

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

In March this year, Government launched a year-long programme to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the 1956 Women's March to the Union Buildings. In keeping with this celebratory spirit, this special edition of Izwi highlights women's challenges and successes in the workplace and beyond.

We look at human rights at the workplace from the perspective of one of the brightest legal minds the Office has [p1] and we invade the life of one PSC Commissioner, who shares her life's trials and tribulations as a public servant in the broader sense – mother – wife – and a woman [p4].

We also look at basic facts of women abuse from the Human Resource point of view [p12] and follow the journey of three ambitious OPSC officials who stood against the odds, and rose through the ranks as public servants [p8].

We profile the life of a woman who has become the Voice of the O/PSC [p10]. We also dig deep into the archives to find out the kind of questions that the PSC's first Commissioner with a disability used to ask whenever she spoke about women with disabilities [p12].

Also in celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the 1956 Women's March to the Union Buildings, the PSC has shown its custodianship of good governance in the Public Service, by issuing a special external edition of a publication called Womanhood. We at Izwi, encourage you to also read this once-off sister publication, for you to understand even better, the long walk to equality in the Public Service. Womanhood shares national and provincial representivity statistics and showcases attempts by government to level the playing fields.

Whilst the representivity statistics may look good for certain Public Service institutions, it is important to acknowledge that much still needs to be done if a Public Service that reflects gender equality is to be attained.

In conclusion, Izwi wishes to thank Ms Mancha Mogano for sharing her life story with us; Ms Phume Khumalo for her informative article and sourcing statistics for us; Ms Mmathari Mashao for contributing an informative article; and Commissioner Koko Mokgalong for sharing her life story with us, corresponding for us, and providing us with archive material for use in this issue.

We hope that all the female Commissioners and officials are having a fulfilling Women's Month and trust that as the 50th Anniversary of the 1956 Women's March to the Union Buildings is celebrated throughout the year, they also celebrate anniversaries of their personal milestones.

Thobela!



archive photos sourced from: www.sahistory.org.za

WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS AT THE WORKPLACE -

A CHALLENGE OR SUCCESS, FIFTY YEARS AFTER THE HISTORIC, PEACEFUL AND VIBRANT WOMEN'S MARCH TO PRETORIA.

By Mmathari Mashao

ON 9 AUGUST 1956, UNDER THE BANNER OF THE FEDERATION OF SOUTH AFRICAN WOMEN, ABOUT 20 000 WOMEN OF ALL RACE GROUPS MARCHED TO THE UNION BUILDINGS IN PRETORIA TO PROTEST AGAINST LEGISLATION AIMED AT TIGHTENING THE APARTHEID GOVERNMENT'S CONTROL OVER THE MOVEMENT OF BLACK WOMEN IN URBAN AREAS. ACCORDING TO SA HISTORY ONLINE, THE MARCH WAS ORGANISED TO CHALLENGE THE IDEA THAT "A WOMEN'S PLACE IS IN THE KITCHEN", DECLARING IT INSTEAD TO BE "EVERYWHERE".

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Women's Human Rights at the Workplace.....continues

In tribute and celebration of the historic march, the government announced a year-long programme of activities, starting in March 2006. The 50th anniversary campaign of the 1956 anti-pass march will also be an opportunity to reflect and evaluate on how far human rights of women in workplaces have been turned into a reality as provided in the Constitution.

For one to establish if the human rights of women have actually been attained and are respected in the workplace, one has to commence with the women populace percentage in South Africa. According to the Statistics South Africa's mid-2006 population estimates, 51% (approximately 24 million) of the population is female. Thus women constitute just over half of the South African population. It stands to reason that there should be at least 50% of women in each sector of industry and at each and every level of employment. Yet the reality is that in workplaces, a large concentration of women is still in the lowest ranks and a minute percentage is at top level. At the same time, because of the combination of race, gender and class oppression and exploitation, women are the most disadvantaged section of the population with regard to economic advancement opportunities.

Democracy, peace and stability which were attained in South Africa twelve years ago ushered in, respect for human rights for all including promotion of gender equality in the workplace. Largely the human rights of women aim to ensure amongst others that every single woman, regardless of age, ethnicity or belief should be able to realise and enjoy all the human rights in the workplace, in conditions of freedom, dignity and absence of fear. That in itself means that there should not be any repression in the workplaces, ensuring that all employees are able to exercise their human rights freely to determine their future, growth and career development. Employers must create conditions such that harassment and gender discrimination is banished from the workplace which in turn will enhance advancement of women to top positions, resulting in employment percentages of the populace leveling up in years to come.

However, there are still pockets of the South African population where appalling conditions of employment is all what some women are faced with on a daily basis. Although this is in contravention of the legislative framework mentioned below, there is little, if any recourse for these women largely due to their socio-economic status. The biggest challenge here is for women in general to have knowledge of their human rights at the workplace

and the ability and capacity to realise and enjoy them. In the past ten years, there are numerous laws that have been promulgated to give effect to the constitutional provision of equality before the law, enjoyment of all human rights by women and non-discrimination on the basis of gender amongst others. To mention but a few, the laws that are stated below are aimed at ensuring that women enjoy their human rights at the workplace and that gender equality is protected and promoted –

- Labour Relations Act;
- Basic Conditions of Employment Act;
- Skills Development Act;
- The Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act; and
- The Employment Equity Act.

All these laws are applicable in both public and private sector. Regardless of this excellent legislative framework, majority of women regardless of literacy level, are still faced with challenges of realising their human rights and enjoying gender equality. This is as a result of amongst others, the historical societal prejudices and gender stereotyping. The following provides a synopsis on how women in workplaces can utilise the provisions of these laws to their advantage.

