

**NATIONAL WOMEN IN WATER  
CONSULTATIVE CONFERENCE**  
31 August 2015 | CSIR ICC, Pretoria



**ADDRESS BY Ms. NOMVULA MOKONYANE, MINISTER OF WATER AND  
SANITATION AT THE NATIONAL WOMEN IN WATER CONSULTATIVE  
CONFERENCE IN PRETORIA.**

**31 August 2015**

Programme Director

Deputy Minister of Water and Sanitation, Pam Tshwete

Premier of Gauteng, David Makhura

Members of the Executive Council present

Acting Mayor of City of Tshwane, Cllr Eulanda Mabusela

Members of the Portfolio Committee on Water and Sanitation

Director General of the Department of Water and sanitation, Margaret Diedricks

Members of the Water Boards

Esteemed delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

The Consultative Conference that we are holding today serves as the epilogue in the celebration of August as the Women's month. It was during this month that numerous activities took place to commemorate various meritorious and good deeds by women as well as highlight the plight and struggles of women in a patriarchal society. It is an open secret that women contributed no less than men

in the struggle against apartheid and oppression for the emancipation of the black majority.

Historically, access to water in South Africa, like access to many rights and privileges were determined by the dictates of race and gender. Access to water was further complicated by the link between access to land and access to water. Since access to water is inextricably linked to access to land, the rights of Africans and women's access to water was further limited by their limited access to land, 13% of which was reserved to African's under apartheid policies and legislation. Thus the involvement of women in the anti-1930 Land Act led by Charlotte Maxeke was no mean feat.

This Consultative Conference also takes place against the backdrop of the recently held World Water Week 2015 Conference which took place in Stockholm, Sweden, from the 23 – 28 August. The Conference reaffirmed the position that access to water plays a key strategic role in the socio-economic transformation of society.

Of importance is the fact the transition from the Millennium Development Goals to Sustainable Development Goals should be seen as a qualitative change rather than just a mere quantitative one. It should no longer be about how many pipes and taps have been erected, but rather, whether there is quality water coming out of the taps in a sustainable way.

It also worth noting, that the core topic of discussion at the World Water Week was about improving women's access to water. These discussions focused on how factors such as droughts and urbanisation impact most drastically on women and girl children.

The statistics cited were staggering: around the world, women and girls expend a total of over 200m hours daily collecting and hauling water. In sub-Saharan Africa, 71% of the water fetched and gathered for household use falls under the responsibility of female family members.

Water is perceived to be a women's business but the business of water lacks women. At an institutional level, the number of women in leadership is miniscule compared to the number of men. At the community level, those doing the hard work to transport, re-route, or clean water resources are usually women, while management and distribution decision making is often within the male sphere of influence.

And while we understand the plight of women in water access challenges across the world, I would like to encourage all delegates here today to have a different conversation – how do we inform, incentivise and invest in women-owned businesses and women leaders in water and sanitation? How do we change the debate from one of victimisation to one of transformational leadership?

Part of the answer lies in the power of individuals to educate, mentor, and promote women in order to give them the capacity, self-confidence and opportunity to enter the water sector and succeed within it.

The approach to the challenges pertaining to women issues should not be about insistence at encouraging women to grapple with the issues, but more to emphasize their direct role in becoming part of the very change that they, as women, would like to see. And this can take place, for an example, through solidarity, partnerships, education and sharing of information.

Suffice it to say, that individuals in power have the ability to identify potential women leaders, nurture their talents, offer crucial advice, and promote them. Real change occurs when individuals make the decision to invest their time and resources in future women leaders.

Unfortunately, personal contributions and connections are not sufficient on their own. Changes need to occur at an institutional level in order to ensure that the investments made by individuals have the opportunity to take hold and come to fruition.

There are obvious policy gaps that still make it difficult or unappealing for qualified women to work in the water sector and finding appropriate policy instruments and incentives (such as higher pay, extended maternity leave, tax breaks, etc.) to implement in specific contexts is both the key and the challenge.

The Department of Water and Sanitation acknowledges that it must support the best women's businesses to be effective and efficient in delivering proper services to the public. This focus is and should be on getting women to be creators of jobs and wealth than perpetual recipients of these from the private sector and elsewhere.

Along with the understanding of the need to support and develop women businesses the Department is proud to launch the 3-year national Women in Water Programme that comprises of a mentorship programme, a women in water business incubator and a women in water forum. The scope of the programme covers all women-owned businesses that are competent and excellent in the provision of services to the Department.

The objectives of this programme are to:

- Identify and address the key gaps between the current scenario and expected future scenario for the participation of women owned businesses in the water sector
- Accelerate the growth and success of entrepreneurial companies through an array of business support resources and services that might include but are not limited to the following:
  - ✚ physical space
  - ✚ capital, coaching
  - ✚ common services
  - ✚ networking connections
- Develop business talent to enhance performance of women-owned businesses and create readiness for transition to the next level of operation
- Develop a succession and retention plan for women-owned businesses to sustain organizational excellence in terms of service delivery

The beneficiaries of this programme can be categorised into 3 Cohorts:

- ✚ Beginners (women-owned enterprises in business however with no sustainable growth)
- ✚ Intermediates (women-owned enterprises in business however not as established as big enterprises)
- ✚ established women-owned enterprises at intermediate stages that function as fully-fledged businesses but that require additional

assistance to take their business to the next level of operation and compete nationally and globally.

The programme will target the following women-owned company groupings:

1. Women in Science and Engineering
2. Women in Innovation
3. Women in Construction
4. Women in Local Community Initiatives
5. Other women owned businesses may be considered based on merit

Pursuant to the points raised above, I am delighted that the commissions that we shall be going into are a reflection of the needs for capacity building and participation in the water sector across the board for women. The four commissions to guide the deliberation will be the following:

- Women in science and engineering
- Women in innovation
- Women in construction
- Women in local community initiatives

As we go into these various commissions we need to ensure that the level of the deliberations is such that clear actionable milestones that can be monitored and evaluated are achieved.

In conclusion, let me hasten to say, that we have to collectively take pride in the achievements of our fledgling democracy in the first twenty-one years of its life.

As today's activities roll out, let us remember that our work is not about ourselves, but is rather about consolidating the gains that we have made over time, and ensuring that indeed "***Water is Life, sanitation is Dignity***".

Dankie

Ngiyabonga.