

PublicSector

M A N A G E R

Professor Liesl Zühlke

In conversation with
the 2026 L'Oréal-
UNESCO for Women
in Science laureate

Women's Month 2026

Minister Chikunga
reflects on
empowering
women to build
a stronger nation

Nomfundiso Msweli

Engineering the
airports of tomorrow



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August 2026

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Healthy women, empowered nation:

why access to healthcare must be at the centre of women's empowerment

Every August, South Africa pauses to celebrate the courage, resilience and enduring contribution of women to the country's democratic journey. Women's Month is more than a commemorative occasion; it is a national call to accelerate gender equality, dismantle structural barriers and create an enabling environment in which every woman and girl can realise full potential.

The 2026 Women's Month theme, "Empowered Women Empower the Nation," captures a profound truth: the empowerment of women is inseparable from the prosperity, stability and sustainability of our country. While empowerment is often discussed in terms of education, economic participation and leadership, one equally important pillar deserves greater national attention – women's health.

A nation cannot achieve inclusive development when millions of women continue

to face unequal access to quality healthcare. Health is a constitutional right, a development imperative and an economic investment. Every woman who is healthy is better positioned to participate in the economy, raise healthy families, pursue education, contribute to community development and assume leadership across society.

As South Africa advances the priorities of the Seventh Administration, improving women's access to comprehensive healthcare must remain central to building an inclusive, capable and developmental state.

Throughout their lives, women have unique healthcare needs – from adolescence and reproduc-



Photo: Supplied

Minister in The Presidency for Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, Sindisiwe Chikunga.



tive health to pregnancy, child-birth, menopause and healthy ageing. These needs require responsive, accessible and integrated health systems capable of delivering quality services regardless of income, geography or social status.

South Africa has made remarkable progress in expanding access to healthcare since 1994. Investments in primary healthcare, maternal and child health, HIV prevention and treatment, immunisation programmes and reproductive health services have improved millions of lives.

Yet significant inequalities remain.

Women living in rural communities often travel long distances to reach healthcare facilities.

Those in informal settlements frequently encounter overcrowded clinics and extended waiting times. Women with disabilities

continue to experience physical and communication barriers, while older women and those living in poverty often struggle to access specialised healthcare services.

These challenges are not merely health issues; they are barriers to equality, economic participation and social justice.

Removing them is essential if South Africa is to realise the constitutional promise that everyone has the right to access healthcare services.

Investing in women's health is not an expenditure – it is nation-building.

Healthy women participate more effectively in the labour market, establish businesses, contribute to innovation and increase household incomes. They are more likely to remain economically active, support children's educational outcomes

and strengthen community resilience.

Conversely, preventable illness reduces productivity, increases household financial vulnerability and places additional pressure on public health and social protection systems.

The evidence is clear: countries that invest in women's health experience stronger economic growth, improved educational outcomes and greater social cohesion.

For South Africa, where women continue to shoulder disproportionate caregiving responsibilities while driving much of the informal economy, improving health outcomes directly supports economic transformation and inclusive growth.

Women's health is therefore both a social justice imperative and an economic necessity.

Women's empowerment requires healthcare that responds to every phase of life. This includes expanding access to:

- comprehensive sexual and reproductive healthcare.
- family planning and reproductive rights information.
- safe maternal and neonatal healthcare.
- cervical and breast cancer screening and early diagnosis.
- mental health support and

psychosocial services.

- HIV, tuberculosis and non-communicable disease prevention and treatment.
- nutrition and wellness programmes.
- healthcare services tailored for adolescent girls, women with disabilities and older women.

Equally important is ensuring that healthcare facilities become safe spaces, where women are treated with dignity, respect and compassion.

Quality healthcare is measured not only by clinical outcomes but also by the experience of every woman who enters a healthcare facility.

Women's healthcare cannot be separated from South Africa's response to Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF).

Healthcare facilities are often the first point of contact for survivors seeking assistance.

Hospitals and clinics, therefore, play a vital role in providing emergency medical treatment, forensic services, trauma counselling, psychosocial support and referrals to legal and social protection services.

