

2000s - WOMEN IN THE NEW SOUTH AFRICA

In 1996, a new South African Constitution, with provision for women's rights, was introduced along with a Commission for Gender Equality. This marked a turning point for women in South Africa, but although the first few years of democracy continued to empower women in many ways, there are still a number of crucial challenges to be met today.

WOMEN IN GOVERNMENT

South African women, across racial lines, have been the source of courage for all of us in the struggle for democracy. The number of women in official posts at all three levels of government is increasing.

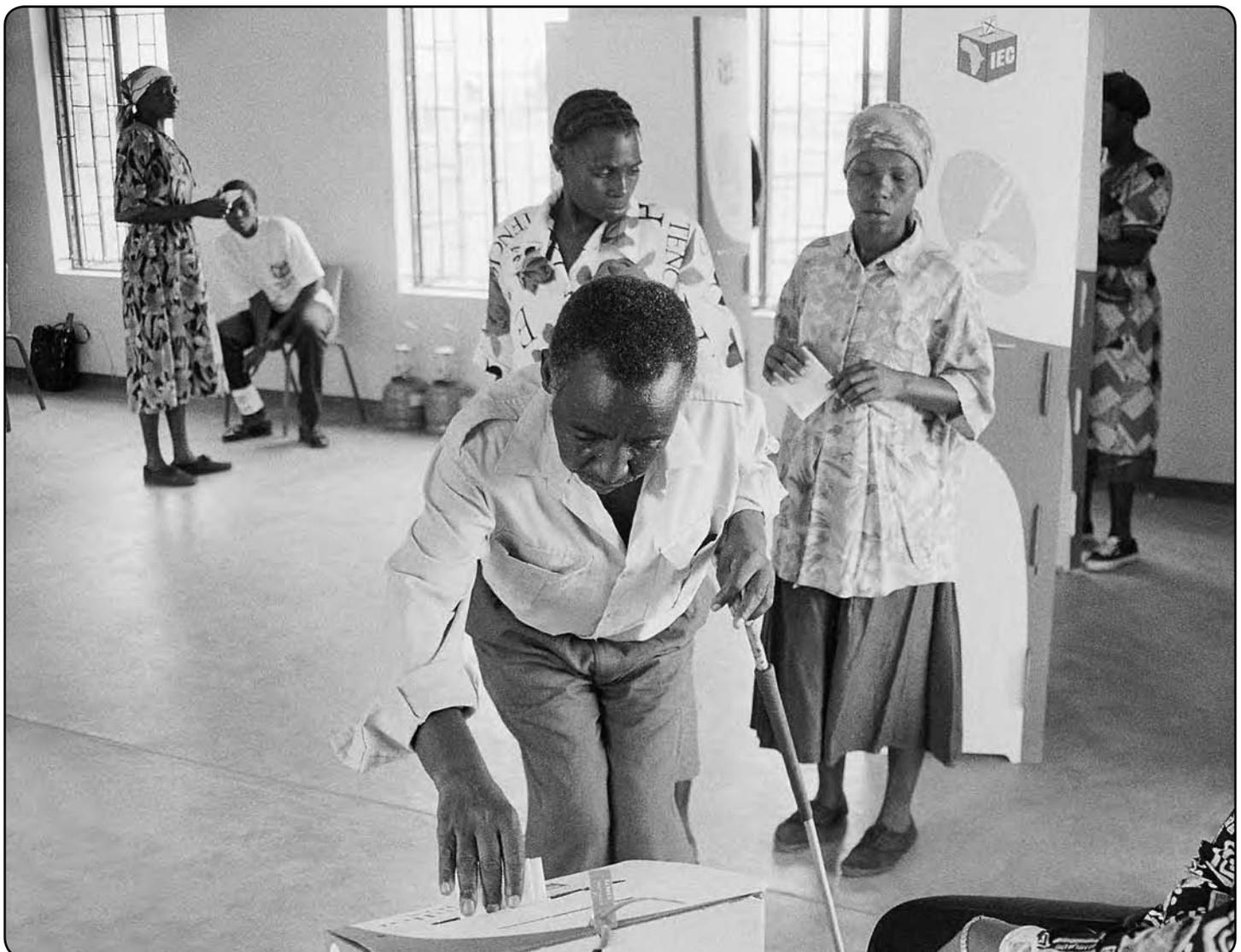
After the 1999 general election, of the 400 members of the National Assembly, 119 were women. These numbers grew to 131 women in 2004 and 172 in 2009.

