



HERS-SA

Leading - Learning - Lifting



20  
years

CELEBRATION  
OF SERVICE

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# FOREWORD

*Dr Soraya Beukes*

**Dr Soraya Beukes** is the HERS-SA Board Chairperson, with years of experience as an academic. She spent six months of her LLD years at University Libre Brussels. During the last year of her LLD, she worked as a research associate at the Division for Post-Graduate Studies at the University of the Western Cape, Where she coordinated, writing coached and managed research programmes such as thesis writing, literature review, proposal writing and writing for publication. In 2017 she did a 10-month Post Doctoral Fellowship at the University Rey Juan Carlos, where she completed a paper on socioeconomic rights and austerity measures.

The HERS-SA Brand has stood the test of time over its 20 years of advocating for gender equity in Higher Education (HE). The vision of the founding women Dr Lesley Shackleton, Penny Franz; Desiree Simonis and Dr Sarah Riordan continues to evolve through the various programs that HERS-SA promote and assist in the development of women leaders in tertiary education. This vision continues in the forward momentum provided by the current board Dr Soraya Beukes (Chairperson), Shahieda Hendricks (Deputy Chairperson) and Directors Brightness Mangalothi, Dr Mamsie Motshekga-Sebolai; Nonkululeko Tsita and Ursula riddles.

Despite our proven abilities, the plight of gender inequity remains stark in HE. This omnipresence we attempt to oppose through HERS-SA leadership programmes, webinars on awareness and development. In our quest for forward momentum, it is incumbent on us to drive the sustainable development goals and in particular goal number five: gender equality. HERSA is the vehicle through which we can continue to make a difference in HE. Most alumni that were graced as HERS-SA Higher Education Women Leaders Awards Awardees have attested to our support of their development through the ranks.

We continuously aim to inspire and attract new leadership talent to the HE academic and professional staff sector, thus creating role models, advancing gender transformation and creating visibility for higher education women leaders in South Africa. HERS-SA encourages these women to lift as they raise, other women through the ranks.

For the last 20 years HERS-SA continues to zealously promote gender equity in leadership within higher education. This is HERS-SA raison d'etre. It is this reason that drives our programmes to chaperon our HERS-SA Alumni on their journey to the pastures of leadership in HE through our Emerging Leadership Programme, Leadership Academy Programme and HERS-SA Academic Leadership Awards.

It is our mission to change the status quo of imbalance that the dismal six women Vice-Chancellors in South African Universities, versus the 20 males attest to. Leadership equity in HE in SA remains at an all-time challenge. Women continue to face challenges in reaching their full potential in leadership positions that is still dominated by heterosexual males.

The Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation in addressing the UN Women's participation in Higher Education in Southern Africa seminar, May 2023, had the following to say: "In South Africa, women in Higher Education remain under-represented in the area of permanent staff and this inequity is more pronounced at senior positions". This UN seminar (UNCSSW 67th Session) evaluates progress and formulates concrete policies to promote gender equality and the advancement of women worldwide.

The government admits that there are still gaps in the system and there is a need to accelerate the work that seeks to improve the position of women decision-makers within our higher education institutions and national system of innovation. The Minister identified the many barriers that women face including: "Failure to recognise, identify and nurture women's talents and there is a need to emulate progressive policies for countries like Sweden where women account as much as 43% as vice-chancellors".

Furthermore, the Ministerial Task Team (MTT) Study observed that HE institutional cultures and practice work against the retention and progression of black academics. Therefore, the recommendations of the MTT Study are as follow:

- progress towards the achievement of equity targets should be built into the performance agreements of university senior management; and
- a collaboration between the Department of Higher Education and Training and the Department of Labor to review the extent to which universities comply with employment equity legislation.



HERS-SA recognises the challenges whereby women and gender-diverse people in HE are not held in the same standing in the workplace as heterosexual males. We are striving to embrace and achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) five: to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Gender equality is a fundamental human right and necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. As HERS-SA we are hopeful in our efforts to work on achieving the 2030 SDG goals, National Development Plan 2030 and the African Union Agenda 2063. These goals recognise reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources in parallel with national laws. To assist in achieving these goals HERS-SA has evolved our leadership programmes to resonate with the challenges faced in Higher Education Institutions.

To celebrate our strides over 20 years, HERS-SA 20-year celebration was underpinned by our inaugural HER-SA Academic Leadership Awards. In South Africa's higher education, while there are many awards none have fully recognised women leaders in HE nationally, for their role and contribution as leaders in education and innovation, for the development of the knowledge economy of the country. These are the reasons that HERS-SA has created seven award categories, to celebrate women leaders, which are: Lifetime Achiever; Trailblazer; Humanitarian; Women in STEM; Women in Humanities and Social Sciences; Women in Academic Administration; Emerging Young Women Leaders.

The 20 years of challenges in trying to turn the tide on gender inequality has not jaded our efforts; HERS-SA is energised by the resilience of our women that reach the pinnacle albeit not in the volumes women deserve.

**Dr Soraya Beukes** (HERS-SA Board Chairperson)

## PAST AND CURRENT

# Board Members

1. Nasima Badsha (Former Chairperson)
2. Colette February
3. Ingrid Fourie
4. Penny Franz
5. Loveness Kaunda
6. Charmaine Klein
7. Firoza Patel
8. Carmelita Raizenberg
9. Sarah Riordan
10. Lesley Shackleton
11. Désirée Simonis
12. Sabie Surtee (Former Director)
13. Karen Esler (Former Chairperson)
14. Glenda Wildschut
15. Nan Warner
16. Lynne Rippenaar-Moses (Former Chairperson)
17. Fatima Darries
18. Denise Zinn
19. Nonceba Mbambo-Kekana
20. Heidi Prozesky
21. Melanie Sadeck
22. Mamsie Motshekga Sebolai
23. Lorna Holtman
24. Marlene Verhoef
25. Glenda Wildschut
26. Nonkululeko Cynthia Tsita
27. Ursula Riddle
28. Soraya Beukes (**Chairperson**)
29. Shahieda Hendricks
30. Brightness Mangolothi - (**Director**)

# THE FIRST DECADE

*Dr Sarah Riordan*

On a clear summer's day in 2001, about 100 women from universities in the Western Cape gathered at Devon Valley Hotel in Stellenbosch for a two-day event intended to address gender equity in SA universities. Organised by the late Lesley Shackleton, Director of the University of Cape Town's International Office and Penny Franz, Administrator, that was the start of HERS-SA.

Lesley had established contact with Cynthia Secor, the President of Higher Education Resource Services (HERS) Mid-America, established in 1972, on her previous official visit to UCT and was the link between the two countries.

After the event, two attendees from the then Cape Technikon approached Lesley and expressed interest in getting involved and growing the network. Sarah Riordan and Desiree Simonis were academic staff in the Technikon's Management Faculty and both recognised the potential that this network could offer to other university women.

Combining their collective talents and in consultation with HERS Mid-America and local stakeholders, the four women formally established HERS-SA in 2003.

Lesley was the Chair, Sarah designed the HERS-SA Academy, Desiree handled all the legal registration and facilitated workshops, whilst Penny managed administration and finance.

Working two to six days a month, they established an independent board, rented a small office in Rondebosch, Cape Town, and initiated contact with the senior management of local universities and the human resources directors of all SA universities.

They then set about ensuring that access to development opportunities was actively created and shared.

Through the generous sponsorship of the Andrew W Mellon Foundation in the USA, small groups of SA university women were able to attend month-long development programmes at Bryn Mawr College, Smith College, Wellesley College and Mount Holyoke College.

These opportunities helped to establish a core of empowered women, with the intention that they would contribute further to advancing the gender equity agenda in South African universities.

Many of these women are highly successful leaders today and some still serve on the HERS-SA Board.

Based on the annual HERS Summer Institute in the USA, the first HERS-SA Academy took place in 2003 and drew 80 university women from all over South Africa for one week to learn, lift and lead together. SA universities nominated and sponsored their participants and the Carnegie Corporation provided funding to enable six colleagues from Nigeria, Ghana, Tanzania and Uganda to attend. This annual residential Academy model of plenary sessions, breakaway workshops and networking remains today. Smaller one- and two-day workshop events were also offered in the Western Cape to address development topics of interest.

In 2010, for various professional and personal reasons, the founding members assumed other roles and HERS-SA appointed the late Dr Sabie Surtee as the Director of HERS-SA. Together with her new team, she continued to advocate for gender equity in the university sector.

## The HERS-SA founders

**Dr Lesley Shackleton** (late), a marine geologist who later completed her PhD in Gender Studies, became the founding Director of UCT's International Academic Programmes Office. She helped to found SAWISE (South African Women in Science and Engineering) and HERS-SA.

**Penny Franz**, now retired, worked extensively as an administrator in the higher education, environmental, national government, and non-government organisation (NGO) sectors.

**Desiree Simonis** BA (Hons) LLB was a lecturer in law, with a special interest in employees' and women's rights in the workplace. She was part of the working group that drafted the sexual harassment policy for the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT).

**Dr Sarah Riordan** was a lecturer in management who later managed her own consulting practice in Cape Town. She currently works in learning and development at the United Nations World Food Programme (UNWFP) in Rome.



**Prof Nokuthula Sibiyi** is Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research, Innovation and Engagement at Mangosuthu University of Technology. She previously rose through the ranks at Durban University of Technology, from head of the Department of Nursing to Executive Dean: Faculty of Health Sciences, to DVC: Teaching and Learning. Prof Sibiyi was made a Fellow of the Academy of Nursing of South Africa in 2015, in recognition of her contribution to primary healthcare for mothers and children, and she won the award for South African Distinguished Woman Scientist in Humanities and Social Sciences in 2018. Her research area is primary health care with a specific focus on maternal and child health. She has published over 120 journal articles, conference proceedings, books, and book chapters, and has successfully supervised 60 Masters' and 31 PhD students.

## GALVANISING WOMEN'S EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP

*Prof Nokuthula Sibiyi*

Exposure to HERS-SA has equipped me not only with the skills for leadership but also the desire and inspiration to become a leader in higher education.

Whilst head of the Department of Nursing at the Durban University of Technology (DUT), I attended HERS-SA Academy workshops in September 2011. Inspired by the robust discussions there on women in leadership, I attended a follow-up "mini" HERS-SA Academy in 2012. This Academy equipped me with leadership skills and sparked my desire and inspiration to aim for leadership positions in the higher education sector.

Since then, I recorded achievements for the DUT Department of Nursing, including successfully implementing a new undergraduate nursing programme in which pass rates progressively improved to over 90%. As head of department, led implementation of an extended curriculum programme and postgraduate research workshops. Overall, the department achieved improved graduation rates and research outputs while 10 staff members successfully completed their master's degrees and three completed doctoral studies. Four staff members were promoted from lecturer to senior lecturer positions.

I was later appointed as Executive Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences at DUT, my core business to provide direction to 10 academic departments with 3000 students spread across three faculties. During this time, I was awarded by the then Department of Science and Technology as the 2018 South African Distinguished Woman Scientist in Humanities and Social Sciences. I also received several research awards from DUT.

Before my term as Executive Dean ended, I was appointed in 2020 as Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Teaching and Learning at DUT, just when the country entered the first "hard lockdown" due to the Covid-19 pandemic. My core business included providing strategic leadership, management and coordination of the academic activities of the university.

Guided by the skills I had acquired as a HERS-SA Fellow, I managed to develop teaching and learning plans that ensured that the academic project was not compromised, and that no student was left behind for the two consecutive years of the Covid-19 impact on education.

In 2021, I had the privilege of being selected as one of 30 women academics to participate in the first cohort of the Higher Education and Leadership Management (HELM) Women in Leadership (WiL) Programme 2020/2021. The HELM's WiL programme focuses on creating a pipeline and expanding the leadership pool, advancing and supporting women to lead change in a complex higher education context. It prepares women leaders and managers for a world of balancing paradoxical demands, engaging with pressing student and public voices, and synthesising global and local imperatives in sustainable ways. These are viewed as opportunities to shape an environment in which women can succeed and ultimately thrive. I successfully completed the programme in 2021.

In September 2022, I was appointed at the Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT) as the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research, Innovation and Engagement. I am tasked to provide strategic leadership and direction in research, innovation, technology transfer, partnerships, international linkages, and engagement, including community engagement, in pursuance of the institution's vision and mission.

It is a long way from heading up a single academic department and pursuing a research interest in that field.

I extend my sincere appreciation to HERS-SA for galvanising my interest in executive leadership and management in higher education. I urge universities to support women to attend HERS-SA Academy initiatives so as to advance equity and empowerment of women in leadership in higher education.

**HERS-SA**

*in collaboration*

# HERS-SA; HERStory

*Prof Hilda Israel*

HERStory is an overview of what HERS has meant to me in my journey as an academic in leadership positions. It is a story of a South African academic who was privileged to be one of the six women graduates of both the HERS-SA and HERS-USA programmes in 2006.

Why HERStory? A story is a narrative, representing what is meaningful to the woman telling HER story. It cuts across disciplines. An auto-ethnography “describes and systematically analyses the personal experiences of individuals (the 'auto' aspect) to understand the ethnic or cultural (ethno) experience” (Khair, 2020). So, the internal experience, the challenges, the choices confronting one woman are explored against the backdrop of other women on the same journey, thus extending their understanding of their personal academic identity.

HERS-SA saw me spending a week in Cape Town as a delegate of the Transformation Committee of Nelson Mandela University (NMU). That programme exposed me to management and leadership contexts within a higher education institution. An immediate outcome was that, for the next few years, I sat on the committee that sent more women to HERS-SA, and visibly saw the confidence that the programme instilled in some of them. It was the HERS mentorship concept that impacted most on women who attended.

Such mentorship is critical. This has been confirmed by research indicating that “mentoring is a strategy to enhance levels of self-esteem and research productivity and ultimately improve the representation of women in leadership and senior positions” (Obers, 2014).

For me, mentorship then came in the form of activists like Dr Ruby-Ann Levendal, Prof Gordon Zide, Prof Thoko Mayekiso and Prof Jonathan Jansen.

Then came six weeks at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania on the international HERS-USA programme, where I was one of six South Africans attending. This experience was a stepping-stone to success in our academic careers.

HERS brought us together as diverse South African women who returned home to challenge the norms; to choose differently; to choose change; to choose challenge despite the patriarchal, race-based system within which we worked.

For two of my colleagues, this is where our choices, and challenges, have led us:

Dr Choice Makhetha is now Senior Director of Student Affairs at Stellenbosch University and a former Special Assistant to the Vice-Chancellor of the University of the Free State.

Dr Daisy Selematsela is now a University Librarian at the University of the Witwatersrand. HERS gave us exposure and training in almost every higher education scenario. Topics we interrogated included:

- The many shifts of Black women
- The personal challenge of women in leadership
- Understanding gender and organisations
- The struggle for diversity in Higher Education
- Dealing with the future NOW
- Leadership and institutional transformation
- Mapping Your Leadership Development

Being exposed to international experiences enriched us as women academics. Not only did HERS-USA raise our benchmarks, but it challenged us to do things differently. You choose differently. You challenge yourself and others differently.

My HERStory is that the insights gained on the programmes prepared me for the challenges I face as an academic leader. They provided more options, more choices, more lenses through which I viewed my role. HERS also gave me a different identity – as an international scholar. It meant that my knowledge was wider, that my network of academics now extended across the world; that every HERS alumnus was now available to me to consult on whatever I needed. Prolific researchers are described as having the ability to develop a good network of international fellow scholars and strong mentors (Geber, 2009).

As a 21st century woman academic, what would one challenge today? Patriarchy? Gender-based violence? Sexual harassment? Racism? Corruption? Verbal and emotional abuse? Social injustice? Colonial curriculum content?

What would you challenge about yourself?

Your prejudices? Covert racism? Beliefs? Fears? Circumstances?



**Prof Hilda Israel** is the Dean of the Faculty of Education. She completed the BA, BA (Hon) and UHDE at UKZN, followed by the B Ed at UNISA. As a Fulbright Scholar at Baylor University, Texas, she completed the Master of Science in Education and Doctor of Education. Prof Israel has since added many professional development qualifications to her profile, including Management Skills for 21st Century Leaders, International Developments in Doctoral Education & Training (Scotland) and Supervision of the Post-Graduate Student.

Your strengths? Indulgences? Comfort zones? Yes, challenge them. Choose to stretch yourself.

Choose to manage yourself better. Choose to keep your sense of humour.

As a woman academic, one lives in a constant yin-yang of challenge and choice.

Without the challenge, you do not have a choice!

Without the challenge, you stay where you are.

Without the challenge, there is no forward movement.

So, choose your challenge first. Choose carefully; and choose wisely.