Strengthening the health sector's response to GBVF supports the implementation of the National Strategic Plan on GBVF while reinforcing the

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

principle that survivors deserve comprehensive, survivor-centred care delivered with dignity and professionalism.

Healthcare workers remain indispensable partners in preventing violence, identifying vulnerable women and ensuring that no survivor navigates the system alone.

The Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities continues to advocate for policies that promote inclusion and equitable service delivery.

This requires strengthening partnerships across government, civil society, development agencies, academia, organised labour, traditional leadership and the private sector.

Mobile health clinics, digital health innovations, community health workers and outreach programmes must continue expanding healthcare into underserved communities, where women face the greatest barriers.

Special attention should be directed towards rural women, young women and adolescent girls, women with disabilities, older persons, women living in informal settlements, migrant and vulnerable women, as well as women entrepreneurs and informal traders, who often face barriers that limit access to healthcare services.

Inclusive healthcare strengthens social justice by ensuring that geography, disability or income never determines access to quality medical care.

Women's Month should be more than a celebration. It should mobilise the nation around practical interventions that improve women's lives.

Across the country, government departments, municipalities, healthcare institutions, civil society organisations and the private sector should collaborate to deliver integrated women's health and wellness programmes.

These may include mobile health services reaching underserved communities, breast and cervical cancer screening campaigns, mental health awareness initiatives, sexual and reproductive health education, nutrition and healthy lifestyle promotion, wellness programmes for women in workplaces, GBVF awareness and survivor support services and community dialogues that promote health literacy.

Such initiatives embody a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach that advances the constitutional promise of equitable healthcare.

The responsibility for improving women's health does not rest solely with the healthcare



A young woman consulting a healthcare provider.

sector. Employers must create healthier workplaces, communities must challenge harmful social norms, educational institutions must strengthen health education and families must support women's well-being.

The private sector must continue investing in healthcare partnerships, while development partners should strengthen collaborative programmes that expand access to quality healthcare. Collectively, these efforts reinforce a simple but powerful principle: empowering women requires investing in their well-being.

The 2026 Women's Month theme reminds us that empowered women are the architects of stronger families, thriving communities and a prosperous nation. When women are healthy, children flourish, families become more resilient,

communities grow stronger, businesses become more productive and the economy expands. Ultimately, investing in women's health contributes to a more prosperous and inclusive nation for all.

Access to healthcare is therefore not simply about treating illness. It is about unlocking human potential, expanding opportunities and creating the conditions for women to participate fully in every sphere of society.

As South Africa continues implementing the priorities of the Seventh Administration, let us place women's health where it belongs – at the heart of national development.

Healthy women empower families. Empowered women empower communities. Empowered communities empower the nation. ♦



Femicide is not fate — it's preventable.

Report any form of GBVF to your nearest police station or call toll-free
Crime Stop number: **086 00 10111**

Victims and survivors are encouraged to use the 24-Hour
Gender-Based Violence Command Centre hotline **0800 428 428**

    @GovernmentZA | #StopGBVF | #EndGBVF | #GovZAUpdates



REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



Strengthening regional cooperation for a shared future



Nomonde Mnukwa, GCIS Acting Director-General.

South Africa's destiny has always been closely connected to the destiny of the Southern African region. Our history, economies, communities and development aspirations are bound together by geography, shared experience and a common desire to build a peaceful, stable and prosperous future. As the region confronts rising economic pressures, climate-related shocks, food and energy insecurity, unemployment and migration challenges, it has become increasingly clear that no country can sustainably advance on its

own. Our progress depends on the strength of our partnerships and on our collective ability to respond to shared challenges with unity, purpose and practical action.

This is what makes the Southern African Development Community (SADC) such an important platform for South Africa and the rest of the region. For more than four decades, SADC has enabled Member States to work together in pursuit of regional integration, peace and security, trade, economic development and improved conditions for growth. While chal-

lenges remain, the organisation continues to demonstrate the enduring value of cooperation, solidarity and shared responsibility in advancing the interests of the people of Southern Africa.

Later this month, leaders from across the region will gather in Durban for the 46th Summit of SADC Heads of State and Government – an important opportunity for Member States to reflect on progress made towards regional integration, peace, security and economic development, while shaping the region's future direction.

