



**KWAZULU-NATAL  
LEGISLATURE**  
AN ACTIVIST PEOPLE-CENTRED LEGISLATURE



## **MULTIPARTY WOMEN'S CAUCUS**

### **REPORT ON THE 2025 INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY FORUM**

**HELD IN DURBAN - 07 MARCH 2025**



## 1.INTRODUCTION

On Friday , 07 March 2025 , the Multiparty Women’s Caucus in partnership with the Democracy Development Programme (DDP) hosted the Women’s Forum . The event was aimed at celebrating the International Women’s Day , a platform dedicated to accelerating action toward gender equality .The day is celebrated annually all over the world on 08 March .The main purpose is to celebrate women’s social economic , cultural and political accomplishments , while also calling for action to accelerate gender parity

***Themed “For all Women and Girls: Rights. Equality. Empowerment”*** the event featured panel discussions moderated by Ms N Mkhize , DDP facilitator .Presentations were followed by robust engagements .Stakeholders included female Councillors of eThekweni municipality , a variety of women formations , civil society organisations , gender and human rights activists . Expert panels discussed the following key topics:

1. Climate justice and gender equality
2. Promoting gender equality in local governance in fostering gender equality and dismantling systemic barriers
3. Empowering young women through education and employment
4. Advancing women and girls’ rights

## 2.OBJECTIVES

**Key objectives of the Women’s Day Forum were as follows :**

- Share experiences and promoting actionable strategies
- Advocate for gender equality
- Increase awareness of women’s rights
- Address systemic barriers to gender equality
- Engage on gender mainstreaming strategies

## 3.WELCOME ADDRESS

The welcome address was delivered by Dr Paul Kariuki , Director of DDP. In his address he emphasised

- The promotion of gender equality and women empowerment
- Challenged societal norms and structures that hinder women’s progress
- Advocated for inclusive leadership and ensuring that all voices are heard
- Highlighted existing barriers such as poverty , gender segregation and patriarchy

## 4.OPENING REMARKS

In her opening remarks Honourable C Q Madlopha , Chairperson of the Multiparty Women’s Caucus acknowledged the support that the MPWC receives from various stakeholders and has contributed to the success of the event . Madlopha expressed solidarity with women who had perished in countries affected by global conflicts like

Gaza and the DR as well as women who were victims of floods in KZN .A moment of silence was observed

She reminded women that 2025 marks the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action which aimed to guide governments to develop policies and programmes that will impact significantly on various aspects of women's lives

She called for government to develop legal frameworks and productive measures to dismantle patriarchy and discrimination .The government and the private sector must demonstrate their commitment to deal with widespread, deeply entrenched views that contribute to an unequal society

She stated that the theme for the 2025 IWD is a call to embrace humanity in its entirety, with no exclusion of anyone. This is a clarion call to empower women and girls in their adolescence, and a future with women in the leadership to drive everlasting social change. She urged women to lead in all areas of society and not agree to be silenced but challenge all forms of patriarchy. Women in higher positions should lift those below them

She said that the theme makes a call to all to engage, challenge all forms of discrimination, dismantle patriarchy and to elevate voices of the marginalised ,especially rural women. "The view that we remain second-class citizens must be eliminated in the minds of all women so we can realize inclusive access to opportunities in education, in the economy, and leadership positions.

The Chairperson concluded by calling men in leadership positions to join this fight so that humanity wins and expressed appreciation for the Speaker's efforts to ensure that the LGBRQIA+ community is included

## **5.MESSAGE OF SUPPORT**

The following are the highlights of the message of support delivered by , Dr Devi Rajab , Chairperson of DDP

- Paid tribute to historical women leaders and criticised America's decision to terminate the South African USAID/PEPFAR co-operative agreement . and funding
- Even with the best Constitution in the world and the legislative overhaul that safeguards women's rights, South Africa cannot eradicate the scourge of violence against females .
- Sexual harassment is indicative of how society views us. Women are viewed firstly in terms of our genitalia. Child abuse in South Africa surpasses any other country in the world and SA remains one of the countries with the highest rate of domestic violence
- Highlighted the importance of understanding global political shifts in advancing gender equality

