

# Skills development empowers the water sector

**T**he EWSETA is mandated to drive skills development in two of South Africa's most critical sectors – energy and water. This is achieved through research to determine the skills demand; the facilitation and coordination of skills development programmes to respond to sectoral challenges; driving excellence through quality assurance; and fostering an ecosystem in the energy and water sectors that creates inclusive economic development.

Given the challenges facing South Africa's energy and water sectors, many of which are impacted by a lack of relevant and sufficient skills, the EWSETA has a key role to play in building capacity for the short and long term in these two critical sectors.

The challenge facing the EWSETA is a big one. To fulfil its role and meet its objectives, the EWSETA requires a focused approach and fearless and bold leadership. At a young age, Mpho has proved herself to be the leader that will see the EWSETA leaping towards its ultimate goal of building an ethical,

capable and relevant workforce for the energy and water sectors to ensure economic growth and sustainability through these sectors.

#### Passion for the public sector

If anyone understands the challenges faced by South Africa's youth, particularly those born and raised in rural parts of the country, Mpho does. She was born and grew up in Zeerust, a small village in the North West.

Her passion for the development of the country, and its young people, has served as the driving force for her dedication to the public sector. In living what she describes as her true purpose, she constantly reiterates the importance of service and being lucky enough to serve the public sector to the best of her ability – reinforcing actionable solutions – and being a role model for young people in the country.

#### National Water and Sanitation Summit

Hosted by the Minister of Water and Sanitation, Senzo Mchunu, a diverse contingent of water and sanitation

In idiomatic terms, 'the hot seat' refers to a position that holds the responsibility for making tough decisions and the accountability for an organisation or group's actions. Success within this context requires a courageous and resilient individual. Mpho Mookapele, CEO of the Energy and Water Sector Education and Training Authority (EWSETA), has the strength and courage to take up that seat.

stakeholders gathered at Gallagher Estate in Midrand in mid-February. The event sought to craft lasting solutions to challenges facing the sector to ensure water security and dignified sanitation in the country.

Mpho was given the opportunity to address the summit. She highlighted ongoing challenges that negatively impacted the sector:

- There is a lack of – or inadequate participation by – levy-paying employers in the EWSETA's annual Workplace Skills Plan (WSP) process, which aims to determine a consolidated picture of the 'real' skills required in the sector. While the submission of a WSP entitles an employer to access Mandatory Grant Funding to drive employee training, this process fulfils a critical research function in terms of determining skills demand to serve and grow the sector. A lack of meaningful sector participation in this process means that the information being submitted by a small percentage of the sector results in skewed skills demand data for the country.



sustainability of water supply in the country." The water sector must look to the future when assessing what skills are required.

"The perceived inability to address the challenges we face can no longer be an excuse. We have the money and we have the people; what we need now is action to drive what is a critical enabler to water security and effective sanitation for all," she added.

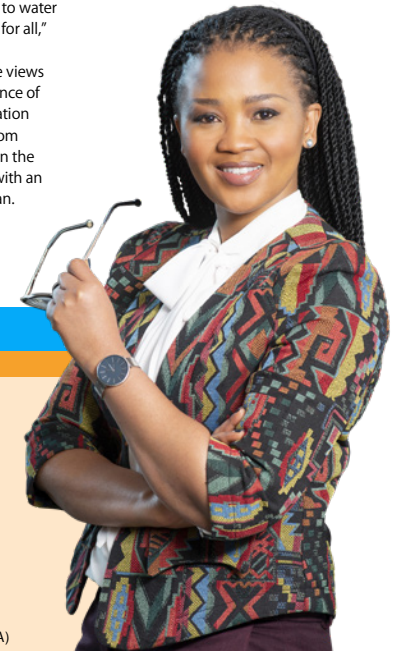
Minister Mchunu echoed those views when he motivated the importance of government not working in isolation and that the views and inputs from experts and other stakeholders in the sector are critical in coming up with an inclusive and comprehensive plan.

The EWSETA fully agrees with the Minister's view on sectoral collaboration. "Our people are tired of us talking and making

endless promises – they want concrete solutions, they want clean water, they want dignified sanitation from us, and we are constitutionally mandated to provide these basic services to them," he said.

The EWSETA is committed to assisting the country in meeting its water needs. **35**

- An important mandate for the EWSETA is qualification development and realignment to meet the specific needs of the sector. Without active industry participation, irrelevant or mismatched skills are being rolled out that result in the sector not benefiting from trained graduates and leading to high graduate unemployment. Once again, industry participation is key to identifying the qualifications and skills programmes needed to meet sector skills demand. Mpho appealed to stakeholders at the summit to work with each other and the EWSETA to address the skills development challenges facing the sector. "We regularly need to ask ourselves if we have properly determined the skills we need in the sector to contribute to future



#### MPHO MOOKAPELE – PROFILE AT A GLANCE

- 37 years old
- Born and raised in Dinokana, Zeerust, North West province
- Completed a year of architectural studies and realised she was better suited to a business career than a creative one
- Completed a BCompt Honours in Accounting at the University of Johannesburg and went on to join Ernst & Young to serve her articles
- Qualified as a CA in 2011
- Worked in London to gain practical experience
- Returned to SA and joined the public sector technical team at Ernst & Young where she became intricately involved in strategy formulation for public entities
- Joined the EWSETA in 2016 as Chief Financial Officer
- Appointed acting CEO for the EWSETA in 2018
- Selected as the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA) Top 35-under-35 in 2019
- Appointed as the EWSETA CEO for five-year tenure in November 2020

**Mpho Mookapele**  
CEO of the EWSETA

