

MEC BITSA LENKOPANE CHAMPIONS FINANCIAL INCLUSION FOR WOMEN ACROSS THE NORTH WEST

The North West MEC for Economic Development, Environment, Conservation and Tourism, Bitsa Lenkopane, has called for bold, collaborative action to dismantle systemic barriers that continue to exclude women from full economic participation. Speaking at a high-impact engagement on Women's Financial Inclusion, hosted under the banner of G20 South Africa at the Carousel Casino & Hotel in Hammanskraal, MEC Lenkopane emphasized the urgent need to centre women in the transformation of financial systems.

"Too many women remain locked out of economic opportunities — not because they lack potential, but because they are systematically excluded from access to land, finance, and influence," said MEC Lenkopane. "This is not a failure of women; it is a failure of systems. It requires a collective response from the banking sector and other key stakeholders to rebuild systems with women at the core."

The session, held in partnership with the Mayor of Moretele Local Municipality, Cllr Masango George Manyike, Speaker of Moretele Local Municipality, Cllr Freda Mapele, Cllr Ditshego Mbezi, Speaker of Madibeng Local Municipality, and local ward councillors brought together women from rural and urban communities to explore financial instruments, digital skills development, and institutional support mechanisms available to them.

MEC Lenkopane underlined the North West Province's commitment to enabling women-owned businesses to thrive through improved access to credit, procurement opportunities, and representation in decision-making structures.

"Our goal is not just awareness but empowerment. We must ensure women are supported, not only to know about opportunities but to seize them," she said.

The engagement forms part of the province's G20 Empowerment of Women Working Group (EWWG) sessions, which aim to address critical priorities, including:

- Advancing the care economy;
- Promoting financial inclusion for and of women;
- Combating gender-based violence and femicide.

Local Economic Development initiatives, Industrial Parks, the Bojanala Special Economic Zone, Biodiversity Economy Markets, and beneficiation programmes were highlighted as strategic enablers for women's economic advancement. Women in the province have long driven informal economies through stokvels, cooperatives, and village savings groups, and now, pathways are being opened for them to scale, formalise, and trade beyond borders.

"But as we rise, we must lift others. We must be intentional about opening the door wider for the next woman in line," added MEC Lenkopane.

She also urged the financial sector to reimagine inclusive systems that serve the unique needs of women entrepreneurs, particularly those running micro and small enterprises. The call to action was echoed by the Mayor of Moretele Local Municipality, Cllr Manyike, who

reaffirmed the municipality's commitment to economic empowerment through local interventions such as mentorship platforms, microloans, and funding support.

Participating women had the opportunity to engage with representatives from strategic institutions including African Bank, the National Empowerment Fund (NEF), Small Enterprise Development Finance Agency (SEFA), SARS, UNISA, and the Young African Entrepreneurs Institute (YAEI), which was recently launched in partnership with North-West University to boost entrepreneurship and reduce graduate unemployment.

MEC Lenkopane further encouraged the adoption of circular economy models within the province's economic strategy, spotlighting waste-to-wealth enterprises, agro-processing, upcycling, and bio-energy as practical areas where women can lead.

"From bee farmers turned wine exporters in Taung, to skincare innovators in Mogwase, and the globally recognized Mor-Gin brand in Moretele, women in the North West are already trailblazers," she said. "These are not just success stories, but blueprints of what's possible when women are given equal access to capital, markets, and knowledge."

The session concluded with a resounding commitment to ensuring that women in the North West are not only beneficiaries of development but also agents of economic transformation, equipped, empowered, and enabled to lead the province toward inclusive and sustainable growth.