## 6.SUMMARY OF THE KEYNOTE ADDRESS - HON NN BOYCE , SPEAKER OF THE KZN LEGISLATURE

### In her keynote address the Honourable Speaker ;

- Encouraged strong partnership with the Women's Caucus and DDP to amplify impact
- Acknowledged the changed that is brought by women in politics .Women have been oppressed in many ways, but it took women to change the status quo
- Emphasised that not all women who are political activists are progressive .”Being progressive or regressive knows no gender. If you are not empowering women and educating them to stand in the world”
- Described the theme for IWD 2025 “ ***For all Women and girls : Rights Equality ,Empowerment*** “ as a call to action , a call to guarantee a feminist future
- Stressed that gender equality requires collective action and inclusive dialogues to dismantle patriarchy. Central to this vision is empowering the next generation, the youth, particularly young women, and adolescent girls as catalysts for lasting change. .
- Conceded that despite considerable progress made in advancing women's rights since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995 , the world is experiencing new and overlapping crisis and the erosion of rights.
- Encouraged women to be politically informed and proactive in overcoming systemic barriers.
- Said that when there are challenges in education it is the female learners in rural areas who suffer the most .Issues of women's health are raised as issues of shame. In war torn countries women and young girls are most affected people .The displacement comes with sexualised assault on the rights and dignity of women
- Cautioned against the perception of women of a certain age being useless and assured women that they matter despite the hot flushes they may experience.
- Stressed the importance of education for girls stating that we must raise educated , independent girls who do not have to rely on men for survival
- Appealed for unity in the fight for gender equality saying that when women unite beyond what divides them, they unite on the agenda of progress.
- Emphasized that the fight for gender equality includes the LGBTQIA+ , women who want to undergo gender affirming surgeries and women who experience challenges and want other types of their bodies to be fully affirmed .
- Encouraged young people to focus on developing skills since SA needs a skilled nation which will provide opportunities for employment and self-employment
- Advised women not to despair regarding the USA's decision to cut off PEPFAR funding , other opportunities and partnerships will open up as experience has taught
- Urged women to take the fight for gender equality to their constituencies and communities and also educate communities on legislation that has been enacted to protect women against GBV

- Stressed that it is the responsibility of women in parliament to ensure that budgets presented by departments are analysed from a gendered perspective , an intersection of gender issues in the budget .The further pointed out if this is not done parliament will be enacting laws that are good on paper but will not transform the landscape of the country

## **7.PANEL DISCUSSIONS**

### **7.1 Panel 1 : “Promoting Gender Equality in Local Governance”**

Panellists on the topic were Professor Halima Khuonete , Chief Director for Capacity Building at KZN COGTA and Councillors Jeniffer Vallan , a SALGA representative and councillor at iLembe district . In their presentations presenters.

- Applauded the government interventions that have contributed to the increase of women in leadership positions in both the public and the private sector. In KwaZulu the Provincial Gender Strategy Plan 2021- 2025 aims to advance gender equality and address gender-based violence in the province
- Appreciated that at local government level there are Gender Desks and gender focal persons
- Stated that in order to ensure that men and women are equally represented in municipal councils , political parties should work to increase women’s participation in politics
- Stressed the importance of establishing gender platforms in all municipalities These key interventions should be monitored by COGTA which has 119 programmes throughout the province and works with female amakhosi
- Alluded to the need for collaboration and the importance of cascading information to other women who are not present in this gathering
- Advocated for equal representation of both men and women in decision making processes within municipalities
- Encouraged provision of leadership training for women to equip them with the necessary skills and confidence to participate effectively in the economy
- Advocated for gender budgeting at local level and stressed the importance of incorporating gender consideration into municipal budgets and Integrated Development Plans (IDPs)
- Pointed out the need to conduct awareness campaigns to educate municipal officials, Councillors and the broader community about the importance of gender equality and gender responsive policies
- Pointed out that municipalities must establish robust monitoring and evaluation systems to assess the impact of gender equality initiatives and ensure accountability

