



**REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA**

**KEYNOTE STATEMENT**

**BY**

**RIGHT HONOURABLE SAARA KUUGONGELWA-AMADHILA**

**PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA**

**AT THE**

**NAMIBIA WOMEN IN ENGINEERING ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

**ONGWEDIVA,**

**FRIDAY, 26 JULY 2019**

**09H00**

- Director of Proceedings, Ms. Esther Nashipili,
- Hon. Sankwasa James Sankwasa, Deputy Minister of Works and Transport,
- Honourable Members of Parliament
- Hon. Elia Irimari, Governor of the Oshana Region,
- Your Worship the Mayor of Ongwediva, Hon. Angelina Angula
- Prof Kenneth Matengu, Vice-Chancellor: UNAM,
- Prof Frank Kavishe, Acting Pro Vice Chancellor (Research, Innovation and Development).
- Dr. Smita Francis, Chairperson of NAMWIE
- Dr Petrina Johannes, Dean: Faculty of Engineering and IT, UNAM,
- Distinguished Stakeholders and partners of NAMWIE,
- Delegates
- Esteemed Invited Guests
- Members of the Media
- Ladies and Gentlemen

1. I am delighted to join you today at the Namibia Women in Engineering Annual Conference aimed at celebrating Namibian Women's excellence

in the field of engineering and to encourage and motivate girls to fearlessly pursue careers in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) fields.

2. It is befitting that this event is taking place here at the Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology Jose Eduardo do Santos Campus, which is the heart of engineering learning activities for the University of Namibia. The Center, I understand, has graduated over 250 engineers since its establishment in 2009.
3. This number, when seen together with the 200 students graduated in the Engineering field from the Namibia University of Science and Technology illustrates the gain we have made as a country in promoting students in STEM which is indispensable for technological advancement and economic growth. This achievements are also of great significance seeing that before independence engineering qualifications were not offered in Namibia to all and those who wanted to pursue this field of study were forced to go outside the country.

4. I view this annual conference as very important as it creates a platform for women in engineering not only to share ideas, but also to promote career opportunities available for girls in STEM. This platform also raises the profile of Women Engineers to serve as role models to other women in this male dominated field.
  
5. At this juncture, I want to appeal to women engineers to take the younger professionals in the engineering field under their wings and provide the much needed advice and mentorship. Mentoring of young engineers is crucial for their career development and provides confidence and impetus for them to build successful careers in this field. Young girls also need to be encouraged to take interest to study and ultimately practise engineering. This can be done by holding career talks to target age groups particularly at public schools and other schools with little or no guidance/career counselling.
  
6. Too often, school-age children see engineering profession as being confined to jobs in construction, transport and manufacturing. However, engineering can also be about developing products as such as computing, healthcare, medical and environmental protection products.

So there is a wide diversity in the career options in the engineering profession to cater for the diversification of talents and interests for engineering aspirants.

7. I am glad to note that the Namibia Women Engineering event is linked to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 5, which is *“achieve Gender Equality and empower all women and girls* and SDG 4, which is *“ensure inclusive and quality education to women and girls.”* This embraces our 5th National Development Plan theme which is *“working together towards prosperity in pursuit of our National development goals”*
8. In realising this goal, our Government has reformed and passed several laws, post-independence, such as abolishing discrimination on the basis of gender and promoting the protection and empowerment of women and children.
9. In addition, Namibia is a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing

Platform for Action (1995), the CEDAW optional protocol (2000) and the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development (2005).

10. The aim of all these laws, conventions and protocols is to ensure that women have equal opportunity to their male counterparts. However, despite efforts made, Legal Equality has not yet transformed into structural equality. Women remain at the lowest level of employment and struggle with practical impediments that limit their economic independence and self-sufficiency. Recent UN statistics show that Women earn 23 per cent less than men, while the 2018 World Economic forum report indicates that it will take 202 years to close the global pay gap. It was <sup>1</sup>found that the lack of women in certain industries and specific jobs is one factor that lead to this pay gap. Significantly, women continue to lag in the STEM fields particularly in mathematically-intensive fields, and gender differences in university major has been found to be an important determinant of the pay gap between university-educated men and women.

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<sup>1</sup> National Bureau of Economic Research UK July 2019

11. The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report further states that <sup>2</sup>Gender inequality is directly linked to income inequality, which in turn can weaken the sustainability of growth in a country. Women getting paid less than men directly contribute to income inequality, and higher gaps in labour force participation rates between men and women result in inequality of earnings, unequal pensions and savings. Closing the gender wage gap can lead to greater equality in the overall income distribution.
12. But as we heard, Gender diversity is not only important for gender equality but it also facilitate for the diversity in innovation products due to diversity in perspectives and thus accelerate technological advancement and economic growth.
13. Thus initiative such as this one taken by the Namibia Women in Engineering to promote STEM and Engineering careers to high school learners is commendable. I am informed that this platform will also identify solutions to challenges facing women in engineering and STEM careers workplace environment. We must draw lessons and best

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/08/chart-of-the-week-equal-pay-remains-a-global-issue>

practices from others as to how these challenges are being dealt with so we can replicate the global success here at home.

14. In conclusion, I would like to once again express Government's commitment to the empowerment of women, through providing equal access to education. It is against this background that Government has introduced free education at Primary and secondary levels and this has resulted in an increased enrolment of the girl child in primary school.

15. With that, I wish you successful deliberations and declare the Namibia Women in Engineering Annual Conference officially open

I thank you.