SPEECH BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT, MS THULISILE MANZINI

WOMEN IN MINERALS LEADERSHIP ENGAGEMENT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Programme Director,

Greetings to our Deputy Minister, Ms Phumzile Mgcina
Let me acknowledge the entire Leadership of Mintek,
All board members present
President and Chairperson of Women in Mining SA, WIMSA, Ms Mogaleadi Seabela
Chairperson of AWIMSA, Founder and National Chair, Ms Mamosa Modise
CEOs of Mining Companies present
CFOs, DGs and DDGs but importantly our host CFO

Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning,

Let me begin by expressing my sincere appreciation to **Mintek** for creating this important platform for dialogue, collaboration, and action. Today's engagement brings together women leaders, entrepreneurs, industry players, government, and development partners around a common purpose: ensuring that women participate meaningfully and benefit equitably from South Africa's mineral wealth.

Platforms such as this are important because they move us beyond conversation and into collaboration. They provide opportunities to build relationships, share experiences, identify solutions, and create pathways for women-owned businesses to access opportunities within the mining and minerals value chain.

Most importantly, they remind us that the future of the minerals sector cannot be fully realised without the full participation of women.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Department of Small Business Development was established on the understanding that small businesses are not merely contributors to economic growth, but they are drivers of transformation, job creation, innovation, and inclusive development.

Across the world, thriving economies are built on strong small and medium enterprises. In South Africa, MSMEs have a critical role to play in reducing unemployment, expanding economic participation, and creating opportunities for historically disadvantaged groups, particularly women.

Our responsibility as government is to create an environment in which entrepreneurs can start businesses, grow them, become competitive, and ultimately create sustainable jobs.

However, supporting entrepreneurs cannot end at the start-up phase.

Too often, support is measured by the number of businesses launched rather than the number that survive, grow, enter markets, secure contracts, attract investment, and create employment.

The real measure of success is not how many businesses are started, but how many become sustainable enterprises.

Women entrepreneurs need support across the entire business lifecycle, from start-up to growth, expansion, innovation, and market entry. They need access to finance, business development services, technology, procurement opportunities, mentorship, and strategic networks.

In other words, businesses do not only need funding. They need ecosystems that enable success.

Programme Director,

Women-owned enterprises are already making significant contributions to our economy.

They create jobs, support families, stimulate local economies, introduce innovation, and enable greater inclusion in economic activity.

In many communities, women-owned businesses are not only enterprises. They are vehicles of community development and economic resilience.

Yet despite these contributions, women entrepreneurs remain underrepresented in many high-value sectors of the economy, including mining, manufacturing, technology, engineering, and industrial services.

This is not because women lack capability.

It is often because women continue to face barriers that limit their ability to participate fully in economic opportunities.

Among the most persistent challenges are:

- Limited access to procurement opportunities;
- Difficulty accessing established corporate supply chains;
- Limited access to business and professional networks;
- Restricted access to affordable finance;
- Insufficient mentorship and industry exposure; and
- Limited participation in decision-making and leadership spaces.

For many women entrepreneurs, the challenge is not capability. The challenge is connectivity.

The opportunity may exist, but the pathways to access that opportunity are often unclear or inaccessible.

That is why gatherings such as today's engagement are so important. We appreciate the **Mintek** leadership for their foresight in creating spaces where relationships can be built, opportunities identified, and partnerships formed.

PARTNERSHIPS: THE KEY TO UNLOCKING OPPORTUNITY

Ladies and gentlemen,

No single institution can solve these challenges alone.

Government cannot do it alone.

Industry cannot do it alone.

Financial institutions cannot do it alone.

And women entrepreneurs should not have to do it alone.

Success will require strong partnerships and deliberate collaboration.

The mining and minerals sector presents enormous opportunities beyond extraction itself. Opportunities exist in manufacturing, logistics, engineering services, environmental management, technology solutions, catering, construction, maintenance, mineral beneficiation, renewable energy, and professional services.

The question before us is straightforward:

How do we ensure that more women-owned businesses participate in these opportunities?

The answer lies in partnership.

We need mining companies to open supplier development pathways and increase procurement opportunities for women-owned enterprises.

We need development finance institutions and commercial financiers to provide appropriate and accessible funding solutions.

We need business associations and established entrepreneurs to provide mentorship and market intelligence.

We need universities and skills institutions to support innovation, research, and capability development.

And we need women entrepreneurs themselves to collaborate, build networks, share opportunities, and support one another.

When partnerships are intentional, they become powerful instruments for transformation.

Partnerships convert potential into participation.