In relation to the Basic Conditions of Employment and Labour Relations Act, there are tribunals set up to hear matters relating to these laws. In the event that the matter remains unresolved, the Labour Court and ultimately the Supreme Court of Appeal and Constitutional Court in that order, may be able to hear and hand down judgement on the said matter.

The Employment Equity Act and Skills Development Act are also confined to employment related issues and their enforcement is through a tribunal system at the lower level and a specialist Labour Court at the higher echelon. The challenge for women is that once a matter is referred to the Labour Court there are lawyers' fees that have to be paid. Although the Constitution provides that everyone has access to courts, majority of women cannot realise this right as there are prohibitive legal costs involved in most cases. Furthermore, there are very few lawyers or organisations that handle women's human rights relating to employment matters for free, unless they are of public interest and are likely to have greater impact on human rights of women (setting a precedent) than the individual woman.

The Equality Courts were finally established three years ago for members of the society to be able to have their matters adjudicated upon if conciliation has not been successful. The organisations which are competent to conciliate and refer women's human rights and gender equality matters to the Equality Courts if conciliation fails are, the Commission on Gender Equality and Human Rights Commission.

The Equality Act provides that complainants (including women), to assert their human rights, may still approach the Equality Courts directly without first approaching the institutions established to promote democracy. This means that it is of paramount importance for both women and their employers to address gender equality and realisation of human rights of women in the workplace through popularisation of all the legislation that has been enacted since 1994 that addresses these issues. In final analysis, the initiatives highlighted above, will give the women new legal platform from which to proceed as they continue the struggle for their emancipation in all respects. As such, from the point of view of the statutory institutions, this means that for women to assert their human rights at the workplace in the public sector, they may if the matter remains unresolved departmentally, approach the following institutions amongst others –

- The Public Service Commission;
- The Sectoral Councils;
- Human Rights Commission;
- Commission on Gender Equality; and
- Labour Court, Supreme Court of Appeal, Equality Courts and the Constitutional Court.

Unless women in the workplace are able to assert their human rights at all these institutions, the face of poverty will for a longer period remain that of a woman and a child. All the laws and existing transformation programmes of the government will be a mockery. All the decades' battles for democracy and lost lives will be in vain.

In conclusion, the five decades have passed since the historic march of women for collective recognition of their human rights. However, in workplaces notwithstanding all the remarkable laws for which South Africans are renowned and at times even envied by the developed countries, majority of women have but only paper rights and are still to be sensitised and empowered to effectively assert their human rights and realise gender equality.



Ms Mashao is OPSC's Chief Director: Labour Relations Improvement.



I, THE CIVIL SERVANT, WIFE, MOTHER, AND WOMAN

By Commissioner Koko Mokgalong

This contribution to Izwi is dedicated to all the young women in the Public Service and those who still aspire to make the Public Service an employer of choice. May the sharing of my personal and professional experiences with you inspire you to contribute to the realisation that you are capable of greater things in life. My life has been shaped by the words of George Bernard Shaw when he asserted, "life is not a brief candle to me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I have got hold of for the moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations".



I was born ten years after the historic march of women to the Union Buildings. Needless to say, the march was a landmark in the political protest of women, and we will forever be grateful to these women for the journey travelled in liberating women in general.

I was born the youngest of three children, and would like to pay tribute to three women who have taught me all that I know about women's struggle and women power. First, my mother for the gift of life she has given me, and my former colleague, Maria Rantho, for her very strong belief in herself and her capabilities not just as a woman, but also a woman with a disability; her appetite for life; and for teaching me that "impossible" is a word that only exists in the dictionary. And finally, my daughter Makganwana, for her very strong views about the inherent power women have at their disposal, and for making me a proud mother and teaching me the value of selflessness and unconditional love.

Shattered Dreams

As a young girl, all I wanted was to be a Nurse. I loved the order that seemed to define nursing at that time, and the pleasure of being able to tend the sick and make them well again. What was for me a noble dream that I cherished for years, was miserably shattered in an instant when I was giving birth to my daughter at the age of sixteen, realising for the first time that I could not stand the sight of blood.

With my first dream shattered, I developed a passion for social work. Like with nursing, this newfound passion would enable me to interact with and help people. Determined to live the social work dream, I set foot at the then University of the North for orientation but as it came out to be, this (social work) too, was never to be. A student advisor told me in no uncertain terms, that unless I wanted to spend a minimum of seven years instead of four, studying social work, I better think about something else. I was left with no choice, but to enroll for a Bachelor of Arts in Education, to be an Educator - a profession I grew to love and respect.

Inherited Profession

The last two years of my studies were the most difficult, having lost my father and mother a year apart, in 1988 and 1989 respectively. When I finally obtained my 'license' to teach in 1990 at only a tender age of 24, I was not ready for what awaited me. The loss of my parents still weighed heavily on me and having a six-year-old daughter, who was battling to come to terms with the fact that I was her mother, did not help either.

Having spent all my childhood life there, my first choice of employment would never in my wildest dreams have been in Lebowakgomo. Unfortunately, as fate would have it, I found myself having to take a post at my alma mater, Lebowakgomo High School and live in my parents' home, while I adjusted to motherhood and being a Teacher.

As I came to realise, settling in at Lebowakgomo High was not going to be easy. To most learners, Teachers and parents, I was instead of being seen as a Teacher, referred to as "ngwana wa mistress Mamabolo", meaning, the child of Mam Mamabolo, my mother, who herself, was a Teacher and later a Principal. The final blow came from the school principal, who also happened to be my principal when I was still a learner at the same school, jokingly saying to me, "Koko, I think it is time for me to resign, I cannot teach with my pupil". I had to prove to everyone else that I was a Teacher in my own right, that I had not inherited the profession, but studied very hard to be one, and I was going to be the best.