The Summit will provide a platform to strengthen collaboration on emerging challenges while advancing regional priorities. It will also mark South Africa's formal assumption of the SADC Chairship for the next 12 months.

At Madagascar's request, South Africa assumed the role of Interim Chair in line with the organisation's rotational leadership arrangements. The Summit will formalise South Africa's appointment as SADC Chair, building on its interim leadership role and working closely with fellow

Member States to advance the organisation's priorities over the coming year.

The Summit will be held under the theme, "Resilient, Sustainable and Inclusive Industrialisation through Infrastructure Development, Agricultural and Critical Minerals Transformation in Pursuit of a Just World." The theme reflects the region's commitment to building more resilient economies, accelerating industrialisation and promoting inclusive growth through strategic investment and deeper regional integration.

The significance of SADC's work has become increasingly evident as the region faces a convergence of economic, social and environmental pressures that demand collective action and shared solutions. Unemployment, poverty, food insecurity, climate change, energy constraints and migration pressures transcend national borders and cannot be addressed by any country acting alone. Addressing these challenges requires countries to work together, share

expertise and develop practical regional solutions.

This is particularly true in relation to migration, which is closely linked to broader efforts to advance economic development, regional integration and shared prosperity. Recent discussions across Africa have underscored the importance of managing human mobility in a manner that is both effective and developmental. As SADC Member States deepen regional integration and economic cooperation, it is equally important to strengthen collaboration on migration management. By promoting inclusive growth, expanding economic opportunities and enhancing stability across the region, countries can address the underlying drivers of migration while supporting safe, orderly and regular movement. This reflects the spirit of regional solidarity and shared responsibility at the heart of SADC's vision for a prosperous and integrated Southern Africa.

The Summit will also assess progress in implementing the

region's development agenda and identify priorities for the year ahead. In line with the Summit theme, SADC is prioritising industrialisation, infrastructure development, agricultural transformation and the sustainable beneficiation of critical minerals as drivers of resilience and inclusive growth. Success in these areas will have a direct impact on the lives of ordinary citizens by supporting job creation, improving food security, expanding access to energy and creating new opportunities for economic participation.

The Summit will also provide an important platform for advancing partnerships that support regional development and integration. It will foster greater collaboration between governments, development finance institutions, the private sector and other stakeholders. Regional agreements and collective aspirations must ultimately be translated into practical outcomes. Achieving this will require sustained investment, effective partnerships and

continued commitment to the region's long-term development.

As public servants, we should draw inspiration from the principles that underpin regional cooperation: partnership, solidarity, mutual respect and a commitment to improving the lives of our people. These values remind us that lasting development depends on collaboration and a shared sense of purpose.

As South Africa prepares to host the Summit and assume the SADC Chairship, we are reminded that our prosperity is deeply connected to that of our neighbours. The challenges facing Southern Africa may be considerable, but they also present an opportunity to strengthen regional cooperation and advance shared solutions. Through unity of purpose and coordinated action, SADC Member States can continue building a region that is peaceful, resilient, inclusive and prosperous, creating lasting opportunities for current and future generations. ♦

Partner with South Africa in hosting the 2026 SADC Summit

Government invites strategic partners from the private sector, development finance institutions, state-owned entities, civil society organisations and international stakeholders to support South Africa's hosting of the 2026 SADC

Summit and related engagements. Sponsorship opportunities include:

- Conference and Summit venues
- Transport and mobility
- Hospitality and accommodation
- Media and broadcasting
- ICT and connectivity

- Branding and printing
- Security and protocol support
- Sustainability and green initiatives
- Delegate welcome packs and gifts
- Cultural and tourism showcases

Expressions of interest may be submitted to: [SADCsponsorship@](mailto:SADCsponsorship@gcis.gov.za)

gcis.gov.za and hennie@gcis.gov.za
Sponsorship arrangements will be managed in accordance with applicable government prescripts, including the Public Finance Management Act of 1999 and Treasury Regulations.

MEC Ramokgopa champions

entrepreneurship to drive jobs and economic growth in Gauteng



Photo: More Matshediso

As Gauteng intensifies efforts to stimulate economic growth and create jobs, MEC Vuyiswa Ramokgopa has taken on an expanded mandate that includes Agriculture, Rural Development and Economic Development. At the

heart of her vision is tackling unemployment and creating pathways to opportunity for the province's residents.

