

THE SPEECH OF THE MEC ON THE OCCASION OF THE 2016 FEMALE FARMER ENTREPRENEUR AWARDS

05 AUGUST 2016

MATJHABENG.

Programme Director,

The Leadership of the Municipality Present,

The Head of Department, Mr Thabethe

The Management and Staff of the Department

Leadership of Agricultural Organisations present

Nominees

Esteemed Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Allow me an opportunity to welcome everybody present. Today's event is meant to pay respect, honour and appreciation of the efforts and positive impact of Women towards improving our lives. I would like to pay a special acknowledgement of all the Women who participated throughout the process of these Awards, those who made it to this stage and those that could not.

Program Director,

2. We mark the beginning of Women's month by saluting the struggles of women against systems that suppressed their development through a special event like this one. We pay a distinctive tribute to Women like Katie Louw, Mrs Gabashane and Mrs Kotsi who, barely a month after the formation of the ANC in 1912, delivered a petition containing the grievances of women of Free State to Parliament.
3. We bow our heads in remembrance of women of 1913 from Bloemfontein, Winburg and Jagersfontein who braved imprisonment by defying oppressive laws that restricted freedom of women. When he visited at Kroonstad Prison late in 1913 and saw the horrifying conditions in which they were held, Sol Plaatje wrote, "... They are determined to fight the pass laws no matter where they might be...They are fighting for the freedom of women in the Free State...They don't care even if they die in jail."
4. This month, we salute the bravery of women of Marquard whose militancy against oppression saw them being marched on foot for more than 40 km to Senekal Prison in 1921. Despite the appalling prison conditions of that time, Women refused to pay fines and resorted to imprisonment.

5. We dedicate this event in honour of women of 1956 who marched to the Union Building against the pass laws. On the same day, more than one thousand women marched in Bloemfontein and Winburg in support of those that went to the Union Building. Their battle-cry was 'Wanthintúmmfazi, wanthintúmbhokodo'.

Program Director,

6. This militancy and bravery has always been at the centre of women's character throughout the known history of the human species. It is women, who have always managed families to give direction of the future to young generations in the family and society. It is women, who have always ensured that everyone in the family gets food, even if men would go out hunting.
7. It is women, who would till the land to ensure that there is enough food to sustain the family throughout the year without relying on hunting, and that was the beginning of the establishment of villages and settlements. It is that bravery and militancy that has always brought stability in societies and governance, all because 'Mme o tshwara thipa ka bohaleng'.
8. When men went out to hunt, women tilled the land. As men went out to war, women battled to fend for the kids and the sickly through the vegetable gardens and fruit trees they planted.
9. When men went to mines and cities to work so that the families can have finances to survive and transact for their needs, women, would be left behind to till the land so that there is enough food to sustain survival of the family.

Program Director,

10. This event is appropriate to honour Women for the work they have been doing in societies for centuries, without appropriate appreciation. We reflect on projects in Vegetables, Fruits, and Meat Production that Women have established to supply markets with fresh produce. Some of those projects are reliable suppliers to big Supermarkets.
11. It is important to highlight that agricultural production serves as a key driver in the second economy.
12. When projects, especially through Corporatives, grow in leaps and bounds to provide competitive products in the markets, we become proud that the efforts of government in developing entrepreneurs of note are bearing positive fruits.
13. When a project becomes successful, it creates jobs and provides income to families.
14. Government should always be available to assist with the provision of the necessary skills to drive Corporatives in order to prevent collapse or failure of projects.

Program Director,

15. This year's event marks the 17th anniversary since the launch of these Awards, and the theme is:

“Reaffirming commitment towards women empowerment in the Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries sector”

16. Adjudication of the Awards was done by a team consisting of Agriculturalists, Farmers’ Unions, Farmers and Officials. Today we have the following categories:

- Best Female Worker in the Sector
- Best Subsistence Producer in the Sector
- Top Entrepreneur in the Sector: Smallholder
- Top Entrepreneur: Commercial
- MEC’s Special Award
- Overall Winner

It is worth noting that there were no nominations for the Exports Markets and Processing categories. This is an indication of the challenges we still have in our endeavour to develop Agro- processing entrepreneurship. It is also indicative of the fact that we are not producing enough, both in quality and in quantity, for the Export Markets. It is incumbent upon government, in close collaboration with the Private Sector, to put more injection in the form of incentives to promote these sectors.

17. It is necessary and befitting to recognize the sterling work done by previous winners like Ms Rosy Matlanyane from Bethlehem, Ms Mponeng Lentoro from Bainsvlei in Bloemfontein.

18. Lastly, we must put all efforts in bringing as many women as possible into the Agricultural Industry as competitive entrepreneurs. The Premier always emphasizes empowerment of women. The opportunity that the industry has is that the Provincial Government is keen to assist in the growth of Agro-processing. We cannot allow our primary goods to leave the province unprocessed like it has always been happening with our minerals.

19. The bravery and militancy with which you have conducted your struggles should be applied in this industry in order to grow and strengthen it. We must think of the opportunity cost of going on with our lives while ignoring what Government and the Industry present.

I thank you.