

*Towards the criteria necessary for the career
success of women in the water sector:*

Profiles of Interviewees

*Nazreen Kola, Lindiwe Ndlela, Bibi Fatima Rawat,
Tracey Jooste, Esther Njiro & Susan Kimathi*



TOWARDS THE CRITERIA NECESSARY FOR THE CAREER SUCCESS OF WOMEN IN THE WATER SECTOR:

PROFILES OF INTERVIEWEES

Report to the
Water Research Commission

by

**Nazreen Kola, Lindiwe Ndlela, Bibi Fatima Rawat, Tracey
Jooste, Esther Njiro and Susan Kimathi**



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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.

The *background* looked at the circumstances under which the women had grown up and the factors that had contributed to their success in the sector, that is, what the motivating factors had been and the drivers in their success.

The *challenges encountered* explored the obstacles that the women encountered growing up, the way(s) in which they dealt with them, and whether these challenges had encouraged and enabled their growth or impeded it.

In terms of *support mechanisms* the women were asked to describe the kinds of support that were in place to accommodate them in their career advancement and how they experienced various forms of support, that is, personal as well as professional support. The interviews with men commenced from this category onwards. The men were asked about their role in supporting women and the contributions they had made to enable women's growth and advancement in the sector.

The *policy environment* addressed the extent to which legislation and policy has enabled women to develop and attain senior positions. This was viewed as a critical category in that there appears to be a gap between the advanced legislative and policy environment in South Africa and the implementation of the legislation and policy. The women were asked to share their experiences regarding the extent to which the legislative and policy paradigm enabled their development, and their insights on the gap between the existence of the legislation and policy and the implementation thereof. The men were asked about their involvement in the implementation of the gender mainstreaming policy as well as to share their views on whether or not the policies are instrumental in ensuring that more women will attain the top leadership and management positions in the sector. The category also sought to understand whether having women in senior management is necessarily transformative and enabling for other women.

The fifth category, *women's leadership in the sector*, looked at the current level of women's leadership in the sector, and whether or not women who hold meaningful positions have decision-making power. Further, the category unpacked the impact of women's leadership in sector transformation and in advancing a transformative agenda that creates space for other women to climb the ladder and achieve positions of seniority in the sector. The questions in this category were similar for both the women and men interviewed. In an additional question the men were asked to express their views on whether women in leadership positions were adequately addressing the

gender-based biases against other women aspiring to higher positions on the career ladder.

The women interviewed are profiled in this publication showcasing their achievements and the paths taken towards achieving them. Included below are excerpts from the men's interviews and the study report. It should be noted that the study was initiated in 2008 and since then some of the women have moved on to new jobs. Furthermore, there has been a name change for the national department for water from the Department of Water Affairs of Forestry (DWAF) to the Department of Water Affairs (DWA).

The statistics at the time of the study show that in terms of women in senior positions, DWA has a high level of female representation with approximately 70%. In the water boards 46% of members are female and 25% of water board directors are female. The number of female directors in water boards is comparatively low. At the level of local government, the statistics show that there are far fewer women in the water sector. In the metros, only 6% of women hold senior positions, 14% in the districts and 4% in the locals. The overall statistic for these institutions is that women hold 31% of senior positions. A possible reason for the low number of women in local government is that the job requirements in water are more technical and there are few women in the sector holding technical qualifications.

Member of Parliament

1.1 Connie September

At the time of the interview Ms September was a Member of Parliament. She was the Chair: Portfolio Committee for Water Affairs.

History

Ms Cornelia 'Connie' September was born in 1959 in the Cape Town suburb of Grassy Park. She grew up in Lotus during the apartheid era. Ms September matriculated from Grassy Park High School in 1977 and was an active member of the anti-apartheid youth movement which took place in the Cape during the 1970s and 1980s.

Her family structure centred around her mother and sister and later on, her own and her sister's children with whom she shared a home. Growing up, her mother was a significant figure in her life and played an important role in her own personal development and growth. Her family, she says, was her pillar of strength and it was through the support of her family, her mother's in particular, that she was able to play an active role in the movement. Her mother's support was most crucial when it came

to helping her care for her young child. She feels that this support structure gave her the space and opportunity to contribute to the fight against the apartheid government through various initiatives.

Life presented her with a host of challenging circumstances. She grew up in a poor family and was raised in a neighbourhood which was socially and economically disadvantaged. She managed to rise above these challenges through her determination to see change. She yearned for an education and invested a significant amount of time and energy into pursuing it. This was not easy to achieve given the political and social climate of the times. Her contribution to the liberation movement was also pivotal as it provided her with a channel to influence events and to overcome the challenges which she and many other individuals and communities faced.

The historical experience of women in South Africa has been that they were not '*given*' power but instead claimed it both during the liberation struggle as well as during the time of the transition into democracy.

Ms September has a great deal of respect for the working class and has played an active role in COSATU, fighting for and defending labour rights. While at COSATU she completed her teaching diploma and relished the opportunity to empower others through teaching. She actively engaged in trade-union negotiation processes and quickly worked her way up the hierarchy of COSATU. In 1993 she was appointed Second Deputy President, the first female to occupy this post, and in 1999 she was elected to the position of First Deputy President. In that same year she became a Member of Parliament, representing the ANC in the National Assembly. She has been the Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Water Affairs and Forestry since then and a member of the Portfolio Committee on Trade and Industry, since 2004.

Tools for success

One of the main factors which contributed to her success was her self-determination and personal drive to meet her educational goals. Despite difficult circumstances and limited opportunities, she made significant progress in terms of her education. The support of her teachers was particularly important during her high-school period, not only in terms of encouraging her and others to pursue their education, but also because her teachers were influential in motivating students to participate in the liberation movement.

Political activists and apartheid protesters of the time were also important. Some of the people who influenced her political activism include Nelson Mandela and the many women who were active in fighting the apartheid regime.

Her admiration for the working class inspired her to play an active role in trade-union movements. She finds the working class inspiring, because despite their personal struggle and strife they remain humble and still manage to find some humour in life and show appreciation for what they do have. They influence her and motivate her because of their determination. She has been active in working for the rights of labour for many years, playing a significant role in COSATU.

The study's findings indicate that the process of empowerment is essential to women's advancement, and involves women feeling capable, confident, and having the requisite

competencies and qualifications to carry out the responsibilities and tasks called for in their positions. The understanding of empowerment is the process by which women achieve increased control over decision making. Such empowerment is women's route to changing the practices and laws that discriminated against them, and achieving equitable access to opportunities and resources.

Drivers for success

On a personal level her main support mechanism was undoubtedly her family, who provided a structure upon which she could rely and call on when she needed it. She has a deep appreciation for her family and the role of family in her life, particularly her mother. Her family has provided her with the support base which gave her the strength and the space to pursue her goals.

Her personal desire to see the end of apartheid was a major driving force and it has contributed to the person she has become today. Her skill and commitment is evident in the pace at which she was able to grow her career and climb within the ranks of COSATU. As the first female deputy chairperson of COSATU she achieved notable success in a short period of time. She survived personal challenges through the support of those around her. Ms September is a religious person in her own right and she values spirituality and religion, and finding inner peace has been crucial to her personal growth. Several mentors have assisted her and continue to influence her and she acknowledges the significance of these people in her own development and success.

Ms September places significant value on education as the most important instrument for growth and development of individuals and nations. She was spurred on by her desire to acquire training and education and to assist others, particularly the working class, to fight for and defend their rights.

In terms of the formal policy mechanisms which were designed to promote the role of women in government, she acknowledges that while these policies are significant she does not see herself as a token female leader. The tripartite alliance has a commendable set of policies on gender quality but in reality, she found that some people found it difficult to 'handle' a woman in a leadership position. As the first female to occupy a leadership position in COSATU she had to break the glass ceiling and show that she was equal to any other office bearer, very soon winning the respect of her male counterparts. She managed to stand her ground and to play a pivotal role in a male-dominated environment. Interestingly, the response she received from men differed from that of women in the sense that her male colleagues accepted her much more readily than her female colleagues. This did not distract her from achieving what she set out to do and she continued to make a valued contribution within COSATU, becoming very much a part of the leadership structure without being treated differently because of her gender. Ms September is of the opinion that her attitude to her work and the manner in which she interfaced with her colleagues are the main reasons why she reached this point.

Playing a role in the growth and consolidation of South Africa's economy and young democracy motivates her on a professional level. While South Africa faces significant challenges, the country has a lot of potential – she is motivated by her desire to see the country prosper and her will to assist in addressing these challenges. Women have historically played a part and continue to play an important role in South Africa's progress.

Within the water sector in particular, she recognises that women occupy leadership positions of note across the sector, both politically and at the administrative level. On a policy level the development of women in the water sector is acknowledged as being good. However, the sector does not have sufficient women in technical positions and there is an urgent need to build capacity of women in engineering and science. This is an area of development in which she would like to see further progress.

'A lot of our work when I was at the Department focused on the emancipation of women, this was our focus especially in the rural communities. Ensuring that women obtain easy access to clean water is our primary concern. We set the target at that time that 50% of the water committee should be women. As leaders, we need to understand what access to water means to our people as well as the constraints which the lack of adequate water and sanitation brings and we need to empathise with this.'

Professor Kader Asmal

The findings show that the level of access that women experienced in entering the sector was rooted in women's increasing consciousness of gender, which stemmed from women claiming gender equality and advocating it in 1994, when South Africa entered a transition period. Women were either politically involved or at least politically aware, and in that, they were more engaged in issues of women's rights and gender equality. This can be linked to the vocalisation of women's issues in the mainstream, which is also evidenced by women's knowledge and understanding of gender debates, demands and the importance of ensuring that it is on the mainstream agenda.

Further evidence was the sector's commitment to implementing the policy imperatives, which provided a framework for women to gain access to the sector. The sector's commitment is linked to the strategic positions that influential women and men held. In 1994, the advisor to the Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry was a woman named Janet Love. The interviewees recognised her as being pivotal in promoting women in the sector. She held a strategic decision-making position, which was supported by the employment of other women in senior positions during the same period. These women were recognised for driving a women's agenda in the sector where the aim was to increase the numbers of women in the sector and to raise women's interests and needs in issues of water. With these changes and the legal reforms in place, women increased their own access and assisted each other in gaining a foothold in the sector.

On the issue of the enabling environment being created by the water sector, she feels that the sector has definitely made positive strides in the promotion of women across the sector, especially from a policy perspective. However, she is of the opinion that the social and economic value of water is undervalued and that there is a need to do more to promote the importance of the sector as a whole. Women can become great leaders in the water sector in the smallest of ways, e.g. teaching about cleanliness and water-saving approaches. These are small things but they can have a powerful impact by saving a life and promoting longevity.

Advice to aspiring women

According to the study, *Conscientisation* is the process by which women realise that their lack of status and welfare is not due to their own lack of ability, organisation or effort but stems from the discriminatory practices and rules that give priority access and control to men. This motivates a collective urge to take action to remove discriminatory practices that block women's access to resources. It is here that we see the potential for strategies of improved information and communication as a means for enabling the process of conscientisation, but driven by women's own need to understand the underlying causes of their problems, and to identify strategies for action.

While the water sector has progressed significantly with respect to empowering women to reach leadership positions, a patriarchy still exists and consequently women still face challenges. Her advice to women entering the sector is not to allow the gender issues of other people to adversely affect their own progress. It is important not to subscribe to the culture of women having to convince their seniors of their ability and worth. Women should not have to compromise themselves. These issues should not distract women in the sector and they need to focus on their role and contribution in the development of the sector, not only in terms of delivery but also in terms of the development of people in the sector. She places significant value on education and encourages both men and women to invest in their education. She is particularly concerned about the shortage of women in the technical and scientific realm of the water sector and feels that more women should be empowered to explore study and career opportunities in this area of work.

Department of Water Affairs

1.2 Moshibudi Rampedi

At the time of the interview Ms Rampedi was the Deputy Director General (DDG): Forestry at the former DWAF

History

Ms Rampedi was born in Limpopo Province, the former Transvaal. She received her primary and secondary school education in Limpopo, and thereafter went to the Eastern Cape for her tertiary education. She also studied abroad in the United Kingdom at tertiary level.

Prior to joining government in 1996, Ms Rampedi worked as an educator for 11 years. She worked for the government in the past but became a manager in 1996.

She is a mother of 3 boys, aged 25, 14 and 10. She finds being a mother to be most fulfilling as 'there is an unconditional love and support.' She views her professional work as a bonus as her main drive remains the daily responsibility of her family and friends, which is what motivates her every day. In her professional life, she sees herself as a role model for her children. She is committed to serving the people of South Africa.

She is the eldest child in a hardworking and competitive family where non-achievement was not an option and education was emphasised. Her father was a teacher and her mother a home-maker. She enjoyed school and saw it as a part of her journey to the world. She has always been curious about that which exists beyond what she knows. Working hard has been important to her all along and she knew that through an education she would be able to improve her prospects of achieving success and to learn that much more.

Ms Rampedi grew up in a rural area and because of the limitations of her environment she identified that as one of the challenges in her formative years. She had limited exposure and interaction with the outside world but books and travel broadened her horizons and she learnt that the world is enormous with much to offer. This fuelled her desire for adventure and to move beyond her home area. A further challenge was that she was a young woman in a society that expected little from women and set boundaries for what women could achieve. Ms Rampedi's family was different in that they encouraged her to pursue whatever she was interested in and they did not define her path.

In 1981 she decided to study plants, a decision that was unusual at that time, but she found it exciting and was eager to build her career in an area that had to do with nature. Plants give life; they support life and are integral to peoples' lives. She loved these aspects about this field of study. Based on this passion she chose a career in the forestry sector. She also sees the sector as critical to both economic and social development.

Tools for success

The main factors that contributed to her achievements were her social environment and her background. She took her achievements as blessings and opportunities. She also felt that she was at the right place at the right time, which she feels led to her becoming a DDG. Most of her support in shaping her career came from her family. They have been the backbone of her success. Her life partner has also been a major support as he has been willing to take on roles that are not typically seen as those of a father. These support mechanisms have enabled her to have the time and the space to invest in improving and growing her career. Through a system of coaching and mentoring her work environment has also been supportive, and she is being mentored by a coach from the private sector.

The findings reveal that the women had varying levels of welfare; however, all the women drew strength from their backgrounds. This contributed to their respective achievements and successes. Each woman described growing up in an enabling environment that encouraged and nurtured her, despite the various limitations of race, class, gender and poverty.

The social factors that influenced her path in life include politics, poverty, social inequity and injustice. She experienced the injustices of the past when she was arrested as a student. Her experience gave her a sense of resilience when she could have given up at that time. However, she wanted to persevere, to make a difference and to be a part of the change that would eventually become South Africa. She grew up during a time when there were those who gave selflessly and key people like Nelson Mandela and Mother Theresa influenced her path in life. Others who contributed to her life were some of the people she worked with who encouraged her

to grow and develop. She also learnt a lot from the students whom she taught as well as from her own family.

In terms of women in professional environments, Ms Rampedi found that over the years there has been a significant change in the way people perceive women. She is of the opinion that this break with the past is linked to South Africa's maturity as a nation. The policies have made it easier for women to gain access to positions and have encouraged them to achieve. As a result of the policies and the commitments made towards implementing them, the resistance in organisations has been broken down. However, it is important to bear in mind that this does not mean that women are less qualified or less deserving.

According to Ms Rampedi the following mechanisms and support are required for women to excel in the water and forestry sectors: good leadership and management that is responsive and supportive; flexible working hours; the option to work from home; a day-care facility; basics such as a restaurant or cafeteria; improved employee wellness; and the social aspects of work where there is time and space to build social capital.

'Organisations need to make a concerted effort to ensure that women feel that their work environment is conducive to their development. This includes ensuring that when people resign those that are retained are given the opportunity to develop themselves further.' Advocate Matipa

She mentioned that there are organisations that have already mainstreamed gender equality and where *gender* is considered in all decisions. This makes it easier for women to advance, and furthermore, organisations can no longer be gender blind. She believes that women are equal to men but different, and there must be accommodation of that difference in order to claim equality.

When women began entering the sector, accounts of the formation of networks and coalitions were noted. African women found strength and comfort in connecting with other women who were going through similar experiences of change and transition in a new work environment. It was also important for them to network with those women who were already in the sector and to learn from their experiences and to share in their knowledge of the sector. The women felt they had a safe space where they could discuss challenges, request support and guidance on issues, and most of all, it was a safe environment where the women could interact with colleagues and friends.

Men were a part of some networks, but in a more limited capacity. In other words, the women spoke about men who assisted them and were a part of their network, but the interaction with men was more about the work environment and less about the issues the women were dealing with on both a personal and professional level.

Drivers for success

Ms Rampedi's success has been driven by her positive attitude towards work and her ethos that 'hard work never killed anyone'. She has always been willing to learn and is flexible and open to new ideas. She is accommodating and accepting and aware of the

fact that she will never know everything. She constantly learns from people regardless of who they are.

She has adopted a strategic approach to engage people and gain their support. Over the years, she learnt how to improve the informal lobbying part of what she set out to accomplish. She felt that, traditionally, women do not unite and lobby very effectively even though the benefits of networking are significant. She found value in being able to sound out ideas informally with colleagues before entering any formal decision-making process. In her view, people need to work harder on forming relationships which are a source of support. This is important for women who are often lone voices in the water and forestry sectors.

She feels that the gap in the number of women who are in senior positions can be closed by women enabling other women as they rise to success. Men need to be a part of this, since it cannot happen effectively without the support and inclusion of men. Ms Rampedi holds the view that a progressive transformation agenda for the water and forestry sectors is a more inclusive and future-oriented approach, rather than trying to settle past imbalances. This is a more sustainable approach.

Advice to aspiring women

Ms Rampedi regrets that the sector has not been visible enough and as a result there are women who may not be aware of the opportunities available in the water sector. To improve the career path for women, she feels that the sector must be responsive to women, and to take cognizance of women's needs and interests. This is necessary to encourage younger women to join the water and forestry sectors and to be aware of the career opportunities offered by these sectors. Women need study opportunities, scholarships and bursaries, and a social support network.

She believes that the implementation of the gender policies is an obligation, and the senior positions that women hold make it possible for them to ensure that implementation happens. The gap in the number of women who are in senior positions can be closed by women enabling other women as they rise to success.

1.3 Thandeka Mbassa

At the time of the interview Ms Mbassa was the Deputy Director General (DDG): Regions at DWA

History

Ms Mbassa grew up in the rural areas of the Eastern Cape Province which typically reflect the various dimensions of poverty experienced in the rural parts of South Africa. She described her childhood home as an area characterised by poor service delivery that compromised the quality of life of people who lived in it. This experience had an impact on her and influenced her desire for change. She understood that education was essential to achieve this and she worked hard at school.

In terms of her training, Ms Mbassa's path was uneven. Not knowing that she would one day become a manager in the public sector, she began her training in the field of natural sciences but soon became interested in development issues. She completed her studies with a qualification in regional and town planning, noting that it was the political atmosphere in South Africa during the time of her schooling that influenced this interest. Having been too young to participate in the anti-apartheid struggle, she later viewed a career in the public sector as an opportunity to contribute to the

country. To date, Ms Mbassa feels a strong sense of duty to ensure that government succeeds in its commitment to deliver quality services to people.

The findings reflect that the women were passionate for change and wanted to make a difference through the work that they did in their careers. The water sector provided them with an opportunity to make a difference to the lives of ordinary people.

She began her career in a municipality in East London and then moved to the Eastern Cape Department of Land Affairs. Her first appointment in the former DWAF was in the Eastern Cape as the provincial director of implementation. From here she advanced to become the DDG: Regions in the Department's head office in Pretoria.

She is of the opinion that a career in the water sector is demanding since the sector is intimately related to the socio-economic development of the country in general. Economic growth translates into challenges for the water sector because growth tends to be accompanied by an increased demand for water, and the challenge for South Africa is the careful management of its scarce water resources.

Tools for success

It was mainly her family that influenced her life. Ms Mbassa's mother and grandmother were the major influences in her life. She described her mother as a hardworking woman who was determined to see her children through school. This built a strong sense of responsibility in her and she felt inspired to succeed if only to meet the wishes and hopes of her mother.

Her grandmother was an inspiration to her, and imbued her with a sense of values. Although not a career woman, her grandmother was an admirable woman with a strong value system and principles. At the heart of those values was that people should maintain their sense of principle which should be rooted within their value system. Her grandmother taught her to live within the boundaries of a value system.

The former bosses, colleagues and the people that Ms Mbassa supervised were also a source of influence in her life. She indicated that she has always been able to learn something from her bosses, whether negative or positive. The negative experiences often highlighted areas that needed to be managed differently, while positive experiences showed that certain approaches produced better results.

Drivers for success

She attributes her success in her current appointment not just to the training and qualifications that she has but also to her strong ability to learn from her immediate work environment in the water sector. She notes that she is not an engineer; however, she is responsible for managing qualified engineers. In her view, managers do not need to have technical skills, like engineering, but they should be willing to learn from their colleagues to ensure that the desired outcomes from initiatives are achieved. Continued learning is important to Ms Mbassa; she believes that managers should be pro-active and willing to adopt novel ways of doing things. She feels that the way in which this can be achieved is through knowledge sharing within the organisation.

Ms Mbassa considers the water sector environment to be conducive to the development of women leaders through the opportunities and exposure it offers to women. At the same time, she feels that the sector can do more to empower women. This could be done by increasing the human resource capacity of the sector since the

current staff are overloaded and stretched thin. The reduced workload would enable staff to keep abreast of the changes taking place in the sector; the different trends and issues; and to empower themselves with relevant skills.

On a personal level, Ms Mbassa acknowledges that policies such as the Affirmative Action Act assisted her to access the positions she was appointed in; however, she would not have gained entry or been promoted if she had not been appropriately qualified and hardworking. It is mainly her hard work and productivity that has enabled her to grow professionally and to achieve success. For Ms Mbassa professional growth occurs in an environment that is collaborative, and where people have access to support. For her, the collaborative environment at DWA and the partnerships she has established have been the main forces that helped shape her professional career in the water sector. She views the water sector as a huge family at the local, regional and even at continental levels. The cohesiveness of the sector provides an enabling environment that helps to mitigate the many challenges in the sector.

'In the water sector, delivery equates to commitment to the poor and the marginalised. Those in senior positions must be committed towards these goals. We need to work together as a sector to achieve these goals.' Dr Guy Preston

Advice to aspiring women

According to Ms Mbassa, success is rooted in hard work. Although government needs to support women, Ms Mbassa is of the view that there can be no substitute for hard work in attaining success. Productivity should be emphasised as a prerequisite for career advancement. She also feels that there is a need for a mechanism which ensures that productive women are promoted without being stereotyped.

In order to improve the gender balance in the water sector, she suggests that the sector should take the risk of incorporating inexperienced women and supporting them to learn and gain the skills that are needed. This would be an investment, particularly in the technical areas, which would contribute to transformation in the sector. Once a woman has entered the sector, the onus would be on her to improve and advance in her career. The important aspect is that the sector will be creating the opportunities.

Ms Mbassa holds the opinion that the gender policy should be treated as an integral part of all the programmes in the sector. She emphasises the importance of a gender focal point that monitors gender mainstreaming in the sector to ensure that the policy is implemented in ways that are meaningful. Without this she believes that the implementation of the gender policy will remain an elusive goal in the water sector.

