

Young women encouraged to take up careers in forestry

Environment, Forestry and Fisheries Deputy Minister, Makhotsa Soty, has encouraged women, particularly young women, to take up careers in the forestry sector.



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"Young women are needed to prepare and take up opportunities offered in the sector, including senior positions, starting their own businesses and board participation," Soty said.

She was speaking during a webinar on Friday, as part of the forestry sector's Women's Month celebrations.

The webinar was convened to celebrate and acknowledge progress made in the last two decades regarding women entering the forestry industry.

Soty said the objectives of the webinar related well to the Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) programme in the Amended Forest Sector Codes, which have set a target for inclusive participation, including women.

The discussion focused on creating representation of women in forestry.

As part of this campaign, Sotyu said work will be done to improve the state of rural schools in forestry areas, particularly the worst performing schools.

Assistance will be offered to girl children to make their school lives easier.

"The experiences of women in relation to forestry have been markedly different from those of their male counterparts, making gender issues pertinent to forestry. Some of the issues women are confronted with relate directly to the manner in which forestry is defined," Sotyu said.

While forestry can be defined beyond the limits of timber extraction, Sotyu noted that it is often equated with logging, which has historically been considered as men's work.

"Such a characterisation not only shuts women out of jobs they are willing to undertake but are not afforded the opportunity, and also discourages others from even considering forestry as a profession in the first place," the Deputy Minister said.

She said other opportunities available in forestry, such as sustainability and ecological stewardship, need to be more publicised, so that more women can take up space in the sector.

"Such a portrayal might lead to a more positive impression of forestry among the general public too, painting a picture of forestry as being more than just cutting down trees."

Sotyu said mentors or role models have been important in supporting and encouraging women in forestry.

It is one of the many reasons ascribed to more female faces in the sector, she said.

"Within forestry, women are noticeably present in every part of the forest sector from research, cultivation, nurseries, silviculture, harvesting, environmental management and fire protection to transport, pulp and paper, sawmilling, and furniture production.

"Through the continued profiling of women by the Forest Sector Charter Council in the Youth and Women Outreach Programme, youth would take up careers in forestry," Sotyu said.

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