In the classroom, I found myself teaching Afrikaans in what was then standard 9 and 10. I had to come to terms with teaching some learners who were my seniors when I was at primary school and those who were my classmates at high school, who had dropped out of school for one reason or the other. As if that was not enough, some of my fellow Teachers who had taught me when I was still a learner at

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Lebowakgomo High, went out of their way to make me uncomfortable.

All these attitudes brought out the best in me, and motivated me to excel in my subject matter. Age was also on my side; being single, I had a lot of time to spare. Using my inherent skills of being a good listener and communicator, I literally got involved in all extra mural activities provided at the school, except music. Amongst others, I was chairperson of the debating and cultural committees; I coached the netball team, and was founder of the drum majorettes. In no time, I had earned the respect of most learners, Teachers, and parents.

Getting unionised

Satisfied that I had laid a solid foundation on which I could establish myself as one of the greatest Teachers my school ever had, I felt confident enough to join Teacher organizations and help shape the new direction for the teaching profession. Sooner than later, I became a member of the then Northern Transvaal Teachers Union (NOT-TU) and later, the South African Teachers Union (SAD-TU), serving both organizations with pride and honour.

As a member of SADTU, I served as Convener of the Gender Desk in Mogodumo Branch, and was later elected Branch Secretary. Both positions broadened my scope and understanding of women issues. It is during this period that I was exposed to and interacted with many gender activists and even later became a member of the then Women's Coalition in the then Northern Province. It was during this period that I was sensitised about women struggles and the triple oppression of African women in particular.

Separating from the Family

My life was turned around in June 1995, when I was told that I was on the 'Provincial to National African National Congress (ANC), list to Parliament' following Maite Nkoane-Mashabane's deployment to an Ambassadorial post in Malaysia. Imagine my exasperation at the thought. Mixed feelings! I was a newly wed, having been married for only eight months, with a 13-year-old daughter. How could these people expect me to relocate to Cape Town just like that? What was to happen to my brand new husband and daughter? I had a choice to make between this great and overwhelming opportunity, and to remain at home as a wife, mother and Teacher.

My husband, bless his gentle soul, made me realise that opportunities like that only came once in a lifetime. He said to me, "love, this is recognition of your capabilities and your efforts, and this is an opportunity to represent women in Parliament. If I were you, I would not think twice; I give you my blessings. Makganwana and I will be fine." And jokingly he added, "at least I will get to bask in the limelight too". It is then that I appreciated the words of wisdom from Dorothea Dix when she asserted that "In a world where there is so much to be done, I feel strongly impressed that there must be something for me to do", and I decided I was going to Cape Town, to be a Member of Parliament and make my people proud by serving them.

I had to explain to my 13-year-old daughter, with whom we had just connected in an amazing way, that I was going to work in Cape Town. My school Principal and Teachers were dumb-stricken when I broke the news to them, but they wished me well.

My move to Cape Town was the beginning of yet another journey, where I had unfortunately, to learn that people had very little regard for women. My husband accompanied me to Cape Town to witness me take the Oath as well as help me settle. To my surprise, when we went into the Chief Whip's office, and other related places, people were shaking his hand and welcoming him to Parliament, totally ignoring me. Intrigued, he would proudly say, "No, it is actually my wife who is a Member of Parliament."

Touching people's lives

My initial experiences in Cape Town notwithstanding, my tenure as a Member of Parliament had its gratifying moments. I found it a humbling experience to interact with rural women, teaching them basic skills of how to earn a living. The expression on the faces of these women when I came to their meetings, said it all. They saw me as someone who was going to contribute in improving the quality of their lives, and to a limited extent, I succeeded. One other achievement was when through the help of an international organization, I secured donations to help build Boredi English Medium Primary School, at Ga-Mathabatha, and donated to this school, what came to be the first South African flag to be owned by a rural school. Today I can proudly say that this English medium public institution is up and running, with donations from the networks I built.

Unlike the women I interacted with throughout my constituency work, I also had to deal with men who were not

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particularly gender sensitive. One recurring incident that is still fresh in my mind is when I had to conduct public hearings on the Termination of Pregnancy Bill. Men were up in arms, totally opposed to the Bill. With it being my responsibility to clarify and explain what the intent of the Bill was, I had to bear the brunt and deliver the message as convincingly as possible. As it would be expected under those conditions, after each public hearing that I addressed throughout my constituency, I would always be the least favourite person to the men who attended the hearings.

Things falling apart

As it can already be assumed from the aforesaid, my experience as a Member of Parliament and an absentee wife and mother, was filled with both the good and the not so good. There were a lot of new things I had to learn, and learn fast for that particular matter. I had to find a balance between serving my constituency, and being a wife and mother during the alternative weekends when I flew to Polokwane. It was very difficult to make all parties happy; the demands from all sides were daunting. At one stage when my daughter was up to her depths needing me as a mother and I could not be there as she expected, she said to me, "you know, parenting is a full time job and you seem to think it is a part-time job". This really broke my heart. As if that was not enough, my husband started negotiating with the relevant parties that no matter what the future held, for the next elections I should please not be on the list to Cape Town again. I knew things were really bad when he would say to me "please come back home, the centre cannot hold anymore".

Finding solace in the wisdom of others

Despite my domestic problems, I persevered and stretched myself to the limits just to see my family intact while also serving the wider populace. Although sometimes it became too daunting for me, I found solace in the wisdom of the many women I met in Parliament, especially Maria Rantho. It is in the Portfolio Committee on RDP and Public Service and Administration where I met this very remarkable and powerful woman.