1.4 Henriette Anderson

At the time of the interview Ms Anderson was the Chief Director: Engineering Services at DWA

History

Ms Anderson began her working career with an engineering company. She then joined the water sector and the Department of Water Affairs. She has been with the department for more than 16 years.

She grew up within a nuclear family structure comprising her parents, one sister and two brothers. She has always maintained a strong sense of family. Her parents and grandparents have been the most important influences and role models in her life.

Growing up her parents treated her and her siblings as responsible adults who were given the freedom to choose what they wanted to become, but they were always encouraged to pursue a tertiary education. Her parents felt that it was important to obtain a qualification, and her father suggested that she study something career-specific. At school she enjoyed maths and science which influenced her decision to opt for a career in engineering.

She could not recount any particular challenges growing up noting that, 'There were no extraordinary challenges.' She enjoyed her youth, had a wonderful childhood and has been able to maintain healthy relationships with her family, friends and colleagues.

In school, she and the other students generally did not have good exposure to career opportunities. However, in high school she worked during the school holidays, which presented her with the opportunity to learn about other career options. She worked at a factory where she gained exposure to industrial engineering, and she also worked at a municipality where she experienced the local government work environment. These experiences provided her with a sense of work opportunities.

'I am not satisfied with the rate of transformation in the sector, much more needs to be done in the sector, especially with regard to engineering skills. I support plans to invest in education and development of women so as to build a cohort of skills in the sector and equalise things. We should work towards supporting career pathing, we should not rush things too quickly.' Dr Guy Preston

Ms Anderson regards herself as being competitive by nature and she competes with her peers. She is a self-motivated individual who always endeavours to keep abreast of new developments in her field. People inspire her to do more and to grow, and she believes an individual is responsible for his or her own decisions, which determine their future.

The findings show that the White women in the study encountered fewer of the intersectionalities of race and class, whereas the African women, in general, were confronted with the reality of having been born into less privileged families. Despite the variances, all the women drew strength from their backgrounds, which contributed to their achievements and successes. Each woman talked about growing up in an enabling environment that encouraged and nurtured them, despite the various limitations of their race, class and economics.

Tools for success

Most of Ms Anderson's support in terms of shaping her professional career came from her family. Her parents were very supportive and in her extended family she found role models that she could emulate. Her father was an electrical engineer and her mother a home-maker and a music teacher. There are a number of engineers in various fields in the family, which influenced her career path.

The qualifications that she achieved have directly assisted her in the work that she does. Ms Anderson mentioned that the 'soft skills' such as communication, mentoring, etc., are important and one learns these through experience and by listening to advice and criticism. Learning by doing is crucial and it is hands-on experience that is invaluable.

She believes that the policies promoting gender equality, such as the Affirmative Action Act, have assisted people in gaining access to positions in government specifically, and to an extent this policy has enabled her, as a woman, to obtain the position she holds. The legislative and policy paradigms have allowed for and enabled diversity, which has allowed women to enter senior positions in the sector. Being in a senior position has further challenged her to improve her qualifications by studying further.

Her view on women in the sector is that there are fewer women in the technical areas. She feels that the reason for this may be that there are other more glamorous professions which tend to have more appeal to women. The field of engineering, in terms of its appeal, tends to compete with finance, medicine, architecture, information technology and the other sciences. Engineering is a career with high risks where the remuneration is not great and as a result it is not seen as desirable as the other technical areas. Also, government is an unattractive employer when compared to the private sector and it is perceived as being an inflexible and weak learning organization. This makes it difficult to attract talented, skilled and experienced women. As a result, engineering is male dominated and the public sector struggles to attract and retain engineers.

Ms Anderson described engineering as a challenging field because of the kind of work that is part and parcel of it. The physical side is tough and the working conditions are challenging. She gave an example of why engineering does not appeal to women. When she did vacation work as a student for an engineering company she was sent on-site. There she was asked how she wanted to be treated. She responded by saying that she wanted to be treated the same as everyone else, that is, the 'guys'. This was accepted and she was sent out to survey a pipeline with two helpers, and quickly learnt just how demanding the working conditions can be. She also learnt that by joining forces with those working with you, you can create a winning team that is supportive and motivating.

'The reality is that the technical fields tend not to be very attractive for women to work in, especially sanitation and waste water treatment plants. For instance, to be a resident engineer in site, one has to be accustomed to working in a noisy, dusty, male dominated environment. Engineers who work with operations, dams and infrastructure are often placed for long periods of time in remote areas and work under challenging circumstances. These circumstances are part of why some women tend not to prefer the more technical fields. However, at the end of the day, there is a huge demand for skills at both a management and a technical level.' Dr C Ruiters

For Ms Anderson the water sector offers a huge amount of job satisfaction; however, the career planning and remuneration offers could be improved, particularly if the sector wants to attract scarce technical skills, including women. She also does not believe that the sector provides an ideal environment for women to become great leaders. She feels that there is scope for organisational improvement where the department could be more flexible and offer more attractive working conditions such

as a day-care facility for children. She believes that this would make things easier for many of the women in the department.

Drivers for success

One of the attributes that have worked for Ms Anderson is her ability to manage the different personalities among people she works with. She notes that many people base their perceptions and judgement of people on their appearance without getting to know them. This results in stereotyping. Before making judgements on their personalities, her approach would be to get to know people better first, without prejudice, and to take cognizance of their particular backgrounds. In time it then becomes possible to build trust and to find common ground and to use that as a point of departure.

'The water sector needs to transform from its currently male dominated status, particularly in the area of engineering and this means also dealing with stereotypes and deep set prejudices. I strongly believe in equality and that we should be working together towards equal opportunities and unbiased development.' Dr Guy Preston

Ms Anderson regards herself as being a good team player. She really appreciates her team, and is of the opinion that the people she works with enable her to progress professionally and personally. Her motivation in her career has been kept alive by always having something that she looks forward to doing. She enjoys new challenges and tackling new issues.

She believes in a culture of continuous improvement and progression and this has contributed to her making a success of her career. The water sector is a constantly changing environment and one needs to think ahead and plan for the future. There is also a need to build resilience to face challenges when they occur.

Ms Anderson does not see herself as a leader. She believes that someone like Nelson Mandela who can inspire and unite people is a leader. She considers herself to be a successful manager. As a leader a person needs charisma and the 'x-factor'. She is still growing and feels that she is more of a facilitator and an enabler who makes things happen. She would like to create an enabling and cooperative environment; however, this takes time and people skills.

She believes that there is a progressive transformation agenda that some women and men in senior management subscribe to, and feels that having women in senior management is positive. 'A woman is not necessarily there because she is a woman.' There is a need for competent and skilled women who can then make a positive contribution to transformation. Women should not feel entitled to positions just because they are women but because they are skilled, competent and can perform adequately and responsively with intelligence, integrity and energy in positions of power. However, having skilled and competent women in senior positions sends a positive message to other women who might be aspiring to reach such positions.

'The Water sector has benefited much from the work of the female Ministers who have sensitised top level leadership in the sector to take into account gender equity in all that they do. What is lacking, however, is a clear feedback mechanism that showcases the best practises in advancing women and the achievements that women have brought to the water sector.' Makuma Ubisi, Sedibeng Water

The level of consciousness the women described in the latter part of their careers in the sector was markedly different from what they discussed in the period during which they entered the sector. Most of the women understood the importance of gender and acknowledged the role women had to play in supporting other women. There was recognition of the impact policy imperatives had on both African and White women in gaining access to the sector. They were clear that while the policies opened the door to the sector, it was competence, hard work and dedication that furthered their growth and development.

Advice to aspiring women

To encourage women to attain senior positions in water management, Ms Anderson suggests that networking for women is important, as networking enables women to gain exposure and to build good relationships. Networking should not be restricted to women only; rather, women should network with both men and women to market themselves and to build a reputation so that at the end of the day their appointment to a senior position is justified. It is essential to build experience.

Furthermore, people should be well informed about the work that is required of them and in the position that they hold. Training is provided internally in the sector and gaining external exposure is important. The department places a significant amount of resources towards achieving this. There is a need to assess whether anything else could be done in order to allow more women into the sector. She is of the opinion that women need encouragement to attain a tertiary-level education and support to advance in their careers, and thereafter to build their skills and experience in line with their abilities and interests, i.e. to continue to develop professionally. While the initiative should come from the individual, it is also important for the organisation to provide the necessary resources to advance people who would like to further their qualifications. She also feels that mentorship is critical; mentorship programmes should be based on and linked to formal strategies of the sector, and should be focused on providing support and guidance that will encourage career development.

1.5 Thami Mpotulo

At the time of the interview Ms Mpotulo was the Chief Director: National Sanitation Programme

History

Ms Mpotulo was brought up by her grandmother and thereafter by her mother who worked as a teacher. Relative to other families she knew, her family was well off and she does not recall poverty as being a factor in her childhood. Growing up she feels that she had an easy life and only came to face real-life issues later on in her life. Her grandmother believed in hard work and upheld the belief that 'hard work does not kill'. This value has always remained with her. Her mother valued education and achieved five degrees, that is, two Honours Degrees, 2 Masters Degrees and a Bachelor of Arts Degree. Her mother influenced her in valuing education, which she in turn would like to share and pass on to other people.

The study findings show that for the African women education was seen as a necessity in order to improve one's status and position in society. It was a prerequisite for progress and change, and there was a sense of empowerment that the women felt they would attain through education.

Ms Mpotulo holds a Masters Degree in Urban Sociology and a Master of Science in Management and Urban Policy Analysis from New York. Before joining the water sector as the Chief Director of the National Sanitation Programme, she held the position of Chief Director of the National Public Works Programme, and she also worked as a Programme Manager for the South African Foundation for Public Management and Development. This was a USAID programme that aimed to capacitate newly elected politicians and the executive arm of the government.

She has been exceptional and exemplary in her leadership, which has led to a number of achievements that she has been rewarded for. She won the award for the Top Performing Woman in Government in 2007 and was amongst the top three finalists of the most influential women in government in 2008. She has achieved admirable outcomes when she was managing the Local Government Programme in DWA and won the VUNA award for two successive years in 2006 and 2007.

Tools for success

Ms Mpotulo views her education as one of the gateways to her career success. Her qualifications have been important to her as they gave her the confidence and readiness to enter the job market after her studies. They provided her with knowledge and skills, including political and economic analytical skills. Her qualifications from the United States gave her exposure to different perspectives and approaches; this exposure has been advantageous to her career. In hindsight, she feels that her decision to delay her entry into the job market was worthwhile because it gave her the opportunity to study and acquire a strong educational base. This benefited her in the longer term and increased her career prospects. When she received her first degree, she was offered a job but decided to forfeit it to continue studying. She believes that her career progression did take time; however, it would have taken much longer if she did not have the education and expertise that she has.

Her support comes from friends who have been really important to her. They have been by her side in difficult times, praised her achievements and constantly encourage her to keep working at her goals.

In terms of women's leadership in the sector, she sees this as a source of motivation for her as well as for other women. She feels that as more women join the sector, it encourages and inspires other women to become involved and to achieve. It drives an ambition among women and Ms Mpotulo herself has drawn motivation from the entry of more women into the water sector.

Ms Mpotulo also mentions that her exposure to different experiences and environments has contributed to her continued development. Through her involvement in trips to overseas countries where water-related issues are discussed at regional and global levels, she has been exposed to different perspectives, practices and information in the water sector.

Drivers for success

Ms Mpotulo has benefited from her ability to focus on her goals. She has created a vision of what she would like to achieve in her career in the sector and she has

dedicated herself to achieving it. Hard work and being highly organised are important to her. She considers herself an achiever and she refuses to simply accept failure. She has a strong personality and is an extrovert.

She does not believe that her appointment was the result of the Affirmative Action Policy. Rather, her appointment was based on merit and on her management capabilities. Her strength is in management. When applying for jobs, she would apply for the top positions because she believes in her abilities. She considers herself to be a charismatic manager who has a special way of getting things done.

Advice to aspiring women

Ms Mpotulo's advice to aspiring women is that they should understand that being a manager does not make one an expert. Like other employees, senior women managers also need to be open to learning from the people they work with. They should pursue opportunities for travel outside the country as this opens up opportunities for new areas of knowledge, which support personal and professional growth and development. She feels that it is also necessary to continue to enrol in courses to further develop oneself in the sector.

'Gender equity is crucial to the development of women. I ensure that there is buy into that vision by all managers. I also encourage all newly recruited women to attend continuous training and be exposed to the areas and tasks that will build their leadership skills. I also ensure that we have one on one discussion with my male and female colleagues so that they can get the practical guidelines on actual issues.' Makuma Fani

A good education is a necessary tool for acquiring knowledge, and women must empower themselves through an education. She feels that education liberates and enables people to think widely. With an education people are in a better position to analyse situations and develop strategies for dealing with challenges and issues that arise.

Mentorship opportunities should also be made available to aspiring women. In turn, women should take such mentorship opportunities and utilise them towards achieving their career aspirations.

Ms Mpotulo also believes that people should be allowed to identify their development needs and come up with their own personal goals. They should be given the opportunities and support needed to realise their goals.

1.6 Thoko Sigwaza

At the time of the interview Ms Sigwaza was Chief Director: Institutional Oversight at DWA

History

Ms Sigwaza grew up in a rural area in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). She is the eldest of ten children, and comes from a deeply Christian family. Her family background and upbringing has influenced her character, and her father, who was active in development issues, particularly water issues, shaped her passion and interest in

development. She grew up in a hard-working family that emphasised the importance of education. It was important to her father that his children have the opportunity to attend university, and with the income he earned as a local business person, he was able to send all his children to university.

She grew up with the challenge of having to fetch water every morning for her family. As a child, she saw everything being centred on the issue of gaining access to water. Children would play where they queued for water, and for Ms Sigwaza, it felt as though the daily ritual took things away from her childhood. Through this lived experience, her passion for the water sector grew along with her commitment to making a difference so that other children would not have to wake up at four o'clock in the morning to fetch water.

Ms Sigwaza holds an Honours Degree in Development Administration and has completed a course in International Project Management. At the time of the study she was completing her professional registration for Project Management. In terms of career-pathing, Ms Sigwaza is a development practitioner who has been involved in community development work since the 1980s. Her first employer was the Valley Trust, a social health non-governmental organization (NGO) situated in the Valley of a Thousand Hills, KZN. From there she moved to the Centre for Health and Social Studies at the University of Natal where she worked as a researcher. In 1996 she joined Mvula Trust at the start of the National Government's Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). She was then seconded to the DWA Durban Office when the Community Water Supply and Sanitation Programme was initiated. Before joining the Masibambane Programme at DWA in Pretoria, Ms Sigwaza was the Water Services Authority (WSA) Manager at Sisonke Municipality.

Tools for success

Ms Sigwaza's religious upbringing inculcated values in her that have been instrumental in shaping her character. As mentioned above, one of the most influential people in her life has been her father. She described him as a forgiving person who believed that people have to be able to forgive.

In the early 1990s, during the democratic transition of South Africa, it was difficult for a woman to gain access to the water sector. She described the sector as 'scary'. The sector was largely occupied by men who operated in a very technical environment. When Ms Sigwaza joined DWA at the end of 1995, she found that the women who were already there paved the way for other women to have easier access. She was the second Black woman in the Durban DWA office. This was really challenging, especially dealing with men who were very technical and who found it difficult to deal with the 'soft' issues. When she applied for a position at the DWA Head Office in Pretoria, she was interviewed by a panel of men only and even the Director of Transformation was a male. The sector was daunting at this time and there were only a few women. She felt inspired by the women who were there and the effort they made towards improving access to the sector for other women. These women were committed to achieving gender parity in the water sector and paved the way in terms of policy and practice that supported women.

The changes in the country's political climate had a major impact on the changes in the sector and the prioritisation given to women. In adopting the Affirmative Action Act and the Employment Equity Act the sector committed to achieving 50/50 gender parity, and in accordance with this, women should be given preference over men in terms of employment. However, it was emphasised that the women should be qualified, competent and placements should not be tokenistic.

The immediate post-1994 period was full of change and numerous thrusts came together. During this period the women's movement was strong and engaged. The needs and interests of women were heard; although it was not a single, unified voice, multiple women's voices were being expressed. The outcome was that women entered the sector and became increasingly present in terms of numbers and in terms of the positions they occupied. There were women who entered into senior decision-making positions where there had been no women in the past. Of significance was that African women were beginning to assume positions of leadership. The transversals of gender and race became prevalent in the sector, and while there were political shifts that enabled African women to gain access to the sector it was not easy for all African women.

She believes that the water sector has a supportive policy environment and policies, such as the Affirmative Action Policy, supported her. People in the sector were aware of the existence of this policy and that *others*, especially women, should also be given the opportunity of being appointed to positions, on condition that they have the requisite qualifications and experience. She feels that people were knowledgeable of the policies; they understood the imperatives of transformation; and they were willing to accommodate women. These were mostly men who had been in the sector for many years. These men were also instrumental in assisting women, particularly those women appointed to senior positions, to grapple with issues and challenges.

Ms Sigwaza mentioned that networks have been important for her and she has utilised them throughout her career in the water sector. She feels that there are some things that can be learnt from a manager, but there is a lot that is learnt (informally) from other people in the sector. She views people within the sector as being giving and willing to assist. In the sector a person does not have to contend with challenges on their own and having networks makes it possible to access support within a safe space.

'I believe that in leadership some people, men and women, focus too much on processes and not enough on people. Building relationships and establishing good lines of communication and support are important for good leadership.' Neil McLeod

She feels that the sector can improve the formal support mechanisms that are available for women. She explains that women have been put in places that were traditionally technical and occupied by men, such as water services. The ideology, the vision and the thinking of the people who had held those positions in the past and those who hold them now have changed. For her the challenge is that there has not been sufficient support to manage the changes that have taken place. In this she makes reference to the support that could be provided to women who have less technical expertise but are responsible for managing programmes and projects that require some level of technical understanding.

Her lived experiences together with her education have given her an intricate understanding of community development issues in South Africa. Through this she is able to identify appropriate projects as well as guide the evolution of existing projects to ensure that they make a positive impact in communities.

Drivers for success

Her spirit of determination and her drive have been important resources for her success in the water sector. She does not believe that she has achieved success as a leader, but that she is gradually getting there. She continues to work hard in the sector to achieve the desired outcomes of development and improvement in the lives of communities.

She feels that she has benefited from her management style which is interactive and consultative. She holds a one-hour meeting every Monday where her entire office meets to talk about various issues without a fixed agenda. This gives people an opportunity to raise concerns or to brainstorm ideas about projects or other aspects of work that they may be feeling uncertain about. This has created a good working environment for her team. Once every three months, she holds a more focused meeting in which different units report on various issues and staff are given an opportunity to comment on how they feel about the issues discussed. She allows her staff to work flexibly where, if need be, they can work from home or structure their working hours in a way that works best for them. This is accommodated as long as productivity is not compromised. Her emphasis is on outcomes and she feels that employees can decide on how best to achieve their outcomes as long as they are sure to deliver. She believes in her employees and this has enhanced teamwork within her unit.

In her role in supporting the implementation of gender policies, Ms Sigwaza mentions that there are informal conversations that take place about how women feel in the department and the ways in which they are perceived in terms of the stereotypes around women. These conversations have provided a platform for women to understand that they are not the only ones facing gender-based challenges and to appreciate that such challenges can be overcome.

'In my view, we are not placing sufficient emphasis on the implementation of gender issues in our performance agreements. We need to support a process of providing gender targets and policies that need to be mainstreamed within the Departments. We need to engage further on these issues so that we can realise these objectives.' Advocate Matipa

Advice to aspiring women

Ms Sigwaza identified the need for women to acquire the skills and competencies that will enable them to access opportunities in the water sector. The water sector is complex and people need to be competent if they are to succeed.

She feels that the support women require to advance their careers can be given in many ways, both formally and informally. Knowing that there is a committed leadership and that the working environment is supportive is one of the strong points. There has been an internal discussion in DWA that noted the need for a support programme for women in the sector. Ms Sigwaza notes that this platform or network

does not need to be formal but its development should be encouraged and supported. Currently, DWA has a gender budget, but initiatives only come up around calendar dates.

The issue of a women's movement is discussed where there is a conscious decision to promote women at lower levels. In some areas it is still a challenge to obtain access to services and it is women who are mostly affected by a lack of services. Hence, women in senior positions need to be sensitised about this.

According to the findings, the African women had the understanding that their relative lack of status, welfare and access to resources and opportunities was rooted in discriminatory practices that limited their opportunities. This understanding was political, which created a situation of economically and socially deprived communities throughout South Africa. However, during this time many of the African women felt increasingly resilient and committed to wanting to see change. They realised that they were responsible for changes in their own lives, which for some women led to their mobilization when they joined the liberation movement. It was there that the leadership thrust of these women began to find expression. These women became increasingly vocal and assertive in the student movements against the apartheid government. At this time they were against a discriminatory political system. However, their conscious engagement with discrimination enabled their later awareness of issues pertaining to women, the position of women as compared to men, and the need to advance women in the public domain.

Later on when African women pursued their careers and entered the sector they became increasingly aware of gender issues and the impact that the gender legislation and policy imperatives had on their gaining access to the sector.

1.7 Deborah Mochotlhi

At the time of the interview Ms Mochotlhi was the Chief Director: Water Use at DWA

History

Ms Mochotlhi was born and raised in Mafikeng in economically poor circumstances. Her father was a mine worker for De Beers and her mother was a domestic helper. She is the eldest of eight children.

Her father's occupation became a blessing in a sense because De Beers offered Ms Mochotlhi a bursary that enabled her to complete Matric. She feels that she would not have been able to complete her Matric as a full-time student had she not been offered this bursary. The implication of not getting a bursary would have been poor performance as she would have had to work while studying in order to meet her needs.

Although she attained the necessary grade to qualify for university entry, Ms Mochotlhi was not able to go to the university immediately after Matric. Due to the lack of finances she had to go out and work before considering the possibility of enrolling in any tertiary education programme. She was fortunate to get a job as a clerk with the Ministry of Public Works where she worked for two years. She soon learnt that this job was not stimulating enough for her and she was unsatisfied. She knew about bursary

and scholarship opportunities and decided to apply for them from as many sources as she could find.

One of the places where she applied for a bursary was the Department of Health which responded positively and granted her a bursary to study public health. Ms Mochotlhi acknowledged that the bursary came with an immense challenge in that she was the first African woman to study public health (later re-named to environmental health). The Department of Health was piloting bursaries to African female students for the first time and the first candidate to receive it was expected to succeed in the course she pursued. Otherwise, the Department would not fund African female students in future. The conditions at the Technikon where she enrolled were stringent as there were no concessions for failure in the course. The rule was that a student who failed would be discontinued immediately. Ms Mochotlhi knew that she had to pass.

During this time there were other, external challenges that made it difficult for her to maintain her focus. This included the political climate which led to unrests in the schools and tertiary institutions. Students were sent home at a time when they would ordinarily be sitting for their exams. This meant that students who were to be examined that year could not sit for their exams. Knowing that there was no other alternative that would enable her to sit for her examinations at the planned time, Ms Mochotlhi registered for supplementary exams in order to be able to take her exams together with those students who had failed in the year before. Against all odds, she passed her exams. This became a defining moment in her life since she succeeded in a difficult time which proved to her that she had the potential to become anything she wanted to as long as she worked hard towards her goal. This gave her the determination to excel in her professional life.

