



MINISTRY
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From the desk of

Deputy Minister Pinky Kekana

Keynote Address

Low retention rate of women in the IT industry in South Africa: The leaky pipeline report

18h00 – 19h30

20 August 2020

Good Evening

- Marilyn Radebe, Deputy President – Black IT Forum
- Sonwabise Sebata, Chairperson - South African Women in ICT Forum
- Syson Kunda, Author – “The Leaky Pipeline Report”
- Masego Moncho, Programme Director and Moderator
- Ladies & gentlemen

We have had one of the most catastrophic years in history, when we speak of the impact of the global pandemic. But, still, the most shocking thing we could have heard this year, for me – is the fact that gender parity is still 100 years away, according to the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Report,

released at the beginning of 2020. It is a well-known fact that Covid-19 has eradicated most of the gains that were made in the last few years, so it would not be surprising that a future report by WEF could show that this number could be shockingly worse.

It is on this premise that I want to start out my keynote today.

The Leaky Pipes report by Syson Kunda does not show a South African ICT sector that has made progress on gender inclusion. This, even though as a country the aforementioned report showed that we have made significant progress in respect of general gender parity. So, it's safe to say that it's an ICT sector issue.

Statistics show South African women only make up about 23% of the ICT sector's workforce, with only 56000 of the 236 000 ICT roles, being occupied by women.

The report highlights extremely poor retention of women in the industry for the reasons articulated in the report, and while things may seem dismal to say the least, I believe there is a silver lining – actually 4 silver linings:

The first silver lining is the skills shortage in the industry at the moment.

Now, your first thought is to think why would this be a silver lining – well, if you look at it, I believe that when a sector has high demand and low supply, there can't be an IT Manager in the country who would have the luxury of being able to turn down a candidate simply because they are a woman, IF they have the right skills.

My belief is that we have reached a stage in the country, where the tide is turning, and due to low demand, this tide will focus on skills, knowledge and capacity, and not on gender, unconscious bias, societal norms, or even stereotyping.

As a former teacher, I think that education is fundamental to the maturity evolution of any industry and so STEM education makes it's obvious entrance in to this keynote. STEM education for girls, and young women, has been a proactive campaign for a few years already. I do believe that with the dependency on technology over the last few months, becoming a permanent fixture in our lives, the drive for young women and girls to study STEM subjects will be kicked into high gear, as it is our turn now for STEM subjects to be organic choices.

One of the many things that we are constantly monitoring from my office is ICT leadership patterns, and the number of women leaders that have taken over the reigns of ICT companies in South Africa in just the last 12-18 months, is another sign that the game is not changing, it has already changed ... we are just waiting for the effects, and one of those effects need to be closing the gender pay gap. On this point, I look to you SA Women in ICT and the Black IT Forum to ensure that we target this issue in 2021.

The sentiment in the Leaky pipes report is one of a crisis. It has been said "never let a good crisis go to waste". UN Women Executive Director, Dr Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka speaks of "Build Back Better", when she speaks of the losses

against the progress that was made pre-Covid19. Her message is that when we build back what was lost, don't only build the losses, but build with intention and purpose towards a higher level, one that is the closest to our ideals as possible.

Another targeted outcome of this report for both the Black IT Forum and SA Women in ICT, is to ensure that there are women in South Africa with those exact skills that are in demand, whether by skills development or university, to indeed 'build back, better'.

The last silver lining to the challenges quite rightly presented in the report, is probably one of the most important, but one that we will need to work together to achieve. It will not happen if we only speak of it, we will have to put action and effort into it.

I am speaking of Procurement.

At the 64th anniversary of Women's Day, a few days ago President Cyril Ramaphosa said, "we are going to drive women's economic inclusion through public procurement. We have set the target of ensuring at least 40% of goods and services procured by public entities are sourced from women-owned businesses,"

Once the President has said it, it is now for us to activate it and make it work for the women of the industry. Across all of us, we have the ability and access to put programmes in place, hold companies and government accountable to

adhere to the 40%, and so forth. He has made it tangible for us, we have to now turn it into reality.

In conclusion, perhaps, now more than ever, in the history of our industry, we are FINALLY in the driver's seat – the journey and the road ahead might not be the smoothest as is evident in the report, but it will be fulfilling in dealing with each and every struggle.

I want to say to you:

- Take advantage of every opportunity there is, whether it's for a woman or not
- Where you don't see an opportunity for a woman, create one.
- Where you see an opportunity for another woman, show her, take her with you.
- Do not get left behind with obsolete skills, and leave no woman and girl behind – I urge you! I beg you!
- You don't need permission to take up space in the industry! I am giving you permission if that's what you need.
- You don't need permission to make a difference – this report is evidence of that.
- And, you definitely don't need permission to change the world. Actually, I challenge you to turn this world on its head by making your presence in the technology sector known.

Malibongwe!