In Maria, resided a woman with stature, knowledge and influence. She was a woman at peace with herself, knew what discrimination as a woman with disability meant, and she was determined to wage war against such discrimination everywhere she went, Parliament included. She really left an indelible mark on me. She taught me everything I know about disability. And she was afraid of no one. When she wanted something to be done, nothing could stand in her way. She really was an activist in all respects. Parliament owes it to her insistence on

proper access facilities for people with disabilities, that today it (Parliament) is easily accessible for all. She made all of us in Parliament to address issues of disability in all our speeches. She literally scrutinised my speeches and checked whether there was any reference to disability. Even during recess, when I was addressing meetings in my constituency or deployments, she would make sure there was reference to disability.

Just to give a taste of what this remarkable woman meant to me and people around me, what follows is an extract from a Paper she helped me prepare for Women's Day celebrations in 1998 at Musina:

"Once we have addressed our prejudices against women with disabilities and disability in general, it is then that we can start addressing issues of gender equality. ...Let us remember that it is this economic, political and social exclusion and discrimination in accessing equal opportunities and social services that we are all fighting against, but when we do the same to disabled people we do not regard this as a crime against humanity, why? The Paper ends with an appeal for all to "rise against the quadruple discrimination and oppression of women with disabilities and focus on the integration and participation of women with disabilities at all spheres of our lives."

Tragedy strikes

At the time when I needed her the most, Maria was appointed a Commissioner for the PSC. She would leave me in Cape Town and relocate to Pretoria with effect from 1 January 1999. Suddenly, I felt alone.

As you would imagine, it was a very difficult time in my life, having lost my husband in a tragic motor vehicle accident just over a month before Maria left for Pretoria. Widowed at the age of 32, my daughter, who was 16 years old at the time, became my pillar of strength. However, working in Cape Town and leaving her in the care of my domestic worker back home in Polokwane, was very unbearable for me.

As I was still trying to get to terms with my loss, a post for a PSC Commissioner resident in Limpopo was advertised. Fully knowing what I was going through, Maria persuaded me to apply for the post. She even threatened to resign as a Commissioner if another woman was not appointed in the Commission. Today, seven years later, I am in the middle of my second and last term as a Commissioner in the PSC, and loving it most of the time. Looking back, I believe there is a lot that Maria and I could have accomplished had she not left us so untimely, in July 2002.



Custodian of Good Governance

Izwi lase OPSC

Special Edition

August 2006

Celebrating Women in the O/PSC.

I, THE CIVIL SERVANT, WIFE, MOTHER, AND WOMAN.....continues....

The highlight as a Commissioner

The normal operational challenges and success of my work aside, the highlight of my career as a Commissioner, was when I facilitated the hosting of the first "take a girl-child to work" in the Public Service Commission. It was a very fulfilling and inspiring experience, looking at the young girls we hosted share their future aspirations with us.

The challenge of being a Commissioner is that young women in particular, look up to you to assist them realise their professional goals of occupying managerial positions. I have served as a reference to a lot of young women and have mentored a lot of them. My wish for the Public Service and the Public Service Commission in particular, is that we double the number of women managers, and that we do all in our power to provide support networks for them. In doing this, we would have lived Maya Angelou's dream that "if one woman is lucky, a solitary fantasy can totally transform one million realities".

Celebrating women's successes

As a woman who celebrates the success of other women, I am looking forward to a book that profiles women in the Public Service. I find it disappointing that two prominent books published recently, 'Inspirational Women at Work' and 'Life and Soul - portraits of women who move South Africa' do not feature women in the Public Service. I am not sure whether this is an indictment that Public Service holds little value and significance, or whether our Public Service is in a state which does not have any women to celebrate.

Power or empowerment?

In all the positions I have held, both as a Member of Parliament and now as Commissioner, I have never regarded these as positions of power, but as positions where I could use my knowledge to influence and build networks around me to better and improve the lives of other women. I believe I am speaking on behalf of Maria when in the words of Rosemary Brown, I say "until all of us (women) have made it, none of us have made it".

Life after the PSC

Personally, I am at that stage in my life where I can safely say I am at peace with myself. I have grown a lot spiritually and am forever grateful to my father who taught me that "mathomo a bohlale ke go boifa Modimo", translated, the first wisdom is to fear the Lord. I am firmly grounded in my value systems and in tune with myself. I have no firm plans about my professional life post the Commission (2009), yet I know where ever I will be, I will

still be serving my people, because that is where my passion is; contributing in every little possible way to improve the quality of lives for women. And to all the women, I dare to say, we are in the right space, South Africa is alive with possibilities, in this Age of Hope, we dare not fail!

Malibongwe!

THE WIND BENEATH THE WINGS OF WOMEN ACHIEVERS

By Izwi Correspondent

Those who have been in the O/PSC long enough must have seen the rise through the ranks of OPSC's Director-General, Ms Odette Ramsingh and wondered what makes people in her position tick. In trying to understand what enables such people, especially women, to succeed, Izwi got in touch with two powerful sisters, Dr Nelly Manzini, who is the Director-General in the Office of the Premier, Limpopo and Ms Manching Benny Monama who is the Head of the Department of Housing in Gauteng.

Although these sisters, who have over the years served the Public Service with pride, agree that each person would have his/her own way of working towards achieving their goals, this is how they said they achieve theirs:

Dr Manzini

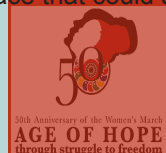
- Commitment to what I do;
- Thorough planning and sticking to the plan;
- Within the plan, I put aside time for myself to rekindle my strength – good relaxation;
- Support from my family; and
- Sharing experiences with colleagues and also getting input from other women.

Ms Monama

- Being more like a perfectionist – that is making sure that I do things right and finish what I started;
- Being passionate about what I do;
- Commitment; and
- Family support.

One similar striking element in these sisters' responses, is something that is outside the work environment – family support. This just shows how much the family support that many of us take for granted until it is withdrawn, is valuable to making public servants function better at work. It therefore comes as no surprise that the Office has an Employee Assistance Programme to attend to even issues from outside the workplace that could affect an employee's performance at work.

