

Freedom cannot be achieved unless women have been emancipated from all forms of oppression," President Nelson Mandela said in his First State of the Nation Address in Parliament on 24 May 1994.

It has been 22 years since those words were spoken and the Constitution of South Africa ratified to give all people access to human rights and for women the right to be treated equally. By still having these expectations and perceptions of 'a woman's place' in the 21st century, how then are women able to flourish and hold their own as independent beings?

Women represent half of the world's population. It should not be that being born a female means having limited capacities and access. A woman should be entitled to live in dignity and in freedom from fear. We need to look collectively at empowering women and advancing their development, while increasing their financial independence and building stairways to gender equality.

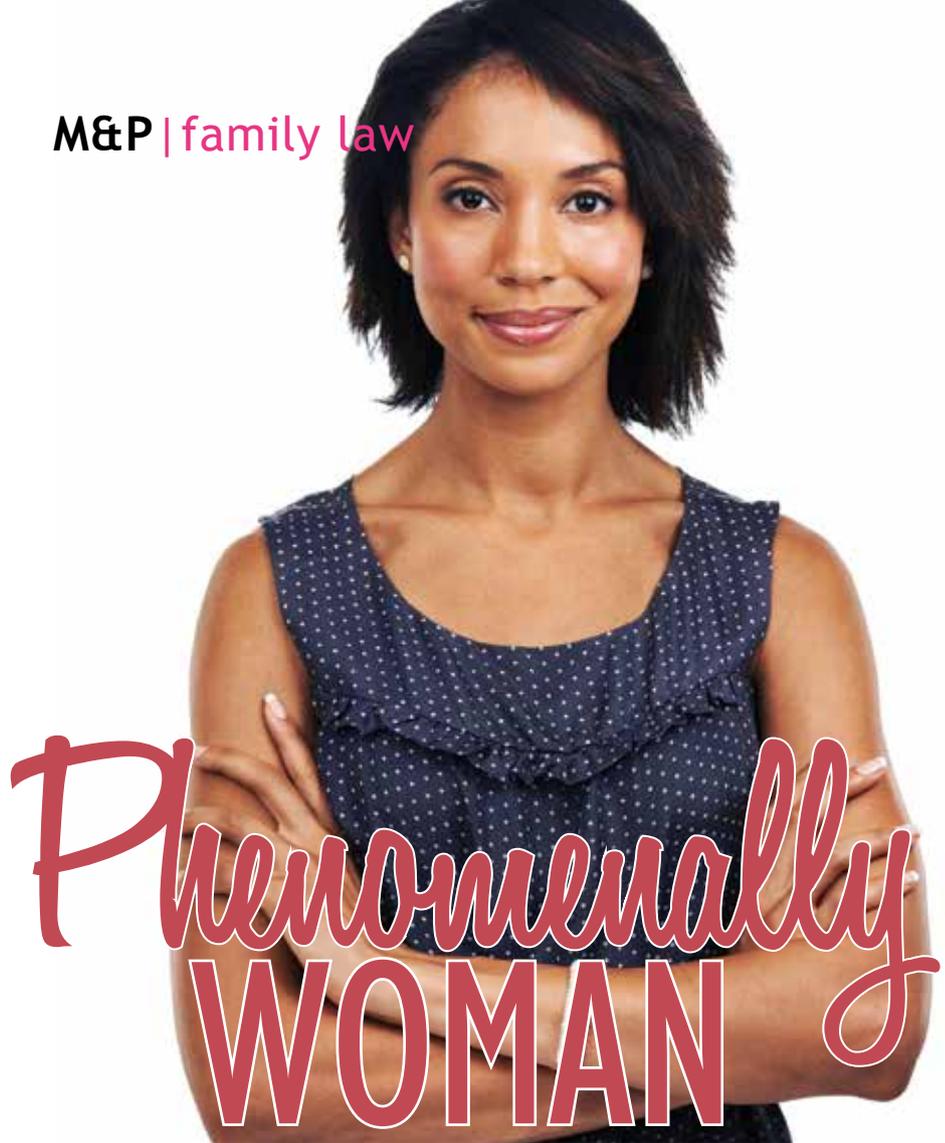
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As Eleanor Roosevelt said, "A woman is like a tea bag – you never know how strong she is until she gets in hot water." With empowerment in mind, the following factors should be instilled in young women as keys to unlocking their empowered selves.

Educational empowerment: Academic, healthcare, financial and life orientation education help women to make informed decisions about their future. In engaging on these topics with young women from the ages of 16 to 24, it is always a pleasure to note their thirst for knowledge. They understand the power of knowledge and it breeds within them the drive to see their children educated.

Studies show that women spend their resources on health and education, creating a ripple effect across generations. A Ghanaian scholar and educator once said: "If you educate a man you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman you educate a family (nation)."

Skills development: No harm can come



Regardless of her occupational status, a woman is still expected to maintain her domestic duties towards her spouse and children, says Advocate Veerash Srikison.

from a woman who creates her own wealth and who is not afraid to free herself from dependency. Create your own opportunities. Get training and make moves to go beyond the circumstances you are given. If you have taken time out to raise your children, do not stop yourself from learning and keeping your skill set updated. If you have a passion you would like to pursue while raising your children, go for it and create your own employment.

Confidence in yourself: There will be days when the challenge to be recognised as equal to men would have you stay in bed and cry. You need to embrace those days, and rise above them with the understanding that everything can only get better when you believe in yourself.

Women are underrepresented in decision-making at all levels from the home to the public sphere, but if you believe you are deserving of recognition, you will start to enforce it on to other people too. Choose the path of self-empowerment and break away from being a life of subservience. Find your voice and do not allow yourself to be oppressed because someone else thinks you are not good enough. Choose to believe in your own freedom.

Never stop celebrating your achievements and those of the women around you. Repeat these words from the late Maya Angelou to yourself and the extraordinary women in your life: "I am a Woman Phenomenally. Phenomenal Woman, that's me." 