Ms Mochotlhi wanted to study for a higher qualification but there were no courses offered in environmental management beyond her first degree. She opted to study social sciences in Mafikeng in order to understand the link between the environment and societies. She majored in public administration for her qualification. While studying in Mafikeng, she was appointed as a senior environmentalist and worked while continuing with her studies. Upon completion of her studies and after a short span of working in Mafikeng, she learnt that Pretoria Technikon was offering an environmental management course at B-Tech level. She moved to Pretoria to further her studies in the area of environmental management. She registered for the environmental course and discovered subsequently that the course was offered only in Afrikaans, which she was not fluent enough in. The language barrier required her to study harder and she had to put in an extra effort in order to pass. She was prepared to pay this cost rather than terminate her studies. While in her second year of B-Tech, she simultaneously registered for a course in public administration to further her understanding of public administration. She completed her studies with a professional qualification in Environmental Management. Thereafter she went on to do a Masters in Environmental Science.

Tools for success

Family values, religious values, socialisation and the challenges she faced in her youth have been some of the factors that have contributed to Ms Mochotlhi's success in her career.

Having been blessed with hardworking parents who worked hard to ensure her success, Ms Mochotlhi appreciated the value of hard work instilled in her by her parents. She was also determined to achieve career success in line with what her parents expected of her and had invested in heavily. Her family set standards that she and her siblings were expected to meet or surpass in their daily chores. Whatever they

did had to be done to the best of their ability. She has a strong sense of responsibility and commitment to excel in whatever she does and she aims to achieve excellence at all times.

Her work experience has been helpful to teach her how to pay attention to detail and to emphasise quality in her work. This makes her strive for perfection in anything she does, which is not always easy, given her heavy workload. To ensure that she meets all her responsibilities, she often works beyond the required hours. This allows her to pay attention to detail and to perfect her work.

She has great appreciation for the study bursaries that she was awarded since she may not have been able to complete her studies without them. She views her education as a tool through which she has gained immeasurable opportunities.

Drivers of success

Ms Mochotlhi views her qualifications as one of the primary drivers for success in her life. These qualifications were attained through resilience, focus and determination even in environments that were often difficult to succeed in.

She mentioned that the environment at work did not change just because gender legislations were passed and policies enacted to mainstream gender. To her 'workplaces do not just change, it is people who change the workplaces and not the other way round'.

'Our Department was seen to be setting the pace for others to follow in gender mainstreaming and encouraging women into top leadership positions. Whilst we have the policies and legislation in place, these are rather cold if we do not bring in the human side. Close monitoring and evaluation of the policies is what makes them work.'

Kalinga Pelpola

She describes the immediate post-democracy work environment as 'an emotionally taxing one'. She notes that it was quite difficult to work in some places and that it has taken time for the professional work places to change. People earned respect on the basis of the credibility of their work and not merely because policies existed.

'I believe that we have come a long way in what we perceive as possibilities for women. These days' women are able to do jobs traditionally undertaken by men, such as fire fighting. There's no other fire fighting force that has more than 2% women on the force. In South Africa 20% of the force are women....we are way ahead!' Dr Guy Preston

In terms of the gender policies, she feels that they have played a minimal role in making her who she is today. The policies may have created opportunities but she feels that she needed to be qualified for the position in order to be hired. She is of the opinion that gender mainstreaming has not been particularly successful because the policies themselves cannot change the workplace. Rather, it is people, and more importantly people in senior positions, who need to facilitate and drive changes regarding perspectives and attitudes. They have an important role in implementing the gender policies. Women, on the other hand, should understand that success cannot be separated from hard work.

Advice to aspiring women

Ms Mochotlhi does not limit her support to women. She supports both women and men who need her support but she is conscious that women have special needs. She believes that the requirements for career success cannot be diluted to make it easy for women to succeed because that would result in poor performance.

'One of the key challenges has been giving effect to the gender criteria that has been set in terms of recruitment and retention without setting individuals up for failure by appointing them into positions which they are not suitable for.' Dr C Ruiters

Rather, women need support structures such as flexible working hours that can enable them to meet the requirements of their careers.

Her opinion on whether women would be more transformative than men is that a transformative attitude does not depend on whether a person is male or female. Rather, being transformative is dependent on an individual's experiences and personality and not the gender of the person. While some women would be very proactive in assisting other women, there are men who are equally fervent believers in the power of a woman and will invest their time and other resources in enabling women to move up the professional ladder.

1.8 Zandile Mathe

At the time of the interview Ms Mathe was the Chief Director: Financial Management at DWA

History

For most of the women their consciousness about gender was limited while they were growing up. The African women, for example, were preoccupied with the various challenges in their lives that stemmed from the apartheid system, and a few women were involved in the struggle for liberation. During this time there was more of a political consciousness among the women. This was not necessarily active, but it did consume more of the women's space and energy, and the issue of gender was less important.

Ms Mathe grew up in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) in a poor family where food was at times treated as a luxury. She became politically active at a young age and was involved in the liberation struggle against the former apartheid government. She was forced to live in exile in Lesotho from 1986 to 1989 and only returned to South Africa in 1990. When she returned she realised that the mood in the country had changed as the way was being paved for democracy in South Africa. This encouraged her to pursue an education because she understood that the country would require skilled African people going into the future. She studied for a diploma at the University of Natal and thereafter for a Degree in Law.

While still studying law, Ms Mathe understood that there was a need to shift from the broad focus on human rights to the provision of basic services. She decided to register

for a Masters Degree in Housing while she was on the verge of completing her Law Degree. She was passionate about housing which she saw as a basic need that would present a major challenge for the new South Africa.

After completing her studies, she worked in a few different organisations before joining DWA. She began her professional career with a consulting company in the housing sector based in Pretoria. She then joined the Department of Public Works where she worked as a manager for programmes on generic construction. Following this she joined DWA as the Regional Programme Manager. While at DWA she was offered a position at a company in Johannesburg. While still considering her options, she was made a counter-offer by the Department that recognised the importance of retaining skilled women. She was appointed as the Chief Director of Financial Management.

Ms Mathe feels that she did not deliberately choose to work in the water sector, but opportunities opened up for her in the sector and she decided to take them. Although she did not have any experience in financial management at the time she assumed the new office at DWA. She had a basic understanding of financial aspects and was keen to learn. She had the added benefit of technical skills which were useful.

Ms Mathe's professional qualifications include a Diploma in Development, a Degree in Law and a Master of Science in Construction. She nearly completed a Masters Degree in Housing but noted that her final thesis was not examined after her supervisor relocated from South Africa. At the time of this interview she was pursuing an MBA in Project Management.

Tools for success

The primary driver for her success has been self-determination and hard work, which has seen her persevere and overcome challenges in her youth. Her dedication to seeing change and development in South Africa formed the basis of her decision to work in the public sector. She considers herself as the kind of a person who does not accept failure and mentioned that, 'Whenever I am down, I fight with my legs knowing that failure is not the end of things'. According to Ms Mathe, life should be taken positively and people should be set on overcoming the obstacles that present themselves from time to time by cultivating a determined spirit.

Her qualifications have been an important asset to her success. At one time, she doubted whether she would be able to apply her diverse qualifications in the positions she held. However, she soon realised that each of her qualifications helped her by providing a wider understanding that culminated in better management skills.

Ms Mathe has also benefited from coaching other people. She found herself gaining a better understanding of the sector and its relationship with other sectors through coaching other people. She considers herself to be a good leader who assists people who turn to her for assistance. In particular, she likes sharing knowledge in formal and informal settings to capacitate other people. Her institutional memory has been useful for supporting newly recruited people into the water sector. It has been important for her to ensure that the contributions of junior staff members are recognised by the senior management in the sector, thereby acting as a kind of link between lower levels of staff and decision makers in the sector.

Drivers for success

Some of the factors that contributed to Ms Mathe's success were the availability of people that turned out to be good mentors for her professional development. Also, the challenges in her upbringing and immediate political environment inspired and

motivated her to succeed in her own life and to contribute to the development goals of South Africa.

Family members have been a positive influence in her life. Ms Mathe admired her father from whom she drew strength and learnt not to accept defeat without a challenge. Growing up in severe poverty motivated her to make something of her life. Many of the things that she would consider basics now were luxuries when she was growing up where she had to learn to share the little that she had. She values sharing and enjoys sharing her achievements and especially knowledge with other people. This has enabled her to become a mentor to those in junior positions in quite informal ways.

She describes herself as an outspoken woman which was a major driver for her political activism. A personal loss during the apartheid regime motivated her to fight for human rights. Consequently, she could not remain silent while the rights of her fellow students were being violated. Due to her resoluteness, she was suspected of being a liberation leader and was expelled from school before completing her Matric (Grade 12). She had to write her Matric exams away from school but she worked hard to pass well. Ms Mathe notes that she did not know that whatever she was doing at the time had any leadership connotations. It is only when she thinks about her past in hindsight that she sees and understands that she started leading at an early age.

Ms Mathe encountered various challenges when she entered her professional career. Her strength and resolution to succeed enabled her to do well in whatever she undertook. The setbacks she faced were always viewed as temporary and she maintained that anything can be resolved and changed. Such understandings and approaches have been influential in enabling her to succeed in life.

Advice to aspiring women

According to Ms Mathe, all employees (both men and women) can add value to an organisation through their productivity. Education is critical and women, in particular, need to develop themselves to build their own staying power. She explains that policies are in place to support women but it is their skills, experience and impact in the sector that will enable their career growth and development. Also, there are resources available to support women in the sector and these should be utilised.

1.9 Penelope Lerato Mokoena

At the time of the interview Ms Mokoena was the Acting Chief Director: National Transfers

History

Ms Mokoena grew up in the Free State in an extended family that was headed by her grandmother. Her mother worked away from the Free State in Johannesburg but she remained responsible for meeting the needs of her children. With her mother being the only breadwinner for her and her siblings, finances were a challenge and she and her siblings learnt to cope with the few resources that their mother could afford. They always hoped that their hard work at school would pay off in future.

She drew a great deal of inspiration from her grandmother who always insisted that schooling was the only means of liberation. Her entire family was very supportive of any endeavours that the children made towards education and tried their best to make it possible for every child to achieve their educational goals. She and her siblings were

given leeway to make their own decisions and to set their personal goals. This was done with the guidance of adult family members; however, it was expected that each child would be accountable for their own actions and take responsibility for the decisions they took in their lives.

Ms Mokoena did not know which career she wanted to pursue. It was only after seeing an advertisement for a hydrology bursary offered by the Water Research Commission (WRC) that she became interested in learning more about a career in hydrology. She shared the information about the bursary with her mother, who bought her a book on hydrology which she felt would assist her in gaining an understanding about the field. Ms Mokoena read the book and researched hydrology as a career. Having grown up reluctantly having to fetch water for her grandmother, she was intrigued by it. She decided that she wanted to pursue a career that had some linkage with the water sector.

With a basic understanding of the course and the prospects of earning a qualification in the hydrology field, Ms Mokoena applied for the WRC bursary. She met the criteria, was awarded the bursary, and successfully pursued a degree in hydrology.

She tried to find a job immediately after her graduation, but struggled to find work in the Free State and decided to move to the Eastern Cape where she was offered her first job with the Department of Agriculture. She later successfully applied for a job with the Department of Water in the Eastern Cape, and her appointment to this position marked the start of a long-term career in the water sector. Subsequently, she was moved from the Eastern Cape to Gauteng under the Department's National Transfer of Assets and Schemes Programme. Based on her performance she gradually climbed the corporate ladder to her current position in senior management.

Tools for success

One of her most significant tools that led to her success is her spirit of determination. Her openness to learn from others and to explore opportunities has been important to her career development. She also emphasises the importance of her education which opened up doors for her.

Drivers of success

Among the numerous social factors that shaped Ms Mokoena, her childhood and the difficult conditions of the working class environment at the time were significant. She knew that she did not want a life characterised by financial strain and opted for a career path that would make it possible for her to have the kind of life she wanted. Although she did not know exactly what she wanted to become, she was sure that she wanted to pursue some profession in the sciences, which led to her career in hydrology.

Like her mother, Ms Mokoena believed that it was possible to become independent as a woman and live a fulfilling life. Her mother exemplified a successful, independent and reliable woman who solely fended for the family and ensured that they never lacked the basics. Her grandmother ignited a spirit of determination in her by constantly reminding her that only she could make the changes and improvements she wanted in her life. Her grandmother insisted that the only option available for her to exit poverty was success, and success would have to be earned through focused hard work.

She describes her first supervisor as a source of influence. He appreciated the work she did and gave her the recognition and positive feedback she deserved. Coming from a rural setting where her confidence had been challenged many times in her youth, her supervisor's appreciation reinforced a sense of worth and grew her confidence. This

positive relationship enabled her to cultivate good relationships with subsequent employers. To date, she feels that the healthy relationships she has had with her employers and colleagues have translated into a 'career wealth' for her. She explains that her success draws largely from the insights that she gained from her employers and colleagues who have been helpful whenever she calls upon them. Also, it was one of her former supervisors who informed her of the opportunity in Pretoria while she was working in the Eastern Cape. She had wanted to move to Gauteng to look after her mother who was not well and needed a job close to Johannesburg. She feels that she would not have been able to find a job as quickly as she did without having had the good relationship with her former supervisor. She also mentions that the challenges she encountered in her life were most effectively mitigated by the support that was offered her quite informally, mainly in terms of emotional support, recognition and motivation. Dissemination of valuable information necessary for personal and career growth is also acknowledged as being a driver for success.

'There is real progress as far as increasing the number of women in management and in administration but not much done to increase the number of women in the more technical fields. This needs more support.' Makuma Fani

She does not consider the gender policy to have contributed to her success as a career woman. She is of the view that she was placed in a position because of her qualifications. Ms Makoena thinks that the gender policy may have supported her promotion to higher positions; however, her performance has always been a core measure that contributed to her career progression.

'Our focus should always be on getting the best people for the job, people who are keen and are able to make a positive contribution rather than simply chasing number targets. Our focus should be on ensuring service delivery outcomes and what we need to do to achieve the best results.' Dr Guy Preston

On the subject of gender mainstreaming, Ms Makoena feels that women are progressing faster now than in the past as more women currently occupy senior management positions in the sector. The technical fields are still dominated by men. She feels that more can be done by the sector to encourage women to enter these fields.

Advice to aspiring women

Having been mentored by former supervisors in her career, Ms Mokoena identifies personal mentorship as being important. She believes that mentorship is a powerful approach for developing leadership skills in others as well as to access useful networks. She feels that women should take opportunities for coaching and mentoring since the benefits are invaluable.

Ms Mokoena emphasises that a woman who is keen on succeeding should adopt a culture of studying hard. Additionally, forming networks of friends with whom you share values can go a long way in facilitating the success of a career woman. These are useful support avenues where issues can be discussed informally in a safe space.

From the findings, the women were keenly aware and conscious of the challenges that women faced in the sector. It was found that the women relied on a range of support mechanisms that worked well, particularly the informal networks. Bridging the gender gap, however, necessitated leadership from both women and men to ensure that there was greater inclusiveness and involvement of women in the sector.

1.10 Nomonde Mnukwa

At the time of the interview Ms Mnukwa was the Chief Director: DWA Eastern Cape

History

For a part of her life Ms Nomonde Mnukwa grew up between Kokstad in KwaZulu-Natal and Mount Ayliff in the Eastern Cape. She completed her primary school education in Kokstad. Thereafter she moved to live with her grandparents in Mount Ayliff in the Eastern Cape. She obtained her BA Social Work from the University of Transkei, her Post-Graduate Diploma in Business Management from the University of KwaZulu-Natal and she is currently awaiting her MBA results from the latter university.

She believes herself to be a very compassionate person with a heart for the people and she wants to contribute to making a difference. She would like to look back on her life and see that her presence in the area in which she has been working has contributed to making a difference. Ms Mnukwa is a results-driven person and her desire to making a difference is tied in with this trait.

Her interest in the water sector stems from her youth; she grew up in rural areas where it was common for women and girls to fetch water. It was primarily the task of women and girls and she rarely saw men taking responsibility for fetching water. This prompted her interest in community development, which she studied as part of her first degree. Her motivation was that she wanted to make a contribution to people so that they could be self-reliant and would initiate projects on their own to better their lives. In the area in which she grew up she saw household owners making a contribution towards ensuring that they had water and electricity in the area. She saw the way in which people could mobilize themselves and become innovative, and this observation inspired her.

Women's *welfare*, that is, material welfare including food, income, education, healthcare and other material needs were important as basic inputs that enabled the women to improve their socio-economic status later on in their lives. These were the foundational elements that the women needed to be able to access other opportunities. African and White women alike had access to basic needs such as food, water and sanitation. However, the type and quality of access differed among the women. In some instances, access to water meant having to wake up early each morning and walking a distance to collect water for the day.

Ms Mnukwa did not have any prior experience when she first began working and this was somewhat of a challenge. Her first manager, who became a mother-like figure to her, enabled her to achieve her goals and to deal with work and issues that had to do

with her personal growth, and to gain a broader understanding of life. She had entered the water sector from quite a different environment as she had been in the broadcasting sector prior to joining the water sector. Her manager in the water sector was a woman who became quite influential in her life. She feels that she is the person she really has to thank for her success. Her manager saw things in her that she did not. She placed her in a position where she was challenged and offered her the opportunity to realize her potential.

Tools for success

Among the tools that contributed to her success was her family. Ms Mnukwa considers herself to be among the most fortunate people who grew up with both parents and grandparents who contributed in numerous ways to her life through their involvement in her life. She received a great deal of encouragement from her siblings, especially her younger sister. Her sister saw potential in her and always motivated her to do things.

The composition of her family was also a source of influence for her. She came from a family that had only girl children. The community never thought that a difference could be made within one's own family given that the normative socialization held that in order for a household to progress, there should be a male. Ms Mnukwa and her family were determined to prove otherwise and she remained resilient in order to challenge this belief. She was focused on working hard to achieve the success that the society saw as a preserve for boy children.

Ms Mnukwa's teachers were also progressive and they turned out to be a source of motivation. She also had the advantage of teachers who saw things in her that she did not and pushed for her to 'unleash the potential that she thought she did not have'. Her teachers were supportive and took a personal interest in her growth.

Access to education was available for the women, although there were differences in the quality and type of education that was provided. This was rooted in the apartheid system wherein African women were in the Bantu system, which was poorly resourced and very basic. Despite the challenges that were prevalent the women were told that an education was the means to improving their lives in the future. This was supported by teachers, parents and other elders.

Her spiritual upbringing enabled her to remain positive in life and build relationships outside the family that were fruitful. Her mother and grandmother believed that anything is achievable for those who put their faith in God. That although there will be hindrances, faith in God would enable one to overcome them. This faith was further cemented by her spiritual parents, Pastor Mkhize and his wife, who held the same values. These parents have always taken a personal interest in her and walked with her through her life's ups and downs. They always encouraged her and taught her to believe that with God she can achieve anything.

Her qualifications assisted her professional life in that her social work background allowed her to understand human behaviour which is central to the work she does in a service provision sector. There were components of community development and psychology in social work that have helped her to understand the social behaviour of communities. Her business administration qualification has enabled her assess efficiency and effectiveness in the work that is being done.

Ms Mnukwa has enjoyed healthy relationships with her supervisors, which taught her to be assertive in her work thereby creating an enabling environment that is

supportive. The fact that the majority of her supervisors were women also boosted her personal motivation and inspired her to develop and improve herself. This she believes is important for women to grow and further themselves in their career. Receiving honest feedback from supervisors is also critical.

In shaping her personal career most of her support came from the South African Local Government Authority (SALGA), particularly the Infrastructure Unit in Pretoria. She would consult the unit whenever she encountered challenges related to policy issues. Her peers in the District Water Services Managers Forum were very supportive too. The Management and Councillors of Sisonke District Municipality who gave her an opportunity, and trust and belief in her ability, even though she was the first and the only female Water Services Authority Manager, gave her great confidence.

'It is very important to ensure that women have the necessary support mechanisms to enable them to succeed. In the Department for instance, this is enforced by the Performance Agreement that compels the manager to develop his/her staff. In general, the water sector is very supportive of women and many women have advanced to the highest levels of leadership such as Minister, Director General and Deputy Director General, Chief Directors and Directors.' Helgard Muller

As the only female WSA Manager she experienced situations that required the participation of WSA managers, and she as the only female was always nominated to participate because there were no women at the time as WSA managers.

As a professional she found openness within the sector. However, in the communities in KwaZulu-Natal her experience as a female WSA manager was very different; she experienced challenges regarding acceptance of senior women in the workplace. It would take time, but peoples' reservations would be dismissed once they realized that she knew what she was doing. This often happened through meetings with communities where participants would realize that she understood the sector, community needs and the municipality's water business.

The policies promoting gender equality, such as the Affirmative Action Act have assisted her professionally immensely. DWA Eastern Cape Regional Office required a female Chief Director for the position she currently holds. She emphasised though that the department did not just want a woman, but a woman with the right attitude, skills, qualifications and experience. She had to have the right aptitude to be given the position, even as a woman.

Her enthusiasm in her work is driven by the fact that she wants to be a change agent in the Eastern Cape. The Eastern Cape is known for its huge backlogs and challenges in the sector which are exacerbated by the rural nature of the area. Ms Mnukwa wants to one day be part of the people who have contributed to making a difference in the current *status quo*. Her goal is to see improvement and change. She feels privileged to work with a supportive senior management team and committed staff who look up to her for strategic guidance and direction. She views herself as a manager who is still learning and hopes to improve through leadership training and coaching.

Flexibility of working hours is important to her and other women, since many women are raising children, who are the potential leaders of tomorrow and women need to be able to impact their lives, spend time with them and be present as parents. She commented that in the Eastern Cape they have established a Women's Forum that is aligned to the DWA Women's Organization. The Women's Forum is the vehicle that will be used to ensure that there is support for women that is both internal and external to

DWA. The Women's Forum looks at women as individuals and provides them with support in their careers, their retirement, and in numerous other facets of their careers. The Forum creates awareness for women through seminars on a variety of topics. The idea is that the Forum will focus 80% of their activities on women and 20% on men. They do not want men to feel excluded.

In her view she feels that the water sector does provide an ideal enabling environment for women to become great leaders. The government policies address women's participation, women's involvement, and there are gender mainstreaming programmes, which are designed to enable women's performance, growth, development and increased inclusion. Ms Mnukwa thinks that in the sector the stereotypes of White males have been challenged. There are changes and the sector is beginning to appreciate women leadership; however, she feels that women are not where they want to be yet but a difference is being made. She personally did not encounter any major challenges in the sector except for the fact that being young counts against her as some people perceive her to be too young for the position.

'Leadership development is not about strategies.....leadership is largely a question of moral and ethical codes.' Professor Kader Asmal, Former Minister of Water Affairs

Drivers of success

Ms Mnukwa is a results-oriented person who gets serious about the task at hand and she delights in seeing positive outcomes in her work. This has been the primary motivating force in her achievements.

Secondly, her personality enables her to deal with people of different personalities and she has an ability to adapt easily to diverse circumstances. She noted that she does not have boundaries and engages DWA National where they can be of assistance. She is not territorial in her work environment, which allows her to engage with people at all levels, improve her work and respond more effectively. Ms Mnukwa believes that the gap between the gender policy and its implementation stems from men generally not being committed to gender policies. They think that it is a 'women thing'. Without strong men and women driving the policy it will not succeed.