Ms Mokgalong is PSC Commissioner based at Commission House, Pretoria



PROFILES

The following profiles, for Ms Winnie Lebesse, Nelly Lukhero and Sheila Masilo, are an attempt to celebrate their achievements. Although they are not in senior management positions yet, their commitment and never-say-die attitude should be reason enough for others to keep on going on. Information as to which officials meet the requirements for profiling was sourced from Human Resource.

WINNIE LEBESE - the self made Senior Provisioning Administration Clerk

By Mabel Morontse

Ms Winnie Lebesse's association with the OPSC started in 1997 when she was appointed into a position of Food Service Aid. Before joining the OPSC, she worked at the DPSA rendering similar services.



At the OPSC, Winnie held the Food Service Aid position for a period of four years.

What is striking about Winnie is that while rendering food aid service, she vowed to leave the food service aid scene for something more interesting for her. With the knowledge that opportunities do not always come knocking on the door, Winnie involved herself in other activities at the Office. "I would never let a phone ring by itself while I was delivering tea and coffee around offices, and everyday after doing my food service aid work, I would go to Registry to help Abigail Steenkamp", said Winnie.

Winnie's hard work and commitment was recognized and acknowledged in September 2001 when she was promoted to Senior Telecom Operator. With great devotion, she operated the switchboard for a period of four years.

Her experience in Registry work came handy when she was transferred to Registry in May 2005. She worked in Registry for a period of a year performing a variety of administration work.

Armed with administration skills "...that any administration clerk would dream of having", Winnie's move to Senior Provisioning Administration Clerk post was just a matter of when rather than whether she will get it.

Winnie is currently registered with UNISA, studying

towards a National Diploma in Public Management and Development.

Asked what she attributes her success to, Winnie told Izwi, "I always had the desire to know administration work and to know different general office duties. I would always ask some staff members if they needed assistance with duties like filing and packing of documents I did not mind to do voluntary work". She regards asking for advice and putting more effort in whatever she does, as her survival strategies and the reason for her success.

While others would be satisfied with her achievements, Winnie would like to see herself occupying a senior position in the Procurement sphere "...because I have realized that I am more interested in procurement work and with the confidence I have in myself, I know I am going to do it."

NELLY LUKHERO MAKES THE RIGHT MOVES

- from Security Officer to Senior-Library Assistant

By Agnes Malwane

When you enter the OPSC Information Resource Centre, you'll be greeted by the ever smiling and welcoming face of Ms Nelly Lukhero. MaNellys as she is affectionately known by OPSC staff members, joined the Public Service in 1997 as a Security Officer, working for the Department of Education.



Nelly worked for the Department of Education for a period of seven years before joining the OPSC as a Senior Library Assistant. As an employee of the OPSC, Nelly's commitment was recognized when she became a finalist in the IVAISLP Librarian of the Year competition in 1999 and a runner up of the same competition in the following year.

A mother of three, Nelly has taken it upon herself to balance work; her role as a wife and mother, and her studies. She is currently studying for a Diploma in Library and Information Science with UNISA.

Her duties as a Senior Library Assistant include assisting library users to meet their information needs by conducting inter-library loans and doing information searches on the website.

PROFILES continues ...

She is a member of the Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA) and the Inter-departmental Vocational Association of Information Specialists and Library Personnel (IVAISLP).

Nelly sees herself becoming a businesswoman one day. For her, being a Senior Library Assistant is just a step on the ladder of success.

SHEILA MASILO – Making her mark

By Mabel Morontse

For a person who has literally transformed herself from a Food Service Aid to a Document Control Clerk, it will not be surprising for Ms Sheila Masilo to one day realize her dream to see herself in a management position within the finance field.



Sheila joined the OPSC as a Food Service Aid on the 17th of February 1987. Before joining the OPSC, she worked as a Switchboard Operator at Macrall Timbers for a period of six years. Part of her duties at Macrall Timbers included answering calls, filing and preparing accounts and wages for staff.

Having rendered food service aid to the OPSC staff members and Commissioners for a period of sixteen years, Sheila had an ambition to learn and know about office work.

Everyday after serving tea, Sheila would engage herself in office work by assisting the Commissioners' Secretaries with administration work and also rendering messenger services when the messengers were off duty.

Sheila's determination paid off when on the 13th of January 2003, she was promoted to Document Control Clerk, the position she is currently holding. She now has a strong financial background and she performs a variety of financial management duties.

She sees her work as interesting and having responsibilities. Her responsibilities include ensuring that service providers are paid for services rendered, within 30 days after receipt of invoices.

Having met the requirements for a certificate in Public Management through UNISA, the sky can only be the limit for Sheila.

MAINSTREAMING WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES

By Manase Makwela

The challenge for the Public Service is not only to attain the 2% target set by the Cabinet in terms of representivity of people with disabilities, but also to ensure that issues of reasonable accommodation and improved work environment are enhanced by making the Public Service an employer of choice for people with disabilities.

The Office currently has only one female with a disability, (Ms Mancha Elsinah Mogano), making the total number of officials with disabilities to two. This is by no means adequate in terms of for starters, meeting the set targets. However not all is lost. Izwi spoke to Deputy Director: Human Resource Management, Ms Phume Khumalo, who revealed the plans that are in place to close the existing gap.

- With regard to work environment and facilities, the Office has already started to put in place, general facilities suited for persons with disabilities.
- On Retention Policy and Strategy, the Office's Strategy has been drafted and will soon be finalized.
- In terms of Diversity Management Programme and Sensitisation, a training programme is being put in place. A Senior Human Resource Practitioner: Special Programmes, has been appointed to manage the Diversity Management Programme and Sensitisation.
- On recruitment and selection, advertisements of posts are being forwarded to organizations for persons with disabilities so as to recruit and attract candidates with disabilities. Ms Mogano, who is the Office's Switchboard Operator, was recruited in a similar fashion. Izwi had a chat with her to find out who she really is and what it is like for her to work for the OPSC. Her story appears on the next page.

