

## Introduction

South Africa has been at the forefront in advocating for the inclusivity of women and women's needs and interests. Government has passed legislation to formalise its commitments toward achieving gender equality in South Africa, thereby creating a public space where women's voices have a platform. Drawing on these national objectives the water sector has prioritised gender mainstreaming, and this sector has seen a significant number of women enter and take up senior leadership positions. Women in the water sector have held, and continue to hold, the highest offices including those of Minister of Water Affairs, Deputy Minister, senior advisors, and numerous other high-profile and decision-making positions. The sector has been successful in achieving gender parity in many of its institutions, and the success achieved by the Department of Water Affairs (DWA) in this regard is exemplary. To gain an understanding of how women in the water sector have achieved positions of seniority and leadership, the Water Research Commission (WRC) commissioned a study on the criteria necessary for the career success of women in the water sector. A group of women who hold senior positions in the sector were interviewed and are profiled in this report. The purpose of the study was twofold: The first was to gain an understanding of how these women progressed to where they have, and secondly, the aim was to explore the lessons that could be drawn from their experiences to inspire other women who aspire for leadership in the sector. From these experiences and lessons shared the study distilled a set of criteria for women to achieve career success in the water sector. The study's departure point was to focus on those women who have made it to levels of leadership and senior management in the water sector; and to find out how they made it and the ways in which they cope with the responsibilities of their high-ranking positions. It represents a focused analysis of women working in the water sector, specifically those women who occupy senior positions (Director Level and above) within public-sector water institutions. In addition to the women, a few senior men in the sector were interviewed in order to learn about their role in mainstreaming gender equality in the sector. The interviews were carried out according to five broad categories that included background, challenges encountered, support mechanisms, policy environment and women's leadership in the sector.