'Whilst there are policies that promote gender mainstreaming, there are gaps in these policies as well as implementation challenges.' Advocate Matipa, COO, DWA

Advice to aspiring women

In her view women's leadership within the water sector is critical if the sector is to respond effectively to its evolving role. She has worked with a number of women leaders and she believes that there are people in the sector who have been called on to make a difference at the current time and stage of development in the country and in the sector. She feels that women leaders are able to bring forth an angle that is broader, with a wider perspective, and they see an opportunity in every challenge. They are innovative in how they respond to challenges. She believes that women's leadership in the sector is growing and there is an increasingly strong presence of women in the water sector.

'I have observed from powerful women leaders such as Indira Gandhi that women have the knack for leadership which is usually ignored and subjugated by men because of prejudice over the years. I became interested in finding ways to harness this potential (of women) within the Department.' Kalinga Pelpola

For women to attain senior positions in water management, they need to understand that many and varied aspects contribute to water management. It comprises social, economic, policy and strategy aspects as well as a technical component. The sector is not limited to people with technical expertise; there are also opportunities for women with non-technical skills.

There is a need for women in the sector to be more visible at high school and university levels in order that girls and young women can see the opportunities that the sector has to offer. Links should be formed with tertiary institutions especially in post-graduate programmes to encourage students to consider water-related careers. Ms Mnu kwa mentioned that the University of KZN offers an MBA with a specialization in water that is non-technical. Programmes like that should be marketed and women should be encouraged to enrol in them. DWA should possibly link up with institutions such as WEDC where people can take short courses and capacitate themselves.

1.11 Lindiwe Makhanya

At the time of the interview Ms Makhanya was the Director: Organisational Development at DWA

History

Ms Makhanya grew up in Durban in a close-knit family with her father who worked as an Anglican Church priest and her mother who worked as a teacher. She has two brothers and one sister. Her family structure, the importance of discipline that was enforced at home as well as guidance from her parents has contributed to the person that she has become. She feels that her home environment was conducive to learning and education was encouraged. As the youngest in her family she felt the need to do her best and to exceed in everything that she did. All her siblings are well educated and hold good positions, which established a benchmark for her.

She did not encounter too many challenges growing up. Her family struggled financially as her father was a church preacher without a reliable income and her mother was the only breadwinner. Her mother managed to send her to a boarding school to ensure that she received a good education. By the time she was ready to enrol in a university, her brothers and sister were working and they made the necessary contributions to support her studies. One of her strongest motivations was to do well in her education and pay back those who invested in her education. She also set her vision high and drew her inspiration from her siblings who were well educated.

Tools for success

Ms Makhanya's educational qualifications have been the main tools for her career. She was able to join management and moved up rapidly because of her qualifications and success in her relationships with people. She enjoys working with people and her networking has assisted her to advance in the sector.

The support mechanisms that were in place to facilitate Ms Makhanya's rise to seniority in the sector began with her education and the institutions she attended. She went to Amanzimtoti Primary Boarding School in Durban and before that she attended the same school where her mother taught. For her, being in the same environment as her mother, prompted her to uphold the value system that was applied at home. She enrolled at the University of Zululand where she graduated with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Social Work. She worked for a year and then joined the Natal Technikon where she graduated with a Diploma in Human Resources (HR). She later obtained a certificate in leadership from the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS) in 2007. She did not enjoy social work and decided to shift into the field of business management.

Most of the support that shaped her professional career is derived from the fact that she realised her mistake of having chosen social work as a career. This realisation enabled her to seek the means to make a career change which motivated her to study further. She worked at a Child and Family Welfare Centre in Durban for one and half years. This work was depressing and she moved to another employer, the National Ports Authority, a division of Transnet, to work in the Employees Essential Programme for four years. She entered a succession programme in HR where she acted on behalf of her manager. There was a high turnover rate of HR managers as the workers were highly unionised. She built a good relationship with both the managers and the unions which made it possible for negotiations to take place and for some of the tensions to be eased.

Her professional career evolved over time. Once she moved to Pretoria from Durban, she joined the Department of Public Enterprises as a Deputy Director in the Organisation Development Unit where she stayed for two and half years. The unit was small and she formed good relationships with her colleagues. She then found an opportunity to join the Human Resource Department at the Department of Minerals and Energy where she stayed for three years. She grew bored because the work environment offered her few challenges. She enjoys being challenged, and once she puts things in place she seeks challenges to keep her busy and enthusiastic. She moved to a management company for a year and thereafter joined DWA as Director: Organisational Development.

She believes that the policies promoting gender equality did support her in being placed professionally. However, her current position is not a result of the Affirmative Action Act; instead it is based on her competencies and experience. She agrees that the policies promoting gender equity have made it possible to access opportunities that were previously out of reach for women and for Black women in particular.

Professionally, programmes for capacity building, opportunities for training and bursaries like the one she received to study at GIBS, supported her career development.

In her personal life, she has a supportive husband who respects and understands her career ambitions.

To facilitate her work she has formed coalitions with several networks of HR practitioners. She consults experts in the area of line management and she reads extensively to familiarise herself with best practices in HR.

The strategies that she has used to mentor and nurture the new generation of leaders includes mentorship, which she regards as the best strategy.

The political changes that took place in 1994 paved the way by providing the legislative and policy framework for women to gain access to the public sphere. The women had a legal environment as well as the rights based development approach of the State that enshrined the right of access for women and promoted equality of opportunity. Government prioritised gender equality and gender mainstreaming, and the water sector was fully committed to achieving gender equality. Legal reform to remove discriminatory practices was ratified and women had legal access to positions in the sector, on an equal basis with men.

Drivers for success

Ms Makhanya feels that her resonance with her current position has brought her success. Mechanisms that have supported her are the mentors and coaches that are available for all directors at corporate level.

Hard work is essential and she feels that DWA is not an easy environment. There are numerous challenges and things change all the time. She feels that women often have to convince their seniors of their ability and worth, which is different for men who do not have to prove themselves in the same way professionally.

For her, it is her belief in possibilities that has enabled her to remain focused on succeeding. She is confident in her potential to achieve because she believes in herself and holds the attitude that anything is possible. She sums up her success as being based on the right education, an encouraging family background and her own vision.

Advice to aspiring women leaders

Ms Makhanya emphasises that there is a need for mentorship for the women who are aspiring to higher-level positions. What is needed to encourage women to attain senior positions in water management is mentorship, coaching, target-training programmes and other ways of empowering women. She has been actively involved in ensuring that women move up the ladder. She provides the needed mentorship and she delegates authority so that other women can grow in their careers. She prepares them for a very competitive world, and she has always ensured that women are recruited whenever vacancies open up, given that they have the commensurate qualifications.

'In my view, I would encourage women who have been successful to share their success in terms of how they have made it through the system so as to encourage other women to succeed in the water sector.' Dr C Ruiters, DDG: Water Resource Infrastructure, DWA

1.12 Antonino Manus

At the time of the interview Ms Manus was the Director: Policy and Strategy at DWA

History

Ms Antonino 'Nino' Manus was born in 1976 and raised on the Cape Flats. Her parents did not have a tertiary education and were not 'well-off'. Her father was a factory worker and her mother a housewife.

Ms Manus attended the St Andrews High School which was a technical school situated in an unsafe 'gang area'. She undertook technical studies at school, including metal-work, technical drawing and welding. This was not a field that many of her female peers had chosen to study in. As a result, she was one of only three girls in her field of study at her school. From her high school years, she became accustomed to working in a 'male dominated' environment and learnt that she had to 'stick to her guns' and stand up for herself to prove to her male colleagues that she 'as a women she could do things'. The trend of choosing 'odd' subjects continued at tertiary level. Ms Manus was one of two non-White students in the engineering class at Cape Technikon in 1995. She felt that she needed to work harder than the White students to prove to her lecturers that she was capable. She reflects that she would have taken an engineering course at tertiary level had she known the discrepancies between an engineer and a technician.

Due to financial constraints, she stayed at home and commuted to technikon daily by train. She considers herself fortunate to have received a bursary from her father's employer for the first year of her studies. The subsequent years of her studies were paid for through a bursary from the National Department of Transport. In turn, she had to work for the Department during her vacations which benefited her in terms of experience. She gained considerable practical experience in that time through her work on a road construction site for a period of six months. This experience gave her leverage once she had completed her training.

Ms Manus is a mother of two young children, and is a self-driven person who has steered her career development whilst still maintaining a healthy balance between her family and career.

She joined DWA in 1998 immediately after completing her studies at the technikon as part of a team recruited by DWA from the technikon. She received six months of in-service training relating to the skills necessary for engineering and was then deployed to the Northern Cape where she started working at the Dam Safety Section at DWA. Her supervisor at the time tended to give her all the administrative and secretarial work whilst her male colleagues were given all the 'construction work'. Ms Manus raised her concern about this and indicated that she would prefer to work in the Water Services Section of DWA instead. She was then given an opportunity to work in Water Services which allowed her to become involved in the community water supply and sanitation (CWSS) programme (which was then known as the MIG programme) and the Consolidated Municipal Infrastructure Programme from the then Department of Provincial and Local Government. This allowed Ms Manus to work with municipalities and their communities and consequently to build her project management skills. She reflects that one of the reasons why she had chosen to study civil engineering was that she did not want to 'work with people'. To her surprise, she found that in her job at water services 'everything was about talking to people' and hence she needed to shift her own mindset and adapt to this environment.

Her senior at the time, a male colleague by the name of Louis Brink, encouraged her development and created opportunities for her to be exposed to new areas. He also gradually 'handed over' tasks to her which enabled her own development. When Louis moved out of the CWSS programme, Ms Manus took over his job.

'All stereotypes regarding women and what they are capable of professionally need to be broken down so that women are given an opportunity to work in an environment that promotes their development.' Dr C Ruiters, DDG: Infrastructure, DWA

In order to further her development and career, Ms Manus and her husband decided to explore career opportunities at the National Office of Water Affairs. So when her husband received a promotion to work at the DWA Head Office, she also sought a transfer to the head office. Here, she was exposed to a different work environment from what she had been doing in the regional offices. While her job in the regional office was very operational and involved working with municipalities, her job in the head office was more office-based, focusing on writing memorandums and preparing submissions for the Minister. This was a huge adjustment for her who had become accustomed to being 'more hands on'. She accepted her new job as a challenge and saw it as an opportunity for her to develop and enhance her skills. She found that her self-confidence grew once she got a sense of what was expected of her. Gradually, she started assuming more responsibility and eventually assumed the role of Deputy Director in the unit.

In the four years that she was Deputy Director, Ms Manus managed staff and projects and realised that she needed to take personal initiative and 'do things' herself instead of waiting for guidance from others. She also learnt that she should not be scared of making suggestions and that she should be flexible enough to adapt to changing circumstances.

Her four years as Deputy Director were part of an important learning curve for her. One of the key lessons for her was that a career in government requires ability to adapt, hence government employees cannot restrict themselves to what they studied at university or technikon.

For organisational and institutional change to take place in a sustained manner the understanding is that women must participate as equal and full partners. For this to happen women in the water sector need the time, energy and space to be able to engage effectively and meaningfully. The findings show that support mechanisms, such as home support and a supportive work environment are essential to enabling women's involvement.

The women spoke of the need for improved work-life balance and the support mechanisms needed for that. The women voiced the need for increased flexibility, child care facilities and other organisational changes that would allow women to further their careers without feeling as though the workplace was too demanding and that their scope for growth was limited.

Tools for success

Of the many tools that have shaped her success, the role of family has been the most important, both in childhood and in adult life. Her parents provided tremendous support to Ms Manus and her siblings and encouraged them to pursue an education. She grew up at a time where the tendency in her 'Coloured community' was for youngsters to work after Matric and to stay with their parents. From early on in her life, she was determined to gain an education and have a 'better life'. She had often accompanied her cousin to university where she was studying social work and realised that she wanted to strive to gain a tertiary qualification. Her family supported her decision and her vision and provided the support that was necessary for her to realise her dreams.

In adulthood, her husband has been her greatest strength, inspiration and mentor. They have worked together in DWA since 1998. Leonardo has been supportive both as a husband and as a colleague in DWA. He understands the water sector and its challenges and has been able to support and guide his wife and enable her to progress in the sector. Both have demanding jobs and they work very hard to ensure a balance between their family life and their careers by trying not to work over the weekend and by trying to prioritise their children's needs.

Colleagues have been a source of support and inspiration from the onset. Her Director at the time she joined DWA, Abri Vermeulen, played the role of a mentor and gave her the 'space to deal with things' in her own way. Since her appointment as the Director: Policy and Strategy, Ms Manus has also received much guidance and support from her Chief Director, Helgard Muller. Mr Muller, a well-experienced Chief Director who has been in senior management in DWA for several years, has been extremely supportive of her, and gives her scope to grow. Mr Muller 'makes time' to meet with Ms Manus on a regular basis.

'Women should not just pursue management careers only. They should be supported to advance in science and technology so that they can be well-informed advisers. Some of the ways in which I have supported some of my female colleagues, included identifying talents and gaps in skills; instituting ways of formal training and supporting colleagues to seek opportunities to advance their skills.' Helgard Muller, Chief Director, DWA

Other colleagues have also been very helpful to Ms Manus. She received tremendous support from her male colleague, Louis Brink, who gave her exposure to new areas of work and allowed her to build her skills and capacity. Women who were at director level in the organisation also supported and encouraged her, in particular Marie Brisley and Thoko Sigwaza. It helped her to be able to share her anxieties and frustrations with her female colleagues.

Today, adequately balancing the role of mother, wife and career woman is every woman's struggle. While multitasking remains a woman's strength, it can also turn out to be real source of unhappiness when the family is neglected as a woman meets the demands placed on her by her professional career. Ms Manus places significant importance on her family and she is grateful that her work environment respects her private life and has allowed her the space to prioritize her family. As a mother of two young children, Ms Manus requires that her seniors recognise and support the fact that she has a family life besides her career. She has requested to be allowed flexibility in respect of her working arrangement. By her own recognition, she is committed to ensuring that she delivers on what is required of her and often works at night or arrives in the office very early in the morning to ensure that she meets her commitments. Women should not be judged as shirking their duties if they leave the office at 4pm to fetch their kids from school. In her view, the issue of flexibility in working hours needs to be addressed. In addition, the working relationship needs to be premised on a level of maturity and trust that the job will get done even if one leaves the office early to take a sick child to the doctor. Nino extends the same courtesy to her team and allows them flexibility.

External to the DWA, Ms Manus has a number of friends who she connects with and reflects on her experiences and challenges. In her view, she finds it extremely useful to have fellow women professionals who she can confide in and whom she knows will give her their honest input and feedback which she can use to improve her life.

While in school, her teacher's belief in her was also a major contribution to how she viewed herself. Her metal-work teacher at high school provided her with career guidance and advice and encouraged her to pursue an education. Her professional qualification in civil engineering has enabled her to adapt to changes in her career. Her training in project management has assisted her tremendously. In her view, she is strong on project management due to her engineering background. Whilst at times, Ms Manus regrets that she is no longer exposed to 'pure engineering' work, she quickly realised that she has gained a tremendous amount of skills in other areas and is currently completing her B.Sc. in an attempt to further enhance her skills. She reflects that professional and academic qualifications are very important to one's career development

Whilst she acknowledges the importance of having policies in place to ensure gender equity, she does not believe that her career progression in DWA has been due to policies. She believes that her career development has been due to her own hard work and determination. At the time when Ms Manus was appointed Director: Policy and Strategy, two female directors were already in the Chief Directorate. From a compliance perspective it was not necessary to appoint another female director. Her appointment as director was in recognition of her ability and competence to perform the job, as well as the contribution that she had made to the directorate over a number of years.

In her assessment, the Water Services Section of DWA has made tremendous strides in terms of its receptiveness to and encouragement of the development of women managers. The Masibambane project has played a significant role in terms of sector collaboration and this along with government's commitment to gender mainstreaming and empowerment has shaped a role for women in the water services component of the water sector. However, more attempts should be made to address gender equality in the water resources side of DWA. Historically it has been very technically orientated and has recruited more male professionals than female.

'There is a growing recognition in the sector that Water Resources is not just about engineering and that there is a need for a multi-disciplinary approach to water resources. This has started to enable women to be appointed in leadership positions in water resource management.' Advocate Matipa

Drivers for success

Perhaps the most significant driver of her success has been her determination and focus. She knew that she needed an education to succeed and not even the environment in her neighbourhood could deter her determination. While most of her peers resorted to working after Matric, she knew that she needed more than a Matric and proceeded to enrol in a challenging subject that few women would dare to do.

Ms Manus has also benefited from being focused in life. Her pursuit of a career in the water sector and her decision to remain in the sector and grow within it enabled her to accumulate relevant experience that resulted in her promotion. She reflects that she had a number of opportunities to 'take other jobs', but opted to stay in the water sector and build her skills. She realised that in order to do that she needed to remain at DWA and develop herself further. She needed to be sure that she could take on tasks confidently before she 'could make her next move' along the career ladder.

Besides, she is focused on the priorities of her personal life as she protects her private time by prioritizing so that family life does not suffer. With her children in formative years, she understands that her investments in her children matter and she is focused on achieving set goals.

Advice to aspiring women

Throughout her career Ms Manus has realised that women have to constantly work hard to prove that they can add value in the organisation and that they are not 'over-emotional'. She is extremely passionate about her work and focuses on doing her best at all times. She believes in promoting people based on their skills and development and will not promote a gender policy to the detriment of a very able and competent male contender. The defining criteria should be whether a prospective employee can do their job and not whether they are women.

Ms Manus encourages other women to trust their own abilities and to have confidence in what they know. Women should also not be afraid to be honest about challenges facing them as people will always try to assist them to address these challenges.

She encourages managers to recognise that whilst their female colleagues have other responsibilities and require flexibility in their work time, there should always be the trust and maturity to recognise that the female colleagues will always get the job done on time. Her view is that the work environment for women should be flexible to allow for and encourage a work-life balance. Managers should realise that women do not thrive on being micro-managed!

1.13 Mokgadi Mathekgana

At the time of the interview Ms Mathekgana was the Director: Environmental Engineering at DWA

History

Ms Mathekgana grew up with both her parents but lived with her grandmother and cousins in the same household. Her father came from a poor family and his experiences growing up gave him the determination to want a different life for his children. He worked hard to ensure that the needs of his children were met. This influenced Ms Mathekgana's own work ethic and dedication and inspired her to work hard for those things she wanted to achieve.

Ms Mathekgana could not recall facing any atypical challenges in her youth and feels fortunate to have had the upbringing that she did. She remembers going to the best schools in the neighbourhood and had a conducive environment at home to pursue her goals.

Her qualifications include a Bachelor of Science Honours Degree in Engineering, a Master of Science Degree in Engineering, an Advanced Diploma in Project Management, a Post-Graduate Diploma in Project Management, and a Professional Certificate in Environment Management from Germany. At the time of this interview she was pursuing a Degree in Commerce, majoring in Supply Chain Management. She joined the water sector in 2006 at the DWA Head Office in Pretoria. Prior to her appointment at DWA, she worked for the Department of Land Affairs and the Rustenburg Local Municipality.

Tools for success

Her openness, commitment to supporting people and desire to see people succeed has played an immense role in her professional growth. She feels that although it is expected that people will be supported in their positions, the kind of support that they receive depends on the personality of their supervisor. She learnt early on in her career about the importance of support. Mentoring people and teaching them life skills have enabled her to successfully manage and support people. Over the years, she has become more outspoken about the obstacles that people face in their work environments and the difficulties they have in accessing support.

'There is a lack of guidelines as to how women should be supported once they are recruited into management positions. I have supported accelerated gender equity whereby women are encouraged to embark on leadership training even if there are no leadership positions available at the time in the organisation. We need a critical number of women leaders who can bring about change wherever they are working.'

Makuma Fani

She has great respect for her academic supervisor for her Masters Degree whom she considers to be the most influential person in her professional development. According to her, her supervisor was a wise, down to earth person who nurtured his students through mentorship. He instilled a strong sense of responsibility in his students and assisted them to acquire a value system that attaches importance to a positive attitude to work. Her supervisor was also available to discuss matters with her that did not relate directly to academics as long as the discussions helped her find answers. He even supported her when she was a newly appointed inexperienced employee in the water sector. She would contact him when she experienced difficulties in applying what she had learnt theoretically into the world of work. It helped her to talk through her ideas with him and she always valued his feedback and suggestions.

Her parents have been a major influence in her life. They laid a strong foundation for her ambition to achieve. She is married to a supportive husband who is determined to see her succeed in life. The church has also provided guiding life principles that have helped her to live a balanced and fulfilling life at both a professional and personal level.

Drivers for success

She has a passion for learning and this is shown in her numerous qualifications that span across the fields of environmental engineering and management sciences. She is keen to study further and has a personal goal to broaden her areas of understanding in the management sciences in order to perform better at work. According to Ms Mathekgana, practical experience has helped her to bridge the gap between theory and practice. The combination of theoretical training and experience has helped her to develop appropriate skills to deal with various situations that arise at work.

The ability to lead is one of Ms Mathekgana's attributes that has enabled her to succeed in her work. She has been given informal and formal leadership opportunities that have provided her with a platform to strengthen her leadership skills. She is aware of the need to constantly improve and she hopes that she has been a good leader and manager to her team.

She supports the implementation of gender policy in a number of ways including participating in the DWA Gender Committee meetings. She has been vocal in highlighting the existing gaps as well as identifying possible solutions to bridging those

gaps. She also participates in workshops that promote a different perspective on the role of the water sector in the economy and advises on the role of career planning in institutions.

On a personal level, Ms Mathekgana is committed to being involved in youth development in her community. She engages in youth workshops and debates that are organised by her church. These workshops involve discussions of various issues that affect the youth and on career guidance that should be given to the youth. The workshop delegates are asked to share their experiences and the information from the workshops with their parents in subsequent parents' workshops. The aim of these workshops is to create a mutual understanding of problems that the youth face and to think of ways to deal with these problems. Ms Mathekgana considers this volunteer work to be rewarding since it helps her to impact positively on the youth in her community.

Advice to aspiring women

She believes that women have a great deal of potential and can achieve whatever it is that they aspire to. Education is critical and without a sound base of knowledge it is difficult to grow in the sector and achieve seniority. Women should be supported in building their self-confidence by being given the space to perform and by being mentored as they perform in their roles and responsibilities. She feels that women who perform well should be recognised and motivated to raise their performance to even higher levels.

Women should continually empower themselves and showcase their potential where possible. They should be confident enough to take an assertive stance when it comes to making decisions. She feels that many women shy away from taking a stance in the boardroom and as a result they do not contribute to making decisions that shape the organisation.

She considers it important that women work together to support and advance women's needs and interests within the sector. Her view on gender mainstreaming is that gender is not mainstreamed well enough in DWA. There is no pressure on leaders to pro-actively mainstream gender and to perform against an agreed target. Gender mainstreaming is left to leaders who are under great pressure to perform in other areas of their position, in terms of their job descriptions, and the issue of gender mainstreaming is therefore not given enough priority. Although the Minister champions gender equality, it is unlikely that her efforts will have effect as long as there are no specific targets and no means to achieve those targets. She feels that women have a responsibility to champion gender mainstreaming, along with the support of men in the sector.