MANCHA ELSINAH

MOGANO -- a woman at peace with herself and the world around her

By Manase Makwela

Ms Mancha Mogano is like a fire: lively and spontaneous yet exudes warmth. The first time you speak to her you are besieged by her ability to immediately put you at ease. She has no reservations about accepting her disability.



Her only wish is for Commissioners and staff to know that she is partially sighted so that they may understand when she does not respond to their hand waving greetings. "You see, with my condition, you have to be closer, for me to see your hand signals. Otherwise, you may think I am a bad person."

Mancha is a woman at peace with herself. When asked to share her naughty moments as a young girl, she gives account of the "little problem" her partial sightedness once got her into, with such infectious cheerfulness. "I was with my Isaac at a corner, exchanging sweet little nothings when my mother suddenly came by. I only saw her when she was closer and it was too late to make a run for it. As you can imagine, she went straight to my father to report about the 'horrible' scene she had just witnessed."

For a person who comes from a christian family, Mancha's friendliness and honesty, come as no surprise. Asked why there is a Bible and its reference booklet on her office desk, this lover of gospel music says: "Whenever I need spiritual strength, I consult the reference booklet to identify the appropriate scripture and then I go to the Bible for detailed information." She was born at Ga-Molepo in the Limpopo Province and moved to Mamelodi after getting married to her Isaac, with whom she has "two lovely daughters, Lethabo (21) and Lucky (15), who have both become "my closest friends." From Mamelodi, the Mogano family went to live at Nellmapius, which they call home today.

Having struggled with her sight since Grade 3, then Standard 1, Mancha's childhood has always been a cautious one. Although her sight problems led to her dropping out of school in Grade 9 and later in Grade 10, her scariest moment came when she was in Grade 11. As she says, "my eyes completely gave in and I thought

I would never see again. Nobody seemed to know where they could take me for help; no information about schools for the blind, nothing."

Being the first born in a family of three girls and two boys, Mancha was always assured of support when the going got tough. As she says, "at times I felt so overprotected that it came as no surprise when my father did not want me to get married." Knowing that her parents may not be part of her future, she sat her father down and had an emotional discussion with him. "Though he was satisfied at what we discussed, he still wanted to have a chat with both my husband-to-be and my mother-in-law to be.

Although Mancha appreciated the support from her parents and siblings, she did not and still does not like to be pitied. "I don't expect special favours. I want people to treat me like any other person who can contribute positively to the environment in which she finds herself. Where I need help I will ask." It was because of this attitude to life that when she was a housewife, she hated it with all her heart. Although she has nothing against being a housewife, for her, as a housewife with a disability, she wanted to stand on her two feet and prove that she can also provide for her family and not just the other way round.

Mancha's philosophy is simply, 'the taste of the pudding is in the eating'. "I just cannot say it cannot be done until I have tried it. I have also instilled this in my daughters to make sure that they do not allow others to deviate them from their dreams. Although at first I doubted myself, it was this philosophy that saw me registering for a computer course at Optima College in 2001."

Her dream was to be a Social Worker – a dream that was shattered when she had to leave school in Grade 11. While one could expect her to still be wallowing in the past, she says "you cannot hang onto the past forever. You have to draw lessons from it and move on." Besides, she sees her work as a Switchboard Operator as having elements of social work in it. "In my current line of work, I work with people of different moods and psychological make-up. My responsibility is to meet their communication needs."

She brings vast experience to the OPSC Switchboard office, having worked as a part-time Nurse and Counselor at the Sun Garden Hospice; part-time Switchboard Operator at the South African National Council for the Blind; Care Giver at Kalafong Hospital; and Call Centre Agent at Opticall.

MANCHA ELSINAH MOGANO -- continues...

Between 1999 and 2004, Mancha attended various courses and acquired various skills such as computer literacy; telephony; being a call centre agent; counseling; stress management; time management; listening; and communication skills. Although she can write in braille, one thing she still has to get right is to read it (braille).

Mancha openly talks about her relationship with her parents and regards her father as a hero. What I liked about my father was his love for the truth. "He did not take sides. If you were wrong he would say it irrespective of how you were related to him. He had time for people; he listened and also took advice from others." As one would expect, in bringing up her daughters, Mancha draws from the well of wisdom that her father left her.

She is as down-to-earth as they come yet greatly strong-willed. When you ask her where she got her inspiration to be where she is today, she mentions without thinking twice about it, "not being able to do matric; staying at home as a housewife; and meeting successful blind people."

In concluding our interview, I asked Mancha what she would say if the whole world were to stop and listen to her. Laughing, she looked at me hoping that I would let her not answer the question. I looked at her with a smile, and said 'yes, you and the world'. As if she just imagined herself on the stage talking to the world, she suddenly lit up. Before she could answer, the phone rang and on the other side, the caller wants to talk to somebody who called him wanting to have his gate at home fixed. As you would expect, Mancha did not know who to transfer the call to, yet she managed to make the caller realise and appreciate that she had no way of knowing who called him to fix the gate. Despite that, she still ended the call with a smile, saying "you are welcome sir."

She tells me that is the kind of calls she gets sometimes. "Even worse, others talk to you with a very disrespectful and rude tone and expect you to remain calm. Thankfully, drawing from my father's moral teachings, I treat each call as it comes. I cannot let one person spoil my day and that of the people I serve."

Having made her point, I look at her again and say 'the world'. "Yes, I would tell them..." and the phone rings again. This time the caller wants her to go and check if a

certain official is in the office because he is not answering the phone. I look at her with pity and she laughs. "You see, I can understand people temporarily pitying me for something that you can later laugh about like this one but not my disability. That's why I do not even use my white cane. I have it in my bag but I only use it when it is really necessary."

