



Monday, 04 October 2021

Dear Fellow South African,

If we are to achieve meaningful equality between men and women, which is one of the principal aims of our Constitution, we need to ensure the full and equal participation of women in the economy.

As a country, we have made progress in promoting equality for women in areas like government, civil society, the administration of justice, sport and culture. Unfortunately, we haven't made the same progress in the economy.

There are more men in employment than women. Men are more likely than women to be in paid employment, and women are more likely to be doing unpaid work.

The most recent employment numbers show the unemployment rate of black African women is the highest at 41% per cent, more than 4 percentage points higher than the national average.

The inaugural Women's Economic Assembly, which will convene in Gauteng later this week, is part of our national effort to change this.

The assembly will bring together delegates from government, civil society and the private sector to develop a common plan of action for advancing women's economic empowerment.

Last year, government announced that at least 40 per cent of public sector procurement will go to women-owned businesses. As we work towards this target, we are calling on the private sector to make a similar commitment.

The Women's Economic Assembly will consider how supply chains can be used to benefit women-owned businesses, address the policy impediments to women's economic empowerment, and improve access to financing for women-owned businesses, especially rural enterprises.

A number of economic sectors, such as automotive, agriculture, mining and energy, will present commitments and action plans to enhance the participation of women-owned businesses. Some government departments and state-owned enterprises will also present their commitments.

Over the past year, government has been erecting the scaffolding for women's participation in procurement, establishing an institutional framework for operationalisation, holding capacity building and training workshops for women-owned businesses, and linking up women-owned businesses with public sector opportunities.

Although some departments have increased their procurement spend on women-owned businesses, effective monitoring is needed to ensure this translates to tangible growth and sustainability.

For us to realise our ambitious goals, business needs to be on board. The financial services sector must work to broaden access to credit and digital financial services like e-commerce and online banking. Lack of financing impedes the expansion and sustainability of many women-owned businesses, especially SMMEs.

Supporting women-owned businesses through procurement is not the only area where this administration is actively working to empower women.

Women continue to be prioritised for work opportunities through a number of public employment programmes. In the first phase of the President Employment Stimulus, for example, 66% of participants were women.

Of the 206,000 hectares of state land released in the last year, 54,000 hectares – comprising 78 farms – were made available to women beneficiaries. However, we need to do more to improve women's access to productive land for farming, and the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development aims to allocate at least 50% of allotted state land to women.

We also need to address the inadequate representation of women in managerial positions in the private sector. Some 67% of managerial positions are held by men compared to 33% by women.

Even though we have solid policies that outlaw gender discrimination in the workplace, wage differences between men and women persist. According to a report by the National Business Institute, women earn R72 for every R100 earned by a man.

We need to ensure greater social and other protection for women employed in the informal sector and in elementary and domestic work occupations.

The first-ever Women's Economic Assembly is a milestone to be celebrated by us all. It brings us all the closer to meeting our Constitutional aspiration of equality and will be a vital tool through which we can accelerate the transformation of our economy to benefit all.

In the final decade towards meeting the 2030 vision of the National Development Plan, let us work together as the public and private sectors and all of society.

Let us act with renewed urgency to realise the full economic empowerment of our country's women, of the women of Africa and of women everywhere.

With best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Cyril Ramaphosa". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.