'Through the Working for Water Programme I have gained a lot of insight about the challenges which women in the sector face as well as the need to support them. I believe that correct measures are important, for example setting a target that 60% of a service provider's wage bill should be allocated to women (instead of 50%) is necessary to address past imbalance.' Dr Guy Preston

1.14 Louise Colvin

At the time of the interview Ms Colvin was an independent consultant; however, she is a former Chief Director: Water Services at DWA

History

Ms Colvin grew up in a close-knit family that moved all the time. This 'nomadic' lifestyle was a kind of a blessing because moving around gave her a great deal of exposure and she became aware of the many different things that were happening all around her. Both her parents were educated and stressed the importance of an education to her. Her father came from a poor family while her mother was from a more wealthy background. Her parents gave her a lot of trust and freedom, and she was allowed to backpack through Europe at the age of 14 years.

She attended a boarding school in England. She mentions that she loved politics from as far back as she can remember. Even in school she supported the British Labour Party among many young conservatives. She enjoyed the heated debates and the energy of those interactions where people would get so 'riled up' about their views and beliefs.

While at boarding school she would visit South Africa every Christmas and during these visits she learnt more about the change in politics that was taking place. She became fascinated and intrigued by the African National Congress (ANC) and when she decided to attend university in South Africa she joined the ANC. She views herself as somebody who is committed to justice, especially economic and social justice. She found a home for her ideological views and beliefs within the ANC.

She was one of the first women to join DWA in the post-1994 period. Leading up to this she was involved in rural development initiatives where she worked with stakeholders and grassroots communities. She considers herself a water sector activist and loves both sides of the practical hands-on work as well as the more strategic, policy and planning side of the sector. One of the initiatives she was involved in was a Drought Forum through DWA in which she facilitated bringing in engineers from England to support the programme which also included the establishment of community development offices in drought-stricken areas of South Africa. Through the Forum funding was sourced to finance the programmes. The Forum included important sector role-players who were particularly influential in transforming the water sector in the post-1994 period. Some of the members were Glen Abrahams, Malcolm White, Derek Hanekom and Janet Love who later assumed an advisory role to the former Minister of Water Affairs, Mr Ronnie Kasrils.

This programme became an eye opener for government as it provided evidence that the vast majority of rural people lacked a political voice. This realisation prompted her to begin a National Rural Development Forum that had provincial branches. The Forum enabled her to reach out to rural people on development issues such as water, sanitation and job creation. She then set up a National Works Programme that brought powerful people together who came up with a one-page document outlining the key issues that affected people's development.

In the immediate post-1994 period there were few women who joined the sector, and it was later in 1996 that there was a greater momentum and women began to apply for positions in the sector. The findings show that part of the increase in women entering the sector could be attributed to the few, 'pioneering' women who had entered the sector in the immediate post-1994 period. These women are seen to have paved the way for other women. In addition to the women, there were influential men who were committed to transformation and enabled women's access. These women and men saw the importance and the need for the involvement and advancement of women in the sector. They provided opportunities for women to join the sector and went on to mentor, support and train women who did not have a background in water.

The focus of the sector shifted during this time with water services becoming a priority issue and requiring a different skills set from that of managing water resources. The shift in the sector provided an opportunity for people with social science skills to be involved rather than people with technical skills. Water services needed people who could work with communities and who understood issues in development. It was found that there were many women with social science skills and qualifications that met the needs of the sector.

Ms Colvin concentrated her efforts on policy work at a national level and her main concern was to ensure that the issues pertinent to rural people were incorporated into the national integrated development plans. She further established a Standing Committee on Water and Sanitation Matters that became the voice of the water and sanitation sector. This Committee started to work on the principles and approaches of what the new South Africa would have to focus on in terms of water and sanitation service delivery to all people. Following this, Ms Colvin joined DWA in the water services sub-sector, which has continued to be her main area of involvement to date.

Tools for success

Ms Colvin's parents influenced her success in many ways. Their willingness and ability to believe in her enabled them to give her space to experiment and discover herself. She was exposed to different environments that shaped her thinking. Her life partner was a significant support in that he ran the home and gave her all the support she needed for her to focus on the work she was involved in. Through her travels to different parts of the world and her role in the liberation struggle, she met very influential people, and these interactions shaped her thinking and approach to life. She has always been her own person who dared to do things differently and often brought in different paradigms and nuances.

Ms Colvin's life has been her experience. She does not think that people should be judged by papers such as degrees and diplomas and she notes that she has a 'healthy disregard for pieces of paper'. She does not feel advantaged by her education. Instead, passion, drive and commitment in her life and her own voluntary activities have been the tools that propelled her to where she is. Through these attributes, she has pioneered development activities. She brought people into DWA who knew little about water but who had an understanding of development and were keen to volunteer, to learn and to be mentored. As the first female director in DWA, she went into a technical, engineering environment and assisted in building the water services side of the Department without a formal qualification in engineering or any other technical field.

'I support transformation. I worked along side (former Minister) Kader Asmal in promoting the transformation of a Department that was white, male and Afrikaans. We ensured the promotion of women in a department that desperately needed change. If you look today, you can see that these changes have taken place throughout the water sector, in the Department, at the WRC, in water boards, etc. I believe that there remains a great need to build capacity and leadership skills in the sector.' Dr Guy Preston

Ms Colvin is driven by a sense of fairness. She is committed to seeing the growth of people that she brought into the sector. She played a background role in the Masibambane project and is proud of what that project has achieved, including bringing non-technical people with experience in community development into the water sector.

Drivers for success

Her optimism has been a strong driver for her success. She has always been driven by fairness, justice and equity and always believed that it is possible to change a person's course of life. Her drive is about humankind and making the world a better place for all people to enjoy.

She feels that her nurturing character brought an approach to the sector that was quite different at the time. At the time when she was a Chief Director, women leadership was lacking in the water sector. The sector needed good strong women who would add humanity to it. She believes that women's leadership was a gap that needed to be resolved. Her approach to water services brought in a new paradigm that challenged the traditional approaches to engineering in the sector.

'It is very important that women are in top leadership as they are more familiar with issues of water than the men. Women must be in the leadership of all levels of the water sector from the water users associations to the Minister. The more women we have in the system, the more the possibility of those who can bring gender justice in the sector.' Kalinga Pelpola

She considers herself to be a good leader who has retained humility and humanity. She is known to be driven by a passion for what is best for the sector. This has earned her a place in the sector where she can still mobilise resources and people even when she no longer is an employee of DWA. She was able to make a difference while she was at DWA and brought in people who formed a strong team that brought about changes in how the sector operated. Reflecting back, she is proud of her achievements in the sector.

She feels that her interest in the sector has also sustained her morale. She has been happy in the sector and draws a lot of satisfaction from working there. This satisfaction in turn sustains her passion.

Advice to aspiring women

Ms Colvin advises aspiring women leaders to begin leading in the small positions they are in. For her, it does not take a bureaucratic position to lead and influence people's lives. Through small beginnings, women can make a difference and in the process

acquire valuable lessons from their experience. 'Life is always a better teacher than books.'

She further advises that there is a great deal of benefit in mentorship. Women should consider exchanging their ideas with people whom they respect to help refine them. This kind of approach enables a person to make better decisions leading to improved management and leadership.

She feels that those that have institutional memory in the water sector are ageing and there is the danger of losing that institutional memory. The young aspiring leaders should be keen to learn about the sector to preserve this institutional memory. The older people in the sector also have a responsibility to disseminate the knowledge they have to the young aspiring leaders through mentorship.

The majority of the women interviewed felt that they have a responsibility and a role to play but they need the time and space for it. Gender is viewed as a soft issue and measurable targets have not been set for it in terms of performance management, and as a result, it does not receive the level of attention and priority that it should.

Water Boards

1.15 Nolene Morris

At the time of the interview Ms Morris was the Chief Executive Officer at Bloemfontein Water

History

Ms Morris grew up in a family of seven, six girls and one boy, as the youngest of the seven children. She grew up on 'the flats' in Newclare in the west of Johannesburg and was schooled at the CJ Botha School until Standard 9.

The findings show that the family structure that the women grew up in tended to shape the way in which the women were raised and impacted on their life experiences.

She then went off to a boarding school in Swaziland where she did her O levels before returning to South Africa to study speech and hearing therapy at the University of the Witwatersrand. All this time, she harboured the desire to study law which was a childhood dream that was cultivated at the age of ten when her brother was murdered by apartheid police. Her brother's death instilled in her a strong political sense and a desire to fight injustice and hence she saw her future as a lawyer. After 6 months of doing speech and hearing therapy at Wits University, Ms Morris was awarded a scholarship to study law and politics at Keen University in the UK. After completing her studies and on returning to South Africa, Ms Morris was first employed as a researcher at the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) whilst simultaneously studying for a Bachelor of Law (LLB) at the University of Natal.

Ms Morris experienced a number of challenges growing up in a 'Coloured community' where she and her family were considered 'odd' as they had African heritage. Her

heritage was rather mixed comprising different races and different tribes. Her father is a German Jew whilst his mother is a Tswana lady. Her maternal grandfather was half English and half Zulu, whilst her maternal grandmother was a 'Coloured' from the Eastern Cape. Ms Morris is proud of her mixed heritage and the fact that she and her family never hid their heritage in their community, despite being made fun of. Growing up, however, she was often made to 'feel like an outcast'. She explains that these perceptions may have been the main reason behind her preference for the Free State where the majority of the 'Coloured' community were in fact Sesotho speaking. As a child, she preferred playing with the boys and often had to prove her abilities in these friendships.

Ms Morris has been admitted as an attorney to the High Court of South Africa. She started off her law career as a clerk to the constitutional court, then moved to the Supreme Court in Bloemfontein and subsequently did her articles at Edward Nathan Sonnenbergs Inc. (ENS). Following her admission as an attorney, Ms Morris set up her own law firm specialising in Information Technology (IT) Law while lecturing 'Ethics in Broadcasting' on a part-time basis at the University of South Africa.

Ms Morris then joined the City of Johannesburg as a Deputy Director in the Contract Management Unit. She progressed well in her career and was subsequently appointed as the Director of the Shareholder Unit focusing on the financing and corporate governance structures of the new Municipal Entities that had been set up by the City of Johannesburg. Whilst at the City of Johannesburg, Ms Morris was appointed by the Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry to sit on the board of Bloemfontein Water and chair the board's Finance Committee. Her work was quite successful in the City of Johannesburg which prompted the City of Cape Town to head-hunt her to set up its shareholder and contract management unit.

In June 2006, Ms Morris was asked to act as Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Bloemfontein Water pending the appointment of a CEO. Her appointment was vehemently opposed by the South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) on the basis that she was not from the Free State. However, Ms Morris had performed very well in the four interviews and was appointed despite the pressure from the trade union. The challenge was that the environment was male-dominated and since Ms Morris also had the task of proving her critics wrong, she knew from the outset that she would have to work harder than the normal call of duty in order to defend her appointment.

'When it comes to management – women do their jobs; they are committed and hard working. When people can see that they are good, all the nonsense disappears.' Neil McLeod

Due to her hard work and diligence, Ms Morris managed to achieve outstanding performance and even got the Free State Premier's Award for her exceptional leadership in transforming Bloemfontein Water. Her recognition extends beyond the Free State and she has received a host of other awards in recognition of her management and leadership abilities.

Tools for success

Among the people who have had a positive influence on Ms Morris were her family members, especially her parents. Her parents were extremely supportive of her desire for education and held very progressive views. Her parents and older sisters also

ensured that her material needs were met at all times. Despite the fact that they did not have a formal education, Ms Morris's parents understood the value of education. Her father was a gambler and did not progress beyond Standard 3. Her mother dropped out in Standard 8 as Ms Morris's grandparents could not afford to keep their daughter in school. Ms Morris's mother was married a year after dropping out of school and was never employed. She focused her time and energy on raising her family and encouraged her children to 'be anything they wanted to be'.

In adulthood, Ms Morris receives overwhelming support from her husband who has always believed in her abilities and supports her and her approach to career development. Ms Morris's personal circumstances enable her to work 20 hours a day when necessary as she does not live with her husband and they do not have children. In her view, she would not have been able to be as committed to her work as she is had her personal circumstances been different. She feels that the support from her husband in this matter has enabled her to meet and exceed her career targets.

On a professional level, Ms Morris has also been influenced by the Mayor of the City of Johannesburg, Amos Masondo whose family were also Jehovah witnesses. She was impressed by his emphasis on service delivery and his determination not to allow himself to be bullied by technocrats. What Ms Morris admired most was the fact that Amos Masondo had a very practical focus on service delivery. He spoke simple English and did not mystify the jobs that needed to be done. His attitude shaped Ms Morris's way of working.

Her former boss was also a profound source of influence. She gave Ms Morris the space and freedom to develop while recognising that she was a hard worker. By her own admission, Ms Morris, detests being 'micro-managed'. She prefers to give her team a task and allow them to take the initiative to define the ambit in which they perform the task. Her focus as a manager is on empowering her staff and not controlling their every move.

She has also received tremendous support from the friends that she has made in her adult life as well as the people whom she works with. Within the first few days of her appointment at Bloemfontein Water, there was a massive water failure when the water supply was found to have been contaminated with *Escherichia coli*. This contamination was due to a fault on the part of Bloemfontein Water. She felt that she could not manage the situation as she was under extreme pressure and a feeling of despair crept in. However, her colleagues supported her and together they managed to rectify the situation.

Creating the space to be innovative and develop one's personal style of managing also brought success to Ms Morris. She attributes her personal and career development to the fact that she was given the space to develop and to learn what is important and feels that she was fortunate in that the people she reported to during her career recognised this and did not micro-manage her.

Drivers for success

Self-motivation has been Ms Morris's driver to success. Growing up in Newclare, with its high incidence of teenage pregnancies, and where most of the older folk abused alcohol, and even the children turned to drinking alcohol, Ms Morris was determined to 'make it at any cost'. This resolve was bolstered by the value systems that she acquired as a devout Jehovah Witness child. Ms Morris and her family were devout Jehovah Witnesses during her childhood, a practice that emphasised thoroughness and discipline. She opted out of this belief system by the age of 13 but some of the values she learnt guide her approach to life. For instance, she points out that even though

she is 'no longer practising' some aspects of her belief system are deeply ingrained in her psyche. She attributes her love of reading and studying to her belief system. As Jehovah's Witnesses, she and her family were extremely disciplined and studied religious materials and prepared prior to going to church.

In her view, DWA has been amazing in ensuring that a substantial number of women have entered the water sector in such a short space of time.

'The policy environment at DWAF was already pro-women's development as exemplified by the fact that between 1970 and 1977 the Hydrological Research Institute at Roodeplaat Dam was headed by a woman by the name of Joan Whitmore. Current gender policies have advanced women to the highest positions as DWAF has a ratio of 60: 40, i.e. women are more than the men.' Helgard Muller, Chief Director, DWA

She feels that at board level, there are sufficient policies in place with respect to gender mainstreaming. Time and energy needs to be put into changing mindsets at all levels within the organisation. Changing one's mindset actually starts at home. In her assessment 'we have not moved our mindsets' and still have a long way to go.

Ms Morris does not support the view that women are generally transformational. Women in senior positions within an organisation will not necessarily pay attention to the barriers that hamper the progress of other women. Ms Morris recalls that some of her worst critics in Bloemfontein Water were actually women and suggests that, in fact, women are their own worst enemies. Organisations need to ensure that they create practical structural support for women. For instance, she identified a space to open a day-care centre on the Bloemfontein Water premises, but there were competing demands for this space as the IT unit needed additional office space. Such dynamics, that affect women issues within organisations, cannot be downplayed. Instead, organisations need to constantly talk about and engage on the issues that impact on women.

Based on her own experiences, Ms Morris knows what it feels like to be a Black woman in a male-dominated environment. She understands that the women she has appointed at Bloemfontein Water sometimes go through hard times emotionally. Her ambition is to support them to focus on their work and to become productive. Personally, Ms Morris is committed to the development of her team and makes time for 'one and one sessions' or '*koek en tran*' ('cake and tears') sessions to discuss their concerns, insecurities and challenges and provide her with an opportunity to give advice and guidance where necessary.

Advice to aspiring women

The issues of building self-esteem are central to the career advancement of women. Women managers/seniors need to be sure of themselves and their own abilities and need to have the confidence to discuss issues that are crucial to the development of women as well as issues around sexism.

'In my view, women know more about water issues and their presence in high positions will ensure that the right policies are formulated.' Mr Makuma Ubisi, Sedibeng Water

Women, especially those who work in male-dominated careers need to believe in themselves and not have to apologize first before they give their professional input, which is still typical of many professional women.

Empowering other women should be a core business for senior women employees. Ms Morris recalled that when she started working at Bloemfontein Water, there was one White woman and two men in executive positions. She opted to recruit internally and was able to place two additional women in executive positions and appointed a woman as an assistant executive director. To date, all of these women work extremely hard. For them to succeed, Ms Morris ensured that support structures were put in place to create an environment that was enabling.

'My experience has been that there are a number of women in senior positions who have not had the faith in the abilities of other women and have tended to see themselves as the exception.' Advocate Matipa

Organisations also have a role to play in creating an enabling environment for women. Ms Morris feels that there is a need for a review of existing policies and practices that hamper the advancement of women.

The challenge for organisations is to match their gender mainstreaming policies with their organisational practices to provide a work environment that is supportive of women.

'Gender mainstreaming is about understanding that women have skills that can be unleashed at every level of the administration. Gender mainstreaming is useful in that it would ensure that policies translate to being beneficial to women and enable women to gain access to resources.' Mr Makuma Ubisi, Sedibeng Water

Organisations need to go the extra mile and enable women to be more flexible by providing laptops and 3G cards that will allow women to work away from the office.

1.16 Edith Sempe

At the time of the interview Ms Sempe was the Director: Operations at Sedibeng Water

History

Ms Sempe grew up in a supportive family with both parents and three older brothers. She was the only daughter in her family. She grew up in an atmosphere of love and was always encouraged to achieve high grades at school. Her father was the principal of the school and her mother was a social worker. Although she went to the township school her father took time to tutor her at home so that she was not disadvantaged by the inadequacies of the Bantu education system. Her personal belief is that life is all about knowing as much as possible. As a person one should be able to embrace uncertainty and change, and believe that experience rather than theory is an essential source of knowledge.

At the age of 14 she experienced a setback when her parents divorced and her mother was granted custody of all four children. Her mother is a very strong, resilient woman who, even in tough times, continued to be a great achiever and became one of the first Black women to head a government department when she was appointed as the Deputy Director General (DDG) of Social Development, Arts and Culture. She was never judgemental towards her and always encouraged her to reach her highest aspirations. She attributes her leadership abilities to the fact that she had an in-house mentor and guide in her mother.

As the only girl in the family, both her parents and brothers always encouraged her to excel in all that she did and to aspire for the highest opportunities. They were especially supportive of her when she became pregnant and had a child before marriage. They took turns to look after her child as their own, allowing her time to pursue her studies and move up in her career.

Ms Sempe sees herself as contributing to her family by giving back to her community. She matriculated at Moemedi High School in 1988. After matriculating she studied for a Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) degree specialising in Microbiology and Biochemistry (1990) and a Bachelor of Science Honours (B.Sc. Hons.) degree specializing in Biochemistry (1991) at Rhodes University. She further continued her studies at Damelin where she obtained a Diploma in Production Management in 1994 and also obtained an MBA at Potchefstroom University in 1999.

Her extensive professional career started in 1992 with her involvement in a USAID Community Development Housing Project in Mangaung. This was followed by a move to quality assurance management in the sorghum beer industry (1997 to 2002) where she worked as a microbiologist and chemical analyst of clinical and environmental samples in the Mangaung Local Municipality. She managed the incubation and innovation programmes in regional and local economic development projects, with the main emphasis on science, engineering, technology and entrepreneurship interventions at the Central University of Technology Science Park (2002 to 2004). Thereafter she was appointed as the Deputy Director: Pollution and Waste Management at the Free State Department of Tourism, Environmental and Economic Affairs (December 2004 to May 2005). She was Deputy Manager: Scientific Services at Sedibeng Water (June 2005 to February 2007) where she was responsible for the provision of a comprehensive analytical and scientific service to both internal and external clients; expansion of the external client base; and the identification, implementation and review of community-based projects. Currently she is the Director: Operations at Sedibeng Water.

Tools for success

Ms Sempe's parents and nuclear family played an important role in enabling her to achieve her goals. They gave her what she considered supportive encouragement in the early years. They provided her with an environment that was conducive and met her emotional and physical needs. It was also through her family and a family friend that she was able to avoid the pitfalls of Bantu Education that programmed students for low careers. She was able to access a better education opportunity at Rhodes University at a time when few Black people were accepted. She feels that she was fortunate to be given a place at Rhodes.

Her mother has been more than a mother to her. She has always been her mentor and urged her to become an achiever notwithstanding her being a Black woman. Her mother was a great role model and a resident mentor at home.

At Rhodes University she made use of the bursaries that were offered to encourage Black students and did not experience any financial constraints. Her studying at Rhodes exposed her to people who were high achievers and who influenced her in setting her goals. She drew inspiration from her classmates who were all hard working and who have gone on to become great achievers.

She considers herself privileged to have worked under excellent bosses on her first job at the National Sorghum Breweries, which was the first Black-owned industry, and she saw it as a great privilege to work for that company. Some of the most highly educated Black people worked there, and she was fortunate to work among such people who also respected her and were willing to mentor her. She feels that she was able to escape the racial discrimination that put down new Black graduates when they entered work places.

The fact that she has high education qualifications has assisted her in her career path. She wisely selected her studies to fit her future career opportunities in the water sector. Her mother advised her to take social science subjects and humanities at Rhodes University but she decided that this would not bring about job prospects that fitted in with her interests. She left the Bachelor of Arts (BA) classes to register for the combined biology and chemistry classes. She saw these subjects as having the potential for many future opportunities in a career in science in technology.

The Affirmative Action Act was advantageous to her and the gender equity policy played a role in her appointment to her current senior level position as Director of Operations. She is the first woman to occupy this position at Sedibeng Water. However, she does not want to be seen as an affirmative action candidate because she has the necessary qualifications for this position and went through a rigorous screening process to qualify for the position. The gender mainstreaming imperative played a role given that female representation at senior levels is low in the water boards. While this may have given her a slight advantage, Ms Sempe feels that she was selected and appointed on merit.

'I believe that appointments need to be based on competence and not race or gender; otherwise we face a situation where we are potentially setting people up for failure.'

Neil McLeod

She suggested that the formation of an executive women's forum where women in high levels of decision-making can freely share their successes and challenges at work would be a benefit to her and many other women. There are some issues that women feel they cannot share freely with male bosses no matter how good their relationship is. Women and men differ in their leadership in that men tend to keep quiet about their problems while women are quick to articulate their problems. When a company is led by a woman any internal problems are more likely to be exposed than when it is led by a man. In this regard, women need a platform or a forum that provides a safe space among friends and peers who come together to talk and discuss ideas, challenges, approaches, strategies, etc.