This time, I leave it to her to restart the conversation. She looks at me and say, "you see, I would say to them:

- as a person, you have to grab the opportunity as it comes and use it profitably;
- never lose confidence in yourself irrespective of your disability or condition; and
- do not hang onto the past. Draw lessons from it and move on."

Satisfied that I have got what I came for, I look at her again and release one of my thank-you-sister smiles. As I pick up my camera, she positions herself in front of the two computer screens that are part of her workstation. With her head to one side, she warns me that she rarely sits straight for a photo. As I direct her to which side to move her head, I find myself appreciating the energy in this woman of middle height, who is dressed in navy blue jersey and pair of trousers, a white poloneck, and black suede boots.

Just as I click the shooter of my camera, she moves her head to the side again, and I know I cannot win against her. As I show her the photos on the camera screen, she takes a magnifying glass to improve her vision. This broke my heart but recollecting our interview, I found solace in the fact that she is a strong willed woman who asks for no pity.

If I were to be disabled one day, I wish to be like her – at peace with myself and the world around me.

QUESTIONS STILL UNANSWERED

When one reads the life story of Commissioner Koko Mokgalong, one name that keeps coming up is that of former Commissioner, Ms Maria Rantho, who recently had a clinic posthumously named after her in Soshanguve.

Following are questions raised in a Paper she co-authored with Commissioner Mokgalong for Women's Day celebrations in 1998 at Musina, Limpopo Province. Some of these questions are still so relevant today that one could easily guess that if Commissioner Rantho were to get an opportunity from the 'other side', she would still ask them with the hope that somebody will do something to change the status quo.



Commissioner Rantho

Did you know that:

- "Women with disabilities are more likely to be poor or destitute, and to receive less food than other able-bodied women?"
- Women with disabilities are more likely to be illiterate than other able-bodied women?
- Women with disabilities are more likely to be without family and community support than other able-bodied women?
- Women with disabilities are less likely to be believed when reporting abuse or harassment than able-bodied women?
- The stigma of disability, myths and fears are likely to increase disabled women's social isolation?
- Women with disabilities experience violence and oppression, but without receiving the same sympathy and respect awarded to other able-bodied women?
- Women with disabilities do not receive the same admiration given to other able-bodied women?

These questions in mind, the big one that the able-bodied people have to ask themselves, is what role can they play to change the status quo for people with disabilities. If there ever was a time to start, that time would be now
– Editor.

WOMEN ABUSE - the basic facts

By Phume Khumalo

WHAT IS ABUSE?

Abuse is any form of behaviour that controls another person, causes physical harm or fear, makes someone do things they do not want to do, or prevents them from doing things they want to do. Abuse can be verbal, emotional, physical, sexual, material or financial.



FORMS OF ABUSE

Physical Abuse includes:

- slapping, punching, hitting, kicking, shoving, scratching, biting, throwing things at you;
- threatening or attacking you;
- locking you in or out of the house or abandoning you in a dangerous place; and
- refusing to help you when you are injured, sick or pregnant.

Sexual Abuse includes:

- making you wear clothes or do sexual things that make you uncomfortable;
- pressuring or forcing you to perform sexual acts that you do not want to do;
- forcing you to have sex when you do not want to; raping you or threatening to rape you; and
- forcing you to have sex with other people.

Emotional Abuse includes:

- insulting you;
- making you feel stupid or worthless;
- ridiculing your beliefs;
- humiliating you in public or private;
- ignoring you;
- intimidating or harassing you;
- being overly jealous or possessive;
- accusing you of infidelity without good reason;
- isolating you from your family and friends;
- preventing you from going to work or school;
- attacking your children or your pets;

Financial or Material Abuse includes:

- threatening to kill you or to leave you or throw you out;
- threatening to kill himself or go mad if you leave or don't do what he wants;
- taking or spending your money;
- preventing you from having a job;
- taking or destroying your possessions;
- spending most of the money on himself or giving you a very small allowance expecting you to account for every cent or do more with the money than is possible; and
- refusing to give you information about your joint financial situation.

Abuse at the Workplace

The more common abuse that occurs at the work place is sexual harassment. Its occurrence has been higher in cases where the female is the object of the harassment than the male being the target of harassment. This is not to minimize those instances where the reverse has been true.

Sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination that violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Verbal or physical advances, requests for sexual favours, or other verbal or physical conduct of any sexual nature's submission or rejection of these conducts will explicitly or implicitly affect a person's employment, or interferes with his/her work performance, or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive environment.

A victim may consent or agree to conduct and actively participate in it even though it is offensive and objectionable to him/her to avoid adverse treatment. However, submission to such behavior does not negate the victim's rights to file a sexual harassment.

Another form of abuse that is found at the workplace is emotional abuse. This form of abuse is like brain washing in that it systematically wears away at the victim's self-confidence, sense of self-worth, trust in their own perceptions, and self-concept.

Many women find that emotional abuse is difficult to name or even talk about. They often wonder if it is serious because you cannot see it, like bruises or broken bones, hence it is often not reported. For example:

Abusive Expectations

The other person places unreasonable demands on you and wants you to put everything else aside to attend to their needs. But no matter how much you give, it's never enough.

You are subjected to constant criticism, and you are constantly berated because you don't fulfill all this person's needs.

Emotionally abused women state that one of the biggest problems they face is that others seldom take it seriously.

To whom can I turn if I find myself in such situations?

First it is important to check the Office's Gender Equality and Sexual Harassment Policy, accessible on the intranet at <http://home.opsc.gov.za/HRMatters/Policies> and take the steps listed there. It is recommended that if you need any clarification on the issue of harassment in the workplace, you consult Ms Eva Mahlokweng at the Office's Special Programmes Unit (tel. 352-1073), to help answer your questions.