### **7.2 Panel 2 : Climate Change and Gender equality**

Dr Gabi Mkhize , Paballo Moerane and Ms Zanele Mkhize from the University of KwaZulu Natal made a joint presentation on the topic . Ms Shanice Firmin from South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA) also presented on the topic Panellists highlighted the gendered dimension of climate change and the following key issues

- South Africa is struggling with Climate change, and the country is currently faced with water scarcity .The right to water and sanitation is being compromised .This significantly impacts women and girls' lives and livelihoods
- Climate change is not just a weather issue but a gender issue . When young girls are menstruating at school or at home their hygiene and safety is compromised .They are at risk when they have to go to bushes to relieve themselves and there's possibility of being raped .
- Women and girls are disproportionately affected by climate change as they face multiple forms of discrimination including lower levels of education , less access to resources and more barriers to land ownership.
- There is a relationship between climate change and gender-based violence (GBV) .When communities become stressed due to economic instability , food security and mental anxiety that are a result of climate change and natural disasters , various forms of GBV increase
- Socio economic pressures drive sexual exploitation and abuse , early forced marriages ,intimate partner and domestic violence among other forms of GBV
- Unavailability of water inadvertently leads to unhygienic conditions, and this is In townships there are no adequate systems in place when taps run dry .
- During floods families have to relocate and the burden falls on women since women and girls are the primarily responsible for food and water collection
  
- SA is signatory the Paris Agreement , a Treaty adopted at the 2015 UN Climate Change Conference whereby countries agreed to set their own emissions reduction targets
- The audience was reminded that South Africa was a signatory to the Paris Agreement ,
- Ms Shanice Firmin programmes Manager at the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA ) was critical of many KZN municipalities for failing to adequately address climate change and its impact in the region particularly air pollution and infrastructure resilience.
- Most Municipalities have not effectively addressed the devastating effects of climate change. eThekweni municipality was cited as an example and there is concern that the municipality has not invested in resilient infrastructure and urban planning .This has resulted in increased casualties and widespread destruction during major floods
- There are too many cases of poor drainage systems within the city and there is also a lack of evacuation plans in spite of known flooding areas like the M4 and N2 highways
- Climate change impacts disproportionately affects marginalised communities such as those living near industrial areas or in informal settlements , these vulnerable communities are the most affected . eThekweni municipality's climate action plan does not adequately address the needs of vulnerable communities.
- District municipalities do not seriously take gender into consideration when developing policies and other important documents . Provincial and municipal policies were gender blind .
- Some municipalities do not mention climate change at all in their plans and have no programmes .They do not report on the gendered impact of climate change .Those who mentioned gender did not provide specific or detailed information on plans to mitigate the impact of climate change

### **7.3 Panel 3 : Empowering women through Education and employment**

The panel discussion centred on inspiring women especially young girls to get education especially in study field that are seen to be traditionally male dominated. The panellists were Ms Weliswa Kunene , a scientist and pharmacist , Ms Balungile Masuku , a lecturer in maritime studies at the Durban University of Technology and Ms Buhlebuyeza Motsene , DDP facilitator .Their presentations highlighted that :