Drivers for success

Ms Sempe's resilience and hard work played a vital role in her success. When she fell pregnant and gave birth to her child she did not drop out of the education programme that she was in. She juggled a job and a Masters course, and was far away from home where her child was being looked after by her mother and brothers. After completing

her studies she decided that she wanted to live in the Free State so that she could be close to home to look after her child. She is grateful today for the birth of her daughter even though it was a great challenge at the time. Her daughter is now a young woman in her teens and has brought her a great sense of fulfilment.

She has always been resourceful and has been able to turn potential challenging situations into opportunities. At times when she made decisions that she realised were unfavourable, she was able to change them to better suit her interests.

What keeps her going in her professional life is the realisation at the beginning of her career that as a woman she has to work harder than her male colleagues. She has been fortunate to work under supportive bosses who have helped build her career. She finds her work inspiring and feels that there have not been any dull moments.

She considers herself a successful leader because of the positive feedback she receives. She manages people who are at least 10 years older than she is and she has not encountered resistance to her leadership. She sees herself as a change agent and although those who work under her have engineering skills and other technical skills she has worked hard to gain a working understanding of the technical side of the sector. She is firm with her managers and she applauds work that is well done. Her terms of reference are very clear on the kind of outputs that are needed and she stresses team effort.

Advice to aspiring women

She advises women who are aspiring for senior leadership positions to understand themselves and be sure of what they need early in life. Women need to gauge their abilities, opportunities and career preferences and determine what they want to be so that they can invest in making their dreams come true. She suggests having mentors who contribute critically and positively. These are the kinds of people who help one to achieve success.

'Women should be supported by their managers and their organisations through coaching and mentoring so as to assist women in their professional development. This requires a commitment on the part of the organisation and the manager to ensure that the issues of women's development are prioritised and realised.' Dr C Ruiters, DDG: Water Resource Infrastructure, DWA

She feels that women should view their backgrounds as an asset and not a deterrent to their achievement. Women, no matter where they come from, must always maintain their integrity and self-respect and their backgrounds should not be a constraint. A person from humble beginnings can ascend the career ladder provided that he or she has the necessary skills; personal and professional support; and the drive and ambition to want to achieve.

She feels that there is a need to market the water sector to young women in schools and universities, as they should be aware of the prospects the sector has to offer researchers, scientists, technicians, engineers, etc.

'There is a need to make the career of water and sanitation attractive to women. There needs to be a girl child program for engineering. It is far more important for the water sector to mainstream engineering as a career path to women than to focus on the number of women in relation to men (in engineering).' Neil McLeod

Water is a basic need that is under threat globally, and there is a need to get both women and men specialists into the sector. Young women working in the sector have a promising career path if they adhere to professionalism and integrity and if they believe in themselves. The goal is to establish what works in the sector to make a difference in the lives of all South Africans.

1.17 Mapuleng Lesoro

At the time of the interview Ms Lesoro was the Manager: Talent and Transformation at Rand Water

History

Ms Lesoro was born and raised in Kimberley in the Northern Cape Province. She completed up to Standard 8 (Grade 10) and then moved to Taung in the North West Province to complete her high school education. Her childhood was atypical in many ways. What defined her was growing up as a girl in the township, having a mother with a nursing qualification who was made to be a housewife, and a father who was the first Black police sergeant in the country. She is the youngest of six children and she recollects growing up with very little financial support. She and her siblings had to make sure that the little they had went a long way.

At the age of 11, she lost her mother to the calling of becoming a *thwasa* (for a period of six months) in Giyani. During this time she was sent to live with her brother's wife while he was away working in the mines. Here she faced many challenges, including having to go to school without any lunch. Fortunately for her there was a teacher at school who looked out for her. He found a way to support her by coming up with a rule in class that any pupil that got less than 95% on a test would have to pay two cents into the sugar pot he brought to class. Ms Lesoro always achieved above 95% and the money was used to provide her with lunch at school.

The findings show that interviewees who had teachers that encouraged their potential were aware of the difference that made in their feeling empowered and capable to venture into anything that they wanted to. Teachers were viewed as having the ability to '*unleash the potential*' that the women doubted they had. The women who had supportive teachers, defied societal expectations and norms and took an interest in the growth of their students made a significant impact on the choices the women made

She performed exceptionally well at school and by the time she reached Standard 8 (Grade 10) she had received bursary promises to go to university. The South African Council of Churches was administering funding for high achievers to study at a Technikon. She undertook the requisite screening tests which she passed, and this provided her with funding for her tertiary education. She used some of the stipend from the bursary to support her family. She believes that these experiences have made her the strong person she is today.

She attended the Mangosuthu Technikon to study Public Administration. At the technikon she also conducted HIV/AIDS counselling and training. She enjoyed this and approached the Department of Health to work as a volunteer with no pay, and while there, she met a doctor who appreciated her work and decided to pay her R3 800 per month. Through the department she was sent for training in Bloemfontein and started

developing her own programmes. She began training doctors and nurses on HIV/AIDS. They were surprised at the knowledge she had about HIV/AIDS and that she was a good researcher. She employed about 10 peer educators to visit homes. The nature of the work was challenging and even though she contracted TB while doing this work, she did not give up on the work.

During this time, she married and decided to return home to work at the Premier's Office of the Free State. She also completed a course on work study at the University of the Western Cape. This course was offered in Afrikaans and the pass mark was 90%. As a non-Afrikaans speaker, she had to translate it to English to understand the content. Through determination and hard work, she passed the course. Later that year her husband was transferred to Pretoria and she decided to join him. She took up a job with the Department of Housing as a work study officer, looking at work flow processes, ergonomics, and efficiency. She left the Department of Housing for the City of Johannesburg as a senior work study officer. Her strength was in the area of employment equity and she was promoted to Assistant Director: Employment Equity.

After working for the City of Johannesburg, she joined Rand Water to implement the transformation agenda of its Board. She came in as the employment equity consultant and she quickly moved up the management ladder of the parastatal. In the first year of her employment, Rand Water increased the number of people with disabilities from 23 to 32. By the end of the first year Rand Water had already met its employment equity targets.

At the time of the interview she was responsible for talent management in Rand Water. This task involves attracting and keeping people with scarce skills and looks at the retention and the rewarding of talent required for the board. As part of this responsibility, she has established a head-hunting unit.

Tools for success

Ms Lesoro cites the strength and the tenacity of her mother as one of the factors that influenced her. She feels that her mother represents strength and resilience. She struggled to raise her children with little support from her husband. This inspired and motivated Ms Lesoro to be strong in the face of adversity. She made a promise to herself that she would excel in her studies so she could have a better life. Her siblings have also inspired her to be the success that she has become. She is close to her sisters with whom she shares much about her life experiences. One of them also works for Rand Water.

Another influence came from her teacher who supported and encouraged her to do well in her studies at high school. This was the teacher who devised the strategy to ensure that she had lunch at school. He made her see that life can be better with an education.

She has a mentor in her professional life who was appointed to her through the International Women's Forum which is run by the Gordon Institute for Business Science (GIBS). Ms Zanele Mbeki, the former First Lady is the patron of the Forum. Ms Lesoro holds much admiration for her mentor and has learnt a lot by observing how her mentor lives her life.

'Mentors are there to offer support and assistance when needed. It may not be necessary to have a formalised relationship, what is important is that everyone has someone that they can go to and engage with when they need help. It's about being supportive to others.' Dr Guy Preston

Education has been one of the tools that facilitated her success. Her qualifications have groomed her to be a good leader and have given her the tools she needs to be effective in her work and in her leadership.

In terms of the policies promoting gender equality, she feels that these have supported her in the role that she is playing because the targets are legislated. However, she feels that there is still a long way to go with regard to implementation. She says that the implementation of policies should be looked at as a triangle – 1) enactments and compliance; 2) measuring effectiveness; 3) attitudinal change in organisations. This is what needs to happen to achieve success in implementing gender policies in organisations. While implementation is happening, the pace is slow.

'Although legislation and policies are well articulated and many women have entered the workplace in both the public and the private sector, there is a lack of well defined strategies that address how the legislation and the policies should be applied. After all policies are nebulous and it is up to the individual to interpret them and make them work. Hence, key performance contracts are key to ensure that managers develop plans to champion gender equity and ensure the development of women.' Makuma Ubisi, Sedibeng Water

Importantly, she warns that women should not allow the perception that women are in these positions only because of affirmative action. This perpetuates a negative perception of affirmative action. It should be understood that women are in positions of power because they made it there on merit.

Drivers for Success

Ms Lesoro's passion to build talent within the organisation has been a key driver for her success. Water resource management has been a male-dominated area for a long time. Very few women are found in this area of the water sector and the space has not been created to accommodate women.

'The Department does not receive many applications from female engineers. In instances where female engineers have been head hunted by the Department, they often turn down the position as they are being offered better salaries by the private sector. A key challenge for the Department is how to remunerate sought after female professionals in a highly competitive environment.' DR C Ruiters

As part of her job, she has established the Rand Water Alumni comprising of excellent performers who have left the organisation, but who Rand Water would like to attract back. She believes it is good for an organisation to have people leave to gain more experience and then come back. She is facilitating the Rand Water Homecoming Campaign focusing on South Africans who left for jobs overseas to try and recruit them back into Rand Water.

Her role in the workplace is constantly changing. She describes herself as someone who thrives on challenges which stimulate her thinking. Rand Water has realised this and has expanded her role. She has been given other tasks to keep her interested and engaged, and she keeps looking for other tasks that will challenge her.

Advice to aspiring women

She believes that women in strategic positions need to create their own space. Women tend to sell themselves short and allow circumstances to shape them. This results in women being undermined even though they are strong individuals. Further, women in leadership positions should create space for women below them. She notes that, 'Women need to be built to be leaders. We are not born leaders – we are made.'

'I have used the following strategies to ensure that women are well supported in the workplace:

1. Intensive training of both administration and management.
2. Mentorship of women as well as coaching and constant dialogues.
3. Encourage women to speak up in meetings and in so doing instil their confidence.

Women should be supported and encouraged to achieve their full potential at the workplace.' Makuma Ubisi, Sedibeng Water

Ms Lesoro regrets the fact that once women move into leadership positions they quickly forget about other women looking for support in developing themselves and their careers. She suggests that women leaders should share the opportunities they have been given with other women whenever possible. 'People believe we have arrived and we have not'. She uses an analogy of a ladder where, 'Women get to the top and they are not putting the ladder down for other women to climb up'. She feels that women need to build collaborations and networks and should coach each other. Successful leadership depends on the openness of the leader to learn from their environment.

Ms Lesoro feels that women need to identify their successors and groom them. They should let them know that they are their successors and teach them appropriate strategies that will promote and ensure the success of the organisation. This is what strategic leadership is all about. She organised a session at Rand Water around strategic leadership for women that covered this mentorship approach. She also wrote a leadership and development manual for women focusing on how a leader should react under changing circumstances.

She believes that women should start bringing men on board as partners. She paints a picture of a woman that has been appointed to a technical position. When a valve breaks this woman may need a man to help her as some of these valve repairs require manual strength.

As a water sector human resource specialist, she believes that managers need to understand what talent management is and should have strategies in place to implement gender policies. An example is a strategy for attracting women to critical positions. It is not enough just to believe that the women are not available or not qualified for employment in the sector.

'We need to make recruitment a strategic issue. Currently we do not focus on issues such as the type of people we are looking for and the value that we would like people to add to our organisations. If we change the way we approach our recruitment processes, we will surely fast track the journey towards gender mainstreaming.' Advocate Matipa

The sector needs to build the capacity needed rather than being passive about the challenges. For instance, the water sector gives bursaries to students but it does not follow up on those students to establish what happens to them after they receive the bursaries. The sector should be pro-active, visit schools and universities and encourage women to move into the sector. Recipients of bursaries from the sector should also be followed up to ensure that this investment will be of benefit to the water sector once the bursars have completed their studies.

1.18 Lucritia Govender

At the time of the interview Ms Govender was the Director: Corporate Services at Amatola Water

History

Ms Govender was born and raised in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), as one of two children. Along with her younger sister, she was largely raised by her father. Her mother passed away when she was young and being the eldest child she assumed significant responsibilities in their household. Carrying this level of responsibility from a young age has influenced her personal growth and has played a major role in where she finds herself today.

She completed her schooling in Durban. While she obtained a good level of education, the impact of segregation policies of the time was evident where 100% of the learners at her school were Indian. Her father placed great importance on education and was able to support her in pursuing a tertiary education. She matriculated in 1993 and commenced her university studies the following year. She commented that university was 'a culture shock' because it exposed her to a greater diversity of cultures and races. The experience was mind-opening and helped to prepare her for the real world. It allowed her to interact with people from a range of backgrounds, and she learnt valuable life lessons in the process.

In terms of her professional path, she started working in the private sector in the field of human resource management after completing her education at the University of Natal. In 2004 she joined the Eastern Cape Development Corporation, with a focus on economic development in the Eastern Cape. Here she held an Executive Management position, before moving to work at the Amatola Water Board (AWB) just under four years ago. The water board appealed to her because it provided her with an opportunity to work in an environment that focused on improving people's lives whilst at the same time having exposure to the commercial operational side of the business.

The findings show that Coloured and Indian women were slightly more fortunate than the majority of the Black women. For these women, they were better off in terms of material welfare, compared to most of the Black women, who spoke of realities of poverty (social and economic impoverishment) that was pervasive, in their homes and in their communities.

Tools for success

Apart from her personal drive and motivation, Ms Govender's success has in part been shaped by a number of influences in her life, including social and cultural factors, as well as the support and encouragement she received from family, friends and co-workers.

In terms of the social factors that influenced her path in life, Ms Govender values her family's support most. Her family never placed any pressure on her to marry or have children and she feels fortunate to have been given the chance to pursue an education and career. She knew from an early age that she had to make something of her life and that establishing a career for herself was important.

With respect to individuals who influenced her, she acknowledges that her father played an important and positive role in her life. He motivated her and pushed her to achieve.

On a cultural level, she felt the influence of Indian culture on her upbringing, where education was given a high priority and paving a career was seen as an important part of the cultural framework. Also culturally significant was the fact that women in her generation were equally motivated as males to obtain an education and pursue a career.

When she entered university her friends became the bedrock of her support, especially with regard to the kind of female support and bonds she longed for. She valued these connections as well as the opportunity to interact, share and learn from other women.

Throughout her professional life she has had some very good managers who have influenced her. She has a host of mentors who motivated her and provided her with the support she needed to pave a professional career for herself. While she did not consciously seek female mentors in particular, some of her most significant influences have been senior female managers. This, she notes, may be subconsciously linked to the absence of an older female figure in her childhood.

The current policy environment has been able to provide greater scope for women to access senior positions. While these policies have promoted access of Black females to opportunities in the water sector, Ms Govender believes that she would have made a success of her career even without this because she is hard working. She does, however, fully appreciate the value of policies aimed at vulnerable groups, particularly in South Africa.

Drivers for success

Ms Govender's education established a foundation for the achievements in her career. With her interdisciplinary background covering the fields of English, psychology, personnel management and management advancement, she has the ideal mix of skills to relate to and understand the people and the business elements of operations. She believes that education is essential to broadening one's perspectives on life and she places great value on the role of education in the development of people.

She also believes in the importance of leading a balanced life and exploring other areas of oneself. She has taken up extracurricular activities, which she never had in her life as an adolescent because her free time was spent doing household chores and taking care of her family. These activities have helped her maintain a healthy and balanced lifestyle.

In terms of what keeps her going in her professional capacity, the nature of her work is a key stimulant. Corporate Services cuts across a variety of areas, including human

resource issues, public relations, information technology, procurement, business systems, etc. She enjoys having a diverse portfolio that allows her to interact with many different facets of AWB's operations. It is also personally rewarding as it has allowed her to explore different sides of herself and has taught her interesting lessons along the way.

Ms Govender's commitment and passion for what she does are the key drivers for her success. She takes pleasure in her professional role, she values the environment that she works in and takes pride in the nature of her work. She is committed to building good relations with colleagues and values her job for the opportunities it gives her to contribute to positive change. AWB ultimately has a social responsibility in the sense of promoting access to clean, safe water. At the same time they are a business that needs to be financially viable and self-sustaining, which requires a balance of social and human responsibility with efficiency. In many ways her career offers her the chance to engage with the best of both worlds and she expresses great satisfaction with the kind of work which AWB undertakes.

The dynamic nature of the water sector also stimulates and challenges her, and the fact that Amatola Water can play a positive role in addressing municipal capacity shortages is motivating. The shortage of skills in local government has created a challenge for service delivery, especially in the area of water, which presents a valuable opportunity for Amatola Water to assist in improving the provision of water and ultimately to make a difference in the lives of others. The impact of the work of Amatola Water is clear and this promotes a great sense of pride in what they do.

Advice to aspiring women

Advancing a career depends on a host of factors, the most significant being those which come from within. She feels that women first need to have faith in themselves, and to be confident in that they are skilled and equipped to make a success of their jobs. Obtaining a good education is an important foundation for success. She feels that women need to support each other, and they also need the support of men.

'Women in senior management will bring about transformation. In my view, women know more about water issues and their presence in high positions will ensure that the right policies are formulated.' Makuma Ubisi

In terms of her role in supporting other women, she aims to do this through leadership development. Working in Human Resources allows her to influence others in the institution and she hopes to be a mentor for young women who aspire to become leaders. The water sector is still male-dominated, especially in terms of where the intellectual capital is located, and there continues to be a heavy reliance on the skills vested in men, particularly the technical skills. This is something which will hopefully transform over time, but it requires strategic efforts and policies which actively target this sort of transformation. Eventually skills will be more evenly spread across the genders and the sector will begin to see more women occupying technical positions.

In terms of what the sector needs to do to promote and retain women in senior positions, she feels that the first step is to open the technical doors for women and thereafter to focus on influencing girl learners and motivating their interest in the sector and its career potential.

Water Research Commission

1.19 Dr Rivka Kfir

At the time of the interview Dr Kfir was the Chief Executive Officer at the Water Research Commission

History

Dr Rivka Kfir has been the Chief Executive Office (CEO) of the Water Research Commission (WRC) for the past eight years. She was born in Israel and came to South Africa in the 1970s with her husband. This was after working in California in the United States for about two years.

She was raised in a middle-class family on a small-holding in a farming community in a rural part of Israel. Her family structure included both parents and two siblings. She describes her family as supportive and encouraging. There were no barriers to education and her parents always encouraged her to study even though they were not graduates. The society she grew up in gave women all the possibilities and did not limit women in any way.

Dr Kfir has always believed that as a woman you can do anything and she has never once thought of herself as being less feminine because of the work she does. She maintains that her family always comes first and this is a core aspect of her values. Her career is important to her and she enjoys it but it has never been at the expense of her family.

Her professional qualifications include a Master of Sciences (M.Sc.) degree from Israel, a Doctor of Sciences (D.Sc.) degree in Medical Microbiology from the University of Pretoria and a second M.Sc. degree in Management Sciences from the London Business School. Academically, Dr Kfir began her professional career in the pure sciences and then transitioned into applied sciences. Before joining the water sector in South Africa she worked in cancer research at one of the renowned research institutions in Israel. It was at this institution that she completed her first Master's degree. She would have liked to have done her doctorate there; however, an opportunity arose for her husband to work in California and they decided to move. Initially, the move was difficult for her and it took time for her to adjust; however, with it came new and different opportunities for her that led to her shift into the applied sciences.

Her introduction to the water sector came as a result of a study she conducted on the chemicals in water that can cause cancer. This research led to her being awarded her doctorate and thereafter she moved more fully into the water sector.

Tools for success

In reflecting on how she got to where she is, Dr Kfir commented that she had no plan for her career path; there was no strategic plan. She learnt to identify opportunities for improvement and not to be afraid to move forward. This together with drive and ambition is central to her success.

In South Africa she started working at the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), which became increasingly business-oriented during the time she was there. She entered into business management and enjoyed it. She enrolled for a course in management studies to gear herself up for the field. She found that she enjoyed the science of management and research and development. She also liked to work with

people and found that line management suited her well. She knows that she prefers to be independent and does not like being given orders. She prefers to manage, which resonates more closely with her personality. She never thought or dreamt that she would be where she is today, but knowing herself and her strengths has been an advantage in getting her into a position where she feels comfortable and thrives.

The CSIR contributed a great deal to her growth in the sector. They invested in her and supported her to do her M.Sc. and Ph.D. Through them she completed a number of courses, and the opportunities they gave her exposed her to invaluable knowledge and experiences.

Throughout her life she took aspects of information and experiences and built on them by using them in different ways. Her qualifications are a part of these building blocks. She feels that she now has an accumulation of all information, knowledge, lessons and experiences and these assist her in what she does today. In this, she feels that her qualifications are an asset and have contributed tremendously to her growth and achievements.

In addition, there were people she encountered in her life who shaped her outlook and approach. She vowed never to be like some of her bosses and from others she received wisdom. She learnt from people who were both junior and senior to her, and the most important lessons included being accessible to people, being supportive and to listen.

Drivers for success

On a personal level the main factors that contributed to her success include her husband and striving for a balance in life. Her husband pushed her to become who she is. She is thankful to him for giving her the space to pursue her interests and for motivating her to believe that she can do more than she thought she was capable of. Striving towards a balance in life led her to always remain focused on the things she wants to do and on those that she is involved in. She manages her time and knows that life is more than work and that it is those things beyond work that make life more enjoyable. She learnt to distance herself and to look at things from outside, which provides perspective and makes life a little easier. She knows that there are people around her who are willing to assist her when challenges arise and she approaches both her personal and professional life in a team spirit.

What motivates her in her professional life is feeling part of something larger than herself. It is goals such as the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, which she believes she can contribute to through her position in the sector. She wants to make more of an impact.

In her view, women in South Africa are politically strong and have made significant, meaningful inroads in the sector. Women are visible in the sector and hold senior, decision-making positions. In her capacity, she tries to support other women, and has encouraged women to join the sector. There is a strong movement from the point of leadership towards integrating women, which she supports and is a part of.

'Women who are successful in the sector should lead by example and serve as role models to other women as they have an appreciation of the challenges that they have faced as they have progressed up the career ladder. In addition, the women who have been successful should also provide insight into informing policies and practices so as to ameliorate the current challenges faced by women in the sector.' Advocate Matipa

For Dr Kfir the word 'success' is difficult to measure and to quantify. In her view, if the WRC is doing well as an organisation then she is successful. Success, however, is not an end in itself and she believes that there is always room for improvement. An organisation needs good people at all levels for it to perform effectively and efficiently, and being able to achieve this drives her. She strives to improve people's perceptions of themselves so that they see their own worth and become aware of the need and value of their contributions. People need to have the space, encouragement and positive reinforcement to feel proud of what they do.

Two years remain before her contract ends, and in this time she wants to commit time and energy towards developing the people who report to her. Her approach is to support people who work with her by giving them exposure and allowing them to profile themselves. Her outlook is that the more involved they are, the better they achieve, and this enables her and the organisation as a whole to do well.

'As managers, we need to instil confidence in women from the early days of employment so that they are inspired to aspire for higher positions.' Helgard Muller

In terms of the formal policy environment that is geared towards promoting women she is unsure of whether they would have made much of a difference to her. The reason for this is that she entered the sector before the policy changes came about and she has the skills and qualifications that place her favourably and suitably in the sector. She does acknowledge and recognise the importance of the policies; however, having the right tools is essential. She also believes that having women in senior positions together with a transformative agenda is important for the advancement of women in the sector. Women in senior positions are role models for other women, and this has the potential to inspire younger women to enter a career in the sector. She has a role and responsibility in this regard and that is to mentor and nurture her staff and other women.