Please don't hesitate to call our EAP call centre on 0800 004 770 if you think you are being sexually harassed or need to talk to someone. Our contracted EAP service provider, the Care Ways Group employee assistant counselors are available 24hrs a day to help you decide what steps to take.

Ms Khumalo is OPSC's Deputy Director: Human Resource Management.

The Long Walk Still Ahead

By Mabel Morontse

On 10 August 2006, all female employees from institutions falling under the portfolio of the Minister for the Public Service and Administration, Ms Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi gathered at CSIR in Pretoria, to celebrate women's month. Speaker after speaker, the common message was that there's a need to carry forward what was started by the women who marched in 1956, by ensuring that all negative issues that still hamper the development and rights of women are addressed.



Ms Odette Ramsingh

OPSC's Director-General, Ms Odette Ramsingh, welcomed and thanked all women for coming forward to celebrate women's month. She urged women to be thankful of the determination, resilience and courage that 1956 heroines had, because if it was not of them, women would not be celebrating women's month. Ms Ramsingh also encouraged women to continue striving to address the imbalances of the past. While highlighting the positive role that women have played in the Public Service for the past ten years, Ms Ramsingh also raised a concern that not all government departments have met the targets set for representivity of women and people with disabilities, by the March 2005 deadline. She deservedly singled out Limpopo and North-West Provinces for managing to exceed the representivity targets set by government.

The occasion was also graced by Ms Amina Cachalia, the 1956 Women's March Veteran, who took the audience through what the women went through as they were marching in 1956. She highlighted that on that day South Africa almost stood still, as women from all walks of life marched from Strijdom Square to the Union Buildings. Comparing the 1956 and the 2006 marches, she said that the mood was not the same. According to her, during the 1956 march, women were serious, quite and anxious but with the 2006 march, women were happy, jolly and vibrant. She mentioned that although thousands of petitions were collected from the marchers, the intended recipient, Mr JG Strijdom, the then Prime Minister of South Africa, was not there to receive them (petitions). As she was talking, there was an element of envy among the audience wishing to have been there. She urged women to face the challenges that they still have to address since they are not yet completely free.

Minister Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi said that 50 years

ago there would not have been a gathering of that nature, for the emancipation of women. She encouraged women to ensure that there is national unity; they occupy leadership roles in society; and they mentor younger women. She further pleaded with women in the Public Service to ensure that they are meaningfully engaged in their work environment. In cases where they are not, she advised that they should consult with their managers and insist that they should be given more valuable duties.



Ms Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi

Representing people with disabilities was Ms Rhulani Baloyi, who was born in Limpopo and has worked for the SABC for six years as a presenter. She shared with the audience, some of the prejudices that people with disabilities come across in their daily lives. Some of the challenges include the following:

- Having a driver's license as a requirement for job opportunities, thus automatically excluding blind people.
- When they are hired, jobs reserved for the disabled people are mostly telephone related duties such as being a Switchboard Operator. This gives the impression that disabled people cannot do any other job.
- When they excel at school, people would not think that they got the high marks because they deserve them.

"Employment is still not easy for us; we are economically active and we can do it; please do not set us for failure", said Rhulani. She pleaded with the attendants not to unnecessarily feel pity for the disabled people.



Ms Rhulani Baloyi



Ms Amina Cachalia

STATS TALK By Manase Makwela

In Ms Mmathari Mashao's article on page 2 of this issue, she mentions that "...the reality is that in workplaces a large concentration of women is still in the lowest ranks and a minute percentage is at top level." A comparative look at the internal statistics as at 31 July 2006 suggests that while the Office has more than thirty vacant posts, there are eleven more male SMS members and eleven more male MMS members. However, the tables are turned at the bottom levels, where there are thirty more females than male employees.

It is however encouraging to note that at the executive level, the OPSC boasts three females out of six filled positions. That previous incumbents of the three executive positions occupied by women were males, is also an indication that there is a concerted effort to level the playing field.

Whilst the Office deserves to be congratulated for meeting the previous target of 30% representation of women in senior management positions by the deadline of March 2005, the real challenge as with most departments, is the target of 2% representation with regard to people with disabilities. However, seeing that a new deadline by which to achieve the 2% target has been set to 31 March 2010, the Office should be able to meet this deadline and also provide a conducive working environment for employees with disabilities. The recent efforts that the Office is making to fill the existing representivity gap, such as submitting advertisements of posts to organizations for people with disabilities, should therefore be applauded.

In her article in this issue of Izwi, Commissioner Koko Mokgalong in reference to Ms Maria Rantho, says, "...Maria persuaded me to apply for the post. She even threatened to resign as a Commissioner if another woman was not appointed in the Commission." This is an indication that the Commission has been grappling with the reality of women representation since its formation in the current form.

A look at the Commission today reveals that while efforts have been made to improve women representivity, the challenge still remains. It is however acknowledged that there is a number of elements at play such as provincial nomination of candidates, before appointment of Commissioners. Therefore one comes to appreciate that the appointment of women may not necessarily be as straightforward as with other posts.

Statistics aside, as alluded to in *Womanhood*, the importance of acknowledging and appreciating the strides that women have made in the Public Service as well as recognizing the contribution of women to the promotion of equality both in the workplace and in the home front, cannot be overemphasized.

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Celebrating Women in the O/PSC.

The 2006 Women's March to the Union Buildings in pictures!

photos by: **Mabel Morontse**

Izwi was part of the 50th Anniversary of the Women's March to the Union Buildings.

**MALIBONGWE
IGAMA LAMAKHOSI-
KAZI!
PRAISE THE
WOMEN'S NAME!**