Your choices define your academic identity. Your choices define your academic career journey.

In the end, the challenge is simple: Do you accept that you are what your choices have made you?





## ●●● Personal development lessons learned from attending HERS-SA and HERS-USA programmes ●●●

*Dr Selematsela*

**Daisy Selematsela (PhD)** is the University Librarian at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits University) Previously served as the Executive Director Library and Information Services at the University of South Africa (UNISA) and Acting Vice Principal for Research and Innovation; Executive Director Knowledge Management Corporate at the NRF. An appointed Professor of Practice of Knowledge Management of the University of Johannesburg. Vice President, 2023-2027; Executive Committee Member of Committee on Data of the International Science Council (ISC). She served on policy forums such as the UNESCO Science Sector; SA National Commission for UNESCO Forum; Executive member: International Council for Science Union (ICSU SCID) ad Hoc Committee on Information and Data; ICSU EDC Panel - International Science Union World Data Centre Panel.

Attending the HERS-SA 2005 was an eye opener for my personal development, in being amongst women from different domains with similar career objectives and with the quest for affirmation embraced by the participants. I was a Senior Deputy Director in an academic library at the time. In my journey with the HERS programmes, I have witnessed first-hand the barriers that women in higher education face. I have experienced the structural challenges that are embodied in, and masquerade as, employment criteria and standards; the ambiguity, the shifting or rising bar, mixed messages from executive management, difficulty balancing work and home life, the lack of time for research and formal mentoring, and the difficulty of establishing working relationships or collaborations unless you are the “so- anointed” golden boy or girl coming in!

The question that then begs to be answered is: How has my exposure to HERS helped to champion my career trajectory to reach the success I so deserve?

When I experienced not being considered for positions because of my age, what I learned at the HERS programme about institutional conflicts and structures assisted me to ask myself some clarifying questions in order to map my Personal Development Plan.

I had to understand the consequences (advantageous or not) of traversing boundaries and/or straddling diverse academic communities. Decide on the kind of professional I wanted to be. Establish a game plan and find a mentor. I resisted the challenge of trying to fix both the “Neck and Hip problem”, to use the words of Adrian Tinsley (my HERS USA mentor), and decided to take ownership of my Personal Development Plan and just go for it!

A month after returning from the HERS-USA programme at Bryn Mawr College in 2006, I made a career-defining move to manager at an institution within the National System of Innovation (NSI). I then moved on to hold senior executive positions at universities, including an acting role as a Deputy vice-chancellor for Research and Innovation. I serve on a number of scientific editorial boards, boards of directors of national and international bodies, and was recently elected as Vice President of the Committee on Data (CODATA) of the International Science Council – one of the first women and first African, let alone an information specialist, to hold this position.

My passion is to inspire the next generation of librarians and address the plight of women in the modern world of work, based on my experiences of how to make decisions on what opportunities to take up, and which to let slide.



**My passion is to inspire the next generation of librarians and address the plight of women in the modern world of work, based on my experiences of how to make decisions on what opportunities to take up, and which to let slide.**





**Dr Kelebogile Choice**

**Makhetha** is a Senior Director: Student Affairs at Stellenbosch University. She has served as Vice-Rector for Student Affairs and External Relations at the University of the Free State (UFS), and as Transformation Advisor in the Office of the Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the Central University of Technology (CUT)..

## HERS Opportunities

*Dr Kelebogile Choice Makhetha*

It is unbelievable that it's already 20 years of HERS-SA empowering women in higher education. Congratulations!

While serving and leading as the Deputy Dean of Student Affairs at the University of the Free State, in 2005, I had an opportunity to attend the HERS-SA Academy at the UCT Business School in Cape Town. It was an exceptional experience and a moment which clarified my career journey forward and unlocked other opportunities.

The HERS-SA Academy gave me the tools and resources I needed, as well as exposure to powerful women leaders within higher education in South Africa. I learnt so much from their experiences and career journeys. The most important lessons I learnt were to own my career journey, to take full responsibility for my further development, direction and progression, and to intentionally build a network of influential colleagues from diverse fields of expertise and backgrounds, relevant to my career path. These colleagues would become great advisors and resources through the different stages of my career and life journey.

HERS-SA Academy deepened my courage and commitment to fight all the battles in my path, successfully, to show great resilience and always show up when it matters most. I got to understand what was at stake and therefore I ensured great support for more women leaders from my institution to enable them to attend HERS-SA.

At the beginning of 2006, I received a surprise call: I had been awarded a fully-sponsored opportunity to attend the month-long HERS Mid-America Summer Institute, focusing on empowering women in senior positions in higher education, at Bryan Mawr College in Pennsylvania. I was extremely excited and valued the opportunity because I did not even understand how I had been chosen as one of the three or four women to attend, from among the many women who attended the HERS-SA Academy in 2005.

“HERS-SA Academy deepened my courage and commitment to fight all the battles in my path, successfully, to show great resilience and always show up when it matters most.”

The time came to go to the USA. The programme was super-loaded, weekdays and weekends. The sessions were powerfully engaging, providing opportunities to unpack critical aspects of higher education and efforts towards the empowerment of women leaders in faculty and support services. Colleagues from different universities in the USA, from other countries and our team from South Africa, shared knowledge and experiences, while also building connections and networks that would continue beyond the Institute.

I enjoyed the sessions with specialists in different fields of higher education, especially the moments of sharing experiences and expertise in leadership and transformation, as well as sharing advice on designing one's own career path consciously and with unwavering determination – “remaining in the driver's seat always”.

These were exceptional moments of learning from one another, getting to understand the higher education landscape better, through both the American perspective and also sharing South Africa's higher education layout and governance structures. It was beautiful to realise that the challenges were similar, although contexts and approaches were different.



## ... HERS Opportunities ...

CONTINUED

The HERS Mid-America Institute of 2006 fast-tracked my growth and development and solidified my commitment to empowering other women through the connections I made. This opportunity unlocked powerful connections that deepened and eventually ensured that more women availed themselves for leadership positions, having seen the kind of leadership style that I intentionally modelled. This meant being human, courageous and ready to lead change, approachable and empowering to every person I crossed paths with.

Sharing knowledge, connections and other resources to ensure continuous efforts to prepare the next generation of women leaders in higher education in South Africa, is crucial.

Stemming from HERS, other opportunities opened up at different stages of my career.

HERS was the launch pad which provided me with a solid foundation and focus, for the different roles I went on to hold in higher education and the broader society. When I became the Vice-Rector: External Relations at the University of the Free State in 2012, and later when my portfolio broadened to include Student Affairs, I took up the responsibility for women empowerment.

Working closely with Human Resources, we ensured a dedicated budget allocation to give more women an opportunity to attend the HERS-SA Academy. We also created more platforms for women to empower themselves further by accessing many other opportunities locally and internationally. My job was to remove barriers in their paths and to fight battles they were not yet equipped to fight, always demonstrating what is possible when resources are availed and positive energy flows across the system.

This consciousness has remained ingrained in my head and my heart, to this day. In every role I play, irrespective of the title, women empowerment remains a priority.

I will always value that first crucial developmental opportunity to attend the HERS-SA Academy because, from there, my career journey was clarified and remained my priority, while I intentionally supported other women and created opportunities for them too – just as I was supported on my early career journey.

Congratulations to HERS-SA on 20 years of empowering women and increasing the pipeline of women leaders in senior and executive positions within higher education in South Africa. Thank you for the exposure provided through HERS-SA and USA.

All the best for the future!

## HERS-SA ACADEMY TESTIMONIES

“The manner in which the sessions were designed was interesting. We had interactive discussion sessions, presentations, and dinners. They were different – it was not one boring session design where you had to listen to the presenter only. The speakers were also prepared for the presentations which made them interesting, as they were also sharing their experiences in order to empower us.”

“Absolutely worthwhile to be a part of the women in leadership. We must continue with these talks as it helps one to grow and know that you are not alone.”

“The experience I have gained will help me in advancing with my career from now on. The speakers were very inspiring and they motivated me to believe in myself and continue doing the good work in order to be successful and be where they are today. I realized it is possible.”



# HERS-SA ACADEMY PHOTOS







# EMERGING WOMEN LEADERS PROGRAMME

IN-PERSON, DOUBLETREE HOTEL, WOODSTOCK, CAPE TOWN

**26th - 29th MAY 2024**

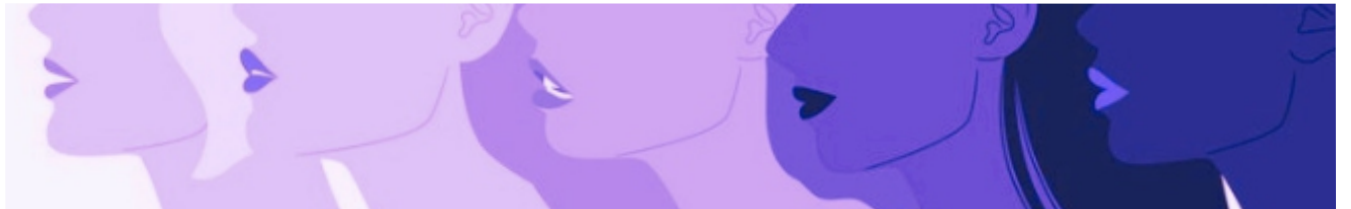
**ARE YOU AN ASPIRING LEADER OR WANT TO REFINE YOUR LEADERSHIP SKILLS AS A WOMAN LEADER?**

This programme has been created with you in mind. Learn more about leading people, processes, and yourself. Get to network, collaborate and work with other Women leaders from different universities.

Ask gurus in leadership questions and hear about other Women's experiences and best practices in the sector.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

[www.hers-sa.org.za](http://www.hers-sa.org.za)  
email: [info@hers-sa.org.za](mailto:info@hers-sa.org.za) or  
[director@hers-sa.org.za](mailto:director@hers-sa.org.za)



# HERS-SA ACADEMY (HYBRID)

CAPE TOWN

**25th - 29th AUGUST 2024**

Come learn from leaders who will provide you with the tools to navigate the higher education sector. Guiding you through the process of developing your personal leadership skills and career planning as a woman leader, managing teams, comprehending institutional procedures and systems and interacting with external stakeholders.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

[www.hers-sa.org.za](http://www.hers-sa.org.za)  
email: [info@hers-sa.org.za](mailto:info@hers-sa.org.za) or  
[director@hers-sa.org.za](mailto:director@hers-sa.org.za)



# FEMALE VICE-CHANCELLORS IN SOUTH AFRICA

## The Winds of Change in Higher Education

According to Butler-Adam (2013) South Africa had 36 higher education institutions (including technikons, which later became universities of technology). Following the mergers instituted by the then Minister of Education, Kader Asmal, the country had 23 universities – now 26 after the establishment of new institutions. To date out of 26 universities there are six (6) women Vice-Chancellors.

The strong winds of change started with the appointment of a woman Vice-Chancellor, in 1994.

### Infographic

**1994**

Prof Brenda Gourley was appointed as the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Natal, now the University of Kwa-Zulu-Natal (Merger of the University of Natal and the University of Durban-Westville, in 2004). She is the first female Vice-Chancellor, post-apartheid.

**1996**

Dr Mamphele Ramphele became the first black and the first woman Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cape Town (UCT).

**1998**

Prof Connie Mogale-Mokadi was the first female Vice-Chancellor at the Technikon of Witwatersrand (Merged with Vista Soweto and the Rand Afrikaans University to form the University of Johannesburg in 2005).

Prof Mapule Ramashala served as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Durban-Westville from 1998 to 2002.

**2001**

Prof Norma Ried-Birley was appointed as the first female Vice-Chancellor of the University of the Witwatersrand. She stepped down in 2003.

Prof Ngoato Takalo – Appointed as the first African woman Vice-Chancellor at the North West University. Prof Ngoato Takala served from 2001 – 2003.

**2003**

Prof Mapule Ramashala served as Vice-Chancellor of the Medical University of South Africa (MEDUNSA now Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University), in 2003 and 2004.

Prof Rachel Gumbe became the University of Zululand's first black female Vice-Chancellor.

**2006**

Prof Vuyisa Mazwi-Tanga was the first Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) Vice-Chancellor, this was post-merger. She was at the helm for eight years.

**2008**

Prof Irene Moutlana was appointed as the first woman Vice-Chancellor at Vaal University of Technology. She served two successful terms over 10 years and retired at the end of her term.

**2009**

The University of Pretoria appointed Prof Cheryl de la Rey as its Vice-Chancellor. After nine years at the helm, she accepted the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Canterbury post in New Zealand.

**2010**

Prof Fikile Mazibuko became the University of Zululand's second black female Rector and Vice-Chancellor.

**2012**

Prof Nthabiseng Ogude was appointed as the first female Vice-Chancellor at the Tshwane University of Technology. She stepped down in 2014.

**2015**

Prof Thoko Mayekiso was appointed as the first Vice-Chancellor of the first post-apartheid university. Making her the first woman to steer the university from its inception. Her contract was renewed for the second term. In November UMP celebrated its 10th anniversary. With numerous achievements up Prof Mayekiso's sleeves proving that nothing is impossible for women.

**2016**

Prof Xoliswa Mtose was appointed as the third Black Female Vice-Chancellor at University of Zululand. Her term was renewed for the second term.

**2017**

Prof Sibongile Muthwa was appointed as the first woman Vice-Chancellor at the Nelson Mandela University. Currently serving her second term.

**2018**

Prof Mamokgethi Phakeng became the second Black woman Vice-Chancellor at the University of Cape Town. Her contract was renewed for a second term and she later stepped down in 2023.

**2020**

Prof Puleng LenkaBula was appointed as the first female Vice-Chancellor in 148 years of University of South Africa's (UNISA) existence.

Walter Sisulu University (WSU) appointed Prof Rushiella Songca, as its first female Vice-Chancellor.

**2022**

The Central University of Technology (CUT), appointed Prof Pamela Dube, as its first female Vice-Chancellor.

# ... CURRENT *Female* CHANCELLORS ...

There are currently fifteen (15) female Chancellors in South African Universities. Mainly African Females. A combination of women leaders from business, legal, political and government fraternity.

NO.	NAME OF INSTITUTION	CHANCELLORS NAME
1	Cape Peninsula University of Technology	Ms Thandi Modise
2	Central University of Technology	Madam Justice Mahube Molemela
3	Durban University of Technology	Ms Nonkululeko Nyembezi
4	Mangosuthu University of Technology	Ms Lindiwe Sisulu
5	Nelson Mandela University	Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi
6	North-West University	Dr Anna Mokgokong
7	Tshwane University of Technology	Gloria Serobe
8	University of Cape Town	Dr Precious Moloi-Motsepe
9	University of Johannesburg	Dr Phumzile Mlambo Ngcuka
10	University of Limpopo	Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma
11	University of Mpumalanga	Deputy Chief Justice Mandisa Maya
12	University of Pretoria	Emeritus Justice Sisi Khampepe
13	University of Venda	Adv Mojankunyane Gumbi
14	University of Witwatersrand	Dr Judy Dlamini
15	Walter Sisulu University	Nonkululeko Gobodo

## FEMALE COUNCIL CHAIRPERSONS

NO.	NAME OF INSTITUTION	COUNCIL CHAIRPERSON NAME
1	Cape Peninsula University of Technology	Dr Laurine Platzky
2	Central University of Technology	Dr Charity Mbileni-Morema
3	Mangosuthu University of Technology	Sanelisiwe Mngadi
4	Nelson Mandela University	Nozipho January-Bardillis
5	Sol Plaatje University	Judge Mmathebe Phatsoane
6	University of Cape Town	Babalwa Ngonyama
7	University of Johannesburg	Xoliswa Kakana
8	Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University	Maria Rambauli



In the realm of academia, **Brightness Mangolotho** stands as a beacon of knowledge and experience. With a rich background in public and private higher education, research, teaching, community service, advocacy, and communication, she has carved a distinguished path over more than two decades. As a lecturer, postgraduate research supervisor, facilitator, and keynote speaker, Brightness has not only imparted knowledge but has also been a driving force in advancing the landscape of education. Her influence extends beyond classrooms, having been featured in major mainstream media. In 2020, she earned the esteemed title of the University of Georgia Fellow for the African Civic Engagement Academy Program and was recognised as a 2015 Standard Bank Rising Star Finalist. The International Association for Business Communicators (IABC) also acknowledged her significant contributions to the communication field.