In addition to this, a woman, Frene Ginwala, was elected as the first Speaker of Parliament. Many of these women ministers have been assigned to non-traditional posts such as foreign affairs, housing, health, minerals and energy, trade and industry, and defence.

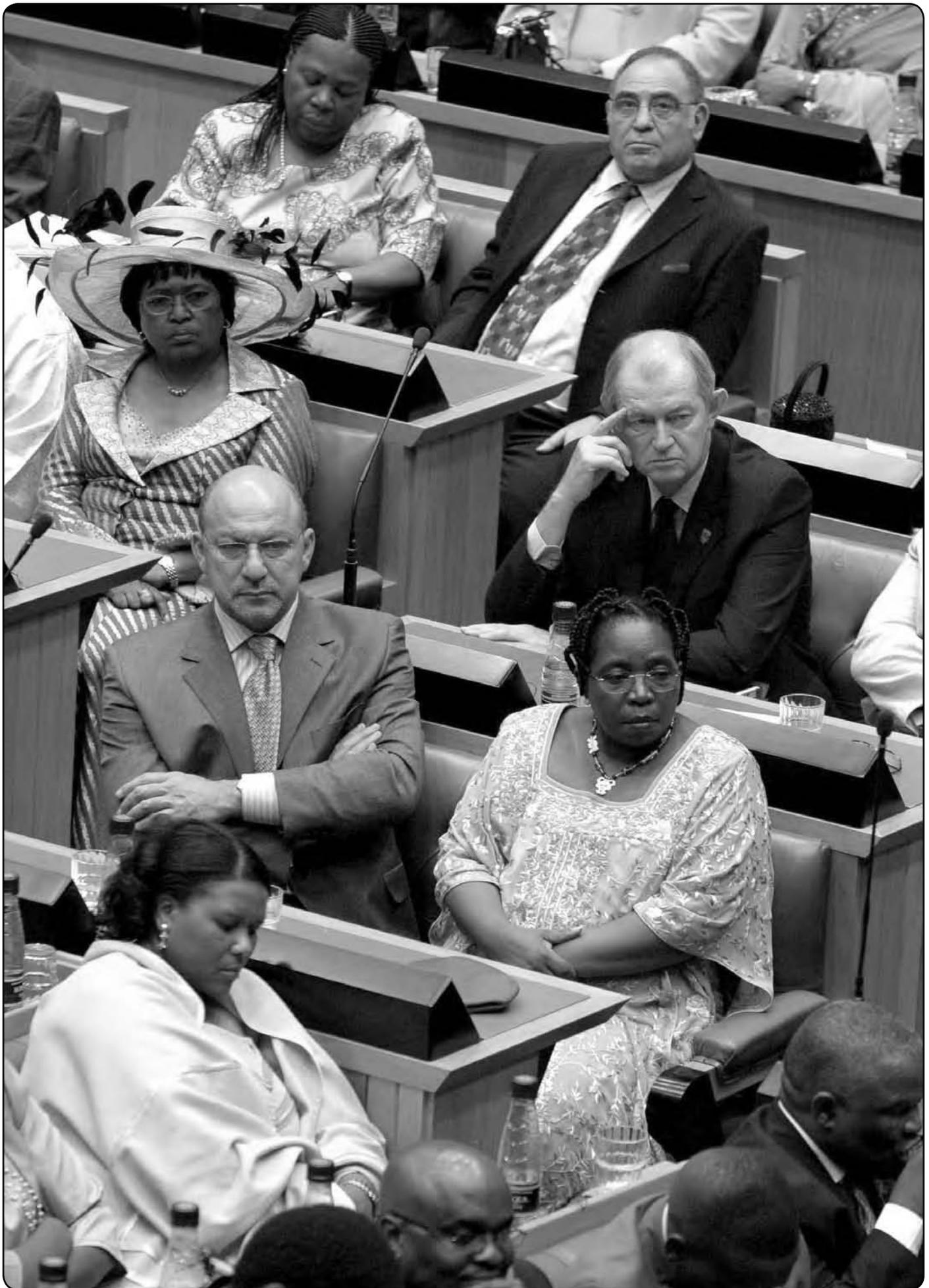
THE FIRST FEMALE DEPUTY PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

History was made in 2005 when President Thabo Mbeki announced the appointment of Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka as the Deputy President. She became the first woman Deputy President of South Africa.