Advice to aspiring women

Dr Kfir feels that the water sector is huge, and it supports the career path of women. There is a current gap in that there are fewer professional women in research and in the more technical areas. She suggests that in order for this to improve, there is a need for more in terms of economics. By this she means that there is a need for more women to study and graduate in these fields so that the few women who do graduate are not scooped up by the private sector. Currently there are very few technically skilled women and the demand for women with technical skills is high.

The sector provides ample opportunities for women. Her advice to women interested in the sector as well as to women entering the sector is that they need to believe in themselves, in their abilities, and in the possibility of having a successful professional career and personal life. Women should not have to compromise themselves in order to have a career, and the sector has a role to enable this by putting in place the institutional systems and mechanisms that are supportive.

Further, there are societal issues related to women working that need to be deconstructed by women and men. There is a need for greater equality in partnerships between women and men where both partners support and enable each other in their professional and private lives. Women have opportunities that are available to them, and they need to take them and make the most of them.

There is a cadre of women who are in the lower ranks within the sector, specifically in the department, who have the potential to grow their experience and to rise within the department and in the sector more broadly. While these women needed the experience and skills to achieve senior positions, it was noted that they also needed the support of other women. What seems to be emerging from the findings is that women who joined the sector in the early stages of transformation were more collaborative and interactive. The networks and coalitions that they formed enabled this and they relied on each other for support. This seems to be less prevalent now. This may be attributed to the fact that there are so many more women in the sector and there is less of a need to mobilise, that is, to rely on each other for support.

1.20 Eiman Karar

At the time of the interview Ms Karar was the Director of Water Resource Management at the Water Research Commission

History

Ms Eiman Karar grew up in Sudan in an upper middle-class family with the influence of an extended family of aunts, uncles and cousins. She was the youngest in her immediate family of two boys and two girls. In her family education was compulsory for both boys and girls and this enabled her to obtain an education in a country where education for girls in the rural areas was not common. She grew up in a tradition that believed children should be seen and not heard. She learnt early on how to suppress her feelings and to refrain from expressing herself, especially when she was annoyed.

Her father was the Director of the National Sports Council and a member of the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA). He was very protective of his children and taught them the importance of perfecting the inner person rather than the exterior.

She felt at ease in the school environment and at university, which was not typical of a girl growing up in the dominant Sudanese culture where girls were forbidden from mixing with boys or from speaking their mind. She attended an all-girl Christian Catholic secondary school, and an English senior school. The norm would be that girls got married before they even finished their university degrees. Her father, however, played a major role in protecting her from this and giving her the space to pursue those things that were important to her, especially sports, volleyball, basketball and swimming which she excelled in.

She graduated with a Masters from the University of Khartoum and went on to further her studies in the United Kingdom for a Ph.D. with two years' secured funding. After the second year, she had to discontinue her studies in the absence of further funding and moved to South Africa. Sudan was her home of birth and South Africa became her home of choice.

Ms Karar's career has been interesting. When she came to South Africa in 1995 she registered at the University of Natal for the same Ph.D. whilst earning some money from working with honours students in the School of Environmental Sciences and Geographical Information Sciences (GIS). She moved to Umgeni Water to work as a soil erosion expert to address the high siltation rate in Hazelmere Dam, KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). She co-supervised three Masters students who studied the causes and the sources of soil erosion using models and mapping as well as involving local communities. She set up the first Catchment Management Forum in KZN at Mdloti

which is the river in which Hazelmere Dam is located, and this became a joint effort with DWAF and others at the time. This was at the time when the National Water Act (1997) was established, and in light of the Act and the formation of catchment areas, Umgeni Water decided to enhance their catchment activities and appointed her as a Catchment Management Coordinator. She worked there for six years from 1996 to 2001 after which she was appointed as the Director of Catchment Management at DWA. From the department she joined the Water Research Commission (WRC) in 2005.

Her professional qualifications include a degree in botany and a Master of Science (M.Sc.) Degree in Environmental Science.

Tools for success

Education is one of the key drivers of Ms Karar's success. Her education and qualifications helped her obtain jobs as well as escape the negative social pressure and gender-based oppression in Sudan. Her high-level qualifications enabled her to enter South Africa and be absorbed at a university. This was an important factor in her career development.

Her choice of career was influenced in part by her mother who wanted her to become a doctor. Her mother had observed that she liked the sciences; however, Ms Karar visited a hospital one day where she saw how doctors worked and decided against a career in the medical field. She does not know why she chose to study botany, and it was perhaps the influence of a Sudanese Professor of Botany who was a friend of the family. She thinks that she may also have been influenced to study environmental sciences at university.

At Umgeni Water, Ms Karar had the space to put her own ideas to use. Her experience there gave her room to initiate projects that were recognised widely. She later decided to join DWA. She feels that the Affirmative Action Act and gender policies supported her professionally when she applied for the position at DWA. The Department was looking to employ more women to improve the gender balance in the department as well as to comply with the employment equity policies. This supported her and she had the necessary qualifications for the position.

'Since 1994, DWA has made an effort to get more women into the sector and promote women's leadership.' Advocate Matipa

When she moved to Pretoria to work for DWA, the department was dominated by men. She received support from a group of women who shared their concerns, challenges and feelings with each other. This helped her to deal with her own difficulties at the time.

Through her experiences she gained an understanding of gender dynamics. She learnt about the different ways that women and men were treated when she was very young, growing up in a patriarchal society. She saw her mother's unfairness when it came to household chores between her and her brothers. She was always asked to do more than her brothers, especially when it came to tidying up and cleaning. She always felt it was unfair and she disliked it, but there was little that she could do about it. When she joined the water sector she was faced with being one of few women who worked in the more technical areas of the sector. The experience she gained and the lessons she learnt during this time stayed with her and encouraged her commitment to support other women to grow and succeed in the sector.

From her long journey, Ms Karar feels that she is in a place at the WRC where she thrives and enjoys what she does. She feels that the WRC offers her an environment that has allowed her to develop, and it is an honest culture whereby people are given positive reinforcement when they do well and helpful guidance in areas where they can improve. There is a general willingness to learn and to adopt a shared vision in an enabling culture where the goal is to achieve the highest potential in deliverables.

Drivers for success

Ms Karar's resilience and positive attitude enabled her to stay on at DWA despite the initial challenges in implementing a new and very innovative water law. She always viewed challenges as opportunities to learn, and after her first three years at DWA she began to enjoy her work at the department. Her ambition and commitment to succeed, no matter how difficult the work was, allowed her to tackle the challenges rather than to shy away from them. This brought about the change for her and she began to understand that implementing the law is a journey travelled by many and not a journey that can be completed by one or a few. She stayed with the department for five years, and tried to enable other women to join the department. She encouraged women to speak up when she noticed that their voices were drowned and they had no opportunity to make their points heard during meetings, for example.

'Whilst there are some women who make an effort to develop other women, there are also those women who do not prioritise this issue. Ultimately, this is an individual decision and should not be a prerequisite for women managers.' Advocate Matipa

The energy to succeed in her professional life comes from within herself. She resolved never to encourage any negative attitude no matter how hard she was tried. She considered problems as opportunities to grow and is grateful that South Africa has given her opportunities that she could not access in her own country.

She strives for excellence in everything that she does. Her desire is to help women whenever she can to improve and move on to better positions. She ensures that there is good rapport between colleagues with whom she works. This type of friendship that is respectful and outgoing is well reciprocated by her juniors.

Her personal life has also been encouraging giving her the space she needs to grow professionally.

Advice to aspiring women

Ms Karar's advice is that women do not need to be in high positions in order to exercise good leadership and a person can lead from any position. To be gender-sensitive and treat people as equals is the responsibility of each person regardless of their position. She advises those in leadership positions that people need to be appreciated and not dressed down all the time. People need to be appreciated and this positivity will support their productivity.

Young people should be encouraged to study science and technology in order to become engineers and technicians, and she feels that little is being done to attract the highest calibre of women and men into the sector.

'Engineering has historically tended to be a male dominated career. Over time this has started to change, however there are not enough women engineers, especially female civil engineers. Despite changes in the sectors, most of the engineering schools at universities in South Africa continue to be male dominated. Hence, while gender policies are fairly progressive, the challenge has been that there are not sufficient women engineers available to be recruited.' Dr C Ruiters, DDG: Water Resource Infrastructure, DWA

She believes that women in senior management are transformative in a positive way. They bring about diversity of views and broaden the policies and see things differently from the men. Women bring to the table issues that are not easily noted by the men. Further, they become role models for younger women.

1.21 Gabsie Mathenjwa

At the time of the interview Ms Mathenjwa was a Board Member at the Water Research Commission, Umgeni Water, Mhlathuze Water and the Mvula Trust

History

Miss Mathenjwa at the age of 33 has completed her MBA, founded her own organisation Gabsie's Business Solution (GBS), and has held management positions in three leading organisations. She is a Board Member of four organizations and currently she is finalising her second Masters degree.

Ms Ziphozethu (Gabsie) Mathenjwa was born in 1976 in Eshowe, KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) North Coast. She completed her primary school education in Eshowe and thereafter attended Inanda Seminary High School, a boarding school in Durban. After matriculating, she enrolled at the University of Zululand where she graduated with a Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) degree in Hydrology and Biochemistry. Additional professional qualifications include a Certificate in Financial Management and Investments, a Post-Graduate Diploma in Business Management, a Post-Graduate Diploma in Strategic Management and Corporate Governance, Master of Business Administration (MBA) and she is completing a Master of Science (M.Sc.) degree in International Management through the University of London.

She grew up in a family structure that included her parents, a sister and three brothers. She describes her family as close-knit, supportive and very consultative. They discuss everything and even though they now live apart from each other (own families) they talk daily. Her family has always been influential and had a great impact on her life, especially in making decisions. She feels that even though she is the youngest of her siblings, she was not treated differently and the children were raised in almost the same way, without favouritism. Growing up she does not recall encountering any major challenges and feels that life has been more about decision making rather than challenges.

The factors that influenced her path in life include her friends (whom she is close to); being aware and in touch with things that were happening around her; and receiving a bursary from the Department of Water Affairs (DWA), which brought her into the sector. When she was a student her priority was simple and it was to complete her degree and get a job. She never knew about challenges facing the water sector and therefore never thought she would make any contribution in the water sector.

However, once she had completed her studies and joined the water sector she became passionate about the issues and challenges.

Among the key people that influenced her path in life, there is one outstanding person, Professor Bruce Kelbe whom she met at the University of Zululand. He saw potential in her and encouraged her to apply for the DWA bursary. He assisted her in securing a bursary and an employment with the department. As a result of her dedication and hard work Prof Kelbe further facilitated part-time vocational employment for her at the Hydrology and Computer Lab at the University of Zululand and also at Mondi Kraft in Richards Bay.

Prior to enrolling for a B.Sc. degree she had minimal career guidance and did not know what route she wanted to follow. However, when she received her bursary she was later employed by the department, and found herself in the sector. This was her first 'real' job. She appreciates this and is also grateful to her professor and the department for the faith they had in her abilities.

She joined the DWA at the time when the new National Water Act was introduced. She was inspired by the changes in the Act and quickly learnt about them. She wanted to be involved in implementing the changes and did so in her work with the establishment of catchment management agencies and water quality management. She has since left the department and even though she is no longer directly employed in the sector, she continues to keep in touch with almost everything and feels as though she never left. She is currently employed by Vodacom where she is involved in external relations. She is also a Managing Member of GBS, a company she founded in 2005. She is a Board Member at the Water Research Commission (WRC), Umgeni Water, Mhlathuze Water and The Mvula Trust.

Tools for success

There are many factors that contribute to her success and these include: her passion for education and her enjoyment of new and changing environments. She values and appreciates her opportunities to study and always aims to make the most of them. Currently she is enrolled with the University of London for her second Masters, which she is doing through correspondence. She feels that years ago she may not have been able to do this because of her upbringing and where she comes from (although her family was supportive, there was no money nor opportunities). In her view the world is full of opportunities and it is great to be relevant. 'It's having many eggs in many baskets.'

'My only advice to women is that they should not wait to be identified by management, they should take the opportunities available to them. Nothing will come to you until you chase for it.' Makuma Ubisi, Sedibeng Water

It was not until later in her life that the transformation of the country and the various factors associated with it, such as personal freedoms, openness and access to information and resources, began to impact on her life. Growing up she lived in a relatively closed environment and she does not remember much about the news. Later on, the changes in the country, especially with regard to technology and increased accessibility to the internet, political climate, began to open things up. There was more communication, programmes and a whole new environment politically, economically and socially, and it felt as though the country started to communicate more. She learnt about the country, the outside environment, and she became increasingly aware of the

impact and outcomes of these changes. It gave her access to a world of opportunities and information, which intrigued and inspired her to learn so that she could interact more fully with it all.

Her family and the many people she has met along the way have also been influential. Her family structure and the systems that she has developed are important. For her these systems include choosing where to live, the decision to have a helper or not, and her decision to study are among the factors that make a difference in her life. Then there are people she met at university, work and social events that she interacted with and that have added value to her life. She is sociable and as a result she has met many people. She has matured and understands herself better than before, which enables her to do the things that matter to her.

Ms Mathenjwa describes her life as demanding with so much going on. She has grown used to it, and feels that if it was any different she would probably be quite bored. She thrives on her 'busy-ness' and the energy of being involved in so many different things and it motivates her to do more. She loves to learn and in her view there is so much out there to experience.

Drivers for success

For Ms Mathenjwa there are numerous intersectional ties between her personal and professional lives. Her work is close to her and lends to her understanding herself. This has been integral to her ambition and drive to continuously improve. She is involved in the kind of work she enjoys doing and feels that she has found the right match, which encourages her and does not make work arduous. She has always been particular to make it known and understood what she likes doing and what not. Most of what she has done has been convenient to her and in that she has structured her work by making the right choices so that it all works in her life and enables her to achieve a work-life balance.

In reflecting on how she entered the sector, it was not planned and it is almost as though it just happened. She did not choose the sector as a career; however, once she was there she got involved and ended up liking it. She notes that in the Black communities this is fairly common where people find themselves in jobs or in careers and it is based more on finding employment rather than on career-pathing. It is rare for young people to receive career counselling in school. The aspect of a career and what one wants to achieve often comes later in life. No one knew what she was studying and neither did she. For her, it was important that she was studying. The way that she came to enrol for a B.Sc. was through her brother's advice and through standing in the registration line at university and overhearing what others intended to do. She heard more about a B.Sc. and it caught her interest. She then enquired about it, thought that it sounded interesting and signed up. Once she was in, the priority was to complete her degree, and she never at any stage thought about the water sector.

When she entered the sector, she was a student and did not know much. She did not know what to look for or what to expect and did not pick up when things were wrong. She worked hard but she was unsure about whether she was doing her best and if what she was doing was right. She did not know what to look for in the environment and did not know whether the sector was providing what she needed. She feels that it is different now because she has changed and grown. The major contributing factors to this are the support she received along the way, her dedication and ambition. She can now say that she is in the right place and is far more confident in herself and in her work. She continuously strives to do new things and as a result she is always faced with new possibilities.

In terms of the support she received, she feels fortunate to have been involved with people who had an interest in assisting her, which helped build her capacity. It enabled her to feel comfortable asking questions and to ask for help when she was unsure about something. She has also been fortunate to be with people who provided leadership to her, and it has influenced her approach in her work and with people.

She does not see herself as someone who has achieved success and feels that she is still on her way there. She knows that she is a part of leadership in the sector; however, she considers her success a 'work in progress'. In some areas of her career she feels as though she has matured and in others she is still young and has a great deal to learn. She wants to make a difference in the sector and at the moment she is in her introductory phase, at a starting point. She does feel that what she has completed thus far she has done well.

The core drivers for Ms Mathenjwa include education, environmental awareness, innovative thinking and objectivity. Education is central to her success and she is driven to continue to improve through further education. Environmental awareness in terms of what is happening around her and in the rest of the world has been important to better position herself and to work towards success. She thinks well outside the box and feels that this is important in making decisions, and objectivity is essential in managing the work she does and the situations she encounters.

In terms of the formal government policies, she thinks back to the National Water Act and other legislation that came about before the gender policies. These brought about so many changes that were empowering for everyone. They made a difference to everyone in that they could contribute and interact as equal citizens. The most important reality was that segregation was removed and people were free to do anything they wanted to.

She believes that the policies have contributed to creating a legal environment that provides opportunities for everyone; however, what is missing is the materialisation of the legislation and policies wherein people have real opportunities that they can access, such as being employed by the sector. She feels that once a person gains entry to the sector they can then see further opportunities, but the difficulty is in getting in and doors are not opened for everyone. In her view there are good systems in place, but getting people employed is still a challenge (unemployed graduates). This motivates her to create space for people where she can. She thinks that the sector has a progressive approach and it is improving every year. However, the pace at which transformation is taking place is not rapid enough. The sector is people driven and it is up to the people in leadership positions to map a way.

'One of the major problems is that the allocation of water is a male driven exercise, the realities facing women are not taken into account. Leaders in the sector have to understand and grapple with these fundamental issues.' Professor Kader Asmal

For her, the legislative and policy paradigm has enabled her. She thinks that perhaps she would not have been considered in the past for a position on a board, and now organisations are looking for young, Black women who are educated, ambitious and possess leadership qualities. The policies have created awareness and organisations want to do the right thing. She feels that without the policies she would not have advanced as far as she has. She received a bursary from DWA because the focus was on giving previously disadvantaged people opportunities. This started things for her, and if it were not for this she would have ended up somewhere but not where she is.

Also, she would not have been able to start her own business as easily. The policies have been relevant at every stage of her life and she is grateful that she grew up with democracy in South Africa.

Towards improving the career path for women, she thinks the sector first needs to find ways to give people an opportunity to work in the sector. Young people, in particular, need the chance to enter into a position, to learn and grow from there. 'No one thinks that a student can solve climate change but look at Bill Gates.' The sector is losing out on a lot because the emphasis remains on things from the past and there is hesitation around change. In her approach towards young people, she feels that she can understand them and she treats them as they are. She feels that she has an understanding of where people are because she has been there as well. She does not force people to think as she does, and she believes that life is a journey. Forming friendships, linkages and sharing information with others are among her principles that have contributed to her success thus far.

Advice to aspiring women

The sector has made strides in transformation and career progression of women. Women hold some of the most senior offices. The challenge for the sector remains in changing the legacies of the past, such as the pre-dominance of men in the sector and also incorrectly balancing by over-dominance of women which makes the sector focus on people balance rather than on what needs to be achieved by both men and women.

'At one stage the Department had 89% women but this is not developmental. It's a gender issue, not a women's issue. It's not about marginalising men, it is about building equity.' Dr Guy Preston

Aspiring women need to have people who believe in their capability. Education is critical together with an understanding of the issues surrounding the sector and other relevant sectors. There is so much to be learnt through the absorption of information. Education is empowering and increases one's confidence so that one is able to interact in one's immediate environment and beyond that. To enable this, women need opportunities and a conducive environment.

'Women are kinder to their fellow women and they address gender bias. My support has been to encourage the women in my directorate to expose themselves to training. We encourage our service partners to assist us with the work of training women. Price Waterhouse Coopers is one of such partners that are helping in capacity building on management skills.' Kalinga Pelpola

Women need to believe in themselves and to gain more exposure and experience. They should form partnerships and work collaboratively with others. Developing networks that are supportive is useful, as is having mentors and coaches. Personal support from people at home - family, and friends - socially, is important and contributes to an enabling environment and makes it easier for women to take risks. She believes that it is helpful to have pockets of support in areas that are important to one's life. Life should be structured in a way that works for any particular individual.

Career guidance is also important and it should be prioritised. People, women in particular, must be encouraged to strive for all that they want to achieve.

She feels that there are already many achievements in the sector; however, there are challenges that still exist and opportunities that need to be explored. There is a need to reflect on and assess what has been achieved and to continue to improve. In this, it is important to appreciate how far the sector has come, to be cognisant of what has happened and to acknowledge it.

Miss Mathenjwa is goal-driven, open-minded, time-conscious and very religious. Her hobbies include travelling, reading, socializing and gym. She spends all her free time with her son, Lizwi. She is thankful to her family, friends, business associates, colleagues and the GBS team and believes this is only the beginning.

1.22 Professor Janine Adams

At the time of the interview Prof Adams was a Full Professor, Department of Botany at NMMU, and Chairperson of the WRC Board

History

Professor Janine Adams was born and brought up in a stable family structure. She was taught responsibility and independence at an early age and experienced only a few typical challenges while growing up.

She completed her Ph.D. at the University of Port Elizabeth (now the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU)) where she was appointed as a lecturer in 1995. She subsequently became a senior lecturer and thereafter a professor.

As an expert on estuarine ecology and management, Professor Adams was appointed team leader of the Department of Water and Forestry Estuarine Reserve Group in 1999. This group was responsible for testing the methodologies for Ecological Reserve determination to allow the implementation of the National Water Act. Prof Adams also co-ordinated a number of environmental flow requirement studies on estuaries for the Department of Water Affairs.

Professor Adams is currently a Professor of Botany at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. She is an NRF-rated scientist and an academic who remains passionate about capacity building and networking in the water sector. She is a co-coordinator for FETWater (Framework for Education and Training in the Water Sector) and has acted as the SANCOR (South African Network for Coastal and Oceanic Research) Forum Chairperson. She is a Board Member of the Institute for Water Research (Rhodes University, Grahamstown) and is the Chairperson of the Board of the Water Research Commission.

Tools for success

Her mother instilled a sense of responsibility and independence early in life. The kind of upbringing she experienced enabled her to adopt a positive attitude to life and value hard work and discipline. She attended a school that taught integrity and independence. Responsibility and leadership were encouraged from an early age. The school's value system reinforced the values she had acquired from her upbringing.

Her Ph.D. supervisor and her colleagues were also a source of influence. While undertaking her graduate research, the Water Research Commission provided a

steering committee composed of a team of experts that developed her research capacity. These experts later became her colleagues in multidisciplinary research projects. Such colleagues have provided support and assisted her in achieving outstanding success in the field of research. She is hailed as the leading female in research outputs in the Science Faculty of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. The WRC also gave her opportunities to lead large multi-institutional research projects through which she developed her leadership skills. She views the water sector as a good area where research can be applied.

Her interaction with a network of scientists and researchers around the world honed her research and leadership skills. She values her qualifications which were important for her appointment and promotion in academics.

She feels that the gender policies have helped her to ascend her professional ladder faster than she would have managed to had it not been for the policies. Although she still would have progressed in her career in the absence of the policy, she feels that her progress would have been slower.

Drivers for success

Professor Adams is motivated by positive feedback that she receives when her students graduate and when her scientific papers and research results get published.

Her enthusiasm has also kept her going as she is passionate about the work she does.

The local networks of colleagues have also been influential in her continued success.

Professor Adams's family has also been supportive. This has enabled her to meet the demands of her career and the other positions that she holds outside the academic profession.

She supervises postgraduate students who are taught to be confident in their abilities, to lead by example and to show initiative. Students are exposed to multidisciplinary research teams. As their supervisor, Professor Adams has to lead her students by example and show initiative. This mentorship relationship further strengthens her leadership skills.