## Celebrating HERS-SA's second decade of Excellence and Leadership

### HERS-SA'S SECOND DECADE: A Journey of Relevance and Impact

The Higher Education Resource Services - South Africa (HERS-SA) unfolded as a period of growth, relevance, and expanded programs. The organisation responded dynamically to the evolving needs of women in the higher education sector. A pivotal moment during this time was the HERS-SA Impact Study in 2017, conducted by the Bureau of Market Research College of Economic and Management Sciences at the University of South Africa. The study showcased the profound impact of HERS-SA on the empowerment and professional development of female graduates. The HERS-SA Academy, a flagship initiative, emerged as a transformative professional gathering, shaping the understanding of higher education, and fostering personal and professional growth among alumni.

### LEADERSHIP IN ACTION: The Appointment of Brightness Mangolotho as Director

In 2019, HERS-SA welcomed a new Director, Brightness Mangolotho. The role entrusted to her encompassed advancing and developing women in the Higher Education sector, advocating for their career and leadership development, working in partnership with institutions for gender equity, researching and disseminating relevant information, and showcasing the achievements of women at various levels. Under her leadership, the HERS-SA Academy remained a cornerstone for professional and leadership development, attracting over 1,680 women in the past two decades. The Emerging Women in Leadership program, launched in 2023, further empowered aspiring leaders through a year-long training curriculum.

Her influence extends beyond classrooms, having been featured in major mainstream media.

### NAVIGATING CHALLENGES: HERS-SA's Response to COVID-19

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 posed unprecedented challenges, especially for women in academia. HERS-SA, recognising the impact, initiated a series of webinars to address the unique struggles faced by women during the pandemic. Profound stories emerged, highlighting the resilience of women in higher education. Amidst the crisis, the appointments of Prof Puleng LenkaBula and Prof Rushiella Songca as the first female Vice-Chancellors at UNISA and Walter Sisulu University, respectively, marked a significant stride. The pandemic also spurred the conceptualisation and publication of the book titled "Women's Empowerment for Sustainable Future: Transcultural and Positive Psychology Perspective."

### MENTORSHIP AND COACHING: Catalysts for Success

HERS-SA responded to the challenges raised by women in academia by launching a mentorship and coaching program in 2021. The initiative provided a platform for interaction, experience sharing, and personal growth. The program has witnessed remarkable success, with mentees expressing increased job satisfaction, productivity, and promotions. Coaching, described as a vital element in women's progression, emerged as a proactive intervention to minimise resignations and enhance productivity.

### REBRANDING FOR THE FUTURE: HERS-SA's Modernisation

In 2021, HERS-SA transformed, modernising its logo and website to reflect a fresh and contemporary identity. The new design, while embracing modernised colours and fonts, retained the organisation's ethos of Leading, Learning, and Lifting. The revamped website offers users easy access to relevant documents, photos, events, and news.

# ... A spotlight on Brightness Mangolothi ...

CONTINUED

## GLOBAL COLLABORATIONS: Building Bridges Beyond Borders

HERS-SA's efforts to create awareness of gender issues in higher education extended globally through collaborations with international universities and organisations. The organisation hosted distinguished speakers and participated in conferences, webinars, and colloquiums worldwide, reinforcing its commitment to fostering global partnerships.

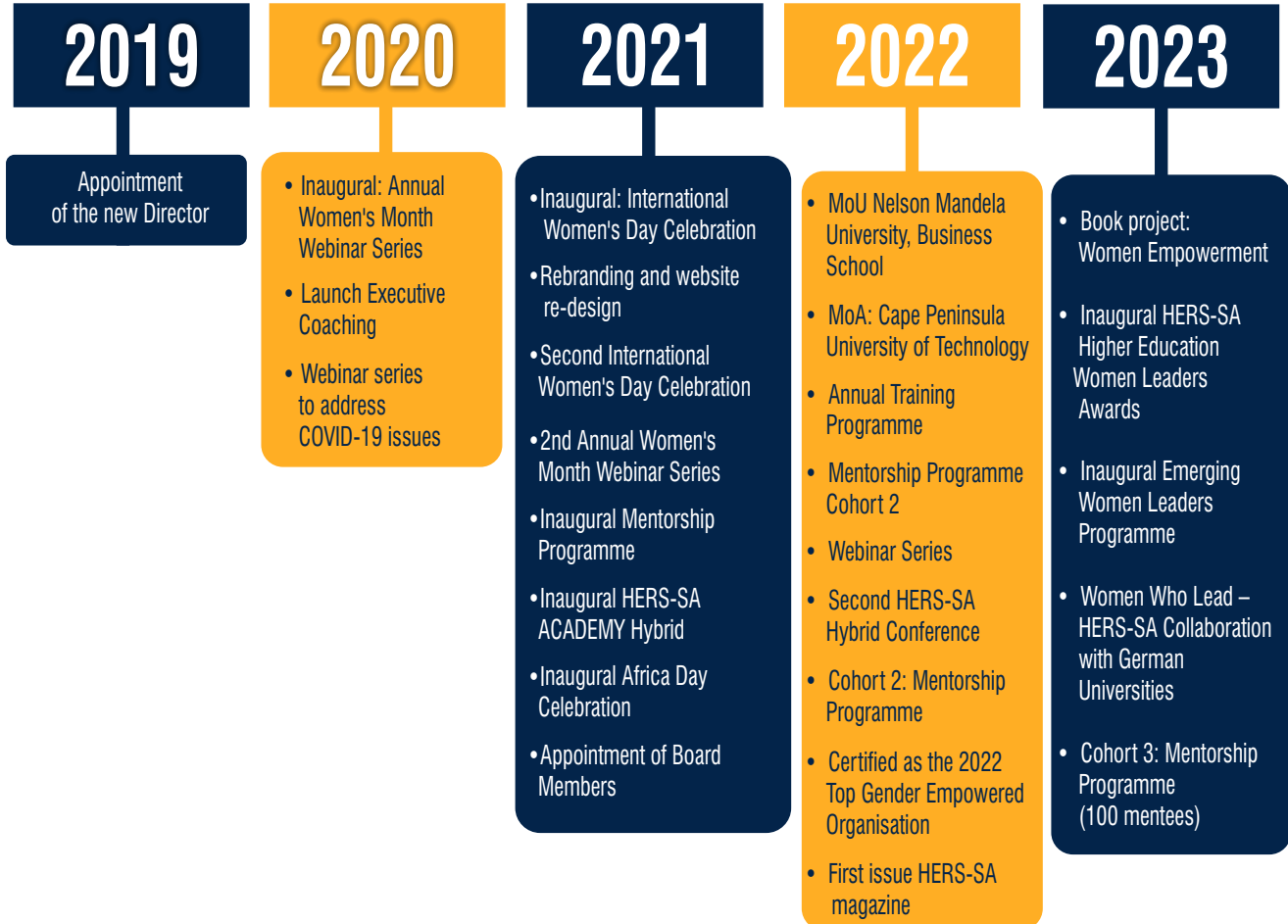
## 2024 HERS-SA HIGHER EDUCATION WOMEN LEADERS AWARDS: Recognising Excellence

Looking ahead, HERS-SA is gearing up for the 2024 Higher Education Women Leaders Awards, the second edition of an initiative aimed at recognising and celebrating the achievements of women leaders. The awards aim to capacitate women leaders, attract new leadership talent, gain national recognition, and encourage institutional support for women in leadership.

## GLOBAL COLLABORATIONS: Building Bridges Beyond Borders

In conclusion, as we celebrate a decade marked by Brightness Mangolothi's impactful leadership and HERS-SA's unwavering commitment to advancing women in higher education, we look forward to a future where excellence, empowerment, and recognition continue to shape the narrative for women leaders in academia.

# ... HERS-SA TIMELINE 2019 - 2023 ...







**Prof Christa Grobler is currently an Executive Dean: Faculty of Applied and Computer Sciences at Vaal University of Technology**

# Leadership Journey

Christa Grobler is an average girl from an average background, with average academic accolades. I was born as the only child. My mother was diagnosed with stage four cancer when I was eight years old. She fought a brave battle for twelve years to raise me to be a strong independent woman.

*never reach it... My faith is shaking ..... But I gotta keep trying, gotta keep my head held high... There's always gonna be another mountain... Ain't about how fast I get there, ain't about what's waiting on the other side... It's the climb"*

I started my career in academia in 1997 at the then Vaal Triangle Technikon as a Medical Technologist fresh from the industry. It was a great privilege to be given the opportunity to transfer the practical knowledge and skills I had to the students. To be honest the main driver for the career change was to have more flexible working hours, to be able to spend more time with my then very young children (Marko was 3 years old and Amé 4 months). My research journey started effectively in 1999, when I was approached by colleagues from another Faculty to get involved in a multidisciplinary nutrition interventional niche area. My motivation for pursuing the opportunity was mainly to improve my qualifications and to secure career development. To be part of a supportive women's research team was the best career move I made.

*I was fortunate to be part of the 2020 HERS-SA cohort and 2021 mentee in the HERS-SA Mentorship Programme. An experience that empowered me, guided me and challenged me. I was confronted with making a career-focused decision, either in management or research. I was not ready to make the decision. I love research, but always been a natural leader with management aspirations. Higher Education management positions are few and very challenging. On the other hand, I was 45+ and not an established researcher yet, which is limiting for funding opportunities. I grappled with these conflicting thoughts.*

*A few months later the position of Head of Department became vacant, I applied and got the position. I saw this as a sign, I asked myself, I am not ready to let go of my research goals. I applied for Associate Professor promotion in the same year. Another year later I was appointed as an Executive Dean. Currently, I am also serving as the Deputy Chair of the Medical Technology Board of the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA), appointed by Dr Zweli Mkhize, former Minister of Health to serve as a member of the Professional Board for Medical Technology for a period of five years from 1st November 2020. I have also been part of other committees:*

My research journey directly resulted in personal development and growth. I had to learn to accept and tolerate criticism, perceived failures, and disappointments. I learned to get up again after I fell or been knocked down. I also had to learn to celebrate and enjoy successes. I needed to keep all the balls in the air and find the balance between family life, academic responsibilities my studies (research) as well as my personal well-being. I was challenged to develop new skills (writing, stats). My research journey created opportunities to meet new and stimulating people and to establish conducive networks. Privilege research created, that I appreciate so much, is the opportunity to travel I have been to many countries and all-over South Africa.

- 5 years on the National Academic and Pathology Committee (NAPC) a sub-committee of the board of National Health Laboratory Services (NHLS).
- Research Ethics Committee Association of Southern Africa (REASA) and also trained as an ethics evaluator.
- Examination coordinator for Medical Laboratory Technologist of South Africa (SMLTSA) during the Biomedical Technologist and Technician examinations, overseeing that the protocol and procedures are followed.
- Laboratory Medicine Group (LMG). Additionally, a trained evaluator for HPCSA and have been part of four evaluation teams thus far.

**The song The Climb by Miley Cyrus became my research journey song and would be my word of encouragement to any women researcher.**

“

*I can almost see it, that dream I am dreaming...*

*But there's a voice inside my head saying "You'll never reach it"...*

*My faith is shaking ..... But I gotta keep trying, gotta keep my head held high...*

*There's always gonna be another mountain...*

*Ain't about how fast I get there, ain't about what's waiting on the other*

*side... It's the climb ”*

”

## MY ADVICE TO WOMEN LEADERS

*“Believe in yourself, focus on growth and development and embrace every opportunity life is offering you”.*

The song The Climb by Miley Cyrus became my research journey song and would be my word of encouragement to any women researcher.

*“I can almost see it, that dream I am dreaming... But there's a voice inside my head saying "You'll*

## *The role of the Registrar:*

### A perspective of the institutional registrar at the Central University of Technology, Free State



**Dr Sally Dzingwa (Ph.D UKZN)** is the Institutional Registrar at the Central University of Technology, Free State (CUT). She held two critical portfolios at the Vaal University of Technology (VUT) as Deputy Registrar: Enrolment Services and Senior Deputy Registrar: Strategic Enrolment Management (SEM), respectively. She also worked at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) and the University of the Witwatersrand (WITS). Her profession is strengthened in the governance of the HE sector.

Challenges in the higher education (HE) sector have been widely reported and persist even today. This may be an indication that the sector is unable to adequately find solutions to the existing challenges.

Therefore, it is important to place the registrar within the context of the sector and its current challenges. These are related, but not limited to, the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS); limited student accommodation; and racial tensions, due to the slow pace of transformation in the system. Governance and leadership failure have also contributed to these challenges.

The registrar thus becomes well placed to comment on the effectiveness of corporate governance and its practices at South African higher education institutions (HEIs) (Barac & Marx 2012). This article will: (i) profile this role of the registrar from the perspective of lived experience; (ii) position the registrar within a convoluted system of governance in the South African HE landscape; and (iii) unearth some of the practical and philosophical issues facing the profession.

The objective of this constructed reality is to find a deepened understanding of what it is to be a registrar in the present time, and to provide some opportunities for future studies that will enhance the role of registrars.

#### Case of the Central University of Technology, Free State (CUT)

As the Institutional Registrar at CUT, I am part of the Executive Management team, reporting to the Vice Chancellor and Principal. I provide leadership and strategic direction with respect to the sections indicated in figure 1 below. It is my responsibility to ensure effective student administration and service delivery by overseeing the provision of adequate services, and to develop and maintain student-centric academic policies and procedures that enhance student success. This role involves the provision of governance oversight; serving as the custodian of institutional records; and being responsible to ensure compliance with the institutional statute, rules, code of conduct, and all related legislation.

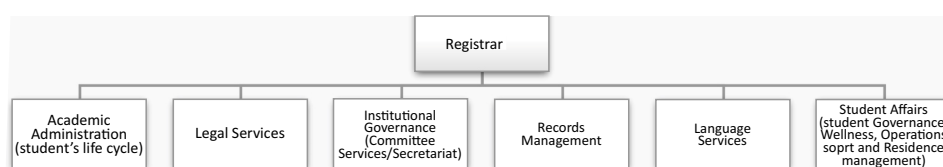


Figure 1. CUT Registrar's structure

In times of crisis, such as student protests, it is my duty to ensure that the situation is normalised, and that the academic project is safeguarded. This requires decisive, firm leadership.

I support institutional governance as determined in the HE Act (Act No. 101 of 1997, as amended), serving as the Secretary to Council, Senate, and related committees.

However, the act does not do justice to the role of the registrar. The act cannot contain all the details nor the role profile of the registrar. For example, I provide guidance on application of the statute, legislation, conflicts of interest, related policies, and the legal and legislation-related implications of discussions and/or decisions taken.

This, of course, needs to be contextualised to reduce potential misconceptions about what it is that the registrar must do, and to what extent legislation determines the role shift of the registrar. It is also worth noting that the role of the registrar has evolved over time as the HE sector continues to reform and reconfigure itself (Parks & Taylor 2019).

What cannot be disputed, is that the registrar is significant in improving institutional governance, and, consequently, the effectiveness of institutions.

# ... The role of the Registrar ...

## CONTINUED

Considering the number of challenges that the sector is facing, and the central role that the registrar occupies, from operations, leadership, and governance oversight perspectives, a major paradigm shift will be for registrars to consolidate integrated and collaborative forms of governance to solve complex sector challenges (Ansell & Torfing, 2015).

The strategies applied at institutional governance level must provide a framework for an effective governance operating model that seeks to enhance the academic plan, and that contributes to student success, good governance, and strong leadership, cascading sector-wide.

he registrar role requires agility; a good understanding of HE sector dynamics and trends; competency in the areas of compliance,

academic administration, corporate and institutional governance; and ethical leadership. Collaborating and partnering with other role players within the system is equally important.

Aspiring registrars (especially women in HE) should consider leadership training and development programmes that speak to such leadership roles. The values that underpin the nurturing of relationships are to promote good governance and institutional effectiveness.

Registrars must ensure staff development and build teams that understand the complexities of the work of the registrar's office.

Aspiring registrars (especially women in HE) should consider leadership training and development programmes that speak to such leadership roles.

HERS-SA has played a critical part in shaping my professional journey and I would recommend that women in middle and senior management roles participate in the programme. In addition, A Registrar's Handbook (Lawton-Misra et al, 2022) is earmarked as resource that clarifies the role of the registrar in simple terms, with easy-to-understand guidelines.

In conclusion, it is clear that to deepen the understanding of this role, it will be valuable to undertake further studies with the purpose of exploring in detail the current and evolving nature of the registrar's role to determine how it can be enhanced to contribute to HE stability and effective governance.

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# You cannot drink from an empty well: Traversing the gendered academic space



**Prof Puleng Segalo is a Fulbright scholar, National Research Foundation rated researcher, and a professor of psychology currently holding the position of Chief Albert Luthuli Research Chair at the University of South Africa (UNISA).**

We live in a world where gender imbalance affects women academically, economically, socially, culturally and politically. Women in academia have to navigate a gendered academic space as they carve out their journeys as scholars, researchers and leaders.

