

DEPARTMENT OF WOMEN, YOUTH AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**SPEAKING NOTES ON WOMEN FOR SOCIAL
PROGRESS**

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Programme director, I am happy to participate in this session which focus on Women for Social progression. This is a very important thematic area which requires us to reflect not only on the challenges but also on the progress, opportunities and suggest solutions to some of these challenges and threats to women progression.

Why is it important to address the question of social progression? In 2025, we will be celebrating 30 years of the Beijing Platform for Action which is an important blueprint for Women empowerment and gender equality. In addition, member states have signed and ratifies several other global, continental and regional treaties, however, women are still confronted with several social issues. These issues have been on the agenda for women's empowerment for many decades.

Women continue to be under-represented in positions of power across the different sectors in our society. It is important to highlight that lack of women in leadership roles holds back not only women, but the society at large. It is therefore important to prioritise women's empowerment to advance society.

Patriarchy is another challenge facing women today. Notwithstanding the experience, education or abilities, the patriarchal nature of society fosters the perception that women are less qualified and less competent than men. What patriarchy has done is convince people that a strong and intelligent woman represents a problem; a disruption to the social order rather than an integral part of it.

Programme director, women across world still lack equal access to opportunity compared to men.

The challenge of care work or unpaid care work is another social issue women which requires attention. Unpaid care work leads to "women's time poverty" which undermines well-being, generates insecurities, fosters financial dependence and limits options for decent work, even to the point of restricting women to low-status, part-time jobs in the informal sector. The care burden thus impacts women's access to economic resources and power, and, as a result, the extent of gender equality at the individual and family levels and in society.

Women occupying positions of power are not exempted from their gendered roles of being mothers, wives, daughters, etc. These women still have a burden of unpaid care work waiting for them at home when they knock off work.

We must also not forget that when we accelerate women to leadership positions, there are certain stigmas that they are labelled with.

Increasing the role of women in the socio-economic development of society to achieve Social Progress

Worldwide, history and research has demonstrated that women's economic empowerment increases their access to economic resources and opportunities including jobs, financial services, property and other productive assets, skills development and market information.

For South Africa this outlook has translated itself in vast areas of development where women are taking the reins and actively contributing to their country's development agenda. South Africa's economic empowerment mechanisms for promoting the status of women, fully utilising government resources and effectively mobilising social resources lays an important foundation in the promotion of gender equality and women's development.

Programme director, shared commitment across all sectors to support, grow, empower and recognise women leaders not only promotes fairness but it also improves the performance state, companies and organisations. Empowered, inspired and developed women are critical to improving any country's global competitiveness, and this is equally the legacy that will be passed over to future generations.

Gender equality and empowered women are catalysts for multiplying development efforts and positively positioning the competitiveness of countries as an attractive investment destination. Women are architects of society and are revered for their strength in building the family unit and homes, as well as their contributions to the communities, societies and nations.

Technological Development and digital transformation of social policy: Effect on improving the quality of life

Programme director, it is important to integrate digital technologies into all areas of business, changing how economic and social activities are conducted.

It is also important to acknowledge that while digital technology can bring tremendous opportunities, it can also widen socioeconomic gaps for those who lack Internet connectivity, affordable devices or the skills to benefit from digital services.

Equally, vulnerable people and groups who don't have training in digital skills can be more susceptible to online risks such as fraud, data disclosure, identity theft and cyberbullying.

The digitalization of social protection presents immense opportunities for delivering welfare services more efficiently and effectively. However, it also raises critical challenges related to data protection, data poverty, and bias and discrimination. Protecting sensitive data, ensuring privacy through consent, and minimizing surveillance risks are crucial for maintaining trust and upholding individual rights.

Addressing the digital divide and providing alternative methods for inclusion will ensure that vulnerable groups are not left behind in the transition to digital systems. Moreover, mitigating algorithmic bias and promoting transparency and explainability in decision-making processes is essential for fair and accountable social protection. By navigating these challenges, social protection programmes can harness the power of digital data while maintaining fairness, inclusivity and ethical standards.

National Strategies for social development: involving public resources in solving state problems.

Programme director, national strategies start with the establishment and support legislations and policies that offer equal opportunities for women and create an atmosphere where they can thrive.

Section 27 (1) (c) of the South Africa's Constitution provides for the right of access to appropriate social assistance to those unable support themselves and their dependants.

The National Development Plan (NDP) (Vision 20230) acknowledges the need to address the critical challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality to improve short-term and long-term prospects of current and future generations. In its efforts to give expression to this guiding policy, the social development focuses on improving quality of life for poor and vulnerable people and, in so doing, contributes to consolidating the social wage through reliable and quality basic services.

The Social development strategy for South Africa ensures protection against vulnerability by creating an enabling environment for the provision of a comprehensive, integrated and sustainable social development service. The state provides social development services and leads government's efforts to forge partnerships through which vulnerable individuals, groups and communities become capable and active participants in their own development as well as society's.

Some of the strategies that are implemented in South Africa include the **Income support to the poor and vulnerable** – This is an important element in government's strategy to tackle poverty and inequality. This programme has proved vital in mitigating the severe effects of the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, which led to many job losses.

In conclusion, allow me to say that gender equality is contingent on women's economic development and financial independence. Women empowerment involves addressing the way power is distributed among women, men, institutions, and laws. It also involves confronting sexism, patriarchy, gender inequality, and systemic injustice.

Thank you