Advice to aspiring women

Professor Adams's advice is that hard work, enthusiasm and always going the extra mile will pay off in the end. Young women must capitalise on the opportunities that are offered to them. They must show commitment and initiative but most importantly they must believe in their own abilities and have the confidence to be different and to make a difference.

She advises women to take opportunities that are provided by affirmative action. She feels that women in senior leadership have the potential to become transformative in positive ways because they have different skills that can be applied in solving conflict.

Women leaders need to support other women by encouraging them so that they know that career progression is achievable. Senior women could also act as role models and help other women to identify their career paths.

'The Department has many women leaders, including that the Minister is a female. This presents the Department with an opportunity to encourage women to join the sector and aspire to greater heights. The female executives in the Department provide excellent role models to the female staff in the Department.' Advocate Matipa

Local government

1.23 Mantoa Matsaung

At the time of the interview Ms Matsaung was the Head: Water and Sanitation at Capricorn District Municipality

History

Ms Mantoa Matsaung was born to a family of three children. Her mother was a school teacher and her father was a policeman. She was born and raised in Sebayeng Township in the area presently known as Solomondale, about 28 kilometres from Polokwane in the Limpopo Province. After completing matric in 1993, she joined Tshwane University of Technology, formerly known as the Technikon Northern Transvaal. She qualified with a Diploma in Civil Engineering in 1997, and she is currently studying for a B.Tech. Degree in Construction. She has 12 years experience in engineering and built environments.

She worked for Kwesi V3 Consulting, a civil engineering company, while still a student. After graduating she joined Eskom Transmission Northern Grid as a senior technician. She realised that she was not well positioned to utilise her potential as an engineer and left after two years to join the Roads Agency in Limpopo. She left the Roads Agency because of internal politics combined with a heavy workload that was not well remunerated. She decided to start her own consulting company called Glematibe Projects (Pty.) Ltd. The company did not do as well as she had anticipated, and she ended up working for other companies as a sub-contractor without getting a major project of her own.

Her family encouraged the children to study and made it possible for them. The greatest challenge she faced growing up was falling pregnant while still in school, which meant that she had to drop out of school until the baby was born. This could have been the end of her education had it not been for her grandmother who was a member of school committees and ensured that she was able to continue. Her grandmother was the most influential person in her life and she saw her as a grounding parent-figure while her parents were usually away at work. She inherited her father's determination to succeed no matter what the odds were and to never be afraid of any obstacles.

She dealt with the challenges in that she went back to school after a year and passed her examinations. Having a child when she was young made her work hard to ensure that the child was fully provided for. When she was at school, she came across an advertisement about a girl who, after having had her baby, went back to school and studied to become a civil engineer. This inspired her to study civil engineering. She is currently the head of Water and Sanitation in Capricorn District Municipality.

Tools for success

Ms Matsaung attributes her success to her family who taught her and her sisters to love education, which built their confidence and they had no inhibitions about

articulating themselves in public. Growing up in a township where people were squeezed for space was another motivating factor that influenced her life. Everybody knew each other and one could not do anything wrong because that would be reported by someone. This was a communal environment where people cared about each other.

Her qualifications as a civil engineer made it possible for her to secure employment even while she was a student. She went to a boarding school at one of the best agricultural schools where only science and accounting were taught. She chose the sciences because accounting meant mathematics, which most people considered to be a difficult subject. Choosing science led to her studying civil engineering.

'Most women who have qualified as natural scientists need not struggle to be engineers as they have adequate information about the water sector.' Makuma Ubisi, Sedibeng

After completing school she worked with supportive people who influenced her and she was able to openly discuss all issues that affected her. She considers herself a smart thinker, which reduced having to do arduous hard work.

She has particularly enjoyed working in teams; however, she has not been able to access any of the informal engineering forums, which are still male-dominated. She also feels that the sector has struggled to retain qualified engineers who are moving to greener pastures in the private sector or outside the country. This leaves those working in the water sector without mentors and it has created a critical void in the sector.

For her, networks have been important and she is involved in a number of coalitions with people whom she shares information with. The Water Sector Services Managers' Forum, sponsored by DWA, and the Water Research Commission (WRC), are two of the networks. In this forum, managers from various provinces in the country meet regularly to share ideas. However, she feels that this forum is not supported firmly as those who work in the secretariat do this on a part-time basis and they do not devote enough time to dealing with the issues raised. There is no network for women managers.

The gender policy imperatives pushed for women to be appointed in the sector, which is why she was recruited and appointed. She was, however, well-qualified for the job and she had the skills needed to perform well in the interview. The shortlist of candidates included many well-educated men.

Drivers for success

Ms Matsaung's family has supported her and thus enabled her to ascend the career ladder. Her husband supports her by taking the children to school and she has a house-helper to do the household chores and look after her three children when she is away. Her children always understand her need to be away most of the time for work purposes.

Her style of management has been a driver of success in achieving her goals. She manages by setting objectives whereby she makes everybody understand the ultimate goal of the programmes and then leaves them to find their own ways of achieving this goal. She observes habits and patterns of individuals in order to know what each individual needs to be productive. She does not like micro-managing people and she hates checking up on what she tells the people to do. She read a book entitled 'One

Minute Manager’ and found that one needs to instruct people, then leave them and see how they tackle their challenges. By following people too much a manager ends up doing the work allocated to others and they are then overwhelmed by their own work. People are not children to be followed after.

Advice to aspiring women

Ms Matsaung is of the opinion that women are born leaders as they are great at nurturing and caring for other people. She noted that even in the rural communities where there are municipal services, it is the women who are at the forefront of ensuring that their families are well provided for with water and sanitation. Women are the leaders for the wellness of their families and they are most active in supporting water-sector activities. Women should therefore use this natural advantage to advance professionally as well.

‘I support women’s ascendancy to positions of power because they bring in new ideas of formulating and developing policies. For instance, it was women who supported the installation of a pedestal at the water points because these are needed for assisting women to lift the water containers on to their heads.’ Kalinga Pelpola, Former CD, DWA

Women should be resilient despite their environment. Women who advance in leadership are the go-getters who could succeed even under the worst conditions. The professional environment of a woman civil engineer is very competitive and one must work very hard. She lacked confidence when she started because there was no mentor and she guessed the right way as she went along. Nowadays she is able to think more confidently and has understood the diversity issues of those reporting to her.

The role of mentorship is crucial. She is of the view that structured mentorship is the major means of knowledge transfer to the young and inexperienced engineers who need guidance. Currently, one is thrown into a management job, even hard-core technicians without any social leadership skills become managers.

It is important that a woman leader distances herself from gossip even though information finds its way to her. Women leaders should avoid controversial issues and be professional in the way they conduct affairs at workplaces. Her advice is that women should respect their positions and in turn others will respect them.

In enabling women to enter the water sector, there is need for career guidance that leads women to see the many opportunities in the water sector. Students should be guided to choose science subjects that will give them an edge in the water sector careers.

She condemns the mentality whereby women tend to choose male personal assistants because they think that men work better than the women. This is in contradiction to the women’s movement vision of not undermining women’s ability. Engaging men as personal assistants by women is against women’s fraternity and it should be stopped as it removes the jobs that were traditionally meant for women.

There is a dearth of platforms for women to showcase their leadership capacities as churches are male dominated even though the bulk of participants are women. It is a sad affair that until recently women were not allowed to speak at the Chief’s Kraal and they had to tell men or even boys to speak on their behalf. Women and men gain experience when they are given opportunities to practise their leadership skills.

1.24 Valitha Roos

At the time of the interview Ms Roos was the Executive Manager: Operations at Johannesburg Water

History

Ms Roos was born in 1967 and grew up in a family structure that she describes as quite ordinary. Her family is predominantly in the area of law, and she attributes her interest in engineering to her time and experiences at the centre for gifted scholars at the Johannesburg College of Education (JCE). She attended the centre where extracurricular classes were offered in subjects that were not ordinarily offered in the public schools. At the centre sessions were held on careers and various study options, and during one of these sessions a director from an engineering firm spoke about the field of civil engineering. His talk sparked Ms Roos's interest in civil engineering at the time, more specifically structural engineering. The talk marked a new interest in Ms Roos, and her tertiary education and career choices leaned towards engineering. During her 3rd year of studies Ms Roos was afforded the opportunity to work as an exchange student at the 'Wasserwirtschaft Institut' in Hanover Germany. It was during this exchange period that her interest grew in the water field and she became aware of the importance of this fundamental source of life.

'Organisations need to start to identify the cadre of women that are needed in the sector and look at ways to train and mentor young women and deploy them across the water sector.' Dr C Ruiters

She performed well at school and thought that she would be granted a bursary to study. She applied for a scholarship with a leading civil engineering company. She was told that she was the best candidate but given that she is a woman and that engineering is a full-time career she would very likely not see such a career through. This gave her the determination to defy this gender stereotype. She was driven to study and to complete a degree in engineering. She then applied for and received a bursary from another engineering consulting company, and was then employed by them after her studies. She gained a lot of great experience through them. They assisted in exposing her to a number of areas, which enabled her to attain her professional registration in the minimum time. She has always been in the water sector. She studied and specialised in water and found it to be a very fulfilling career.

Whilst at the time of the interview, Ms Roos was the Executive Manager: Operations at Johannesburg Water, she has since accepted a job opportunity in New Zealand and is currently working and living in New Zealand. Her qualifications include a Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) Civil Engineering; a Graduate Diploma in Engineering and a Diploma in Water and Environmental Engineering from the United Kingdom.

Tools for success

Her family has been a cornerstone of her career success. Her husband has been supportive and plays a role in caring for their two children, which provides Ms Roos with the structural mechanisms that allow her to focus on the demands of her job. He has his own business and his hours are therefore more flexible.

Sound mentorship has been available to her and she has drawn inspiration from her mentors. She identified one person in particular, a former boss that she learnt the

most from in terms of a water and sanitation perspective. He supported her directly as her boss and thereafter indirectly as a friend (when he left Johannesburg Water) for almost 10 years. She learnt about strategic thinking and innovative approaches from him. Ms Roos has worked in operations and maintenance for some time now and has continued to champion the importance of O&M.

Drivers for success

Ms Roos's ambition, interest and energy have kept her engaged, challenged and committed to her work in the water sector. Her training and hands-on experience in the sector provide her with an acute understanding of the issues facing the sector. She is passionate about the future of providing water and sanitation services to communities as well as the management of water resources. Her interest drives her to work hard and there are days when she works long hours, going the extra mile. She looks forward to learning and maintains that philosophy that nothing comes for free and in order to achieve anything you have to work hard. Her willingness to listen to people and to learn from them has assisted her. She feels that there is a lot to learn from fellow employees, and that it is important to have a genuine interest and to be open to learn from such people, regardless of the level of their qualifications. She believes that 'when a person is open to learning from different people, those people are also more open to you'. She believes that managers should live by example by not having an expectation that other people must do things that they themselves would not be prepared to do. She considers hard work easy because she is excited by what she does, which is core operations and maintenance in the water supply sector.

Attitude is a key element for her and she believes that openness and a modest attitude are enabling and much of her learning has taken place through this. Having an attitude of knowing it all or knowing everything better than others is limiting. Attitude and the motivation to do one's best help facilitate knowledge and skills transfer.

Till today Ms Roos is very hands-on and through this she has a keen and informed sense of what is going on. In O&M one has to be a part of the team and fundamentally understand the subject matter. She expressed her concern that today this is often not the case. There is a shortage of engineers and there are those who are climbing the ladder without the necessary experience and exposure to enable them to understand the fundamental issues so that they can tackle them more effectively.

In an area such as O&M, issues related to women not being able to do physical labour are raised on the maintenance side of things. Women have some limiting factors in terms of their physical strength. However, she feels that a person does not necessarily need physical strength if the right tools, such as hydraulic equipment, are available. When she worked in Limpopo she noticed that it was mostly women who dug the trenches and did the physical labour, which challenged the stereotypical views that women cannot do maintenance work. There are gender stereotypes in the water sector, as there are in other sectors as well, and it is more about people's attitudes and their levels of acceptance that women are competent.

She has a positive outlook on things and feels that nothing is an insurmountable problem; there always is a way to solve it. This, together with her pragmatic approach to her work and with the people she is involved with has contributed to her success. She does not expect others to do things that she would not have done and her attitude is that there is no job that is too menial for her.

In terms of her achievements, she is humble and feels that she has a responsibility to fulfil and she is doing her job. She agrees that it is nice to win awards with the team;

however, personally she does not need to be thanked for something that must be done. This is her approach to life and work.

Ms Roos believes that the formal gender policies have not given her any specific advantage. The gender policies have, however, allowed her to stand an equal chance in the engineering society which was not the case when she started her career. She is driven by her own convictions, hard work and strategic approaches in her career. She feels that her career growth in the sector is as a result of her qualifications, determination and excellent mentorship she has had throughout her career.

Advice to aspiring women

The focus in South Africa is on providing basic services to areas that are un-served. Many women are involved in the water services sector at the grassroots level, which is typically less technical. In her view there is a need for more women in the technical areas of the sector, particularly in the future when the shift in the sector will be towards the provision of higher levels of service; currently there are fewer women with the skills and qualifications required to work in the more technical areas. She feels that in order for transformation to take place more fully in the sector women need to ensure that they are appropriately skilled.

'There are not enough women with technical qualifications in the sector. In our unit, we invest in women and aim to increase the number of women working in our department. We have implemented a bridging program called 'Unite', where we go to the schools to identify and support talented learners with an interest and aptitude for maths and science. If learners have the technical inclination they get offered financial support to further their studies at university, focusing on engineering. There is a particular focus on girl learners.' Neil McLeod

She views a number of principles as necessary for success. Some of the principles in general would be the philosophy to lead by example. Managers should also get ideas from people on mentoring and stimulate them to think about the positives and negatives of employing each strategy. A group of people are more likely to bring up better ideas and to refine those ideas than a single individual. When there is a problem, it is best to bring people together to discuss that problem and come up with possible solutions. That way, the people involved will own up the adopted solutions and be more committed to making those solutions work as opposed to devising solutions in a closed-door environment. If one employee had a problem that s/he resolved successfully, such an employee should share the lessons learnt with others (when the problem is not of a personal nature). Employees should also be encouraged to put their best foot forward in all circumstances and be motivated to become the best they can. Communication is an empowering tool that enables people to know what is happening in the organisation and in the sector, which in turn enables people to make more appropriate plans and strategies geared towards the targets of the sector.

Another aspect that people have to appreciate is that engineering is not the preferred career option for women due to the nature of work combined with stereotypes about the career. There is a need to do work in career counselling and guidance and the emphasis of this should be at the level of schools where students begin to think about their career options and choices. In addition, the sector should be open to women who are keen to gain exposure to the technical aspects of the work. She believes that this will gradually help in bridging the gap in the technical side of the water sector.

Ms Roos feels that the environment that women work in needs to be more responsive to their needs in terms of, for instance, providing facilities that could support and enable a better work-life balance through the provision of, for example, day-care centre facilities.

'Through our Working for Water Programs I have realised how working conditions especially of poor people make their lives difficult. I have argued strongly for taking a closer look at the living and working conditions of people as these are the factors that influence behaviour and choices. This in turn started to shift my own thinking about approaches to making working conditions easier by for example building crèches and providing healthy meals to sustain workers. I was disgusted to find out that the investment in crèches was stopped (by a woman) on the basis that it was not the core function of the Department. I have always strongly advocated that the Working for Water and associated programs should not only focus on environmental deliverables but also on the improvement of people's lives.' Dr Guy Preston

From a legislative perspective the sector has achieved women's leadership and women are at the very top. For aspiring women, they need to explore the sector and the many opportunities that it offers. The water sector is a diverse, challenging, inspiring and rewarding place to work in.

Conclusion

From the findings, it was unclear whether the women interviewed pursue an agenda that is transformative, empowering and enabling for other women. The findings were inconsistent in that some women felt that they had been instrumental in creating space for other women, while other women said that in their view once women acquired positions of seniority they 'close the door behind them'. This fits in with the ongoing debate within gender, which questions whether it is necessary for women to support other women? Do women in leadership positions have a responsibility to assist other aspiring women? Some women felt that they do and that there is a lot more that they can do to support other women. Other interviewees stated that they do not subscribe to gender mainstreaming and promoting women, and instead people who are best suited for the sector are the ones who should be appointed. In the latter view, the women felt that they got to where they did on their own and that other women should do the same.

The issue is not necessarily that the women who hold leadership positions do not want to promote other women, but that these women have major responsibilities and mainstreaming gender is not necessarily on their list of priorities. This can be linked to a matter of space and time. Many women felt that they did not have the time to dedicate towards mentoring or coaching other women because the demands of their work are enormous, and that coupled with the demands in their personal lives, left no space for much else. The transition for women is that they are there because they have made it.

Further, there is the question about the level of consciousness of women who hold senior leadership positions in terms of women's empowerment and furthering the 'Women's Agenda'. The uncertainty surrounding this question can be expanded to include the gender structures such as the CGE, the OSW, Gender Focal Points, etc., where concern has been expressed about the numbers of women and about the possibility of achieving a 50/50 gender parity. The meaningful inclusion and participation of women where there is a greater awareness and potential to impact and transform attitudes and perceptions is more important than the conscientisation of women. Of importance is that even without intrinsic, fundamental changes, women will enter and take up senior leadership positions; however, the expectations and the environment for women will remain unchanged.

In summary the findings show that there is no guarantee that women in leadership will support other women to gain access to positions of leadership. Women who are not necessarily conscientised about gender-based discrimination or do not understand the intricacies of gender relations may disempower other women because of the continued existence of ways and approaches that have not been assessed, deconstructed and improved in terms of their gender-sensitivity and inclusivity. What does emerge through the findings is that the extent to which women (and men) are progressive in mainstreaming gender is personal and based on the understanding and attitude an individual has towards gender and women's empowerment; it is less of a policy decision.

Women in the water sector in South Africa have achieved a high level of empowerment, which is supported by a progressive policy and legislative framework and the determination to see women succeed in the public sector. Overall, the findings of research studies have revealed that women's leadership is found at the highest levels and women's participation is found in all areas of the sector spanning politics to determining policy and strategy, planning, administration, and decision-making. The water sector is committed to achieving women's parity and mechanisms are in place towards achieving this. Women and men have been instrumental in women gaining access to the water sector and the achievements to date can be shared among the women who paved the way, and continue to do so, and among the men who have been determined to see transformation take place in the sector.

These achievements are a tribute to the work that has been done in attaining gender equity. At the same time, there is a gap in the sector in the number of women who are employed in the technical fields. In these fields there is a higher percentage of men, which suggests the need for continued effort to encourage women, specifically young women, to explore a career in the technical fields.

From the interviews with the women given above, it was possible to extrapolate a set of criteria for the career success of women in the water sector. These criteria have been found to include the following:

Functional capabilities: At the most basic level women need access to *functional capabilities*. These include creating opportunities for women to be in a position to participate by having practical choices; real opportunities; substantial freedoms and resources such as well-being and health; control over one's environment; support in terms of welfare and social services; and time and space. These are the core essentials or the fundamentals that form the base from which people, women in this instance, can develop and flourish. These are the constitutive parts of development.

There are various factors that need to be in place in order for these capabilities to be realised, such as government policies, social security, access to education, financial resources, welfare, etc. With these and other factors in place, human well-being is enabled and basic needs are met.

Education: Education is essential and a necessity for career advancement and success. The importance of education was emphasised as a means of achieving success in the water sector. The women profiled have high levels of education, some having one or more tertiary qualifications. The importance of education lies in the independence it allows, the confidence it instils and in being a resource that one owns and cannot be taken away.

Coupled with education is hard work and dedication. These are essential to achieving career success in the sector, and it is only with hard work, drive, determination and dedicated effort that growth, improvement and success are attained.

Support: Personal and professional support, like education, was cited as being critical to career success. Personal support at home, from family, spouses and/or partners provides women with the space and possibility to advance themselves towards realising their goals and ambitions.

Professionally, mentors and/or coaches as well as institutional support have been shown to assist women to progress. It is important to identify and access support and the availability and accessibility of formal and/or informal support in the professional and personal sphere is crucial in this regard. This assists women in rising to personal and work-related challenges and helps them find and maintain a balance between work and personal life.

Further, an institutional environment is needed that is supportive and innovative in responding to the needs of women and the multiple roles of women. This environment should include, for example, mentorship, training, capacity building, the availability of day-care facilities, and flexible working hours.

Passion and ambition: The women related their passion for the work that they do, that is, their involvement in contributing to the lives of South Africans through the provision of basic services, such as water and sanitation. This has sustained their interest and engagement in the sector.

The sector provides a challenging work environment that is diverse and constantly changing. There is need for innovation, creativity, problem solving, and many other skills that keep people engaged. In other words, the sector provides an environment that is stimulating. Drive, passion and ambition are required to achieve and succeed.

Social capital: Social capital in the form of interpersonal networks, contact, knowledge and other related human resources are assets that can be used to address needs and interests. These collective assets provide women who are either entering the sector or who are already in the sector with a means to receive and give support; to gain access to knowledge and information; and to establish and be a part of a community where ideas, challenges, and other facets of work can be shared and discussed. The networks that are formed can be amongst women only or they can include both women and men. Either way, it is important that they are diverse, representative and inclusive, taking into consideration the reason or objective for forming the network. In some instances, the network can be very informal where people come together in a safe space as friends or colleagues to meet and touch base on matters of mutual concern. However formed, networks and social capital, more broadly, allow and facilitate horizontal collaboration that has fewer barriers or obstacles. These collective assets

have great potential to generate individual rewards, such as career opportunities and support networks by encouraging people to work together and increasing the capacity.

Characteristics for leadership: The final criterion lies in the qualities that characterise a good leader. While these are qualities that have been identified in the women holding leadership positions, they are relevant given that the qualities of leadership in the women interviewed were groomed and inculcated over time in their careers. These include a good work and moral ethic; interacting with people in a respectful manner; supporting and providing opportunities to people; interrelating well with people since collaboration and co-operation are essential in the sector; learning from people and sharing information and knowledge with others; fairness and equality; and managing people in a horizontal way that is collegiate and transformative rather than power-oriented and hierarchical.

In summary, the water sector has done well to advance gender equity and to narrow the gender gaps. This is evidenced by the legislative and policy environment that addresses the progression of women and by the number of women with decision-making power who influence and impact the strategies and structures that make up the sector. There are men in the sector who support and are involved in mainstreaming gender; they are committed to transformation and want to see women progress in the sector. They have been and continue to be partners in the process and have been particularly supportive to the women they work with in the sector. There is the understanding that in order for gender mainstreaming to be fully implemented, gender must be understood, internalized and diffused throughout the sector. What is critical is that spaces within the sector are moulded and framed by the inputs of women and men who are committed to seeing meaningful change and improvement happen.

The emerging challenges for women in the sector in the future are fourfold. The first is among the women who currently occupy senior and leadership positions and whether these women will continue the drive that was so profound in and around 1994 to promote women's needs and interests in the water sector. The second lies with newly appointed, younger women who are entering the sector and their level of consciousness about issues of gender equity, women's interests, empowerment, participation and mainstreaming gender. Third is with women in junior positions and the support and encouragement they receive in gaining access to senior, leadership positions. The fourth is in the institutional transformation of the organisations that were involved in the study, that is, DWA, WBs, municipalities, the WRC, etc. – the key stakeholders in the sector – and the extent to which gender is being mainstreamed.