Remarks by Premier of KwaZulu-Natal Nomusa Dube-Ncube during the Women in ICT Symposium 2023 held at the Inkosi Albert Luthuli International Convention Centre on 08 March 2023  
  
May I take this opportunity to acknowledge the organisers of this event under the leadership of Director General, Dr Nonhlanhla Mkhize, in her capacity as Chairperson of the KZN ICT Steering Committee, and Dr Thandeka Ellenson, CEO of the Moses Kotane Institute, for grabbing this international women’s day to talk about EMPOWERING WOMEN IN ICT 2023.  
We congratulate MKI which in conjunction with the Office of the Premier is hosting this event to highlight the successes and challenges faced by women in the field of Information and Communications Technology (ICT), and to promote gender equality in the sector.  
Under the theme “Empowering Women in ICT: Embrace Equity”, the event seeks to empower women by providing a platform for them to share their experiences, achievements, and challenges in the ICT sector.  
The theme is a significant statement on the pace and direction that women’s empowerment should take in the ICT sector in the country and in KwaZulu-Natal.  This is line with the International Women’s day 2023 #EmbraceEquity campaign theme which seeks to get the world talking about why and I quote, "equal opportunities are no longer enough". In fact, the 2023 theme draws our attention to the fact that equality can in fact be exclusionary, rather than inclusive.  
This International Women’s Day coincides with the Human Rights Month which will culminate into the Human Rights Day to be celebrated on the 21st of March 2023. On this day we are reminded that our struggles and victory against apartheid were linked to other international battles and the belief that we were all entitled to human rights simply because we are human. We are here as women occupying different roles in society because before us thousands of women fought so that we could gather freely as we are doing today. So we must thank the likes of Mama Bertha Gxowa, Rahima Moosa, Helen Joseph, Sophie De Bruyn and the 20 000 women who in 1956 marched to Union Buildings to tell then Prime Minister JG Strijdom that he had struck a rock…by striking at woman. Our struggle today is that of equity and reversing the injustice of the past so we could be truly equal.  
State of Women in ICT  
The state of women in ICT (Information and Communication Technology) in South Africa and KwaZulu-Natal, in particular, is an area of ongoing concern. While there have been some advances in recent years, women continue to be underrepresented in ICT-related fields, and face a number of challenges in pursuing careers in this sector.  
In South Africa as a whole, women make up only around 23% of the ICT workforce, and are significantly underrepresented in senior management positions. This is despite the fact that the country has made significant investments in ICT infrastructure and has a thriving tech industry.  
While there are a number of initiatives aimed at promoting women's participation in ICT, such as training programs and mentorship schemes, progress has been slow. Women still face a number of barriers, including a lack of access to training and education, discrimination in the workplace, and limited opportunities for career advancement.  
There is also a significant gender pay gap in the ICT sector in South Africa, with women earning on average 30% less than men in equivalent positions. This disparity is even more pronounced for women of color.  
Addressing the underlying structural barriers and promoting greater diversity and inclusion in the tech industry is essential if we are to achieve a more equitable and just society.  
We welcome the call by the international community in 2023 to embrace equity, as a recognition that past injustices do indeed play a role in preventing and delaying the realisation of equal opportunities, and that unless we appreciate the need to support those who were previously disadvantaged, we will not go very far.   
A shift from gender equality to the process of gender equity is required for meaningful progress and a focus on gender equity needs to be part of every ward, institution, department and the entire province. It is said “when we embrace equity, we embrace diversity, and we embrace inclusion”  
Programme Director, a 2020 study on “How Women End Up in the Information Technology Sector: The Perspectives of South African Women”, by  Zamandlovu Makola states that and I quote: “in South Africa, 51% of those working in the ICT sector are women but around 20% are employed in formal jobs”.  
It further notes that “the Bain and Company Gender (Dis) parity report in SA shows that 31% of South African organisations have no female representation at the senior levels”. It adds that women face several obstacles in breaking into the IT labour force because “in South Africa, women constitute only 13% of those with undergraduate degrees in engineering, science and technology, even though the country was ranked 19th out of 149 countries in the 2018 Global Gender Gap Report.”  
Over the years several studies have identified the following as being among the obstacles for Women to Enter in ICT.  
a) Gender discrimination and stereotypes  
b) Working hours and work-life balance  
c) Lack of role models, mentoring and networking opportunities  
d) Organisational culture  
  