Mlambo-Ngcuka has an impressive record of welfare work and as an educator, a campaigner for women's rights and a senior politician.



Men and women, black and white, all vote in South Africa's Democratic Elections. Local Government Elections. Julesburg, Northern Province. 2000. Photograph by Andrew Tshabangu.



Women in Parliament, 2004. Source: Government Communication and Information System.



FRENE NOSHIR GINWALA

1932-

Ginwala left South Africa as a young student to help arrange the escape of the late President Oliver Tambo. She went on to complete her legal studies at the universities of London and Oxford before returning to Africa to become managing editor of Tanzania's main English-language newspaper. She was later deported and declared a prohibited immigrant. Ginwala worked in Tanzania, Zambia, Mozambique and the United Kingdom as an ANC official and as journalist and broadcaster in East Africa and Europe. She also participated at various United Nations, Unesco and other international conferences on South Africa, covering conflict research, women's issues, development and technology transfer. She was one of 14 international experts invited to advise the director-general on Unesco's programme on Peace and Conflict Research (1987-88) Ginwala returned to South Africa in 1990 to help establish the ANC Women's League and became the Speaker of the National Assembly of South Africa in 1994, a position she held till 2004.



Frene Ginwala, 2007. Photograph by David Goldblatt, supplied by African Media Online.

ISSUES FACING THE WOMEN IN THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY

The country has achieved a reasonable level of prosperity and economic stability, but it has not been able to make a large enough dent on the widespread poverty and deep inequalities that it has inherited from its apartheid past.

South Africa is one of the most unequal societies in the world. The worst affects of poverty and inequality can be seen amongst women in rural areas and informal settlements. South Africa women are faced with a wide range of issues such as the high crime rate, domestic violence, child abuse, HIV/AIDS, poverty, poor local government delivery and unemployment.

POVERTY

One of the most important issues for women in South Africa has always been that of poverty. During the apartheid years, black women were forced into the rural areas and left with very few choices. Some received money from their husbands who were working on the mines and in towns. This has left a legacy of devastating poverty of black women today, where the poorest of the poor are still living under extremely harsh conditions.

Women predominate in the rural areas, which are usually the poorest. Both in the rural and urban environment, women often have to take care of children, and this makes employment options difficult. Many children under the age of 7 years live only with their mother, while many others are left with their grandmothers so that their mothers can work.

The majority of rural black South Africans live in conditions that are inadequate with respect to shelter, energy, water and sanitation. They are heavily dependant on wood for household energy, as many households have no electricity or simply cannot afford basic water and electricity services.

The current government policy on free basic electricity, adopted in 2002, provides poor households with 50kw of free electricity per month, while the Free Basic Water Programme provides poor household with 6000l of free water per month. However, there are still many households that need to access this provision.

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

The biggest challenge facing the transitional government was the de-politicization of school grounds and transforming schools into institutions of learning under one national education system.

In 1993, President FW de Klerk established the Education Co-ordination Service to manage education during the political transition of the 1990s. Its task was to eliminate the duplication inherited from the Apartheid system. In January 1995, all government-run primary and secondary schools were officially integrated into one national Education Department, and the first stage of the transformation in education had begun.

Today, the backlogs from the Bantu Education and homelands system are still immense. A high illiteracy rate of 13.6 % (2010) continues, teachers in township and rural schools are poorly trained, and the matriculation pass rate remains unacceptably low. Access to formal education is increasing, but the quality of the education varies greatly, largely due to gender inequality and poverty.

While 65% of whites over 20 years old and 40% of Indians have a high school or tertiary education qualification, this figure is only 17% among 'coloureds' and 14% among the black population (2010). To deal with this problem, the government has introduced programmes such as the free schooling programme that is targeted at the poorest of the poor. Schools under this programme receive special funding from the state and do not charge school fees. However, a very worrying issue is that of sexual abuse against girls by male teachers and male students.

