



## **SPOT PERSPECTIVE ON WOMEN'S MONTH**

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The 9th of August 2021 remains important for a number of reasons. But critically, a fountain of sage, education, a year of education, women leadership and women economic empowerment.

It happens at a time when human existence is under grievous threat from the coronavirus pandemic that exposes wider fissures of inequality which have sunk women deeper into the abyss of poverty that reflects the scarred face of a South African woman. Relegated to the economic edges, and a recipient of the economic crumbs which toils for without benefit.

With soiled hands of our toil in narrowing the gulfs of disparity and aligning the imbalances in into the state of equilibrium, a woman's life is in disproportion, compounded by monstrous acts of gender based violence and femicide, *quid pro quo* and sexual harassment on the shop floor, rape and marital rape and domestic abuse and flagrant discrimination.

This year's calendar of women activism is aptly commemorated under a theme celebrating the life of one of the stalwarts of the liberation movement, mama Charlotte Maxeke whose Struggles and conviction were to disentangle women from the woven interlace of triple oppression on the basis of class, sex and colour.

Her legacy spanning more than 150 years is still alive even in death. And eloquently articulated by Alexandra Kollontai in "***Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle***" and the 54<sup>th</sup> National Conference of the African National Congress (ANC).

A combination of these invalidate their stature and their inalienable right to equality. And relegates them to the margins of the economy which they built and strive to build with paltry wages for the benefit of capital that remains predominantly male, white, untransformed and exploitative.

It is by no accident that many years later in furtherance of mama Maxeke's dream of an egalitarian society devoid of the triple yokes of oppression that witnessed women united the banner of the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW) fearlessly with determination led by Lillian Ngoyi, Ray Alexander Simons, Amina Cachalia, Helen Joseph amongst reputable others.

At the heart of FEDSAW was the unity of women across the racial and ethnic divides, their elevation from the lowest economic rung to meaningful economic empowerment, leadership in society and workplace and equal citizenship. This culminated in the 1956 Defiance Campaign demanding total elimination of hindrances that emasculated women empowerment and the realisation of their potential.

Women equality, leadership, development and empowerment can be achieved and accelerated through education. This what mama Maxeke envisioned. Correctly contextualised, the decorated life mama Maxeke, her commitment to building women emancipation and a prosperous country at whose priority resides education as a potent force that propels development and recognizes the potential of each individual, coincidentally and relevantly so, takes place when the student movement led by the South African Students Congress (SASCO) commemorates 30 years of its existence.

This is a colossal feat which inter-generationally made a solemn declaration that *"freedom or death"*, *"adapt or die"* and *"free education in our lifetime"* and many revolutionary stances that would give effect to the injunction that *"the doors of learning and culture shall be opened to all"* as weaponry to poverty eradication and self-determination.

This constituted the integral of a Struggle that saw the transformation of institutions of higher learning from ivory towers to peoples' institutions as change agents and instruments of development and socio-economic transformation and a non-sexist and non-racial society based on freedom and justice.

As we celebrate the anniversary of SASCO and intensify the Struggle for decent education we recognize the sterling role played by the late Josephine Mashobane, Tracy Malatjie, Elaine Sacco, Babalwa Ntabeni and many women leaders of the student movement under the Congress tradition who, imbued by the courageous determination against sexual bigotry took up the cudgels for unencumbered access to higher education and its transformation. These are the ardent convictions of Charlotte Maxeke.

***"Black women are chained by a triple yoke of oppression. Under apartheid, each component of their existence as women - their sex, their colour and their class - combine to negate their right to social inequality. Within the racist and sexist system, women are not only oppressed in relation to men, but in relation to each other".***

- Systematic oppression - Unyielding Resistance, date unknown.

Mama Maxeke's quest for a society devoid of discrimination on the basis of class, race, gender and the indignity of oppression were not utopian. This was given meaningful expression by the ANC's deliberate introduction of free quality education commensurate with the human capital need and development strategy aligned to the imperatives of a country at whose pinnacle is an empowered society that recognizes women leadership to address the ubiquitous maladies repugnant and inimical to the quest for a national democratic society.

The Strategic Perspective of Transformation (SPoT) joins South African women and society in commemorating the life of Charlotte Maxeke on the occasion of Women's Day and Women's Month.

SPoT had in its inaugural Conference adopted a complimentary paradigm of collaboration with progressive forces in building a country committed to women leadership and empowerment. This is the dream of mama Maxeke, Lillian Ngoyi, Shope, Ruth First, Mitta Seperepere, Fatima Meer and many others. A dream of an educated, empowered women and women leadership.

It was on the 9th August 1956 that women roared "*wathint' abafazi wathint' imbokodo*". This became seismically powerful that their valiant acts in the deadly face of guns and the entrenched patriarchy shook the foundations upon which apartheid was anchored.

As a contribution to the life of mama Maxeke and in commemoration of Women's Month SPoT approaches this revolutionary milestone under the theme "**BUILDING WOMEN LEADERSHIP AND AN INCLUSIVE ECONOMY**".

Since the dawn of the 1994 democratic sun a lot has been done to change the face of society, transforming gender relations and elevating women to the apex of leadership and development. SPoT has adopted an innovative approach of women empowerment and leadership as a drastic departure from convention, but intertwined within the broader Struggles of eradicating gender based violence and femicide, misogyny and the persecution and killing of the LGBTQI+ community.

The month of August should not be a rhetorical mirage inconsistent with the Struggles of FEDSAW and the ANC Women's League (ANCWL) of Adelaide ambo, Albertina Sisulu, Sophie de Bruyn and Winnie Madikizela Mandela. But building a pipeline of future leadership for posterity and prosperity.

The journey towards a non- sexist democratic and equal society devoid of the mortifications of poverty and inequality is still long. The ugly vestiges of

apartheid are still palpable. This journey can only be shortened by our commitment by consciously removing impediments that punctuate this arduous journey.

We need a new policy paradigm to change the ugly face of the country, class consciousness and a collective resolve. We wish women of South Africa the best of Women's Month and a productive Year of Charlotte Maxeke.

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