



MINISTRY

**HUMAN SETTLEMENTS
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THEMBI SIMELANE, MP,
MINISTER OF HUMAN SETTLEMENTS, ON THE OCCASION OF THE
WOMEN WHO BUILD THE NATION BUSINESS DIALOGUE CHAMPIONED
BY THE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT AGENCY**

27 AUGUST 2026

THE MASLOW HOTEL, SANDTON

Programme Director,
Distinguished guests,
Women leaders,
Colleagues and friends,

Good day.

It is an honour and privilege to join the Housing Development Agency at the second instalment of the Women Who Build the Nation Summit convened under the theme: *“Women Who Build Nations: Advancing Leadership, Investment and Inclusive Development.”*

Let me begin by acknowledging the women gathered in this room, women who lead organisations, build businesses, shape communities, mobilise investment, create employment and, importantly, create opportunities for others to succeed.

I also acknowledge our partners across government, the private sector, the development community, and the built environment.

Your presence demonstrates something important: nation-building cannot be achieved by government alone. It requires partnership, courage, investment, and a shared commitment to building a better South Africa.

Programme Director,

The theme of this summit is woven with the spirit of the moment we find ourselves in as women of this country and it also elevates the vision about women are in pursuit of nation-building, and our gathering here today is a testament that women are indeed always at the centre of the noble task of building nations.

We have built families, communities, institutions, businesses, and movements. We stand on the shoulders of the brave women of 1956, the giants who confronted apartheid with vigour and determination.

The women of 1956 belied the cat. They took the risk for me and you to be comfortably gathered here today without wonder. We salute them.

We can attest that 70 years after their historic march and 30 years since the adoption of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, significant strides have been made in terms of women empowerment, however, we are not oblivious of the fact that a lot still needs to be done.

Under the women leadership, the Department of Human Settlements obtained its first ever clean audit, cementing the statement that women have the capacity and agency to lead and sustain institutions.

We shall build on these tactical victories in ensuring that women are not only participants in the realm of development but are an integral part of decision-making as investors, developers, innovators, and owners of the future we seek to create.

The question is no longer about whether women have a role to play in nation-building. We have proven beyond doubt that we are the trendsetters and trailblazers. We clock it!

We have gathered here to remind each other about magnificent role and contributions we make in building a nation plagued by a many socio-economic challenges.

Programme Director,

Housing is one of the most tangible expressions of dignity.

But we must also recognise that human settlements are about much more than the structure in which a person lives. They are a strategic asset that can create pathways for access to economic opportunities.

They are about schools, healthcare, transport, safety, recreation, and connectivity hence we changed from housing to human settlements.

They are about creating inclusive communities where people can live, work, and build sustainable livelihoods.

It is against this backdrop why the work of the Housing Development Agency is so crucially important in advancing the vision of integrated and sustainable human settlements working in tandem with women.

The Agency sits at the intersection of land, housing, infrastructure, investment, and spatial transformation, and these are spaces largely densified by women. Therefore, any development of these areas must have women at the centre.

The opportunity before us is to use human settlements as a catalyst for broader economic development for women, people with disabilities and the youth.

Programme Director,

South Africa's housing and human settlements challenge are multi-context, multi-faceted and significantly complex. But we are not oblivious of the fact that within these challenges lies an equally significant opportunities to be leveraged for the transformation of the sector as a catalyst for economic development.

We must work together in unison in unlocking greater levels of investment opportunities that exists in the human settlements sector and not tear each other part, women must be united, forge a formidable pact as we claim our position in the sector.

We will ensure that government continues to create the enabling environment for women to find sufficient expression in the built environment. The private sector will be mobilised to bring in capital injection, innovation, and expertise with financial institutions developing appropriate financing solutions.

Developers must identify opportunities that are both commercially viable and socially impactful, and we move from the premise that communities, and especially women remain central to the developmental processes taking place in the sector.

Our objective must be to move from a model where government is expected to do everything, to one where government creates the conditions for multiple partners to build together. Together we can build better, climate resilient, smart and sustainable human settlements.

There is also a particular opportunity to expand the participation of women across the built environment.

We need more women as:

- Property developers;
- Investors;
- Architects and engineers;
- Contractors;
- Quantity surveyors;
- Town planners;
- Project managers;
- Entrepreneurs;
- Financial professionals; and
- Leaders of institutions shaping our cities and communities.

Transformation cannot simply mean creating opportunities for women to enter the sector. It must also mean creating pathways for women to own, lead and influence the sector.

It is our desire that more women must be supported to move from participation to ownership and we must leverage our housing delivery programmes anchored on progressive policies to advance this perspective.

We must create deliberate enabling environments designed to move women from employment to entrepreneurship from representation to decision-making.

Most importantly from being beneficiaries of development to being architects of development.

Programme Director,

Leadership is ultimately measured by what we leave behind.

As women, we have a responsibility not only to open doors for ourselves, but to ensure that those doors remain open for those who come after us.

The Housing Development Agency has an important role to play in this national agenda.

The Agency has an opportunity to strengthen its position as a strategic partner to government, investors, developers, and communities.

Its role must extend beyond facilitating the delivery of housing and it must help unlock land, accelerate development, facilitate partnerships and contribute to the creation of integrated and sustainable human settlements.

This is about building places where people do not simply live – but where people can thrive.

As we celebrate the women who have built before us, let us remember that we are also building for those who are yet to come.

The young girl sitting in a classroom today must be able to imagine herself as an engineer, a developer, an investor, a CEO, a Minister, an architect or a leader of a major institution.

She must see that there is a place for her in the future of South Africa.

And that future is something we must build deliberately.

So, to the women gathered here today:

Let us build with courage.

Let us lead with purpose.

Let us invest in one another.

Let us create opportunities where none exist.

And let us build a nation in which every woman has the opportunity not only to participate, but to shape its future.

Because women do not simply belong in the story of nation-building.

Women are writing that story.

And together, we must ensure that the legacy we leave is one of greater opportunity, greater inclusion and a more prosperous South Africa.

I thank you.