My home discipline is psychology and for the better part of my early years as a student and later as an emerging scholar, I had to contend with imported (Euro-Western) theories that were developed without me in mind, and to be confronted by male scholars who were deemed to be “authorities” on human behaviour. This was my introduction (and I believe the introduction of many women) to academia.

How do you imagine a career in a (academic) space that was not meant for you?

South Africa's higher education institutions have made great strides towards advancing transformation, including access and inclusion of black African women and men into higher education; and advancing black women's leadership positions within the education sector. However, the statistics on accessibility in higher education do not represent a true reflection of the daily experiences of navigating and negotiating the intersections of gender and race. Higher education in Africa continues to grapple with gender inequity and disparities years into independence. Institutions of higher learning bear the blame for entrenching gender discrimination in their structures. This is because, as with many institutions in the world, the academy is a gendered institution in that (white) men created it for (white) men and it continues to be mainly about men, while women are perceived as an irregularity within African academies.

Similar to their private spaces, women are constantly reminded that they do not belong. As with their formal and informal lives, black women, in particular, are forced to navigate and negotiate conflicting issues of gender (in)equality.

Transformation has become a recurring motif when addressing change nationally and in higher education contexts in post-1994 South Africa.

The idea of transformation involves constant change,

conversion and continuous movement. Relevant to the higher education context and South Africa's political history, the transformation of something is often influenced through an external force.

Racism and sexism remain prevalent within the university system and reproduce the prevailing inequalities that continue to exist in society today. They are hyper-visible at executive management levels where women continue to struggle to find a home, as they are constantly made to feel like anomalies or imposters.

As Segalo and Phaswana ([–Women leaders must model sisterhood Thought Leader](#)) assert:

“Even though there have been women ascending to the top, the numbers remain low and those occupying such spaces have to confront perpetual belittling, being second-guessed, undermined and having their authority questioned at every turn. Most women end up leaving these spaces not out of choice but to protect their sanity from this violence. Unfortunately, some of these women executives have to bear similar violent and misogynistic practices at home, which makes it even more unbearable for them.”

It is therefore critical that, as we continue our deliberations on gender transformation within our institutions of higher learning, we do so having given ourselves the chance to make visible and understand the persistent challenges that face women in academia (including female students) more broadly, and women leaders in particular. We need to name, confront, challenge and reimagine together, knowing that it is through collective efforts that we can begin to make a dent in tackling the “war” that women in higher education face.

The “war” also shows itself in women having to carry multiple burdens within and outside the workplace. We need to remember that we cannot give what we do not have, for example time and self-care. Learning to say no is a process. Many women are socialised to give of themselves until there is nothing left to give, while taking time out is sometimes seen as being selfish.

We must unlearn the unhealthy habits that limit our progression and move towards self-care. This will be beneficial not only for ourselves, but in turn for those around us as well – because no one can drink from an empty well!

# Towards levelling the playing field for women employees in higher education:

## A need for gender equality

Higher education institutions are considered by UNESCO to be advocates of gender equality. While these institutions can be lauded for their gains in diversifying the workforce, women remain, on average, under-represented in academia, especially at the most senior levels. This can be attributed to the work environment having not been sufficiently transformed to enable women to compete equally with their male counterparts.

Gender transformation remains a major challenge for higher education despite women being considered by law as equity candidates. While programmes based on the principle of affirmative action have had a positive effect on women's access to opportunities, women in most instances reach a "glass ceiling", as the work environment has not transformed to accommodate women's needs. Women remain in the lower ranks not because of incompetence but due to challenges in their work environment that impact negatively on their ability to progress.

Higher education institutions are committed, in principle, to eradicating unfair treatment of staff members based on the grounds of unfair discrimination, including but not limited to, gender, race and post level. Some institutions have introduced proactive steps in operational practices to ensure proper adherence to this fundamental principle. They support women employees in their career advancement, including the provision of opportunities for interactive professional development. Higher education institutions have put in place comprehensive employment equity plans, through which they identify a number of barriers to employment of employees from designated groups, and equity measures necessary to address these. While these efforts can be lauded for strengthening the process of eliminating barriers to diversity and assisting in identifying aspects of human resources that can advance employment equity objectives, it should be noted that systemic challenges faced by women employees have not been addressed.

The systemic gender-based disadvantage that women are subjected to is deeply entrenched through policies and protocols.

maternity leave, for instance, is one barrier to women's development. Planning for a family is a dilemma for women as the years of career development coincide with the years of starting a family. This unique challenge not only presents a never-ending balancing act on women's pathway of development but is in violation of their freedom of choice.

There is a pervasive sense that becoming pregnant is wrong, as a pregnant employee is perceived as an inconvenience to the institution. The expectation is that a woman should put her plans for pregnancy on hold and focus on work-related projects. If they fall pregnant during the lifecycle of a work-related project, the expectation is that they will report for work until the last trimester. The concept of four months' maternity leave is flawed; hence its definition as a "benefit" is a misnomer. The specified period of maternity leave makes no provision for legitimate post-natal circumstances that might dictate a need for extended leave of absence.

Maternity policies should be reviewed in light of the concomitant effects on women's career advancement and qualifying for promotion. Promotion criteria for academics clearly articulate how one advances from the rank of a lecturer to the rank of a full professor. Institutions of higher education lament the poor representation of women in governance structures with a professoriate full of men, yet they have not interrogated the barriers to women's advancement.

For instance, while women are on maternity leave, their male counterparts are afforded career development opportunities and advancement. Essentially, women struggle their way up the corporate ladder while men breeze their way up. The disproportionate burden carried by women in higher education reflects perpetual gender inequality. It is therefore not equitable to have universally-applied criteria for promotion.

Higher education remains genderised, with its promotion criteria and policies being exclusionary and discriminating against women. The continual tension between career development and procreation is unique to women and represents a discriminatory practice, as their male counterparts are never exposed to such.



**Dr Zethu Mkhize is the Director of the Transformation Office at Stellenbosch University. She is a transformational leader, and an advocate for women empowerment, social justice and self-determination.**

While policies have a key role to play in addressing the structural barriers that continue to impede progress, policies can also be the key drivers of exclusion. In South Africa, for instance, a Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality was developed in 2002 with the aim of achieving equality of opportunity, as well as equality of treatment by employers. However, the principle of equal opportunity for men and women has not been fully embraced to eliminate barriers that hinder women's progress.

Higher education should institutionalise gender equality, along the lines recommended in the policy framework. Transformation can only arise from fundamental changes within higher education when institutions embrace diversity and inclusion and further advance transformation by systematically removing barriers to inclusion through empowerment and the promotion of equity.

## Navigating challenges and fostering self-driven development:

A key to success in Human Resources for higher education in South Africa



**Nashira Abrahams** is the Ombuds at the University of Cape Town. She holds an LLM Degree, obtained in 2018 from the University of Cape Town in Dispute Resolution, along with a Bachelor of Social Science in Social Anthropology (Honours) and a Bachelor of Social Science in Psychology and Sociology. Her tenure and training through the Commission for Conciliation Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) has afforded her the qualification as an expert Labour Law Practitioner (now accredited as a Post-Graduate Qualification), as well as an experienced Alternative Dispute Resolution Accredited Mediator, Lead Negotiator and Arbitrator.

Human Resources (HR) management in South African higher education institutions plays a pivotal role in shaping success and growth. While HR professionals are instrumental in facilitating staff and faculty development, a critical factor contributing to success is the willingness of staff and faculty to actively drive their own continuous development. In a dynamic academic landscape, institutions in South Africa can flourish when HR and employees work hand-in-hand to foster individual growth. However, HR faces several significant challenges in the South African higher education context.

### CHALLENGES IN SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION:

*Resource constraints: One of the most pressing challenges that HR faces in South African higher education. Inadequate funding limits the capacity to invest in staff development and support initiatives, making it difficult to provide the necessary resources for self-driven development. HR must navigate these limitations by seeking innovative solutions and partnerships to ensure staff and faculty have access to development opportunities.*

*Transformation imperatives: South African higher education institutions are under pressure to address historical inequalities and promote diversity and inclusion. While transformation is essential, it can be challenging to strike a balance between academic excellence and meeting transformation goals. HR professionals must navigate this delicate balancing act by implementing inclusive hiring and promotion practices that consider both qualifications and diversity objectives.*

*Socio-political pressures: The South African higher education landscape is often influenced by socio-political pressures, including student protests and government policies. These external factors can create uncertainty and disruptions in institutional operations. HR professionals need to adapt quickly to changing circumstances while still providing a stable and supportive environment for staff and faculty development.*

*Retaining top talent: Retaining top talent can be challenging in a highly competitive academic environment. Many South African academics and professionals may be lured away by offers from institutions abroad. HR must develop strategies to retain talent by offering attractive career advancement opportunities and competitive compensation packages.*

*Access to quality education: South African higher education institutions must address disparities in access to quality education. This challenge extends to both students and staff, who may face unequal opportunities and limited access to resources. HR should work towards creating an equitable environment that enables self-driven development for all employees.*

*Despite these challenges, HR in South African higher education can foster success by implementing strategies to address these obstacles. By recognising resource constraints, embracing transformation initiatives, responding to socio-political pressures, and actively engaging in talent retention, HR professionals can work towards creating a supportive environment for self-driven development.*

*Collaboration and advocacy are also crucial to overcoming these challenges. HR can collaborate with academic departments and administrative units to leverage available resources effectively. Additionally, HR professionals can advocate for increased investment in higher education to alleviate resource constraints and promote staff and faculty development.*

*The success of HR in South African higher education institutions hinges on navigating the complex challenges presented by the educational landscape. While resource constraints, transformation imperatives, socio-political pressures, talent retention, and access to quality education pose significant challenges, HR professionals can overcome these obstacles through creative solutions and collaboration. Fostering self-driven development remains the key to success, with HR playing a pivotal role in supporting and empowering staff and faculty in their pursuit of continuous growth and excellence.*





### Prof Edith Dinong Phaswana

presents this career workshop for HERS-SA, for women on the academic leadership track.

She is Director of Graduate Academic Programmes at the Thabo Mbeki African School of Public & International Affairs at Unisa.

She holds a PhD in International Development from London South Bank University in the UK. Prof Phaswana publishes on African development, equity and transformation, leadership, governance, and policy, and serves as member of the editorial board and reviewer of several international academic journals. She has led and taught in international programmes including the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI) launched by former US president Barack Obama.

Her leadership as a transformative African woman academic has been recognised with numerous awards and in publications including the Standard Bank Top Woman Leaders and the Mail & Guardian Top 100 Women Changing South Africa (2019). She provides leadership, research advisory and consultancy services to various organisations and the government of South Africa.

## Career management considerations for the academic track - Workshop Reflections

The HERS-SA workshop on career management considerations for women on the academic track aims to prepare emerging leaders to become the next cohort of women to join the professoriate, becoming leaders and managers at our universities. It is a highly interactive workshop with activities challenging participants to reflect and ask themselves difficult questions about career progression. The first part of the workshop orientates participants into the university context of work, and the second covers aspects that need to be taken into account in planning to progress as a professor or university manager. At the core of this workshop is the understanding that there are few women leaders in our universities and that this has to change. It is an intervention that seeks to encourage qualified women academics to apply for senior university leadership positions without fear.

The first session situates the university as one of the global power structures that sustain certain forms of domination worldwide. Prof Ramon Grosfoguel of the University of California at Berkeley argues that the “Westernised” university is essentially racist and sexist in nature and it is therefore not a coincidence that most women find themselves “invisibilised”, erased and relegated to the periphery within this space. It is critical for women academics to appreciate that the academy was designed without them in mind. Nevertheless, women have managed to break through some of those traditional barriers. According to Olbers (2012), women’s measure of success is undervalued within the academy, where markers for academic success continue to favour masculine competencies, standards, priorities and practices.

Understanding this background helps participants to appreciate the intervention that HERS-SA is making in their lives. This session opens up much discussion amongst participants as it resonates with many of their own experiences.

At every workshop, it has been concerning to realise that most women academics do not apply for promotion even though they meet the criteria. Studies attribute this to low self-esteem and a lack of confidence in the system.

In addition, the majority of women pay a high price for academic citizenship which is unrewarded and undervalued (Times Higher Education 2016), such as long hours spent as journal reviewers, external examiners and writing book reviews.

The workshop asks each participant to answer these questions:

1. What are my priorities and choices?
2. What are my expectations?
3. What makes me not take up a professorship right now?

This exercise prompts participants to reflect and list all the obstacles and barriers that make it difficult for them to assume professorship. The aim here is to assist them in clearing the hurdles and show them that it is possible to imagine a new journey towards professorship.

Participants are also conscientised that females make up the majority of non-tenure staff. Female academics also carry heavy teaching loads and do not have time to publish. This happens because teaching (undergraduates), despite it being the core academic function, is not a strong factor in defining success within the academy, as research is valued above teaching.

During these interactive sessions, it has become clear that we need to elevate teaching to be recognised and valued in career progression. Some universities have teaching professors as an alternate route towards professorship, and participants in these workshops believed such a pathway needs to be made possible at all universities.

The workshop opens an opportunity for dialogue as participants share their own personal experiences in their respective institutions. It facilitates an opportunity for honest conversations among participants and they learn the skills to strategise their career progression. For example, they are coached on how to identify enablers of their career progression such as social capital, supportive environments and mentors/coaches early in their careers. Enablers also include a supportive dean/HOD or senior academics; international conference attendance; a network of scholars and mentors; and spare time that allows for research.



## ... Career management considerations for the academic track - Workshop Reflections ...

CONTINUED

On the flip side, participants are cautioned about some of the constraints facing women academics, such as less access to critical networks, and lack of awareness about what is rewarded, and what is necessary for promotion.

**Participants are introduced to a simple career management model with key 5 steps:**

### STEP 1

#### **Assessment:**

Clarify and understand your interests, skills, values, and personality.

### STEP 2

#### **Research:**

Explore a career progression path that interest you.

### STEP 3

#### **Make decisions and set goals:**

Evaluate the pros and cons of feasible options and create goals and timelines.

### STEP 4

#### **Take action:**

Write or update your résumé; work or study towards a long-term career goal.

### STEP 5

#### **Readjust or new transition:**

Assess and regroup, or begin anew.

Another important aspect of the workshop is a session on requirements for NRF rating and how to achieve this. Participants are also taken through sample adverts for executive positions, such as a Vice-Chancellorship, to analyse what is needed and be able to strategise on the requirements. The workshop is improved each year through feedback from participants. It is encouraging to receive feedback from participants who are ready to embark on their journeys after the workshop. Many participants continue to interact with the presenter long after the workshop, seeking guidance on certain aspects. It will be useful for HERS-SA to track the participants over the next five years to check their progress.

# A global lens on (self)leadership



**Dr Tasmeera Singh, PhD**, is an international higher education specialist with over 22 years' experience in the field. She is currently employed at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology as the Manager: International Relations. Prior to her appointment at CPUT, she was at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban as the Principal International Advisor. Dr Singh is a current and previous member of the Management Council of IEASA and has served as part of the IEASA Conference Committee for 2017 and 2021 and Head of the Research and Publications Committee in 2021.

“ Thus to be able to learn from others and share your experiences is extremely enriching and it changes your worldview in so many different ways. I can confidently say that I am truly a product of internationalisation ”

I have been in higher education internationalisation since the year 2000 and one of the few to have been part of the initial development and growth of internationalisation in higher education in South Africa post 1994. I am a wife and mother to a 24-year-old daughter and 19-year-old son amongst the many other roles I hold in my family. Being the eldest child and that too a girl child of a traditional Indian family I was naturally birthed into the gendered discourses of life and career. Coming from a family of teachers I too chose the obvious career. However, from a young age I was passionate about making a difference in people's lives so teaching was most suited to my life aspirations.

Growing up I was great at dance, drama and poetry. And we will come back to this point later in my talk. The time I had graduated with my B.Paed degree in 1997 was a changing time in the country's basic education system and unfortunately, I could not be placed as there were no teaching jobs readily available. In Feb 2000 I interviewed for a position in the International Office at the then University of Natal. What started as a half day, part-time position eventually became my career and life trajectory 23 years later on.

And herein begins the story— as I reflect on my journey bringing me to this point in my life and career. I began in internationalisation which was a brand new, somewhat perplexing space in the higher education domain. There was much learning and growing and development, not easy I might add having been trained by one of the founding presidents of our national international organisation who was also the Director of the Office at that time. Indeed, a hard task master at hand. There were many catalytic moments that prompted me to move to the next phase of my career development – but not without determination and support. My first national conference inspired me to register for my Honours degree because I felt a strong urge to contribute to the academic discourse of internationalisation. This was not easy as I had to balance the roles of being a young mother, an evolving work environment and lectures in the evening.

