

# A role model in water services regulation

*Department of Water Affairs (DWA) Deputy-Director: Water Services Regulation, Ntombizanele Mary Bila-Mupariwa, shares what it takes to regulate South Africa's water service delivery sector. Article by Debbie Besseling.*

**B**ila-Mupariwa works in a challenging environment in which service delivery and client service are paramount objectives. Her current position at DWA is where her significant experience in water quality, wastewater treatment processes, her understanding of local government and environmental management has allowed her to provide decisive and confident leadership skills and build teams that continuously add value and exceed community's expectations.

Bila-Mupariwa started her career as a laboratory technician, which has been followed by a strong career history in the DWA. "In 1996 I joined the DWA's then Institute for Water Quality Studies (now Resource Quality Studies (RQS)) as a learner laboratory technician. In 2008, I joined the DWA in Limpopo, (Nsami Dam in Giyani) working as a learner technician, whilst conducting my in-service training," says Bila-Mupariwa.

When her husband secured a job in Cape Town she joined South African Breweries in 2000 as a quality control technician on a temporary basis. In 2001, she volunteered at the City of Cape Town to work on one of the largest wastewater treatment works (WWTW) in order to gain more experience, and later joined the City of Cape Town's Scientific Services as a lab technician.

"In 2002 I joined the DWA in the Western Cape Regional Office

as a water pollution control officer (WPCO) where I was promoted to a Senior WPCO. In 2006, I joined PetroSA as an environmental officer. In 2007, I moved back to the DWA, in the Western Cape as a Principal WPCO. In 2010, I was promoted to the Deputy Director: Planning Support. That is when my family decided to move back to Gauteng, and I requested a transfer to the DWA National Office in Pretoria under the Directorate: Water Services Regulation," explains Bila-Mupariwa.

Currently, in her position as Acting Director: Water Services Regulation, Bila-Mupariwa is responsible for overseeing three sub-directorates: Technical Regulation (Blue Drop and Green Drop Programmes), Economic Regulation (RPMS Programme) and

Contract Regulation (Enforcement Protocol).

This position includes a number of strategic functions that relate to managing the Technical Regulation sub-directorate, which include the following key-outputs:

- Managing the sub-directorate budget in terms of the Public Finance Management Act (PFMA) and Treasury Regulations.
- Regulating water services authorities (WSA) on water services provisioning according to legislated norms and standards for the sector.
- Ensuring the implementation of Section 9 of the National Water Services Act.
- Providing technical regulation advice to the internal and external holders.



- Providing project management support in the Directorate.
- Supervising personnel.
- Providing strategic support to the Directorate.
- Moderating the Blue and Green Drop Certification to the municipalities nationally.
- Managing, developing, monitoring and evaluating the implementation of strategies and the action plan on drinking and wastewater management.

Bila-Mupariwa has been extensively involved in the Department's Blue and Green Drop certification programmes since their inception. She provides an insight into how these initiatives have progressed since 2008: "Both of these programmes form part of an incentive-based regulation approach. The programmes have enjoyed some success, and have certainly triggered a major paradigm shift within the drinking water and wastewater service sphere. From 2009 there has been significant improvement in the number of Blue Drop and Green Drop awards and Blue Drop and Green Drop scores nationally," says Bila-Mupariwa. However, she admits that there are some towns that require improvement and further support in order to deal with the challenges that they are currently experiencing.

The general processes in the auditing and assessment of municipalities for Blue and Green Drop certification involves a number of tasks. The first process that takes place is the training of inspectors for assessments (inspectors include the departmental officials and professional services providers (PSPs)). Once the inspectors have qualified, they are allocated municipalities that they have to assess.

The initial assessments entail the consultative audits which are the desktop exercise whereby water services institutions (WSI) are expected to provide documentation as proof of compliance after

which there will be site inspections of the water treatment systems or wastewater treatment systems. All inspectors are required to submit all the score cards and the technical inspection reports to national moderators.