They convert participation into ownership.

And ownership into sustainable economic empowerment.

PRACTICAL SUPPORT AVAILABLE THROUGH THE DEPARTMENT OF SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Programme Director,

The Department of Small Business Development remains committed to ensuring that women entrepreneurs are able to access practical support that enables growth and sustainability.

Through our agency known as the **Small Enterprise Development Finance Agency (SEDFA)**, we provide a range of financial and non-financial support interventions designed to meet businesses at different stages of development.

One of our important interventions in this regard is the **Imbali for Her Women Entrepreneurship Fund**. The Fund is aimed at enabling women-owned enterprises to establish, grow and scale sustainable businesses. It targets women transitioning from the corporate sector into entrepreneurship, young women graduates entering the entrepreneurial ecosystem and existing women entrepreneurs seeking to scale production.

The initial investment in Imbali for Her is **R716 million**, targeting **375 women entrepreneurs** through structured business-development support accompanied by financial instruments.

The success of Imbali for Her must, however, extend beyond the amount of money committed. We must be able to point to women who moved from small-scale production into manufacturing, women who entered new markets, women who created sustainable jobs, women who became exporters and women who built businesses capable of attracting commercial finance and private investment. I am conviced many of the women here today, could benefit from this fund.

Ladies and gentlemen, please allow me to also indicate that we have an existing programme called Asset Assist Programme which is a 100% grant for machinery and equipment. Yes we buy you a TLB, a forklift and so on, for as long as the cost is up to **R250k.**

We also support women entrepreneurs through the **Township and Rural Entrepreneurship Programme (TREP)**, which assists businesses operating in township and rural economies. I would not have spoken about this programme until I saw exhibitors showcasing some amazing work that we also support through funding and capacity building. Through this programme they can access funding to a maxim of **R3 million**.

Additionally, through SEDFA we also have blended finance which is a combination of grant and a loan capped at **R15 million.**

Programme Director,

At the Department of Small Business Development, we have deliberately placed women and young people at the centre of our enterprise-development mandate. Our guiding framework requires interventions across the DSBD portfolio to benefit targeted groups at a scale of 40% women, 30% youth and 7% persons with disabilities, with a significant proportion of our interventions implemented through the Small Enterprise Development and Finance Agency, SEDFA.

Over the three financial years from 2023/24 to 2025/26, the DSBD portfolio disbursed more than **R3.5 billion** through various interventions supporting approximately **350,379 women-owned MSMEs**. These interventions facilitated the creation of **179,998 jobs** and sustained a further **190,824 jobs**, resulting in more than **370,000 jobs supported** across the portfolio.

Furthermore, the Department continues to advance initiatives aimed at improving:

- Access to finance;
- Market access and procurement opportunities;
- Enterprise and supplier development;
- Manufacturing support and localisation;

- Business formalisation and compliance support;
- Skills development and entrepreneurship training; and
- Support for digital adoption and innovation.

Let me also inform you about the Inyamazane Funding Scheme which offers South African military veterans an opportunity to enter the mainstream economy by accessing credit facilities ranging from R50 000 to a maximum of R15-million to build qualifying entrepreneurial enterprises.

And I am excited to speak about our partnership with CIDB to ensure that there is coordinated support for the construction sector. In this regard, we have unveiled and capitalised the Construction Fund at **R300 million.**

Our commitment is clear: we want to see more women-owned businesses entering and growing within strategic sectors of the economy, including the minerals value chain.

A CALL TO ACTION

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today's engagement must not end as another discussion.

It must become a platform for tangible commitments.

Let us commit to opening opportunities for women-owned businesses.

Let us commit to expanding procurement and supplier development programmes.

Let us commit to mentoring emerging women entrepreneurs.

Let us commit to building stronger networks and partnerships.

Let us commit to investing in women-owned enterprises not because it is the right thing to do, but because it is the smart thing to do for economic growth and national development.

To the women entrepreneurs in this room, I encourage you to be bold in pursuing opportunity. Build relationships. Strengthen your businesses. Embrace innovation. Seek partnerships. Position yourselves for growth and for entry into high-value sectors.

To industry leaders, help create pathways into your value chains.

To investors and financiers, invest in women's potential.

To all of us, let today's conversation become tomorrow's opportunity.

Together, we can build an economy where women are not only participants, but owners, innovators, decision-makers, and leaders.

Let us move beyond representation to meaningful economic participation.

Let us move beyond participation to ownership.

And let us move beyond ownership to transformation.

The future of South Africa's economy depends on the success of its women.

Let us work together to make that future a reality.

I thank you.