It was exhausting to mention the least. However, with the support of my husband, I persevered and managed to complete also expecting my second child at the end. The support that I received then became even more integral in the later phase of my life and career. I then went on to pursue my Master's degree part-time with a second child at hand. Here again, it was no easy feat and I am sure this resonates very strongly with some of you here.

In my workspace, I used the many opportunities I was given to attend and present at international conferences. I networked with intentionality and 23 years later I have a good network of international and local peers. But apart from that my field of internationalisation in Higher Education allowed me to meet diverse people from all around the world from different socio-lingual, cultural and political contexts. And it is through this difference you realise how similar we are. In particular, my last visit to the University of Tlemcen in Algeria was an interesting cultural learning journey. Whilst going on a tour of the city centre we passed some homes and one of the homes had a copper tumbler filled with water and some leaves hanging out the tumbler. I was naturally intrigued. When I enquired with my colleague from Algeria what this was she indicated that it meant that visitors could not come to the home because there is somebody who is not well. And I was pleasantly surprised because growing up in my culture whenever there was a child who had measles in the family my grandmother would do the very same. So, for me this was amongst the many great cultural learning experiences I came across through internationalisation.

Thus to be able to learn from others and share your experiences is extremely enriching and it changes your worldview in so many different ways. I can confidently say that I am truly a product of internationalisation – shaped and moulded to embrace all learning experiences and try to do better. But that is a huge responsibility on it's own right? I was clearly not satisfied because I wanted to understand What I can do with what I know? What is my contribution to the field I would often ask myself? In 2008 the Soudien Report was released which for the first time provided a descriptive account of the social problems plaguing the South African higher education landscape.

# A global lens on (self)leadership

## CONTINUED

The report noted that despite the demise of apartheid, inequalities of race, class, gender and sexuality manifested with negative implications for higher education students disrupting transformation and social cohesion in higher education. After reading this report I knew I had found my PhD topic which led me to understand how students give meaning to race, class, gender and sexuality, foregrounding identity discourses and its implications for transformation and social cohesion. It was a long and difficult journey and took me a while to complete as I had to juggle work, international travel and home balance. Nevertheless in September 2019 I graduated and was the last batch before COVID-19 halted life in general.

In March 2020 I was in the USA presenting my research findings at Drake University when the first case of COVID-19 was reported in South Africa. Thankfully I managed to return home safely much to the anger of my family who cautioned me about travelling abroad in the first place. The next morning after my return I was asked to go into quarantine and not return to work for two weeks. In that time the country had gone into hard lockdown and it was a dark time globally. However, COVID-19 also allowed me the time to introspect and reflect on my life's choices and the journey ahead. I was concerned about the impact that COVID would have on the internationalisation agenda and what a post-COVID internationalisation agenda would look like. Yes it was disconcerting but I had already started looking at ways in which 4IR could impact internationalisation in higher education going forward. But there was also a great yearning to do something different during this very strange and isolating time that COVID-19 brought on.

To my great surprise, I received a WhatsApp message from my past high school English teacher who also completed his PhD years back and doing amazing work at IFAD in Rome, Italy. My ex-teacher inspired me to write poetry as a distraction from the hard lockdown we were in. At the beginning of my talk I mentioned that I loved writing poetry but the truth is the last poem I had written was in 1994. After reading his poem it seemed even more of an impossible task. Anyway, I ended up writing a poem two poems and at the end of this talk I will read the first one on COVID-19-19 entitled "Against All Odds" as it

brings together the power of internationalisation and teamwork. And if you are not bored with the first one and there is time I will read out the second one.

COVID-19 impacted every sphere of life in unimaginable ways but for me it was the turning point of my career with the realisation that I had to make a change to impact my field in a meaningful way. I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to be employed at CPUT in December 2021. It is a huge transition to a different province and half the family remains in Durban. I was fortunate enough to be permitted to work the rest of 2022 in Durban due to family commitments and then in January this year I relocated to Cape Town. At CPUT I have also taken up so many opportunities outside the field of internationalisation. I can supervise students, I am training to be a credentialed coach and we will soon be piloting an internationalisation leadership course amongst the many other academic pursuits that have come my way. I have thus used these opportunities to reinvent myself and remain relevant in this ever-changing space of higher education. I think what an important lesson for me was is how to use opportunities that propel you to the next phase of your growth and think out the box.

Coming back to my PhD some of you may ask but why did I not pursue contributing to the internationalisation field per say— and believe you me I was asked this question quite often. At the culmination of my PhD I was very interested and passionate about the issues of transformation in SA higher education and understanding the lens from the student's perspective both local and international. There was a knowledge gap at the time and I wanted to make that contribution. You will find that post Soudien Report some universities even set up transformation offices as recommendations that emanated from the report.

Hence the concepts of diversity, equity, inclusion and social justice are more relevant than ever before as we navigate a VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainties, Complexities and Ambiguity) state in higher education. But how do we as universities embrace these concepts but more relevant is how do we implement them.

The international literature speaks to Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion known as JEDI as the push to graduate globally relevant scholars and global citizens. In my opinion, a universities internationalisation agenda can strategically and purposively elevate a student's intercultural competence to become globally employable and relevant. At CPUT I am extremely passionate about using internationalisation to broaden access to international opportunities for students who would otherwise never leave the country.

One of the major areas of internationalisation is a focus on the internationalisation of the curriculum and internationalisation at home to create global classrooms and foster intercultural competence learning experiences through COIL programmes. It is important for me as an International Education practitioner/specialist to change the narrative and broaden horizons to be able to relate better to each other and to one another. It only takes difference to make you realise how similar you are to the rest of the world. In doing so we slowly begin to unpack how internationalisation can contribute to the transformation agenda in higher education. I think it takes intent, purpose and passion to disrupt the particular ways in which our students are shaped by their particular socio-cultural, historical and material contexts and as universities remain relevant in the global context what role should they play in creating a global citizen for a better society. So I had inadvertently through much deliberation found ways in which I can intersect the transformation imperatives of SA higher education with the internationalisation agenda in my research going forward.

So in reflecting on my journey through a global lens I want to say that I like to think that I try to be a better human being/leader -indeed a strong word- only because I have been shaped through the internationalisation discourse using a global lens and seeing from the other side in. Some important points of note that helped me in my personal journey of self-leadership is – don't be afraid to put yourself out there and engage in new learning opportunities. Be creative and upskill, continuous learning only makes you sharper and relevant. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness but rather a door to further support and mentorship. Be humble and give back. Share your

# A global lens on (self)leadership

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opportunities so that others can learn and grow from this. Be a mentor and reach out to others – grow your nexus. Give your energy to yield positive outcomes and don't get bogged down by the mundane. Lead by example. Reach out to your international office there are many opportunities for you to engage in staff mobility, research collaborations amongst others as you build your international network of peers and scholars. Leverage your international opportunities wisely and create your net.

As women we need to support each other and the HERSA-SA leadership programme is one of the many ways you can form a strong network of determined and resilient women. I think I would be remiss if I did not thank our very own superstar at CPUT Ms Shahieda Hendricks who has really opened the door for me personally and professionally. Sometimes as women you need to lean on the shoulders of great women and just move humbly. And lastly and most importantly I thank my family in supporting on this journey of self-leadership as I AM because you ARE.



**Give your energy to yield positive outcomes and don't get bogged down by the mundane. Lead by example.**



## *Against all odds*

Without a sigh, gush or gurgle COVID-19 appeared with such tumultuous buffeting, leaving neither a trace nor footprint in its ruination, just an invisible presence.

Borders closed, trains, planes and vessels grounded, and the earth stood still shattering human connectivity. A simple human touch became COVID-19's greatest strength, unleashing a pernicious fury with contempt for human life. Sunshine, smiles and giggles are replaced by darkness, solitude and emptiness, for the hands that once fed, once provided is COVID-19's strongest weapon. Playgrounds, beaches and parks bereft of activity. Schools, nurseries and universities are devoid of learners and students, troubling the foundations of knowledge and progression. Lockdowns, stays and isolation are the new vocabulary epitomizing COVID-19.

Such deafening silence globally parading in all its grandeur, lest not the gurgles and mirth of youth unspent. But in all silence and solitude, we witness the manifestation of nature and nurture in all its glory, forms and shape. Suddenly the sounds of chirping birds, and the crashing of waves against the seashore, echo in the symbolic melody of earth's purity. Clearer skies sans toxins and pollutants

shine in alluring seduction beckoning a crystalline future. Nature is reborn with boom and glory-inducing, intoxicating freshness and rejuvenation all around. Mothers, fathers and children huddled together in the fight of COVID-19. Families rekindle over meals with simple talk without rush and race, just free abandonment for life's simple blessings and gestures. As the COVID storm rages with all its might and fury new appreciation is found. Love, life and laughter are no longer granted meaningless, as we garner the resolve to fight the COVID storm, together in solidarity fearless in all our awe and armoury.

Through internationalisation, new bridges to research connect, and unique collaborations engage as we scurry globally, to find a cure to eliminate this invisible enemy. COVID-19 has only strengthened the human resolve to live, to confront, to conquer against all odds. Ignited is the spirit of solidarity and togetherness in adversity. Your rage, your ruination and catastrophic devastation will come to pass as all things do. Everlasting, never fading, will be the lessons of love for life, festering unwavering adulation for the kindred human soul in humbleness and humility. Endure we shall this rage nor cower, nor bow to fear or be defined by YOU. United our resolve is strengthened with tenacity to persevere until YOU VANISH.



# Gender Equality in the PAST, PRESENT and in the FUTURE...

"Empowering Women in Leadership: Key Insights from the Women Who Lead Symposium"



**Kurhula Mhlaba** is a German Chancellor Research Fellow under the patronage of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, Germany; currently contributing to sustainable development through her research focused on gender equality and transformation. As an International Development Professional presently serving in the position: Specialist Promotor for Global Partnerships and International Collaborations at Bündnis Eine Welt Schleswig-Holstein, Germany. Mhlaba is committed to advancing international collaborations to drive impactful advancements in the field of Gender Equality and Transformation.



Modern-day perspectives on sustainable solutions should not be considered in isolation. The implications of the past and their evidence in the present should be at the centre of discussions about a sustainable future. Furthermore, it matters whose eyes are looking at the future.

In our society today, women who lead should be at the forefront of policy implementation and evaluation for gender equality and transformation. Research projects like Women Who Lead should be endorsed as one of the leading strategies for continued transformation in research and academic institutions.

Women Who Lead is a network of women in leadership positions in research and academic institutions from Germany and South Africa, endorsed by HERS-SA.

This platform for women was established as a research project outcome delivered in my position as a German Chancellor Research Fellow under the patronage of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation with host support of MINC Inclán Garcia & Mikoleit GbR - Kiel. Women Who Lead aims to leverage international partnerships to strengthen research and innovation methods for sustainable gender transformation.

The aim of this project is to bring together voices from Germany and South Africa through the leadership of HERS-SA and the sustainable development organisation Bündnis Eine Welt Schleswig-Holsteinin Germany (BEI). This project has been supported and adopted by both these organisations as a flagship project to promote international partnership as an important step towards a comprehensive examination of policy implementation practices in academic and research institutions in Germany and South Africa. Both these organisations agree that international collaborations are central to sustainable development and democracy globally. BEI CEO Martin Weber affirmed in 2023 that cross-country engagements are the backbone of sustainable democratic societies.

The Women Who Lead online symposium took place in October 2023, covering the theme: "Gender Equality in the PAST, in the PRESENT and in the FUTURE". This well-attended symposium, with 56 participants, was divided into two segments. The first segment was centred around gender equality in the past and present, and the following topics were covered:

- Effective ways of unearthing gender discrimination laws in academic institutions by Prof Mzikazi Nduna, Dean: Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Fort Hare, South Africa.
- Navigating gendered challenges in academic institutions amidst a lack of Gender Transformation: A personal account of paving the way for Equality and Inclusion for Women in academic and research institutions by Prof Mebu Nchimi Jeanne Claire, Dean: Faculty of Law, Université de Yaoundé II, Cameroon.
- Navigating power struggles in developmental and research organisations for Gender Transformation and Equality: Challenges and Strategies by Dr Samantha Ruppel, Head: African- German Leadership Academy, Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS).
- Advancing Gender Equality: An Anthropological Exploration of African Cultures from a Historical Perspective by Dr Rose Jaji, Researcher and Gender Specialist, Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS).

“ In our society today, women who lead should be at the forefront of policy implementation and evaluation for gender equality and transformation. ”

# Gender Equality in the PAST, PRESENT and in the FUTURE...

## “Empowering Women in Leadership: Key Insights from the Women Who Lead Symposium” Continued

The presentations from the first segment suggested a DIET framework (Diversity; Inclusion; Equity; Transformation) as a tool to understand the power dynamics that have long existed in European and African academic and research institutions.

Prof. Enaleen Draai – Senior Academic – Nelson Mandela University, South Africa, tied the discussions together with a reflection on the 2022 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) report on higher education, which revealed that female postgraduate students struggle more than their male counterparts to complete their postgraduate studies and advance their careers as researchers.

The second segment was opened by Prof José Frantz, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research and Innovation of the University of the Western Cape, South Africa, covering Gender transformation in Higher Education.

This was followed by Dr Iris Werner, Head of Department: Gender Equality, Equal Opportunities & Family of Christian Albrechts University in Kiel, Germany, who spoke on Structures and strategies for women in leadership at Kiel University.

HERS-SA Director Brightness Mangolotho continued the conversation, looking into international collaborations and partnerships as powerful catalysts for gender transformation in academic and research institutions. This segment was concluded by Dr Ines Weber, Lecturer: Department of Gender Equality, Equal Opportunities & Family, Christian Albrechts University, on the topic Promoting Equality and Diversity: Best Policy Implementation Practices at Christian Albrechts University.

The second segment produced a portrait coloured in by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically the United Nations Sustainable Development 12: Partnerships as a tool to advance the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5: Gender Equality.

In conclusion, Women Who Lead – The German and South African Chapter will continue to create platforms for international collaboration through employing Bayarn's 2005 proposal for policy implementation within flagship projects, the Five (5) C's of protocol: Content; Context; Commitment; Capacity; Clients, with the addition of Coalitions as a sixth pillar. The Women Who Lead within this flagship project of HERS-SA in partnership with the BEI are dedicated to paving the way for an array of future collaborative opportunities among academic and research institutions that transcend the geographic boundaries of Germany and South Africa.





**Dr Sharon Munyaka** is a work psychologist in service of thriving workspaces. Passionate about facilitating leadership conversations, Sharon works with leaders in navigating complexity. She anchors them as they lead in uncertain times and co-creates ways of working that optimise behaviour and productivity at work.

**In essence, coaching is about partnering, unlocking potential, and connecting the coachee with the best version of themselves**

## The Power of Coaching: Think, Feel, Do

Coaching done with curiosity, courage, and compassion is the gift that keeps on giving. The doors of possibility will open if we allow ourselves to remain open and fully present in what we are creating together.

The coaching journey helps us to connect to our common humanity. It allows two people to engage in a safe and confidential space; a space where the conversation can be deepened without fear of judgment. Seeing our common humanity, and seeing ourselves as human first, enables the boxes that we are defined by to dissolve.

In essence, coaching is about partnering, unlocking potential, and connecting the coachee with the best version of themselves, that who can be impactful and productive in the spaces they lead.

Coaching women leaders has been a journey of discovery and enlightenment. It has been a space to breathe, a space to re-imagine a different world where women can show up in their fullness and lead from an authentic place. As I coach women, my role as a thinking partner takes on many forms. I am a thinking partner who listens, who listens until it hurts, challenges the status quo, affirms, holds up the mirror, and gives feedback on what is emerging.

Some coaching sessions begin with disorientation, sometimes a lot of questions, sometimes frustration at events of the past week, and at other times anticipation of actions completed since the previous session. We deepen the conversation and attempt to understand what drives the behaviour and how adjustments can be made to connect with the coachee's emerging future version of the coachee.

As my coachee goes on a journey of transformation, navigating the complexity of their world, I am also changed. I coach and speak from my position as a black heterosexual woman in leadership. I hold multiple roles in my professional and personal space. Often the matters that the coachees raise are familiar, allowing us to connect at a deep and meaningful level.

According to William O'Brien, the success of an intervention is dependent on the interior condition of the. Before the coachee can make impactful shifts in the spaces they lead, the journey starts with the self. Through a guided process, the coachee goes through an inner journey that supports them in the leadership roles that they hold or aspire to hold.