Subsequent to that, moderated scorecards are sent back to the WSI to prepare for the confirmation assessments. The confirmation assessments are where the WSI's are given the opportunity to provide more information where necessary, as well as to confirm whether the data/information captured by the inspectors is accurate. After the confirmation assessment scorecards are submitted back to the national moderators for the final moderation in order to compile the reports.

A number of challenges are being encountered in the Blue and Green Drop certification programmes. These include a lack of sufficient information from some of the WSIs; commitment and competency in water managerial positions; skilled process controlling; competent plant managers; high staff turn-over within municipalities (skills) and unsatisfactory plant operation and maintenance.

## QUALITY DRINKING WATER AND WASTEWATER

**B**ila-Mupariwa explains the key factors in ensuring quality drinking water and wastewater. "The department realises the need for local government support in areas where there is a drive to comply, however, the lack of capacity and resources compromise local government performance. DWA continues to be involved in multi-department sector support and capacity building initiatives. The major interventions by the department include the Regional Bulk Infrastructure Grant (RBIG) which ensures that rundown infrastructure is rehabilitated; the Rapid Response Unit that ensures the rectification of mechanical and civil infrastructure faults, as well as the Municipal Water Infrastructure Grant. In addition, strengthening the enforcement protocol by the department is of priority."

## DWA CURRENT PROJECTS

**I**n terms of improving water and wastewater quality services, the DWA is involved in a number of

*Zanele undertaking an assessment for the Green Drop certification process.*





Zanele working in the lab.



projects and initiatives. Currently they are pursuing the quaternary catchment-based risk abatement, the main objectives of which are to create ownership and accountability of the water resource shared by all WSIs (municipalities) concerned.

Overall the aim is to get all municipalities and public/private users alike to acknowledge and accept the responsibility they have to the water resource they are sharing. Another project, involves the enforcement protocol where WSIs are found to be uncooperative, and the appropriate regulatory activities will be initiated.

Furthermore, DWA together with Japan (Ministry of Industry and Tourism (MLIT)) has a co-operation agreement in place which allows local municipal officials to receive training funded by Japan. The current programme focuses on supporting municipalities to improve their Green Drop and Blue Drop status.

The programme will run for three years, starting in 2013. The first group has recently returned from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) two week training programme.

Bila-Mupariwa speaks about the team involved in the certification programmes which comprises of DWA officials (national and regional officials) as well as a team of PSP experts comprising experienced engineers and scientists. "The team is committed and enthusiastic about achieving the objectives of the certification programmes, and some of the inspectors have been part of the programme since its inception in the initial stages," says Bila-Mupariwa.

## ACADEMIC PROFILE

**B**ila-Mupariwa holds a National Diploma in Water Care from the Pretoria Technikon, as well as a B-Tech in Environmental

Management from Cape Town Technikon and a post graduate diploma in Integrated Water Resources Management from the University of Western Cape. Bila-Mupariwa is currently finalising the thesis for her Masters in Integrated Water Resources Management, from the University of Western Cape which is about the impact of the Blue Drop and Green Drop certification within WSIs. She is a member of the Water Institute of Southern Africa (WISA) and is a certified scientist with the South African Council for Natural Scientific Professionals (SACNASP).

## A WOMAN IN WATER

**S**peaking as a woman in this sector, Bila-Mupariwa discusses her experience. "It has not been an easy journey for me, but rather an interesting one, especially with regard to the treatment works. This is due to the fact that this area has traditionally been dominated by male process controllers. It has been exciting to be one of the women breaking into this field. There is never a dull moment when you are at the treatment works given the challenges that one faces with regard to the processes. In order to make it in this challenging world you need to respect people from all levels, and the world will respect you back (smile and the world will smile back at you). I have learnt to play the ball and not the man. As a woman you need to work twice as hard to prove that you can do it.

I am passionate about my work. I know that I am contributing to making a difference in my country by ensuring that the public receives good drinking water quality, and making sure that our scarce resources are protected. For me, I subscribe to Eleanor Roosevelt's quote – 'A woman is like a tea bag; you never know how strong it is until it's in hot water.' My strength and passion are in the water sector." □

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