



ANC Parliamentary Caucus

Theme: Celebrating 30 Years of freedom and women's development

27 August 2024

Comrade D. Pule

Topic: Transforming the political economy to empower women and advance gender equality

The transformation of the political economy to empower women and advance gender equality remains an essential component of our country's sustainable development. The empowerment of women requires that an enabling environment is created which supports their active participation and success in the economy, and in pursuits of entrepreneurial ventures. Among others, this entails providing access to quality education and vocational training, investing in employment opportunities which are biased toward the employment of women, and creating safe working conditions where there is equal pay.

To this end, the ANC-led government over the past 30 years has invested its resources towards the transformation of South Africa's political economy through holistic structural and systematic reform of our sociopolitical and economic landscape, in order to foster a more just, equitable, and prosperous society for all. Through the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP) government has been able to make tremendous strides in improving the living conditions of South Africans by providing millions of low-cost houses to those in need, including women. Housing provisions have not only created stable living conditions for women but have also economically empowerment them as they can use their title deeds as collateral to access credit and financial services that women can use to start businesses among other initiatives. This is not only beneficial for women but is an opportunity for employment creation, growing the economy, as well as on challenging poverty and inequality.

In addition, access to housing has improved people's access to basic services such as water, sanitation and electricity. This has had a positive impact on the health outcomes of women and has also given them more time and reduced the labour burden, particularly for women in rural communities.

Chairperson,

The recent signing of the NHI into law was a fundamental step towards dismantling our inherited two-tier health system where human and financial resources in health disproportionately affect South Africans along racial and class lines. it has been the historical



mission of the African National Congress to transform the health landscape and create a more just and equitable system. In preparation for the NHI, the ANC-led government has been able to make numerous women-centred provisions such as free health services for pregnant women; and support about 5 million mothers through the MomConnect platform which sends messages centred on providing education and counselling to mothers on topics such as nutrition, birth planning, breastfeeding, and newborn care via SMS or WhatsApp.

Creating a robust healthcare system that responds to the health needs of women is essential for building stable communities as women are more likely than men to invest their income in their families. Women also play a critical role in the continuity of the labor workforce which sustains the economy by giving birth, nurturing and educating future generations. Stellenbosch Business School in an article titled, 'Targeting women's health can boost the economy' noted that it is estimated that "the global GDP could be raised by US\$1 trillion by 2040 by addressing women's health gap". Furthermore, it is further noted that "Women have made hard-earned gains in increased economic participation and workplace equality, but ignoring their specific health needs places these gains – and their positive socio-economic impacts – at risk,"

Chairperson,

Through various initiatives and institutions such as the Department of Social Development, the ANC-led government has laid a solid foundation in ensuring gender equity and addressing socioeconomic challenges which hinder the growth and development of women. For instance, social grants provided by the department act as a lifeline for poor and vulnerable women, increase their spending power and participation in the economy as well as enable them to care for and provide for their families.

Government has also made positive strides to promote the participation of women in the economy and support women entrepreneurs. For example, through the Isivande Women's Fund, government has been able to provide financial and non-financial support to women-initiated businesses. Through improving women's access to financial services, the Fund has played an imperative role in reducing the barriers which hinder entry into the economy and the sustainability of businesses.

Our government has also recognised and appreciates the significant role that women play in the informal economy. The informal economy remains an essential part of our country's overall economy as it supports the livelihoods of millions of South Africans through opportunities for employment and poverty reduction. To this end, the ANC-led government has implemented several measures to support and empower women such as making



investments to improve infrastructure for informal traders, including the provision of safe and secure vendor stalls.

The government has also put in place a number of training and skill-development initiatives targeted at boosting women's productivity, business practices, and entrepreneurial skills, in order to empower women in the informal sector. For instance, training courses on financial management, marketing, and company planning are provided by the Department of Trade, Industry, and Competition, among other government organizations, with the intention of meeting the needs of women working in the informal sector.

Chairperson,

Despite the abovementioned commendable democratic gains achieved over the past 30 years of our young democracy in transforming the political economy to empower women and advance gender equality, women continue to bear the brunt of entrenched, discriminatory structural and systematic barriers which limit their economic participation and development.

Comrade Oliver Tambo, as noted in the 50th National Conference discussion document of the ANC in 1997, reflected on South Africa's struggle for independence and emphasized that "South Africa will never be free as long as women are not free", implying that the basis for judging South Africa's liberation is to note the extent to which women are free. Thus, in the interest of realizing our strategic mandate of a nonracial, nonsexist democratic country, the question of the liberation and empowerment of women must always be at the top of the agenda.

Malibongwe, igama lamakhosikazi.

Thank you.