Speaking to *Public Sector Manager* magazine, Ramokgopa shared her vision for a more inclusive and dynamic Gauteng economy. Central to that vision is supporting entrepreneurs and small businesses that have the potential to create jobs and stimulate economic growth.

Her commitment to entrepreneurship is deeply personal. Prior to her appointment to the Gauteng Provincial Government's Executive Council in 2024, Ramokgopa built her career

in the private sector and as a businesswoman. That experience continues to shape her approach to leadership and her determination to create conditions that enable local entrepreneurs to succeed.

Ramokgopa opened the interview at the InvestSA boardroom in Sandton with a sense of gratitude, reflecting on the privilege of serving and making a meaningful contribution to the lives of entrepreneurs throughout the province.

"I have walked this journey, I have been through the ups and downs of entrepreneurship, and I have suffered

**Gauteng MEC
for Agriculture
and Rural
Development
Vuyiswa
Ramokgopa .**

through depression and stress caused by financial strain, and that gives me an insight into some of the pressures facing our entrepreneurs, but it also gives me an opportunity to get a lot more practical about how we provide solutions for entrepreneurs,” she said.

Empowering small businesses

Ramokgopa believes government has a vital role to play in helping emerging businesses grow into sustainable enterprises. By fostering strategic partnerships and creating pathways to new market opportunities, she says government can help build a pipeline of thriving businesses that contribute meaningfully to economic growth and employment creation.

“Our job is to ensure that we make it as easy as possible for somebody who is starting a business to grow the business, access information, capital and resources so that they can move to the next level. We expect to see jobs being created out of every rand that we invest,” explained the MEC.

Ramokgopa readily admits that she is obsessed with job creation. In her view, every government leader should be equally focused on combating unemployment by backing entrepreneurs who are committed

to building sustainable businesses and creating opportunities for others.

Among the initiatives Ramokgopa points to is the Boundless Soweto AI App Development Challenge, hosted in June 2026, as part of Youth Month celebrations. The event brought together 50 unemployed information technology graduates to develop artificial intelligence-powered solutions aimed at addressing community challenges and stimulating economic activity in townships.

Home-grown solutions

Through innovation-driven initiatives such as hackathons, workshops and technology challenges, the department is creating opportunities that enhance young people's employability, nurture digital skills and unlock entrepreneurial potential.

The MEC described the initiative as an inspiring project led by a local entrepreneur who uses the hackathon model to encourage young people to develop solutions to challenges facing their communities. She noted that the solutions have the potential to grow into viable businesses that create jobs, while also providing participants with opportunities to showcase and pitch their

ideas to broader audiences and potential investors.

What Ramokgopa finds most inspiring is that the programme was born out of entrepreneurial vision and determination. Its founders took over an abandoned school building in Soweto and transformed it into a technology skills centre that now provides young people with practical training and pathways into tech-related careers.

While the department does not fund the project, it partnered with the organisers to host the challenge and supported recruitment by providing a database of young people who could participate – an example of how government and local innovators can work together to create opportunities for youth and drive economic development.

Support for local entrepreneurs

Unlocking access to capital for small businesses is a key priority for Ramokgopa. She highlighted the Gauteng Enterprise Propeller (GEP), the department's primary agency for small business financing, as one of the mechanisms being used to support entrepreneurs, particularly those operating in townships.

She also pointed to the

Township Economy Partnership Fund, launched in 2022 by the Gauteng Department of Economic Development in partnership with the GEP and the Industrial Development Corporation. The fund is designed to strengthen township enterprises by providing financial and non-financial support to SMMEs operating in sectors such as manufacturing, the taxi economy, ICT, backyard property development and retail, among others.

“It is also important to look at the non-financial support, enabling and facilitating market access for various entrepreneurs,” she said.

Agriculture and rural development

Agriculture and agro-processing remain critical drivers of Gauteng's economy. The province is home to approximately 42% of South Africa's registered agro-processing enterprises, underscoring its strategic role in attracting investment, creating jobs and driving inclusive economic growth.