HOW CAN KZN WOMEN AND SMMES PENETRATE THE ICT SECTOR TO CONTRIBUTE INTO THE ECONOMY  
There are several ways in which KZN women and SMMEs can penetrate the ICT sector and contribute to the economy. Here are some suggestions:  
• Access to training and education: Women and SMMEs need access to training and education programs to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed in the ICT sector. Government and private sector organizations can provide training and education programs that cater to the specific needs of women and SMMEs.  
• Networking and mentorship: Networking and mentorship programs can provide valuable guidance, advice, and connections to women and SMMEs looking to enter the ICT sector. These programs can connect women and SMMEs with experienced professionals and industry leaders who can provide support and guidance.  
• Access to funding and resources: Women and SMMEs may face barriers in accessing funding and resources to start or grow their businesses. Providing access to funding and resources can help to remove these barriers and allow women and SMMEs to invest in their businesses and compete in the ICT sector.  
• Collaboration and partnerships: Collaboration and partnerships between government, private sector organizations, and women and SMMEs can create opportunities for joint ventures, shared resources, and increased access to markets.  
• Access to information and markets: Providing information about opportunities in the ICT sector, and access to markets, can help women and SMMEs to grow their businesses and contribute to the economy.  
Promoting greater diversity and inclusion in the ICT sector and providing support to women and SMMEs can help to unlock the potential of this sector and contribute to economic growth in KZN and South Africa as a whole.  
We need to encourage women to enter the STEM careers by increasing the number of girls who take science, technology, engineering and mathematics related subjects at school. Parents, friends and teachers have a very big role to play in influencing girl learners ‘choices of careers from an early age.  
I loved what Anton Lembede Mathematics, Science and Technology Academy wrote recently when they closed the term and they said:  
“C Our kids are no longer fighting towards 90% in a subject, because they know 90% is no longer the top, but just a mark. Our students are now fighting towards 100%. This term 9 students scored 100% in Mathematics and others at 98% in other subjects.”  
This attitude is important as girls are no longer the minority in our matric schools that are focused on Science and Mathematics in KwaZulu-Natal. This is good news as we are now marching towards excellence.  
As we announced during the State of the Province Address our province has identified coding and robotics as part of the curriculum in certain schools with the aim of providing a strong base for learners. The Coding and Robotics curriculum is being implemented in 26 out of the targeted 33 schools at foundation phase and at 211 schools for the Intermediate Phase (Grade 7). To date 75 youth have received training on mechatronics repair,  25 were trained in big data analytics.  
The province is converting a school into 4IR skills development centre where 800 young people have been trained on robotics, Internet of Things and drones.  To enable access opportunity to these skills of the future we will be setting up digital skills labs in each district.  
The Province is working with the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies and its entities in extending services in the Harry Gwala and Ugu districts through the Broadband Access Funds under the Presidential Employment Stimulus. We are working towards a SMART KZN and we will ensure that women are central to that revolution.  
We acknowledge initiatives such as Girls4Tech, GirlEng, TechnoGirl and African Girls Can Code which inspire girl learners to take up STEM subjects and careers.  
  
ICT and Fighting GBVF  
GBVF (Gender-Based Violence and Femicide) is a serious issue that needs to be addressed in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. ICT (Information and Communication Technology) can play an important role in curbing GBVF. Here are some ways in which ICT can help:  
We announced the roll out of an initiative to use ICT to fight the scourge of Gender-Based Violence and Femicide by distributing panic buttons linked to the police and private sector security.   
1. Mobile Apps: Developing mobile apps that provide information about GBVF and resources available to victims, such as helplines, emergency services, and shelters.  
2. Social media platforms: Using social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to raise awareness about GBVF, educate people about its causes, and encourage people to report incidents of GBVF.  
3. Online reporting systems: Creating online reporting systems where victims can anonymously report incidents of GBVF to law enforcement agencies.  
4. GPS tracking: Using GPS technology to track and locate victims who are in danger, especially those who have filed restraining orders against their abusers.  
5. Electronic monitoring: Using electronic monitoring devices, such as ankle bracelets, to track the movements of perpetrators of GBVF and alert law enforcement if they come too close to their victims.  
6. Data analytics: Using data analytics to identify patterns and trends in GBVF incidents, which can help law enforcement agencies to allocate resources more effectively and prevent future incidents.  
7. Virtual counseling: Providing virtual counseling services to victims of GBVF, which can help them to cope with the trauma they have experienced and access the support they need.  
ICT can be a powerful tool in the fight against GBVF in KwaZulu-Natal. By leveraging technology and using innovative approaches, we can help to prevent GBVF, support victims, and hold perpetrators accountable.  
Conclusion  
In conclusion, empowering women in ICT and embracing equity is not only a moral obligation but also an economic imperative. By ensuring that women have equal opportunities in the sector, we unlock their potential, drive innovation, and promote economic growth in our province. As we celebrate this International Women's Day, let us recommit ourselves to working towards a world where women in ICT are valued, respected, and empowered to reach their full potential.  
I thank you