- Young girls should be encouraged to enter the Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM ) field . There should be more outreach programmes with learners in township schools , empowering them on study opportunities available in the STEM field and careers in science , technology and engineering.
- Many students at university had not been adequately prepared and lacked information on studies. They do not know how an academic degree differs from a professional degree.
- Many learners in township and rural schools are not as exposed to subjects like coding as learners from affluent schools .It is critical for learners to be exposed to IR at an early age .
- It is important for women to have access to knowledge and skills .Education equips women with essential skills to participate in the workforce , political processes and societal leadership .
- Educated women are more likely to break the cycle of poverty in their families Educating women is linked to increased productivity , innovation and economic growth
- Barriers to education for women and girls include among economic constraints cultural and societal norms , early marriage and childbearing .
- Women to venture into traditionally male dominated fields of study and work .She cited various exciting opportunities for women and girls within the maritime industry. The industry is increasingly adopting new technologies The global commercial trade includes sea based and land-based operations
- Women with expertise in environmental sciences and engineering have opportunities in green shipping projects .Participants were also apprised of academic studies in maritime Studies which range from a diploma to a PhD
- Early pregnancy , access to libraries , laboratories and data are critical for access to information for both male and female learners . It is important for girl-children to have role models to look up to

### **7.4 Panel 4 : Advancing Women and Girls' Rights**

Ms Athenkosi Mehlomakhulu , Legal practitioner at Legal Aid SA and Ms Thandeka Magwenyani , Legal Practitioner at the SA Human Rights Commission presented on the topic

The Legal practitioners highlighted key legislation which aim to address domestic violence , promote gender equality and prevent discrimination against women . The government was applauded for enacting various pieces of legislation to protect women and children .These include , among others , the following :

1. Domestic Violence Act – Provides survivors of domestic violence with legal protection

2. Women empowerment and Gender Equality Bill – Aims to promote equality and opportunities for women
3. The Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination – It prohibits discrimination based on gender and provides a legal framework for addressing discriminatory practices
4. Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and related matters ) Amendment Act - The Act addresses sexual offences including those involving women and children.It includes provisions for strengthening the fight against sexual violence and ensuring accountability for perpetrators
5. National Council on Gender-based Violence and Femicide – a Council which provides strategic leadership in the fight against GBV
6. Employment Equity Act , 2005 and the Children’s Amendment Act, 2007 – These acts focus on protecting children from abuse

## **8.CALL TO ACTION / KEY TAKEAWAYS**

**The following recommendations emanated from presentations and group discussions**

1. The school curriculum should focus on developing a range of skills beyond traditional academic subjects .Skills are critical for the country’s economic development
2. The Women’s Caucus should convene a conference for women and engage with ordinary women formations that are doing impactful work but not aligned to political parties. This will be an opportunity to track whether the gender agenda is on track
3. Women and girls’ access to education should be prioritised as it is linked to economic growth .Young women need to be empowered on how they can access economic opportunities. Young women and girls should further be encouraged to enter careers that are viewed as traditionally male dominated These include STEM careers and careers in the maritime sector.
4. KZN Legislature Women’s Caucus to assist in establishing the Women’s Caucus at municipality level
5. The spirit of ubuntu to be instilled in officials working in government institutions
6. Women in leadership positions must be empowered on legislation impacting women as well as on women’s rights .Knowledge gained to be cascaded to women in their constituencies and communities
7. Municipalities should ensure that gender is taken into consideration in all strategic documents and policies .Action Plans to mitigate climate change should be adequate , effective and take vulnerable communities into consideration
8. Strengthen the call for social economic and environmental justice
9. District municipalities should ensure provision of water and sanitation to communities since these are basic human rights .
- 10.Delays in relocating communities affected by natural disasters should be minimal as these impact women negatively

## 9.CONCLUSION

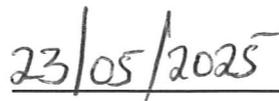
The diverse contributions made during the forum proved that without the participation of women in social and economic development , the goal of building inclusive democracies will continue to be elusive

Women acknowledged the strides that have been made in advancing gender equality It is evident that more remains to be done to address the gender inequality still present in our economy. Women should take it upon themselves to uproot patriarchal systems and practices wherever it exists .Transformation should be accelerated so that women are no longer relegated to the fringes of the economy. Women should fight for social , cultural , political , economic and other barriers to achieve full participation in the economy.



Hon CQ Madlopha

Chairperson – Multiparty Women’s Caucus



Date