



water & sanitation

Department:
Water and Sanitation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

INTERNET ARTICLE

17 year-old Shongwe wants address water challenges

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The Department of Water and Sanitation's (DWS's) bursary holder, 17 year-old Gwendolyn Tematimandze Shongwe, believes that her financial assistance to pursue a career in BSc. Biological Science may well determine the future of the water sector.

Shongwe, who is from the rural province of Mpumalanga in Nkomazi and due to start her studies at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), is a firm believer that the department's bursary will go a long way in addressing the challenges of water scarcity in the country.

She says in most cases solutions to challenges such as water shortages are simply found by learning more about life.

"Given that the next world war will most probably be fought over water," she says, "it is of utmost importance that we educate ourselves now and learn more about life, about all living things so that we come up with ways to use these living organisms to purify and conserve water."

Shongwe says her tutor planted and nurtured the seed of love for biology in her, adding that the fact that there were very few women in her chosen field also motivated her.

"Noting that many students had no interest in biology, my tutor encouraged me to follow a path that was biology-related and also because a lot of girls were not represented in fields that dealt with biology," says Shongwe.

An anti-anachronist to the bone, the young mind says her thirst in biology was whetted when in 2015 she entered the Department of Water and Sanitation's South African Youth Water Prize (SAYWP). In this programme she was involved in a project that focused on harvesting air conditioning water.

Once the water was harvested it was sent to Pretoria where tests were conducted to check if it needed purification before it could be used in the households and the results were that the water was safe to use, even for drinking.

"In this programme we had the chance to interact with other learners from other areas and shared ideas and experiences but mostly we had to come up with ways of solving problems in the water sector. We had to find practical solutions by doing research," says Shongwe.

SAYWP is part of the 2020 Vision programme of the Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS) that promotes science and technology learning among high school learners from Grades 9 to 11. It aims to encourage and empower Youth to participate actively in integrated and community based water resource management. The



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competition also motivates Youth to pursue water and sanitation management careers.

The former Suikernand Secondary School students in Malelane, says after finishing her studies, Shongwe imagines herself plying her trade for the department to purify water, finding cheaper ways to do so and improving the systems that the department is currently using.

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