

Minister longs to see more women appointed in key leadership posts

August 2011 will go down as the most memorable Women's Months in the history of the department for the female officials whom before the evening of 10 August, only knew Ms Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula as only a Member of Parliament and minister of correctional services.

Minister Mapisa-Nqakula relaxed her illustrious political profile, opened up and connected heart and soul with her female employees at a gala dinner held in Kempton Park on Wednesday 10 August.

The gala dinner was used as a build up to the first National DCS Women's Dialogue the following day and that further revealed the minister's maternal instincts when she shared her personal experiences as a leader and a family woman. The Minister talked about being a leader in a male dominated South African government though efforts for gender equality are being accelerated, her role as a mother of four boys and as a wife and the expectations that come with every portfolio.



Minister Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula (centre) getting up close and personal with her women officials at the Dialogue Session in Kempton Park.

At the start of the dialogue, the minister urged the women to cough out all their frustrations in their workplace particularly the “abuse of power by senior officials and sexual harassment that is rife in the system but continues unabated”. She also requested them to talk about the difficulties in their homes because its effect is felt in the workplace where the women spend eight hours a day on average.

In the spirit of “working together to enhance women's opportunities to economic empowerment” and in celebration of the Women's Month, the Minister commended the National Commissioner for employing more women in the senior management (DC Levels) during this women's month (August). “I applaud the commissioner for hiring women in key positions of management but I want more. When my time at DCS comes to an end, I want to have seen transformation. I want to see women as regional and area commissioners as well as head of centres. They are there in the regions and I have interacted with some of them. Those who have been given the roles in these male dominated functions are doing well,” said the Minister.

Since the advent of women appointment in key government leadership positions, the Minister said the status of service delivery was steadily improving and wishes to see the appointment figures of women in the department moving from its current 28% to 50% by 2014.

She assured the women that she will be channelling most of her energy to ensuring that women are well taken care of in the department and that included changing the uniform for women to make them feel feminine and stop wearing men's jackets, trousers and shoes. She said, “I have been focusing more on offender activities since I joined the department two years ago. It is time we start engaging in dialogues as women. Let us talk about the joys and sorrows of women holistically.”

About 210 women, 30 of which were invited from each region including the head office put their heads together in three commissions to find solutions to women challenges by deliberating on the 8 Principle Action Plan for promoting women empowerment and gender equality within the public service. Tasked with leading the cause for dialogue in the regions, the women constructively debated and made proposals on the;

1. Transformation to Non-Sexism
2. Establishment of a policy environment
3. Meeting equity targets
4. Gender mainstreaming
5. Creating an enabling

6. Empowerment
7. Providing adequate resources
8. Accountability, monitoring and evaluation

On these issues and others, the women lamented the lack of efforts for career pathing within the system and claimed that there are numerous women with qualifications in critical skills areas but are overlooked because they cannot compete with other practising civil servants who always get the nod due to their industry exposure and experience.

Some said they were demoralised to study because “everything not aligned to core business (security) was viewed as of secondary importance.”

Others indicated that the centralisation of growth management opportunities at head office prejudiced regional and centre based women aspirants. A larger core of the women claimed that the department has few annual reserves in its bursary and external training coffers and that hampers the skilling and development of women already in the system.

Nevertheless, the fruits of their deliberation culminated into a declaration document read out by the Minister in which she committed herself to advance the cause of women empowerment in the workplace particularly in line with the government's 8 principle Action Plan at the closure of the women's dialogue.

In her closing remarks, the Minister said that dialogues should be a norm in the department and not be a women's month activity. She urged women to go back to their regions and start with more dialogue sessions.

She also came down hard on sexual harassment in the department. “There is sexual harassment that I have picked up and we are covering it up. There are women who land up in psychiatric care because of harassment. Sexual harassment and abuse of power should be reported.” She concluded.