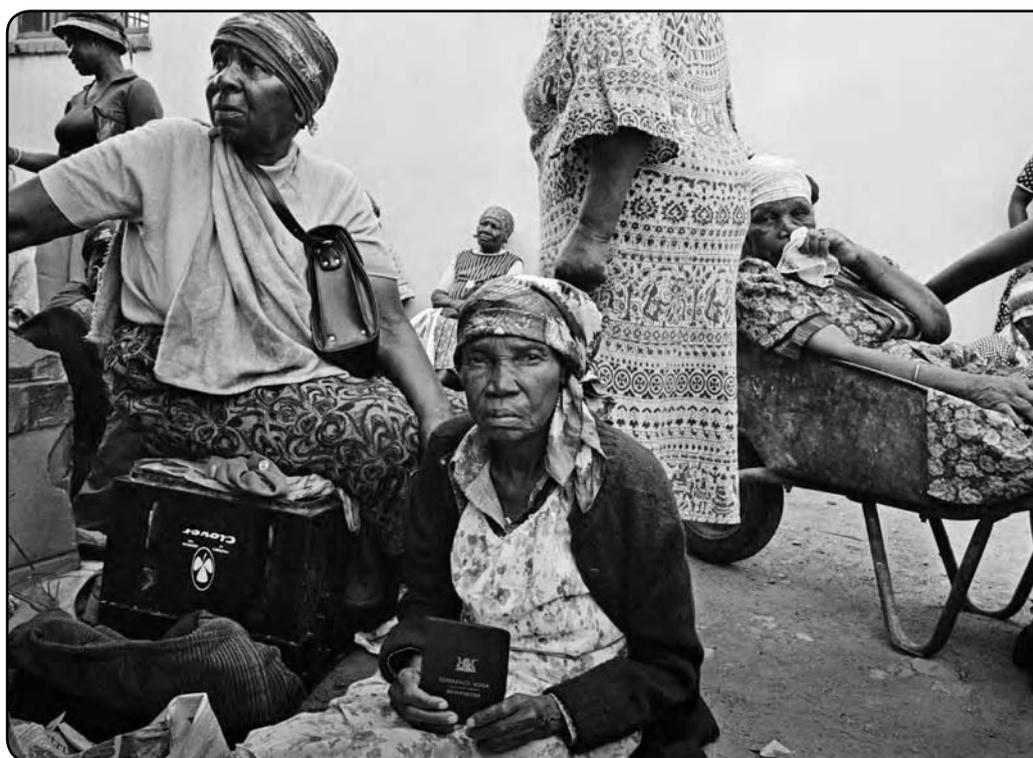


Teacher with her class of eighty children, Inanda 1983. Photograph by Omar Badsha.

GRANTS AND PENSIONS

Due to the longevity of women, they have to support themselves for a longer period after retirement, making them more vulnerable to poverty in old age. The old age pension is the government's most significant poverty alleviation measure. Research has shown that it is effectively targeted at black women, mostly in rural areas. Women older than 60 with an annual income of less than R44 880.00 can apply for the grant of R 1 140.00 per month (2008).

There are often many people in the household that need to be supported with the grant, and pensioners often continue to work to make ends meet. Many women struggle to get pensions due to problems with identity documents and travelling distances to pay points. Despite all these shortcomings, the impact of the old age grant on poverty levels of women is significant.



Pensioners. Mamba Store, Amouti. Photograph by Omar Badsha.

HEALTH

A big problem facing South Africa today is HIV/AIDS. Currently women in South Africa account for 58 percent of those infected with this dreaded disease (2011). Health problems associated with HIV/AIDS such as tuberculosis have increased six-fold for women, compared to three-fold for men in the same age group. This problem is compounded by the underemployment of women.

HIV/AIDS and other poverty-related diseases like tuberculosis and cholera, as well as the inability to pay for treatment, places a tremendous strain on South Africa's health care system. However, there have been significant improvements in some areas of basic health care delivery, such as antenatal care, combating acute childhood illnesses, and administering DOTS (Directly Observed Treatment Strategy) to combat tuberculosis in clinics across South Africa.

THE GIRL CHILD

Poverty as well as the HIV/AIDS epidemic has vastly increased the number of school dropouts and child-headed homes, particularly amongst girls.

The culture that forbids girls to speak about abuse at the hands of teachers and elders in rural areas has seen a tremendous growth in teen pregnancy and also adds to the increase in dropout rates amongst girls. Many girls drop out of school before they reach Grade 12.

