for a homeowners allowance irrespective of their marital status.

Despite the progress outlined above, according to a Cabinet media release, dated December 2005, Cabinet said that government is aiming for a 50% equity target for women at all levels of senior management in the public service by 2009. The media release further went on to say that, women constitute 29% of management in the public service, which was below the 30% target set for 2005.

Department of Public Works: Government introduced the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP): which aims, among others, to provide education and training to unemployed people, especially women, youth and rural communities and to increase their opportunities of becoming self-employed or entering the formal sector.

I wish to indicate at this point, that as the Matjhabeng Municipality, we do not have comprehensive records for the past five years, that reveal how women have benefited from this programme, and this is a cause for concern.

- Preferential Procurement Provisions

A number of targeted small, medium and micro enterprises have been established to ensure that businesses and women owned enterprises in particular get access to information, training, counseling, markets and technology.

Our Supply Chain Management Preferential Procurement Policy makes provision for historically disadvantaged individuals (HDI) to receive more points in the procurement process. This by implication means that companies that are 100% owned by women and people with disabilities, are advantaged by the system.

However, as a municipality, we do not have comprehensive statistics for the past five years, that reveal how our preferential procurement policy has met equity targets, by showing a bias towards women owned or in companies where women have shares. This is a crucial matter that should trigger a debate amongst ourselves as a Council, so that we correct the situation.

An in depth look at the road we have traversed, as Matjhabeng Local Municipality, in meeting equity targets reveals the following; According to a Matjhabeng report on Employment Equity released in September 2005 the status was as follows:

- There were no women in top management positions, out of a total of 4 which are male.
- Out of a total of 44 senior managers, there were only 7 occupied by women and five of them were African. This figure constitutes 15, 9% of the total.
- In the category of professionally qualified/experienced specialists/mid-management there was a total of 94 positions and only 14 were occupied by women, and this figure computes to 14,8% of the total.
- In the division of skilled technical and academically qualified workers/junior management women employees totaled 211 out of a total workforce of 660 and this computes to 31,9 of the total.
- In the category of semi-skilled workers there was a total workforce of 471 employees and the number of women employees was 26, which is 5,5% of the total.
- In the division of unskilled workers the total workforce was 847, with 105 women constituting this component of the workforce, and it amounts to 12, 4%.

With regard to non-permanent employees/legislators the scenario currently is as follows; out of a total of 72 Councillors, 26 of them are women and this constitutes 36% of the total. Also a thorough look at individual political parties reveals the following;

- The ANC, out of a total of 56 Councillors, it has 24 women Councillors and this amounts to 42, 8%.
- The ACDP has one seat and the Councillor is a woman.
- The FF has one seat and the Councillor is a male.
- The DA has 12 seats and only one Councillor is a woman.
- The PAC has one seat and the Councillor is male.

The above statistics indicate that we have not succeeded to meet President Thabo Mbeki's call for a 50% representation of women. This does not augur well for the future, because if the majority of legislators are male, how then do we expect that we will implement equity targets within the administration.

The Matjhabeng Equity Report, September 2005, further reveals that with regard to the total number of job terminations in all occupational levels, out of a total of 392, 196 women had terminated their work (i.e. 50% of the total) in the preceding twelve months.

Service Delivery: As a municipality, we do not have comprehensive statistics/records that reveal how many women have access to clean water, sanitation and housing. This lack of availability of records makes it difficult for us, to reflect properly on how we should implement equity across the spectrum.

The general trend that can be picked up from the above statistics is that as a municipality we need to engage in a conscious effort to enhance our work with regard to the 50% equity target set for 2009, as envisaged by national government. Also the statistics relating to terminations are a grave concern as they reveal high staff turnovers among women in the municipality.

Conclusion

It is abundantly clear to all of us, emanating from this presentation, that as a municipality we are faced with serious and critical challenges with regard to the realization of equity targets. This therefore calls upon us to engage extensively on issues that relate among others to:

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- On the job training for our women employees.
- Creating an environment conducive for women employees by improving systems at the workplace, so as to avoid high staff turn over rates amongst women.
- Compiling databases for women-owned companies so that in the process of procurement, they can be considered.
- Improving on our records/statistics with regard to service delivery objectives, so as to ensure that the plight of women is considered.
- Ensuring that as the EPWP unfolds, women amongst the critical strata of society, benefit.
- Encourage women employees to undertake part time studies in specialized fields.
- Mobilize and create dynamic links with civil society organizations that champion women interests.

The road to the realization of our equity targets may be a long and arduous one, however the obstacles that lie ahead are not insurmountable.

Thank you.

Councillor Mathabo Mokapo
Executive Mayor