



## water & sanitation

Department:  
Water and Sanitation  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

### INTERNET ARTICLE

#### **DWS experiential learning programme is a cornerstone for women advancement**

27 August 2014

*Although most South African women are still facing the challenges of competing in a 'man's world,' the situation is improving by the day at various government and corporate institutions.*

*The Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS) Learning Academy (LA) however, is one of the many organisations that are steadily changing the face of the workplace through the experiential training or Learnerships.*

*This programme focuses on women including men who are given opportunities to succeed in the commonly known as man's field. This is part of the Government's transformation agenda. The common perception across the workplace is the assumption that women are not able to handle stress as well as their male counterparts or that women are not educated enough in order to climb the corporate ladder and that the boardroom is a men's field.*

*However, there are still many women earning less than their male counterparts holding the same positions.*

*Verena Meyer, DWS's Director: LA said the Department is involved in on the job training and experiential skills for various learners such as professional scientists, who are mostly ladies and are absorbed into permanent posts on completion of their studies.*

*The LA supports the academic development component through bursaries and experiential training. The professional development component forms part of DWS's social responsibility in that it incubates young and inexperienced graduates and offers them the opportunity to receive on the job training and exposure in their area of study including on DWS's core business.*

*The LA responds to the imperatives mentioned with a dual focus by addressing both the academic and professional development components that provide aspiring engineers, scientists, technologists and technicians the opportunity to be exposed to real-time professional experiences and valuable work experience. The scope of work of the Learning Academy covers the full spectrum knowledge acquisition including outreach and public understanding of the water sector, supporting academic and vocational training programmes in South Africa, and incubating specifically professionally qualified blacks and female trainees within DWS.*

*Meyer said all these professional scientists started out as Graduate Trainees (GTs). These GTs qualify as candidate scientists. On qualifying they are registered as Professional Scientists and are absorbed into permanent positions by the Department or other entities as Professional Scientists (PS).*

*So far, qualified DWS's PS are : Happy Maleme, Nicolette Vermaak, Sipiwo Xongo, Gloria Muthelo, Zinzi Mboweni and Fhedzisani Ramusiya.*



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*Nicolette Vermaak said in the past there was a perception that women were not able to understand the intricacies of science and that a woman would go crazy if she applied her mind to science. “However, there have been women in history that disproved this – Marie Curie, for example. I read once that in Alexandria there was a brilliant woman physicist, and the men was so jealous of her that they literally skinned her alive. There is also the perception, in different cultures that men are threatened by intelligent women and that they will not get husbands. In Korea the ladies act dumb.”*

*Zinzi Mboweni said in the past, the role of women was seen as being home makers. Women were expected to stay at home and raise children while the men were the ones with jobs and supposed to provide for their families. Over the years, this kind of thinking has shifted and we see more women also working and providing for their families. Whether it’s supplementing the husband’s salary or in the case of single women, they have to provide for themselves and their children. More and more women are getting educated and most are branching to the science and engineering fields which were previously perceived as male fields.*

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