

Women in Water

DWS to boost women entrepreneurs



Delegates from the Department of Water and Sanitation.

The time has come for women to move beyond carrying buckets to driving, constructing and managing the water resource infrastructure they need.

This was the message from Minister of Water and Sanitation, Nomvula Mokonyane, at the Women in Water Consultative Conference held in Pretoria earlier this year.

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 Africans under apartheid policies and legislation.

While much has changed since that time, business of water lacks women. At an institutional level, the number of women in leadership is miniscule compared to the number of men, noted Mokonyane. "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."

But this is set to change, according to Mokonyane. In a moving speech that had the 400-strong audience on their feet, she said that women have to move beyond the 'victim' mentality to become the change they wanted to see. "As women, we need to see ourselves 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?"

As a first step the Department of Water and Sanitation has launched a three-year Women in Water Programme. The programme comprises 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.

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Minister of Water and Sanitation, Nomvula Mokonyane.



Delegates at the Women in Water Consultative conference.

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; and 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 organisational excellence in terms of service delivery

The beneficiaries of this programme can be categorised into three cohorts, namely beginners (women-owned enterprises in business with no sustainable growth), intermediates (women-owned enterprises in business not yet as established as big

enterprises), and 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 mainly target women in the spheres of innovation, construction, and local community initiatives, however, other women-owned businesses may also be considered based on merit.

In her conclusion the minister called on women to use this opportunity to not only enrich themselves, but to ensure empowerment and dignity to all those who still do not have access to water and sanitation services in the country. “Women empowerment is not just thinking about yourself, but also about ensuring access to services for others. We need to make sure that Ma Dlamini no longer has to walk long distances to collect water from sources where animals drink; that no woman has to relieve herself outside at night with the fear of being raped or assaulted.”