As a woman in leadership, there is an internal journey that requires one to let go of certain ways of thinking, doing and being. The coaching journey is in supporting women to recognise those aspects of their lives that they need to let go of. It could be letting go of the need to be right, or letting go of the need to show masculine traits in order to be accepted.

Reflecting on my work with women in leadership over the years, three key anchors have remained in each conversation. The leadership journey is shaped by how women think, feel, and act.

I think therefore I am. As a woman in leadership, it is important to reflect on the thinking that takes place within and shapes how one leads. Activating curiosity is a key lever in supporting this kind of thinking. Curiosity requires an open mind that can receive and consider new information. It is about being able to hold what one already knows, while remaining open to understanding more and accepting that the learning journey will continue.

Leading from the heart. As humans, we are wired for connection. We have the capacity to have the kind of compassion where our hearts crack open and we connect with people in different situations to our own. The child standing on the side of the road begging for food, getting rained on and needing assistance, for example. It is activating kindness and compassion for others. It is the ability to make difficult decisions and still care for the people being led. Women leaders need to be supported in activating their open hearts to enable them to have compassion for themselves and others that they lead.

Beyond rhetoric. When all has been said and done, action is required. Acting requires courage because the most beautiful plans don't mean much unless the leader chooses courage over comfort. Courage does not always mean a giant leap forward. Sometimes, it is getting up and trying again after the first attempt does not materialise. At times it means stepping away from the situation because it no longer serves the required purpose.

The future is female. In providing support to women in leadership, coaching is critical as we focus on sustainability and ensuring continuity in the various spaces in which women lead.

As support is given to women in leadership, workplaces have a better chance of thriving.





**Prof Tembisa Ngqondi** is the Dean of the Faculty of Informatics and Design at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology. Her leadership is based on the inclusiveness philosophy, and she believes that human beings were born leaders in their respective capacities or, rather, capabilities. She won the Humanitarian category in the 2023 HERS-SA Higher Education Women Leaders Awards and was shortlisted in three other categories, Women in Academic Administrative Leadership, Trailblazer, and Lifetime Achiever.

**Just like any other person, my career journey experienced difficulties, where I took unplanned detours due to various circumstances that were beyond my control.**

## Accelerating Leadership through Mentorship and Coaching

A leadership journey without a mentor can be a struggle, and a giant that will scare many leaders, especially women. My career journey started late by the standards of the education sector but having mentors that could identify a talent has fast-tracked my journey.

This started at home with my parents who had always been there to support me and help cultivate my humanitarian spirit. I was fortunate to do my primary and secondary education at schools where my leadership potential was spotted. The responsibilities that I was given planted a leadership seed, embraced along with my personality of not easily giving up.

Just like any other person, my career journey experienced difficulties, where I took unplanned detours due to various circumstances that were beyond my control. The experience of these detours grounded me and helped me to realise that life can present us with what we never expected or even imagined. Some of these detours gave me the humbling experience of working as a domestic worker.

Fast forward, my high school teacher Ms Maki, who was a deputy principal and my mentor, made it possible for me to come back after a detour to complete matric. It was through her leadership and support that I managed to pass matric. As I always say, I must investigate why my results came out with “pending” status for two subjects and we were later given a school average, a sad development after working hard for good results.

In the process of doing my matric, my journey was made easier by my mathematics teacher, the late Rev Masiza, who spotted my talent and persuaded me to apply for a Zingisa bursary that was intended to support performing learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. I was one of the beneficiaries but my dream of becoming a mathematician did not work out due to the pending status of some of my matric results.

I enrolled at the then Border Technikon, where I completed my Diploma in Information Technology. After graduating, I was appointed as a tutor and then junior lecturer. That was when I met Dr Marsh who spotted a talent in me and started to give me responsibilities that unleashed my potential. I started to see things in a broader view. My silent mentors in terms of pursuing my studies

were Dr Dwesini and Ms Ndlazi who carried out their studies and succeeded while engaging in different university academic projects as well as parenthood. They motivated me to realise that advancing my academic qualifications was possible.

My leadership was also strengthened by affirmation and messages of support from my leaders such as Prof Obi and Prof Lukhele. My mentees such as Ms Williams, Ms Nonyane, Ms Masuku, Dr Ndoro, Ms Leutle, my peers, friends, family and colleagues motivated me to break the glass ceiling.

My leadership was also strengthened by affirmation and messages of support from various leaders, mentees, peers, friends, family and colleagues who motivated me to break the glass ceiling.

I was fortunate to serve under the leadership of two developmental leaders, Prof Mayekiso and Prof Bernard, who both have a passion for encouraging growth of their staff by mentoring and allowing them to learn through practice. This experience fast-tracked my leadership skills in terms of understanding the academic sector holistically and also developing a spirit of resilience.

My journey has presented me with a full suite of good experiences. One of the most memorable was to be part of the HELM Women Leadership Programme (WIL), which provided answers to most of my questions as a leader. The programme provided me with an opportunity to meet great leaders in higher education who shared their leadership experiences, which gave me insight into how I can develop my own developmental programmes and support my aspirations as a leader and responsible citizen.

This was in addition to diverse skills attained over the years, including listening, calmness, building boundaries, talking when it is necessary, claiming your space – the list is endless. The programme also presented opportunities to network with like minds and further allocated me a Coach, Dr Sharon Munyaka who has been, and still is, my cheerleader and sounding board. The Coaching Service was rendered by HERS-SA as the Component of the WIL programme. Joining the programmes has enabled me to realise that we can make an impact and contribution to society in different ways.

As an alumnus, I wish to be an ambassador preaching the gospel of women's empowerment.

To conclude, I thank HERS-SA for teaching me the fundamentals of coaching and self-actualisation.



**Dr Naziema Jappie** is Director and Deputy Dean in the Centre for Higher Education Development (CHED) at the University of Cape Town (UCT). She is a passionate mentor, empowering individuals through personalised guidance and actionable strategies. With over 25 years of experience and a background in management, leadership and social justice, she is committed to fostering growth and helping mentees reach their full potential.

One of the most rewarding aspects of mentoring is witnessing the transformation in a colleague's confidence, decisiveness and resilience.

# Reflections on Mentoring

## Introduction

We are all shaped by our unique backgrounds, cultural origins and past experiences in meaningful ways, and these developmental histories influence the strengths, assets and resources that we bring into our work and mentoring relationships. In my experience, growing up with freedom to explore the world and its cultures cultivated in me an enthusiasm for learning that I have used to springboard my zig-zag career over 25 years.

Mentoring is a powerful force that drives individuals toward growth and success in their professional journeys. As I reflect on my experiences of mentoring colleagues in HERS-SA and other organisations, I am reminded of the profound impact that a supportive mentor can have on one's career. This process not only benefits the mentee but also enriches the mentor's own professional development.

In this piece, I will share my reflections on the art of mentoring, highlighting the reciprocal nature of the mentor-mentee relationship and the transformative effects it can have on both parties.

## Time to Reflect

Mentoring does not provide all the answers but is rather a guiding mechanism to allow mentees to discover solutions on their own. Encouraging critical thinking and problem-solving skills empowers mentees to navigate challenges independently. By posing thoughtful questions and offering different perspectives, mentors can stimulate mentees' intellectual growth and foster a sense of self-reliance.

Setting attainable, yet challenging, goals is a vital aspect of mentoring. By collaboratively identifying objectives, I have found that I can help colleagues envision their path to success. These goals serve as milestones, providing direction and motivation. Regularly revisiting and reassessing these objectives and goals ensures that both mentor and mentee stay aligned with their progress.

Beyond the immediate work-related tasks, mentoring extends to the broader realm of professional development. This encompasses skills such as effective communication, time management and leadership. As a mentor, my role was crucial in shaping mentees into well-rounded professionals, preparing them for future roles and responsibilities.

The mentor-mentee relationship is a dynamic and reciprocal one. While mentors offer guidance and expertise, they also have much to gain from the exchange. Mentees bring fresh perspectives, innovative ideas, and a deep understanding of emerging trends. Embracing this mutual learning process enriches both parties, leading to a more vibrant and dynamic professional environment.

One of the most rewarding aspects of mentoring is witnessing the transformation in a colleague's confidence, decisiveness and resilience. Through encouragement and constructive feedback, I was able to help mentees overcome self-doubt and navigate setbacks. This newfound confidence not only fuels professional growth but also permeates into other aspects of their lives.

Acknowledging achievements, whether they are significant milestones or small victories, is essential in the mentoring journey. Celebrating successes instils a sense of accomplishment and motivates mentees to continue striving for excellence. It also reinforces the idea that growth is a continuous, ongoing process.

As a mentor, it is essential to recognise that the needs of our mentees may change over time. Being adaptable and responsive to these evolving needs ensures that the mentorship remains relevant and effective. Regular check-ins and open communication channels facilitate this process, allowing for adjustments in goals, strategies, and approaches.

Setting attainable, yet challenging, goals is a vital aspect of mentoring.

# Reflections on Mentoring

## CONTINUED

### Conclusion

Mentoring colleagues is a journey of growth, both for the mentor and the mentee. It is a reciprocal relationship that thrives on trust, guidance, and mutual learning. By fostering a culture of empowerment, setting realistic goals, and nurturing professional development, mentors play a pivotal role in shaping the careers and lives of their colleagues.

As I reflect on my own experiences, I am reminded of the profound impact that mentoring can have, not only in the professional realm but also in the broader landscape of personal development and fulfilment. Through mentoring, we have the power to inspire, guide, and ultimately, to make a lasting difference in the lives of our colleagues.

Through mentoring, we have the power to inspire, guide, and ultimately, to make a lasting difference in the lives of our colleagues. The reflexive mentor not only critically reflects after mentoring conversations but has the ability to detect and use their own feelings and thoughts in the moment, whilst in a mentoring conversation. This requires a high level of presence and mindfulness. Really masterful mentors can unconsciously pick up on finely nuanced signals from the mentee – reflection in the moment allows those signals to be brought into the conversation and explored.

It is worth remembering these words of wisdom attributed to Maya Angelou: "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."



**Through mentoring, we have the power to inspire, guide, and ultimately, to make a lasting difference in the lives of our colleagues.**



## WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE TRANSCULTURAL AND POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVES

Claude-Hélène Mayer  
Elisabeth Vanderheiden  
Orna Braun-Lewensohn · Gila Chen  
Kiyoko Sueda · Brightness Mangolothi  
Saba Safdar · Soyeon Kim *Editors*

### Women's Empowerment for a Sustainable Future

Transcultural and Positive Psychology Perspectives

 Springer

This edited volume "Women's Empowerment for a Sustainable Future Transcultural and Positive Psychology Perspectives" focuses on women's empowerment for a sustainable future" takes cultural and transcultural and positive psychology perspectives into consideration and explores the topic of women's empowerment from diverse stances, across social strata, cultural divides as well as economic and political divisions. It addresses the critique of the overly Western focus of positive psychology on this topic by adopting a transnational and transcultural lens, and by taking non-WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic) samples into in-depth consideration. The chapters therefore focus on women from diverse socio-cultural, political, socio-economic backgrounds and discuss their ways of empowering others and being empowered. They also discuss related positive psychology constructs, such as: coping, resilience, transformation, growth, leadership, creativity, identity development, sustainable action, as well as positive socio-economic, political and eco-sustainable thought and action. The volume as a whole looks at women's leadership as a factor of empowerment. A further fundamental assumption is that women's empowerment is needed to create a sustainable future at micro-, meso- and macro levels, which presumes safety, peace, ecological considerations, and compassionate leadership.

**More than forty percent of the authors are from South Africa, and most are HERS-SA alumnas.**





**Prof Kat Yassim** is an Associate Professor in the Department of Education Leadership and Management at the University of Johannesburg. She is the 2022 winner of the UJ Women in Leadership Development Programme's Action Learning Project in which she researched the financial coaching needs of female academics in preparation for retirement.

## Making the (in)visible:

### Women leadership of research in higher education institutions

Leaders who make gender diversity a priority spend time, money and good intentions on efforts to build a more robust pipeline of upwardly mobile women, especially within the realm of research. Unfortunately, despite these efforts, women remain largely invisible.

The problem with these approaches is that they don't address the fragile process of coming to see oneself, and to be seen by others, as a research leader. Becoming a leader involves a fundamental identity shift. Organisations inadvertently undermine this process when they advise women to proactively seek leadership roles without also addressing policies and practices that set up a mismatch between how women are seen, and the qualities and experiences people tend to associate with leaders.

The statistics (UNESCO, 2022) speak volumes:

- Less than 30% of the world's researchers are women.
- Women make up 50% of applicants in the hard sciences globally, but only 28% of them are accepted for further studies.
- 16% of Deans, 15% of Chairs, 21% of Full Professors are women.
- 70% of participants believed that more measures should be taken to encourage women to take leadership roles in research.

A case in point is the "face of Covid" in South Africa, Prof Salim Abdool Karim who appeared on television and in the media providing updates on scientific and research development in relation to the pandemic. Over a year, the highly respected and esteemed researcher became a household name, someone we all recognised and trusted. Fears of damnation were mitigated by trust in the medical researchers who were contributing groundbreaking research to help understand the virus, its impact on health, and the vaccinations that could protect human lives.

The same Professor is married to another, also esteemed, medical researcher, Prof Quarraisha Abdool Karim, an infectious diseases epidemiologist and Pro-Vice Chancellor for African Health at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal. Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic and public presentations, she remained unseen.

If an analysis is made, one finds that she has authored and co-authored several medical research articles on the subject of Covid-19, often as first author and often with her husband. So, one must ask the question: "Why have her contributions remained invisible?" (Except possibly within the medical/scientific research fraternity.)

Why was he chosen to be the face of Covid-19 when she too had made significant contributions? Who made the choice? And why?

While we may never get answers to these questions, the discrepancy highlights the age-old conundrum of the gender bias that persists in organisations and in society that, for women, disrupts the learning cycle at the heart of becoming a leader.

“Becoming a leader involves a fundamental identity shift.”

“A woman with a book and a pen Has the power to move nations  
A woman with a mind and a voice Has the power to change worlds...”

Sasha Temerte



## Making the (in)visible: Women leadership of research in higher education institutions

However, one must also balance these observations with gains made. For example, a June 2023 article in Forbes, on a report by Women's Power Gap, highlights the rise of women as leaders of top-tier research universities in the USA. Women made up 30% of university presidents in 2023 (an increase of 7% since 2021). Among the women university presidents, 24% are white, 3% Asian, 2% Black and 1% Latina, confirming racial disparities that need to be addressed as well.

Women's Power Gap president and author of the report, Andrea Silbert commented: "It is heartening to see more women leading elite universities.

This speaks to an increased awareness of the importance of having academic leadership that represents the diversity of the student population it serves. Women have outnumbered men on college [university] campuses for decades, so it's high time we're starting to see more gender and racial diversity reflected in the highest roles in academia."

This pattern of improvement is also evident in South Africa, where females constitute only 15% of the 26 public university Vice-Chancellors; out of 30 Deputy Vice-Chancellors, only 12 are women; and less than 5% of Professors are black females. While these figures are still low, they are showing an improvement and offer the consolation that women are making an impact despite the barriers and circumstances stacked against them.

In another Forbes article that revealed "the world's top female scientists in 2022", the list was not only racially fractured but also dominated by the "hard sciences", leaving social sciences, humanities, business, and other research areas excluded from the list. Low representation of women in such "top women" lists shows that the problem of race and gender inequities continues to persist, pointing to the fact that it is not enough to identify and instill the "right" skills and competencies as if in a social vacuum.

The context must support a woman's motivation to lead and increase the likelihood that others will recognise and encourage her efforts—even when she doesn't look or behave like the current generation of senior and accomplished researchers.



**HERS-SA HIGHER  
EDUCATION WOMEN  
LEADERS**

*Awards*

HERS-SA recognised the achievements, influence and inspiration of seven outstanding female leaders in South African higher education in the inaugural MTN HERS-SA Higher Education Women Leaders Awards.

The awards were inaugurated to mark the 20th anniversary of HERS-SA and to provide a platform for recognising the contributions of women leaders in higher education to the development of our country through educating and empowering the next generation of leaders.

HERS-SA chairperson Dr Soraya Beukes said that while there are many women's awards programmes in South Africa, none have fully recognised the role

of women specifically in higher education, as drivers of leadership, empowerment and equity. She said HERS-SA had adopted the responsibility of providing recognition to exceptional female leaders who have made a significant impact and been influential both inside and outside of their institutions. The awards also sought to recognise the accomplishments of women who inspire and drive individuals to be and do more, both within and external to their institutions.

The awards further aim to inspire and attract new leadership talent to the sector, by celebrating role models who advance gender transformation,

and creating visibility for higher education women leaders in South Africa.