The government has implemented a no-fee policy in certain districts, to enable as many impoverished children as possible to attend school. It has also instituted a nation wide schools feeding scheme to address the effects of poor nutrition. These provisions have greatly decreased the dropout rate.



"Heading Home"
(walking home from school).
Rhulani. North-
ern Province.
Photograph by
Liam Lynch.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, RAPE AND ABUSE

Sexual violence pervades South African society, with one of the highest reported rates of rape in the world, and an alarmingly high incidence of domestic violence and child abuse. Unfortunately, many instances of assault and rape in South Africa go unreported. Victims are faced with an inefficient police and justice system. Women do not report rape out of fear and a lack of faith in the policing and judicial systems.

The South African government and the public have responded to this scourge. In 1996, the government made an attempt to protect the safety rights that women and children by passing the Domestic Violence Act (Act 116). In addition, the justice system has begun to prioritize sexual offences and police offices are being trained to care for rape survivors.



Assault victim. Julesburg clinic. Northern Province. Photograph by Liam Lynch.

WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE

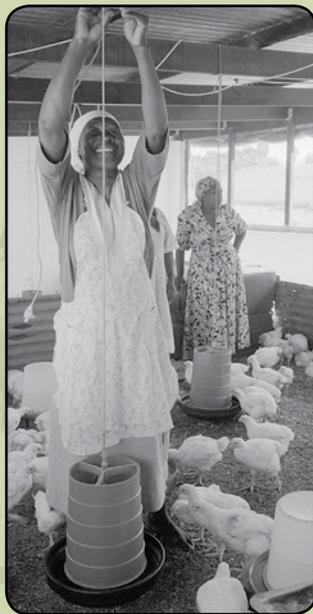
South African society remains a diverse and there are many challenges ahead.

Motherhood is still central to most women's lives and a woman's role in family life is still the basis of a morally sound, orderly and cohesive society.

Although great strides have been made, gender discrimination still takes place in the workplace, and while there are notable exceptions, women are still poorly represented in top managerial and executive posts countrywide.

Organisations such as the Businesswomen's Association of South Africa, who strive to provide ongoing opportunities to advance the interests of women in business, attest to the strides women have made in their struggle to shake off the shackles of the past against political oppression and gender inequality.

Workers on the women's poultry project. Inyavini, Kwazulu Natal. Photograph by Jeeva Rajgopaul.



Ndaya water project. Umbumbulu, Kwazulu Natal. Photograph by Jeeva Rajgopaul.

ROLE OF NGOs AND GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS

There are vibrant Non-governmental Organisations, like People Opposing Women Abuse (POWA) and Women Against Women Abuse (WAWA), which were established in 1979 and 1989 respectively, to educate and support female victims of assault and rape. There are also NGOs, such as SONKE, who work towards promoting social cohesion between males and females in order to break the destructive cycle of violence.

The government's poverty alleviation programmes have become a key element in the consolidation of local government structures and the promotion of the principals of social, economic, cultural, civic and political rights of its citizens.

One such programme is the government's community based Public Works Program (EPWP). The programme aims to employ a million people by 2010. This programme was followed by the Expanded Public Works Program launched in April 2004. The programme is now in its second phase.

In addition, the local chapter of the international organisation Business and Professional Women (BPW), a fairly new entity in South Africa, is set to launch a national campaign to bring about change in business principles and the Companies Act so that women will have more say in making decisions in the workplace.



CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Make a poster

The importance of the events of 1956 is remembered every year on 9 August, the day on which the women marched to Pretoria. In our new democracy, this day is celebrated as a holiday – National Women's Day.

1. Divide into groups and pretend you are going on a march on Women's Day.
2. In your group, discuss what the issues are for women today.
3. Choose a message that your group would like to put on a poster.
4. Discuss who your poster is aimed at and who your message is for.

5. Now decide what words you are going to put on the poster. Try to keep your message simple and memorable.
6. Decide what images or pictures you want to use. You can draw them or cut them out of magazines and paste them onto the poster. Make the relationship between the words and the pictures clear. People need to get the message at a glance.
7. Design a rough poster before you attempt the final one.
8. To test if your poster works, show your rough poster to another group and get their comments.
9. Prepare your final poster and stick your posters onto the wall.