



water & sanitation

Department:
Water and Sanitation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

INTERNET ARTICLE

From SA Youth Water Prize winner to Hydrologist

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When Nompilo Mahlobo entered the South African Youth Water Prize competition together with her two schoolmates in 2006, little did she know that she would end up working for the Department of Water and Sanitation as a hydrologist.

At 16, Nompilo and twin sisters, Thobile and Thokozani Mbanjwa, grabbed a gilt-edged opportunity to enter the competition with both hands. This was as per the advice of their science teacher, Ms Thoko Njoko, at MehlokaZulu High School in Mbali Township, Pietermaritzburg. Six months later the trio was on a plane to Sweden to represent South Africa at the Stockholm Junior Water Prize competition.

This after they beat schools from the other eight provinces and won the SA Youth Water Prize at a tough competition that was held in Pretoria. Nompilo, whose name means “The Energetic One”, has never looked back since then.

“You can safely say I’m a go-getter,” she says.

Although they did not win the coveted international prize, the three girls immersed themselves in their books and later graduated at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Subsequently, they were employed by the then Department of Water Affairs and Forestry, DWAF, (now DWS), as forestry technicians and hydrologist respectively. Thokozani and Thobile later moved to the Department of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture when DWA became DWS two years ago.

Nompilo is working as a Hydrologist in the DWS Provincial Office in the Eastern Cape. She and her colleagues advise emerging and existing farmers on the best ways of irrigation with a view to implement the Water Use Efficiency and Demand Management concept.

“I became passionate about water at the age of 14 when I was in Grade Eight. When we entered the SA Youth Water Prize competition I knew that it was my opportunity to excel in water issues,” says Nompilo.

She is grateful to Njoko, their science teacher, who patiently guided them through their project that landed them in Stockholm 10 years ago. Titled “Value Added Grey Water Plant Tea”, their project was based on a research on the shortage of water as a severe problem in many parts of South Africa, especially in informal settlements. Their research found the one way of solving the problem could be the re-use of household wastewater (grey water).

Following the outcome of their research, the team recommended the re-use of water in schools and surrounding communities through the promotion of their own (learners) innovation – the Plant Tea. Plant Tea is a liquid fertilizer composed of grey water and a variety of organic household waste, which not only saves water but also recycles plant nutrients

The objective of the project was to help people living in informal settlements to conserve precious water and to determine the effectiveness of the Plant Tea as a fertilizer.



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So, where to for Nompilo from here?

“I want to be a farmer one day,” she says.

And to prepare herself for her dream she is studying towards a Masters in Water Sciences.

By Themba Khumalo