To support the sector's expansion, Ramokgopa said the Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has established a R100 million blended finance fund for agro-processing businesses in partnership with the National

“

The plan targets annual economic growth of between 3% and 5% by 2030, positioning Gauteng as a key driver of South Africa's economic renewal.

Empowerment Fund. The initiative is aimed at unlocking capital and accelerating the growth of enterprises across the agro-processing value chain.

The programme is already beginning to yield results. To date, 58 businesses have been approved for funding, while a further 11 projects are undergoing financial due diligence. According to Ramokgopa, this demonstrates the growing impact of the fund in unlocking investment and stimulating activity within the province's agro-processing sector.

Beyond the blended finance initiative, close to 500 agro-processing enterprises have received support through the Comprehensive Agricultural Support Programme, which has invested nearly R19.9 million in qualifying businesses. Additional support has been

provided through the AgriBEE Fund, which has distributed approximately R5.8 million, while a partnership with Nedbank has channelled around R8 million towards aggregation and incubation initiatives. Direct support to micro-enterprises has also amounted to approximately R4 million, further strengthening the province's efforts to build inclusive and sustainable agricultural enterprises.

The funding forms part of a broader strategy to help businesses progress from start-ups to commercially competitive enterprises capable of supplying formal markets and participating in larger value chains.

Strategically positioned as South Africa's agro-processing hub, Gauteng processes approximately 35% of the region's agricultural produce, contributes around 20% of the country's

total agricultural output and is home to about 42% of South Africa's registered agro-processing enterprises.

Priority sectors to bolster economic growth

The provincial government recently unveiled the Gauteng City Region Economic Growth and Development Plan, an ambitious roadmap aimed at accelerating economic growth and development across the province. The plan targets annual economic growth of between 3% and 5% by 2030, positioning Gauteng as a key driver of South Africa's

economic renewal.

For Ramokgopa, however, economic growth is not an end in itself. The true measure of success, she said, will be the creation of sustainable jobs and meaningful economic opportunities for residents.

"On that score, we are targeting between 5 000 and 6 000 new jobs that need to come out of the activities that we engage in. This is a plan that effectively oversees the province's growth strategy, including investments from the private sector and multinational investors," she explained. ♦

MEC Ramokgopa at the Boundless Soweto AI App Development Challenge for IT graduates developing AI-powered solutions to township economic challenges.



Photo: Gauteng Department of Economic Development



SADC Summit

South Africa will host the
**46th Ordinary Summit of Heads of State
and Government of the Southern African
Development Community (SADC)**
from 16 to 17 August 2026 in Durban,
KwaZulu-Natal.



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REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

A **NATION** THAT **WORKS** FOR ALL



Building a pipeline of women leaders in the public sector

Ayanda Mafuleka's work is rooted in a simple but powerful belief: when women and young people are equipped with the right skills and opportunities, they can participate meaningfully in the economy and help drive South Africa's transformation.

As the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Finance and Accounting Services Sector Education and Training Authority (FASSET), the qualified chartered accountant brings extensive experience in finance, governance,

Photo: FASSET

FASSET CEO Ayanda Mafuleka

strategy and leadership across both the public and private sectors.

As South Africa commemorates Women's Month, Mafuleka spoke to *Public Sector Manager* about FASSET's partnership with the Auditor-General South Africa (AGSA), which led to the launch of the Women Leading in the Public Sector Programme in 2025.

Fully funded by FASSET, the 12-month programme is designed to build a sustainable pipeline of women leaders across all spheres of the public sector. It targets 500 women in senior leadership positions from public institutions across South Africa each year, equipping them with the skills, knowledge and networks needed to advance their leadership journeys.

Supporting women in leadership

The programme aims to strengthen integrity, accountability, institutional transformation, strategic decision-making, ethical governance, stakeholder engagement and transformative leadership within the public sector. Ultimately, it seeks to drive systemic change and contribute to the development of a more ethical, effective and inclusive public service.



Fully funded by FASSET, the 12-month programme is designed to build a sustainable pipeline of women leaders across all spheres of the public sector.

"Among other things, the programme seeks to address challenges, including the under-representation of women in senior leadership roles, leadership succession gaps, talent retention and the need for stronger governance and accountability within public institutions," she explained.

