



# MATJHABENG LOCAL MUNICIPALITY

## THE QUEST FOR WOMEN EMANCIPATION CONTINUES

2015 marks the 59<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the heroic march by women to the apartheid government protesting the humiliating laws. This was the second march by South African black women to register their disapproval of the pass laws, following the march 43 years earlier in 1913 in Bloemfontein. The popular march on 09 August 1956 would lay the basis for what the democratic South Africa celebrates as the National Women's Day annually.

The women marches on both occasions were important in many respects. Firstly, it demystifies claims that women can only be spectators in serious tasks of the revolution, incapable of impactful action to alter the course of history. The struggle towards the creation of a national democratic society by the developmental state was always based on the resolution of the triple oppression of women based on class, race and gender. While women stand as the primary motive force of the ensuing programme of the National Democratic Revolution, they deserve commendation for their heroic and selfless deeds that positively affected the course of history.

At the birth of our democracy in 1994, the democratic government placed high premium on the programme of women emancipation. Some of our institutions supporting democracy like the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) were led by women. It is under their stewardship that the IEC became the pride of our incipient democracy and lodestar for other African countries to learn crucial lessons for conditions enabling credible, free and fair elections. Equally, our National Assembly has been led mostly by women since 1994. It is under their guidance that we have registered significant strides in transforming state institutions and ensuring that these institutions serve the interest of the majority of citizens as opposed to the pre-1994 era.

At local government level, we have adopted the Strategic Agenda that governs the transformed, democratic municipality with five key performance areas. One of them is Institutional Transformation, which focuses on the backroom capacity to produce



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sustainable outcomes in the delivery of basic services and local economic development. Our municipality in the current term registered some improvement on women representation. The council currently has 25 female councillors, 3 of which are young women. Out of the expected number of 360 ward committee members, 172 are women, 41 of which are young. We have also established the Women's Commission led by seasoned councillor, Honourable 'Makhotso Ntsebeng, specifically to look on matters affecting particularly women councillors in our workplace.

The numbers above indicate that women have an important role to play in deepening public participation and building democracy. The Local Government Turn-Around Strategy and the Back to Basics Approach adopted by the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) emphasise the importance of responsiveness of the sector to people's needs and expectations. Responsiveness is guaranteed when planning processes involve the right recipients of service. Over a period, women numbers have always exceeded that of men, thereby positioning them at an advantageous position easily to influence programmes that address their unique challenges as women. The National Development Plan and Statistics South Africa Reports continuously point out that triple challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality largely affect black rural women. Municipalities are therefore naturally expected to be at the coalface of turning this tide.

We have made serious strides since the birth of democracy and developmental local government. We do have a good story to tell. However, we also appreciate that we are only at the beginning of our programme of transformation. The struggle continues. The quest for women emancipation continues. The revolution will not be complete until women are fully emancipated. And we want to point out that the emancipation of women is not their responsibility alone. Men need to be active partners in addressing the legacy of patriarchy. Patriarchy is an international phenomenon.



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It is for this reason that Thomas Sankara, the leader of the revolution in Burkina Faso said, of their own national revolution: "Our revolution has worked to eliminate prostitution, vagrancy, forced marriages, female circumcision, and the particularly difficult conditions for women".

We have made progress on these and other areas that this late African leader speaks of. As African leaders have again prioritised the emancipation of women in their African Agenda 2063, women once again enjoy the focus of this programme. Our view is that their emancipation can only be meaningful at local spaces. Local government thus becomes an important instrument to bolster the achievement of the goals of African Agenda 2063.

On behalf of council, I want to take this opportunity to wish all our female councillors, staff and residents in Matjhabeng well as they commemorate yet another Women's Day on Sunday.

## **Speaker**

**Charles Stofile**

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