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Department:
Small Business Development
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

STATEMENT BY THE MINISTRY OF SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 8 MARCH 2024

The 8th of March is commemorated globally as International's Women Day. This is a moment of reflection on how far we have come on the journey towards women empowerment and gender equality. International Women's Day tells a story of the resilience and relentless struggle by ordinary women across the globe and must inspire us to work tirelessly towards the inclusion of women, especially in the economic sphere. For many of us in South Africa, International Women's Day is a moment to rededicate ourselves to the task of building a society that responds to the aspirations and plight of women, and to accelerate efforts towards women empowerment and gender equality. South Africa's democracy has registered significant progress in restoring the dignity of women.

Through the Constitution and an array of other measures introduced since 1994, on the whole, the position and conditions of women in our country has improved drastically. Thanks to the 1994 democratic breakthrough, the living conditions of the majority of ordinary women have undergone significant qualitative change.

While significant strides have been made to empower women and promote gender equality, we remain painfully aware that the struggle for women emancipation is far from over. We must concede that women still bear a disproportionate burden of the triple challenges of poverty, inequality and unemployment.

From the perspective of the Department of Small Business Development, the economic empowerment of women and their enterprises is critical for sustainable development and economic transformation of South Africa.

We remain painfully aware that women-led enterprises face multiple challenges that constrain their capacity to compete equitably for business and procurement opportunities. In this regard, the Department of Small Business Development has made a deliberate and conscious decision to intervene directly and ensure that women benefit from our programmes and funding instruments in a targeted way.



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We are actively supporting women-owned SMMEs in corporate supply chains through enterprise supplier development and supporting export readiness among women-owned businesses.

We are concerned that women in South Africa benefit less from digitalization and 4IR. The 2023 SME Tech Index done by Nashua demonstrated that women-led businesses are not leveraging technology to the extent of their male counterparts. Digitalization presents huge opportunities to level the playing fields for women, but only if we focus on addressing these technology barriers.

We have placed the issue of women empowerment high on our agenda. We will continue to support women in their drive towards greater economic empowerment and to ensure that women in business are actively supported through incentives, information sharing, trade missions, improved access to finance, business support and, where appropriate, other opportunities.

The department is determined to accelerate the starting up of new women-led businesses and the strengthening of existing ones through the roll out of tailor-made support instruments for women. Empowering women economically and supporting their enterprises will help eliminate inequality and enhance economic inclusion.

We believe that the economic empowerment and independence of women will also help us win the war against gender-based violence. Financial dependence of women on their partners exacerbates their vulnerability and tends to force them to stay in abusive relationships. Thus, empowering women economically will help us win the war against poverty, inequality, unemployment and abuse.

On this International Women's Day, we pay tribute to all women entrepreneurs for their resilience and the contribution that they continue to make in the economic development of our country.

In spite of the challenges confronting women-owned SMMEs, and not discounting the current global climate of volatility, we are confident that their enterprises will continue to grow. The



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Department of Small Business Development and its agencies will continue to walk with them throughout their entrepreneurial journey.

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