



MINISTRY

HUMAN SETTLEMENTS
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**INPUT BY THEMBI SIMELANE MINISTER OF HUMAN SETTLEMENTS
ON THE OCCASION OF INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATION, "BUILDING
RESILIENT COMMUNITIES BY STRENGTHENING THE VOICE OF WOMEN IN LOCAL
GOVERNANCE AHEAD OF THE POLLS"
08 MARCH 2026
IVORY PARK, GAUTENG**

Programme Director

Fellow Panellists

Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me start by expressing my sincere and profound appreciation to the organisers of the event and commend the Gauteng Provincial Government (GPG) in ensuring that this event takes place annually to celebrate and mark the International Women's Day.

I am one of the beneficiaries of a democratic South Africa. The sweat, tears and blood of women was an investment for us to have a better life. Are we where we are supposed to be? A simple answer is no. However, policies are in place to enable us to reach our destiny.

We continue with the relentless fight against the three interrelated antagonistic contradictions of class, race, and patriarchal relations of power as recognised by the 2007 ANC Strategy and Tactics.

As a political representative in government sent by my party, the ANC to represent its ideals, I am happy to indicate to this audience that at the Department of Human Settlements we have achieved representation of 56% of Women in Senior Management Positions. We have six branches, 5 of those are led by women as Deputy Directors General. Indeed, we have a good story to tell.

I have been asked to speak on a theme “Building resilient communities by strengthening the voice of women in local governance ahead of the polls”.

Local government is the sphere of government that is regarded as the heartbeat of service delivery, local democracy, community development and empowerment. Its services are disproportionately consumed by women given the significant role of care they play in our varied communities.

The provision of services and its lack thereof impacts directly to women. It therefore becomes not only a legal obligation that they (women) partake in the decision-making of the governance structures of local government, but also a moral one.

I undoubtedly agree with the notion that the strength of our democracy lies in the participation, leadership, and voices of women in shaping decisions that affect our communities.

Building resilient communities requires that the voices of women are not only heard but actively shape local development and governance processes. Women must participate meaningfully in social and economic transformation programmes, particularly at local government level where decisions directly affect communities.

Resilience requires inclusive governance. A resilient community is one where decision making reflects the lived realities of all residents. As women, without a doubt, we are the primary managers of household welfare, community, food security. When women participate meaningfully in decision making, local governance becomes more responsive to the real needs of the communities.

In my opening statement, I spoke about strides we have made in the Department of Human Settlements to ensure we have women representation at the highest decision making of the department. As a country, we have made significant progress across the board, whether in politics, business, or academia.

However, representation alone is and will never be enough. Women must have real influence over budget allocations, policy direction, and strategic decisions in local government. The ultimate should be to shift from representation to meaningful participation and impactful leadership.

It would be amiss of me not to mention that the ANC, a party that shaped me, has proven overtime to be one of the few organisations that promote gender equality and parity in its structures.

I am deliberately making this point because nominations and selection processes in some political parties reflect a bias towards male candidates. Thus, it is important that women unite across the political divide and unite against this gendered norm.

Municipalities are where governance directly affects daily life through provision of basic services, safety, and decent shelter. Women leaders can shape policies and create programmes that improve the everyday realities of ugo go maMkhize and mme Mokoena. Therefore, strengthening women's voices at this sphere of government makes governance more inclusive and more effective.

I strongly believe that strengthening women's voices strengthens democracy. Women's participation should be strengthened not only among elected officials but also

through community platforms such as ward committees, religious and civil society organisations.

We may all be aware that, in terms of the Structures Act, “political parties must seek to ensure that 50% of candidates on their party list are women and that women and men are evenly distributed through the list”. Though the system has significantly improved in creating an enabling environment for women representation in Councils through the Proportional Representation system (PR), women are still not adequately represented at ward level and this needs to be confronted in the upcoming local government elections.

The tactical victories of women representation in decision-making structures at local government won't be enough without developing and enhancing their capacity and skills.

Municipal Councils must have capacity building programmes designed for women to enhance their capabilities and abilities to lead qualitatively both in council and administration to balance the scale.

In closing, we must agree that women's voices must be amplified in local governance. This will result in decisions becoming more equitable, communities becoming more resilient, and our democracy will be stronger.

We know where women lead, they excel. The legislative environment of local government must be strengthened to support the empowerment of women.

I thank you.