The inaugural Higher Education Women Leaders Awards were held at the DoubleTree Hotel in Cape Town on 7 September 2023. Awards were made in seven categories: Lifetime Achiever, Trailblazer, Humanitarian, Emerging Young Women Leader, Women in STEM, Women in Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS), and Women in Academic Administration.

Attendees dazzled in glamorous outfits while Soul Incite Band set the atmosphere for an evening honouring the 35 nominees and eventual award winners.

Opening the evening, Dr Beukes said: "At HERS-SA, our vision is to empower women leaders in higher education. Our mission is to support and promote women's development in higher education in order to achieve an equal and just society. For the last 20 years, we have zealously promoted gender equity in leadership within higher education, and will continue to do so."

"Leadership equity in higher education remains an all-time challenge. Women continue to face challenges in reaching their full potential in leadership positions that are still dominated by heterosexual males. We at HERS-SA recognise the challenges whereby women and gender-diverse people are not held in the same standing in the workplace as heterosexual males. We are striving to embrace and achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5: To achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls."

Keynote speaker Prof Refilwe Nancy Phaswana, a leading public health scientist and Professor of Epidemiology and Public Health in the Faculty of

Health Sciences at the University of Johannesburg, spoke about "Paying It Forward" and how she was impacted by people who mentored her. Prof Phaswana elaborated on how people had sacrificed for her and helped her push forward into new research, and how she wants to repay and help others.

"All I can do is sacrifice for others, pay it forward. That is what keeps me awake at night."

Prof Phaswana said that as a mentor she inspires her mentees to mentor others – paying it forward.

"Everyone has their own journey. I always tell my mentees, don't seek to reproduce me in yourself, look for what you like about me, take it and then carve your own path."

"Looking back, I have learnt that my humble background which I once considered as a hindrance, is actually what has enabled me to become empathetic and sympathetic about the situation facing others who look like me. So, embrace your background. That might just be the tool that is in your hand to utilise," she said.

Prof Phaswana challenged the audience to think about the legacy that they will leave behind.

"What is your pay-it-forward plan? This is the challenge I am posing to you. What is your legacy? What would you like to be remembered by?"

In closing, HERS-SA Director Brightness Mangolotho said: "To all 35 finalists, I want to say, that you are HERS-SA leaders. The fact that you are a finalist, echoes that you are making an impact where you are."

"Leaders are those who are Humane, Empower, Recognise, Support, Steadfast and Adaptable, which spells out HERS-SA. You were selected as a finalist because of these attributes and more. I salute you all."

"May you continue to lift as you rise and look after yourself just as you would those you are in charge of. Importantly, we look forward to celebrating your future achievements."

Mangolotho thanked Dr Beukes and the HERS-SA Board for supporting her proposal to initiate the awards.

"Nothing is as powerful as an idea whose time has come," she said.

 **The awards further aim to inspire and attract new leadership talent to the sector, by celebrating role models who advance gender transformation, and creating visibility for higher education women leaders in South Africa.** 

HERS-SA extends special *Thanks* to the sponsors of the first Higher Education Women Leaders Awards:

# MTN South Africa

With its Women In Digital Business Challenge, the MTN Foundation is helping women take their rightful place in SA's digital industry



MTN

Launched in 1994, MTN South Africa is a subsidiary of MTN Group, a leading emerging market operator with a clear vision to lead the delivery of a bold new digital world to our customers. We are inspired by our belief that everyone deserves the benefits of a modern connected life. The MTN Group is listed on the JSE Securities Exchange in South Africa under the share code 'MTN'. Our strategy is **Ambition 2025: Leading digital solutions for Africa's progress.**

Instead of confining our activities to supporting IT education programmes, we opted for an approach that not only stimulates but provides support to the industry.

Hearing about the 'digital divide' is common in this technological age. Although it usually refers to the gap that separates the digital 'haves' from the digital 'have nots,' it can just as equally apply to women being underrepresented in the IT industry, which impacts every aspect of our daily lives. When one considers that in South Africa women under 35 outpace the number of men holding matrics and that at a tertiary level, 50% more women have degrees or degree-equivalent qualifications over men, it isn't easy to understand why there are so few women in tech. Women also make up 13% of graduates in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields, says Lesimola Selepe, Senior Manager of Community Programmes at the MTN SA Foundation. "For the MTN SA Foundation, the answer to South Africa's enormous information and communications technology (ICT) skills gap and the high unemployment rate is encouraging

more women to enter the sector. For the Foundation, changing the picture of having women occupying only 23% of technology roles in business has required a special approach." "Instead of confining our activities to supporting IT education programmes, we opted for an approach that not only stimulates but provides support to the industry. By showing young women interested in tech that inspirational, entrepreneurial women are steadily changing the face of SA tech, we felt it necessary for us to support determined women forging new paths in the IT sector." Through discussions and research, the Foundation's Women in Digital Business Challenge was conceptualised, with the first challenge launching in 2022 offering R 1000 000 in prize money. The MTN Foundation's Women in Digital Business Challenge aims to empower women already in business to strengthen and build sustainable enterprises.





# MTN South Africa

With its Women In Digital Business Challenge, the MTN Foundation is helping women take their rightful place in SA's digital industry  
...Continued

And unlike other business-orientated events where the winner takes all, instead of having one winner - which limits a programme's impact - the challenge has ten winners selected from an initial national field of more than 50 entrants. Ensuring those selected already have the business skills to build on their success, all the finalists are graduates or alumni of the Foundation's existing SME accelerator programmes. Each of the ten is awarded R100 000 to build their business. The cash can be used for working capital, developing the business, buying additional assets such as equipment and software or meeting other developmental needs. The women also enter a four-month mentorship programme to assist in building up their existing business skills and acumen. They are encouraged to use expert assistance to accelerate the growth of their businesses in the challenging and ever-changing IT landscape.

With the challenge in its second year, some unique trends about women in the IT business are emerging, says Lesimola Selepe. "The womens' unique experiences and backgrounds are helping to create a more inclusive approach to technology," he says.

"What stands out is that many women have used their IT skills to meet the needs of their communities. They have built businesses by engaging with the people around them and offering much-needed opportunities for building practical, saleable IT skills." "Others have addressed the lack of available tech equipment and education at local schools by

establishing after-school centres where children learn the basics of coding and even in demand specialisations like robotics."

"The MTN Women in Digital Business Challenge has, therefore, achieved more than just advance the interests of a handful of skilled women entrepreneurs. It has also helped create an environment which has provided a launching pad for many to enter IT and build digital careers." The MTN SA Foundation's purpose is to bring about meaningful, measurable and sustainable change that helps disadvantaged and rural communities become self-sufficient, says Arthur Mukhuvha, General Manager of the MTN SA Foundation. "As a technology focused company, it is natural that MTN focuses on technology and its use as a tool to help uplift people and communities. Building confidence and independence in these digitally-driven times requires linking connectivity and education."

"We are proud that we have developed an innovative, all-inclusive approach to technical education and have used this as a golden thread that has enabled us to assist and make a difference in the lives of thousands of South Africans regardless of their ages or educational status." "The MTN Women in Digital Business Challenge fits seamlessly into our programmes and though only in its second year, it has demonstrated practical results that has benefitted countless people across the country," Mukhuvha concludes.



**Others have addressed the lack of available tech equipment and education at local schools by establishing after-school centres where children learn the basics of coding and even in demand specialisations like robotics.**



**HERS-SA**

*Awards Winners*

# Awards Winners

## Lifetime Achiever: Prof Heidi Abrahamse



**Prof Heidi Abrahamse** is Director of the Laser Research Centre at the University of Johannesburg (UJ), and holder of the DSI/NRF SARChI Chair for Laser Applications in Health.

Her career spans over 30 years characterised by academic excellence. She received the University of Johannesburg Vice-Chancellor's Distinguished Award for Outstanding Researcher in 2010 and 2020, and the International Photodynamic Association's Humanitarian and Research Excellence Awards in 2019 and 2022.

Prof Abrahamse has supervised 63 Master's, 38 PhDs and 26 post-doctoral research fellows, and published over 400 publications. She is an NRF B-rated scientist with a Scopus H-index of 45, ranked in the top 0.0044% of 44 977 published authors worldwide on photosensitizing agents.

### MY MESSAGE FOR WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION

*Believe in yourself, believe in your dreams and aspirations, believe that you will be successful in every aspect of womanhood. Women have attributes highly specific to their gender and it is those attributes that will drive your passions and beliefs and success.*

In her acceptance speech, she said: "This is simply incredible. I really didn't expect this. I am very honoured; this is a room full of magnificent women and I am well aware of how privileged I am to stand here where everyone deserves to be.

"Leading, learning and lifting is the slogan of HERS-SA. I believe that those are words that inspire all educators and academics to lead by example, to be inspired, continuously learning and uplifting all of society and all who they encounter.

"I definitely believe that academics have in common the need to continuously learn. Despite the fact that I try to teach my own children, all the time continuously; now at ages 23 and 27, I learn so much from them. (Although I won't admit it!) "I learn so much from the young students and I love it.

When you are a professor at a university and you have all these brilliant young minds with you all the time, you see them grow. I even have staff members now that I have taught from first year and they are now full professors in my centre.

To me, that is my legacy I do believe there are no people that walks this earth that don't have the potential to be brilliant, I truly believe that.

"It inspires me to see successful young people who have passed through my life.

"I want to say thank you to God. I have always believed that you don't ask God for everything and anything. God has given you the ability and brain to think and to do things for yourself. I have always felt bad to ask God for things because I always think there are so many people who are less privileged than me that he has to help. What I have always asked God, is please keep your hand over everything in my life.

My children, my parents and very often, before I speak like this, especially at conferences, I say 'God please just give me the words today, just give me the right words to speak'.

"I want to thank HERS-SA, I really appreciate this award. It is just amazing for me honestly. I am currently on sabbatical, and I have been thinking a lot about what things I can still do before I have to retire in six years.

So, thank you HERS, I can't tell you how much I appreciate this. "I do believe in Prof Refilwe's philosophy of paying it forward. I do pay it forward. My students are my children and I teach them way more than science. I love them and they matter to me. All the colleagues from the University of Johannesburg that are here tonight, I appreciate that you are present, I celebrate you. I celebrate all the women from all the different universities and all the universities where I have been.

"Thank you God for giving me the words tonight."



**I celebrate all the women from all the different universities and all the universities where I have been.**



### WHAT DID IT MEAN TO BE NOMINATED?

*I believe that the words of the HERS-SA slogan – leading, learning, lifting – inspire all educators and academics to lead by example, be inspired to continuous learning and uplifting all of society that they encounter. So, for me to be nominated in this inaugural year of the awards is truly an enormous honour and privilege, for I have strived to fulfil all those positive attributes.*

### WHAT INSPIRES YOU?

*All of us have our dreams, goals, ambitions. We all want to be someone, achieve something and live a meaningful life. It greatly inspires me to play a role in the success of young people, to enable them and to see them achieve far greater achievements than they ever imagined. But if you want to reach the stars, or at least be the best you can be, you have to make sacrifices. You'll have to try harder than others, do more and believe that you can.*

*I am no different to most people, I want to be the best I can be at anything and everything possible and small successes inspire me to be better, try harder and try and try again, get up when I fail and persist until I succeed. In South Africa's higher education, through awards and recognition such as these awards, I am inspired that the women of South Africa will continue to be national leaders to contribute to the development of our country.*



# Awards

# Winners



## Women in STEM

**Prof Nosisi N Feza** is Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Research and Postgraduate Studies at the University of Venda in Thohoyandou.

In May 2007 she was awarded a Fulbright scholarship to pursue her PhD in the United States. In 2008 she received the Inaugural Leroy and Margaret H. Callahan Scholarship. She is an NRF-rated researcher and was awarded a diversity scholar award by Michigan University for her research on the influence of culture in teaching and learning of mathematics to students of African descent.

Recently, in March 2023, she received a Lifetime Achiever award from her alma mater Nelson Mandela University.

"I am really humbled, and I would like to appreciate HERS-SA for hosting these awards in honour of women," she said on accepting the award.

"It is never easy for us women, but hard work does pay off.

"We start our journeys with a lot in front of us. With babies, washing machines, dishes; and we are in a room with men - there's nothing in front of them. As the saying goes, it's the washing for me, it's the babies, it's the dishes and they are running. By the time I start, they are gone. But with God's grace, here we are.

"I thank my dad and my mom today for being soldiers who are clean at heart, praying, teaching us how to do the clean work. The clean work is to bring light where there is darkness. The clean work is to sacrifice yourself so that those who are coming after you will have it better. The clean life is to do everything with integrity.

"I would like to say thank you to my children; they have sacrificed a lot. Each degree I had, there was a baby on my thigh. I would like to thank my partner. Thank you so much for the support and love that I get.

"I would like to thank HERS-SA. This is a huge step to recognise women in these difficult times of gender-based violence. All those times when we get into leadership positions and we get criticised instead of supported, all those times when we women pull each other down, this is very important for us. Keep up the great work. To other women, don't get discouraged. and to my peers, I respect you."

### WHAT DID IT MEAN TO BE NOMINATED?

I am motivated, encouraged and humbled by this nomination. My research contribution stems from my own identity and for it to be recognised, I am humbled.

💡 **The clean work is to bring light where there is darkness. The clean work is to sacrifice yourself so that those who are coming after you will have it better. The clean life is to do everything with integrity.** 💡

## Prof Nosisi N Feza

### WHAT INSPIRES YOU?

*My personal mandate of making a mark and working hard to leave a legacy. I have come to learn that some of us have a responsibility to demonstrate excellence through consistency. Not giving up, not being easily discouraged, becomes crucial. Resilience and grit are qualities to attain, and training the mind that perseverance and being goal-oriented is key. Believing that you have talent, and the talent is not for you only. Having an understanding that the more you share the better you become. I know I am a product that gets refined through dedication and hard work.*

*Curiosity. I always have a burning need to figure out how students and young children naturally conceptualise mathematics. I humbly allow students and young children to teach me their thought processes and the language they use to express their thinking. I enjoy observing their gestures, expressions, and interpretations. I believe in their unique mathematical capabilities and hence my research explores educators' practices in parallel with students' strategies and their mathematical developmental levels.*

*In designing an English-IsiXhosa dictionary with colleagues, we were inspired by the mathematical richness of artefacts in the villages of the Eastern Cape and used them to illustrate mathematical knowledge and terminology, not forgetting further developing isiXhosa as a scientific language.*

### WHAT IS YOUR MESSAGE FOR WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION?

*Women researchers have unique aspirations, with one of them being to make an impact on society. I encourage women researchers never to lose focus on what provoked them to become researchers. It takes time to rise in research as a woman because of our philosophical, ethical, and dynamic ways of interpreting scholarship. Be gentle to yourself and know that your research needs your attention and perseverance so that it can influence policies, practices, and shift discourse.*

*You do not become an expert automatically. A lot of investment in yourself is needed. Nothing comes easy; however, courage will take you to places you have never imagined. Women are resourceful, dynamic, and able. Stop procrastinating and start making mistakes for your growth and learning. Fear will not take you anywhere. Your uniqueness is an asset, embrace it.*



# Awards Winners

## Women in Humanities and Social Sciences

## Prof Nicolette Roman



**Prof Nicolette Roman** holds the SARChI Chair in Human Capabilities, Social Cohesion and the Family in the Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies of Children, Families and Society, in the Faculty of Community and Health Sciences at the University of the Western Cape (UWC). She was a leading founder of the Centre, and is its current Director. She was a Visiting Professor at the University of Huddersfield in the UK in 2022, where she delivered a public lecture titled: *Family-centredness in healthcare: Striving for individual and family well-being*. Prof Roman's research focuses on family life to achieve family and social cohesion and well-being. She has a PhD in Psychology and is rated by the NRF as an Established Researcher (C2).

Accepting the award, she said: "I am deeply humbled and honoured to stand before you today with immense gratitude as a recipient of this award. "This award holds immense significance, not just for me personally as a first-generation student, and now a scholar, raised by a single mom in an extended family. But also for all those who have supported and believed in women's leadership, celebrating the collective efforts and contributions of women in academia and particularly in the fields that explore humanity and society. "To the University of the Western Cape, I am very conscious of the legacy I create and will one day leave behind; of the unique blend of personal experiences, values, aspirations and commitment to making a positive impact in education, families, communities and different societies within my institution. Thank you for the opportunities to be the best that I can be, within a space and place I consider home."

**This award holds immense significance, not just for me personally as a first-generation student, and now a scholar, raised by a single mom in an extended family.**

### WHAT DID IT MEAN TO BE NOMINATED?

The nomination was a surprise, and unexpected, because I am a person who focuses on the tasks at hand without the fuss and frills. So, to have been nominated makes me feel incredibly honoured and humbled. As a first-generation university student who was raised by a single mother in the warmth of a large extended family, this nomination symbolises the hardships and successes of journeying through academia as a student during periods of violence and the fight for justice in the apartheid era, and as a female scholar traversing the paths of exclusion, stereotypes, work-life-balance, limited networking and limited access to funding. This nomination stands for the unwavering devotion of a single mother and is a tribute to my mother's tenacity and unrelenting resolve, instilling in me the idea that knowledge and education are the keys to escaping difficult circumstances. It represents the unwavering support of an extended family, a very supportive husband, wonderful mentors and amazing students. Being honoured in the category for women in the humanities and social sciences is a celebration of not only my own accomplishments but also those of the numerous other women who have broken barriers and broken through to the top in the quest for knowledge. It's a celebration of the inspirational tales of women who have defied expectations and broken down boundaries, proving that developing knowledge, skills and science knows no bounds.

This nomination highlights how education may change people's lives and the lives of future generations. It refers to the capacity of education to inspire, strengthen, and spark change within individuals, families, communities and society at large. It serves as a reminder that every experience has the capacity to move others and that every journey has the capacity to inspire. Furthermore, it represents a glimmer of hope for every young woman experiencing comparable circumstances to myself. It represents the possibility that aspirations can come true with willpower, encouragement, and access to education.

In being a beacon of hope and inspiration, this nomination motivates me to not only keep up my dedication to mentoring, advocacy, and scholarship but to also bear the torch that was passed down to me by those who had faith in me, illuminating the path for others who are paving their own paths. Thank you to everyone who believes that every journey has the potential to brighten the world, including HERS-SA, my family, mentors, and especially my students.

### WHAT INSPIRES YOU?

I am inspired by the generation of knowledge, the building and development of science and the unravelling of the complex relationships between thoughts, emotions, and behaviours, among individuals and within families.

Within this inspiration is the experience of my students who are the knowledge and science creators and the next generation of scholars who will go out to transform the world, their communities and families. I am inspired by their hunger and thirst for knowledge and change. Together we change policies, mindsets, and lives, motivating us to carefully investigate, analyse, and explain findings that can help solve social problems and increase understanding. But beyond individual accomplishments, it's the connections and collaborations that truly inspire me. Engaging with diverse perspectives, collaborating with students and fellow researchers, and interacting with communities to broaden my horizons and deepen my insights. I am reminded that my/our work is part of a greater knowledge tapestry and that we are enlightening the globe together. On this inspired journey, I carry my university (UWC) motto with me: *Respice Prospice* (looking back, looking forward), reminding us "to take what is worthy from the past and build the future, to move from hope to action through knowledge.

### WHAT IS YOUR MESSAGE FOR WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION?

On this incredible journey we, as women in higher education, have shared experiences, goals, and obstacles. My thoughts are not just mine; they are a reflection of the many women's experiences in higher education that have defined our journey via

via perseverance, determination, and success. Keep in mind that your presence is invaluable. Your input, ideas, and opinions are crucial to the development of new information and new methods of solving old problems or new problems. The road we travel is not always paved with roses, but it is in rising above difficulty that we discover our true brilliance. Despite discrimination, biases, narrow-mindedness, and structural difficulties, we have managed to succeed. We can make our mark despite the odds because we can overcome them. Our paths may be similar, but yours has the potential to inspire others with its unique twists and turns and the stories you share along the way. We, the underrepresented women of academia, are fierce advocates for equality and acceptance. We contribute a wide variety of worldviews, which strengthens academic discourse and advances global comprehension. Keep in mind that you are not alone on this path. Together, we can accomplish anything. Try to connect with other academic women. Create groups of people who can help and guide one another and work together. Encourage one another, teach by example, and relish in shared success. Together, we can make a bigger difference and foster an atmosphere of mutual help. Never give up on your dreams, no matter how difficult things get. Your commitment to your field and the pursuit of knowledge is inspiring.



# Awards Winners

## Trailblazer Prof Beatrice Opeolu



**Prof Beatrice Olutoyin Opeolu** obtained her PhD (Environmental Toxicology) at the Federal University of Agriculture in Abeokuta, Nigeria, in 2007. She is a full professor in Environmental Chemistry/Toxicology and rated as an Established Researcher (C3) at Cape Peninsula University of Technology. She has published over 120 articles in peer-reviewed journals, book chapters and conference proceedings in her field. She is the Immediate Past President of the Society of Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry (SETAC) Africa and the Vice-president of the SETAC World Council. She is the convener of SETAC Africa women's events and the Co-convener of EmpowHerNg and EmpowHerSA. Prof Opeolu mentors many environmental science practitioners in academia, business, and government.

Prof Opeolu could not attend the awards event and her daughter delivered an acceptance speech on her behalf:

"My mother gives thanks to the almighty God for this gift in his amazing grace. Thank you for all being here today to celebrate women in leadership. I know she's deeply honoured to receive this award.

"I believe that the term trailblazer encapsulates her. Since I've known her, she's always set this standard. I feel like she's set the standard for us that I really hope we can attain.

"She wants to thank the HERS-SA team, friends, family and mentors.

"In accepting this award, she emphasised the importance of empowerment and mentorship, and I quote: 'Let's empower the next generation and commit to being mentors. Diversity and inclusion are vital for innovation.'

"This award is not just for her, but for all women who have paved the way. Let's work tirelessly for gender equality and a world where women's leadership is the norm. Thank you for the honour and let's move forward together in collaboration and empowerment. We rise, we grow, and we thrive together."

Earlier, we asked Prof Opeolu to answer a few questions about her nomination and her leadership:

### WHAT DID IT MEAN TO BE NOMINATED?

This nomination attests to my competencies, achievements, and capabilities. It is a validation of one's values, attributes, and engagements. It gives me a sense of fulfilment, success and a renewed obligation to empower other women inclusively. It means a new responsibility to remain committed as a role model for the next generation of women leaders.

### WHAT INSPIRES YOU?

My background, my "failures", and my community all contribute to my personality. Feedback from mentors, mentees, students, and peers motivates me to improve and develop more impactful engagements. Whenever I can make a difference in any space, I am inspired to do just that without thinking about what it means. Naturally, I love and enjoy being a source of strength to others as much as possible. Putting a smile on somebody's face and supporting others to achieve their goals inspires me to want to do more!

### WHAT IS YOUR MESSAGE FOR WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION?

*We can all grow and thrive together. The sky is just the beginning for us women if we work together rather than against each other. Authenticity to self and others is key. Believe in your abilities and potential. Your presence and contributions enrich the academic community.*

*Don't be scared to pursue passion. Pursue your academic and research passions with dedication. Resilience in the face of challenges is essential for success. Like many fields, higher education may present challenges and biases. Remember your resilience and determination can overcome these obstacles. Seek support from mentors, allies, and networks that empower women in academia.*

*Consider becoming a mentor and/or finding mentors who can provide guidance, share experiences, and offer valuable advice. Role models within higher education can inspire and pave the way for future generations.*

*Advocate for and actively contribute to creating diverse and inclusive academic environments. Embracing different perspectives and backgrounds enriches the learning experience for all. Lifelong learning and facilitating impact and change in communities are essential.*

*Build and engage with support networks of peers, colleagues, and organisations that champion gender equality and women's academic advancement.*

*Balancing academic pursuits with personal well-being is crucial. Don't forget to take care of your physical and mental health. Self-care allows you to perform at your best in both your work and personal life.*

*Celebrate your achievements, no matter how small or large. Recognise your value and the difference you make in the academic world.*

*Above all, let us all celebrate and support each other. Together, we rise, grow and thrive.*

*In designing an English-isiXhosa dictionary with colleagues, we were inspired by the mathematical richness of artefacts in the villages of the Eastern Cape and used them to illustrate mathematical knowledge and terminology, not forgetting further developing isiXhosa as a scientific language.*

**"I believe that the term trailblazer encapsulates her. Since I've known her, she's always set this standard. I feel like she's set the standard for us that I really hope we can attain."**

# Awards Winners

## Humanitarian Prof Tembisa Ngqondi



**Prof Tembisa Ngqondi**, Dean of the Faculty of Informatics and Design at Cape Peninsula University of Technology, embraces inclusive philosophy and believes that human beings were born leaders in their respective capacity or capabilities. Her career journey is informed by a transformative leadership style, believing in developing others as she grows. She is an active community member who participates in diverse community engagement projects, where she funds most of these projects through personal projects and funding from other sponsors. Her research interest is Information and Communication Technology (ICT) with specific focus on ICT for development, and ICT governance.

In her acceptance speech, she said:

“I am really humbled. I have had a long journey. My journey started very long; I wouldn't even have imagined that today I will be standing here. I would like to thank God, who has been the pillar of my journey and who has done great things for me.

“Let me start with when I did my matric. Being nominated for a bursary to go and study but then I did not have all my results, I had two 'pending' results. I think that people in education know that when they say 'pending', they are saying you don't deserve to have that mark, you are being investigated. So they gave me the school average, not what I deserved to have. But I did make it to the Technikon to do my studies. I think now I must go back to them and ask them to give me my actual results!

“I am dedicating this award to my mother who instilled in all of us at home the spirituality of a humanitarian. I would come back from school, and she would still be cooking. In our village there was a clinic and all the people that went to the clinic would pass through our home when they come back from the clinic.

When they were hungry, they had to go home. When she prepared something for us and they came home hungry, she had to dish for them and start cooking again for us. Almost all the time when we arrived at home there wouldn't be food for us. Food would have been given to those people that came from the clinic. I must say that she planted a seed for all of us at home. “Having said that, I must also thank my church that taught me to give beyond what I could. For me, the spirit of humanitarianism is not about ourselves, it's about the other person. If you give to a person, even if it is just one word that is going to empower that person, you have multiplied yourself and you actually increase yourself beyond measure. Meaning that when you take yourself and you add on that person, it means that you now have two brains in one space to empower or increase the knowledge in your space.

“I thank my university CPUT for affording me this opportunity, all my friends, the community, everyone that has walked this journey with me. Above all, I thank HERS-SA for giving me this opportunity.”

### WHAT DID IT MEAN TO BE NOMINATED?

To be nominated means you are making an impact and people acknowledge your contribution. It is an encouragement for one to do and realise more for the betterment of wider society. It is a humbling experience, being lifted higher than one could imagine.

### WHAT INSPIRES YOU?

Seeing people succeed and becoming better people inspires me. I am more inspired when I am part of growth and innovation, be it for systems or in people's lives.

### WHAT IS YOUR MESSAGE FOR WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION?

I would like to see them introducing a better version of themselves every day, try not to be apologetic but rather be kind to themselves when they have not done well, and be willing to take up new challenges. They must make sure that they position themselves for opportunities and always strive to be a catalyst of success for their communities, especially for other women.

“ I am dedicating this award to my mother who instilled in all of us at home the spirituality of a humanitarian.”



# Awards Winners

## Women in Academic Administration Prof José Frantz



**Prof José Frantz is** Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research and Innovation at the University of the Western Cape (UWC).

She was previously the Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences at the university. Prof Frantz has a background in health professions education and holds a doctorate in physiotherapy from UWC and is a past fellow and faculty of the Foundation for Advancement of International Medical Education and Research (FAIMER) in Philadelphia, USA. She also participated in the Oxford University Leadership programme.

Her commitment to human capacity development is reflected in the numbers of Master's (44) and PhD students (19) that she has supervised and her academic activities in terms of teaching, learning and research.

Accepting the award, she said: "Firstly, let me thank God for guiding my footsteps in a way only he could do, all honour and praise goes to him. I am extremely and deeply honoured to have been considered for this award in higher education administration.

"Thank you, HERS-SA, for creating this space and the opportunity for women to be acknowledged.

"Throughout my journey in academia, I have been fuelled by a passion for fostering a dynamic and inclusive environment that allows all who cross my path to flourish and be the best version of themselves. Each day I am reminded of the incredible potential within our educational institutions to transform lives and empower future leaders.

"This nomination is not just a recognition of my efforts but a testament to the collective dedication of all stakeholders, including academics, administrators, students and support staff who together work tirelessly to create a better future through education.

"Together, we have the power to inspire, innovate and shape the minds of tomorrow's change makers.

I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the noble cause of higher education, and I accept this award with humility and a renewed commitment to the pursuit of excellence. Let us continue to collaborate, innovate and empower every learner who crosses our path. For they are the true source of our inspiration and motivation. Thank you for this honour and I look forward to continuing our shared mission of making a positive impact in the world of higher education.

"I want to thank my parents, my husband, my children and my grandchildren for their support. To my colleagues at UWC, the institution where I have been for many years, where I have grown, which has nurtured me to the person I am today, I want to say thank you to all of you and this award is not just an award for myself, but it's an award for us."

### WHAT DID IT MEAN TO BE NOMINATED?

I was humbled and honoured to be nominated. Looking at the definition of these awards made me realise the impact I have made in the lives of others and this for me defines my purpose.

### WHAT INSPIRES YOU?

I am inspired when I see others achieve and grow. Creating a support and enabling environment to capacitate and empower others is what inspires me. I also use myself as an example. Having started from humble beginnings and navigated a difficult path but still having been able to succeed is for me inspiration to motivate others and believe in others.

### WHAT IS YOUR MESSAGE FOR WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION?

There is a need to support each other. We need to work together to uplift each other. For those of us who have navigated the path, both successfully and unsuccessfully, let us share our stories to be able to guide and be role models for the next generation.

💡💡 I want to thank my parents, my husband, my children and my grandchildren for their support. To my colleagues at UWC, the institution where I have been for many years, where I have grown, which has nurtured me to the person I am today, I want to say thank you to all of you and this award is not just an award for myself, but it's an award for us. 💡💡



# Awards Winners

## Emerging Young Women Leaders Award

## Dr Sisanda Nkoala



**Dr Sisanda Nkoala** is a senior lecture in Media Studies at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT), with a PhD in Rhetoric Studies from UCT. She has held leadership positions in several professional organisations, including Brand South Africa, the International Association of Media and Communication Research, and the African Journalism Educators Network.

Dr Nkoala is a passionate advocate for diversity and inclusion in academia, as evidenced by her role as Language and Transformation Coordinator for the Faculty of Informatics and Design at CPUT.

Her expertise as an educator includes providing training beyond the traditional classroom, to empower people from all walks of life on matters related to media and communication.

In her acceptance speech, she said: "I would like to thank the judges for this award, it's a really prophetic award for me. My name is Sisanda, which means we are increasing, emerging.

"To be awarded in the inaugural HERS-SA Higher Education Women Leaders Awards is really meaningful. I wish to thank my institution, the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, for affording me the opportunity to be here. Thank you to our VC's, my Dean, and my HOD. I would like to thank the people who nominated me, the Head of the Media Department Research Committee and the Head of the Journalism Programme.

"I dedicate this award to my children and to my students who are really the fuel behind everything that I do. Last but not least, I must thank my husband who is not here and give all glory to God."

### WHAT DID IT MEAN TO BE NOMINATED?

Being nominated is an honour that affirms that I have the potential to make a difference in higher education. It means those around me, namely my colleagues, recognise something in me that they think is commendable and worth highlighting.



**I dedicate this award to my children and to my students who are really the fuel behind everything that I do. Last but not least, I must thank my husband who is not here and give all glory to God.**



### WHAT INSPIRES YOU?

*I am inspired by many things and many people. My parents, who were academics themselves, were my foundational source of inspiration.*

*My late father, RF Mcimeli was an acclaimed Xhosa author who used the lessons he learnt from his difficult childhood to tell stories that continue to teach many lessons. My late mother CN Mcimeli was also an author, focusing on textbooks. From her I am inspired to work hard on projects that will outlive me.*

*My children and husband also inspire me as they remind me daily that I have a lot to offer the world.*

*My CPUT students are another source of inspiration because they are so brilliant and kind, and despite the hardships they face, they are focused on achieving their goals.*

*Finally, I am inspired by a deeply held belief that I was born for such a time as this, and as such, no matter what I do or where I am, I can add value.*

*In designing an English-IsiXhosa dictionary with colleagues, we were inspired by the mathematical richness of artefacts in the villages of the Eastern Cape and used them to illustrate mathematical knowledge and terminology, not forgetting further developing isiXhosa as a scientific language.*

### WHAT IS YOUR MESSAGE FOR WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION?

*My message is particularly for young women in higher education: your voice matters, so use it, even when it is shaking. We are not here to perpetuate structures that were never designed with us in mind; we are here to dismantle them and rebuild them so that higher education is more accessible and equitable. Some will play a more visible role than others, but every role matters.*





# Awards Photos





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