The partnership was inspired by annual public sector audit outcomes that continue to expose weaknesses in governance, financial management and accountability across government institutions. Many municipalities still struggle to attain unqualified audit outcomes.

Action- and results-oriented, the programme is designed to be part of the solution. By developing ethical, capable and transformative women leaders, it seeks to drive institutional change and contribute to improved service delivery.

Mafuleka says achieving this goal requires intentionally elevating and empowering women leaders so that the public sector can build a strong pipeline of ethical, capable and transformative leadership.

The first cohort of women leaders is already participating in the programme.

"We have recruited women

in senior management such as chief directors, mayors, chief financial officers in municipalities and commissioners in other government organisations," she added.

Building capable and ethical leaders

While the programme is focused on empowering women leaders, Mafuleka emphasised that meaningful transformation requires the active support of men.

She noted that men have historically occupied leadership positions in the profession for longer than women and are therefore well placed to act as allies in advancing gender transformation. By championing women's advancement, opening doors and creating opportunities, men can play an important role in accelerating the empowerment of women and strengthening their representation in leadership positions across the public sector.

Priority is given to women leaders in the finance and accounting professions, as well as those holding qualifications aligned to FASSET's mandate, even if they are employed in other sectors of the Public Service.

The initiative is particularly meaningful to Mafuleka, whose own career has been shaped

AGSA acting chief people officer Vatiswa Nthoesane, Fasset CEO Ayanda Mafuleka, African Women Chartered Accountants President Pumla Molope and Managing Director of Duke Corporate Education Angie Naidoo along with their teams mark the commencement of the Women Leading in the Public Sector programme.



by the public sector, where she trained and spent much of her professional life. She believes the programme has the potential to do more than strengthen leadership capabilities; it can also contribute to the fight against corruption by cultivating a new generation of ethical, accountable and values-driven leaders committed to good governance and improved service delivery.

Having personally benefited from FASSET's support nearly two decades ago, when the organisation funded her studies to become a chartered accountant, Mafuleka understands the transformative power of investing in people. It is this experience that continues to fuel her passion for empowering women and young

people, a mission that remains at the heart of her leadership.

Empowering the youth

FASSET's empowerment efforts extend to other segments of society, particularly young people seeking opportunities in the digital economy. In October 2025, the training authority collaborated with the Department of Higher Education and Training to launch a Digital Hub at South West Gauteng TVET College in Dobsonville, Soweto.

The hub aims to introduce students to emerging digital career paths and equip them with future-focused skills aligned with the demands of a rapidly evolving, technology-driven economy.

By bringing digital learning opportunities closer to township communities, the initiative is also expected to help bridge the digital divide between historically underserved areas and more affluent communities. Through specialised digital courses and access to modern technology, students will be equipped with the skills needed to participate meaningfully in the Fourth Industrial Revolution and contribute to South Africa's growing digital economy.

"We are particularly interested in supporting institutions in underserved and rural communities to ensure that no young person is left behind in the digital economy. Future expansion will be informed by stakeholder partnerships, available resources

and demonstrated impact from the pilot phase," she explained.

This is the first programme of its kind. Since 2022, FASSET has implemented and rolled out state-of-the-art ICT Smart Hubs at all 50 public TVET and Community Education and Training colleges across the country.

"We are in the digital economy now and we must have skills that support it. This is going to assist and empower learners to be able to open their own businesses. I believe that entrepreneurship is a way to go, and the country must produce entrepreneurs who are going to create jobs because government is not solely responsible for creating all the jobs that we need in the country," she said. ♦



SADC Summit

South Africa has identified six strategic priorities for its one-year SADC Chairship which are aligned to the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan 2020–2030.



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A NATION
THAT WORKS FOR ALL



Engineering safer skies: Nomfundiso Msweli's vision for intelligent airports

At the intersection of aviation, artificial intelligence (AI) and engineering innovation, Nomfundiso Msweli is helping to shape the future of safer and smarter airports.

The 34-year-old engineer's journey from KwaMashu, where she was born and raised, to becoming an award-winning engineering innovator reflects the power of early inspiration, persistence and a belief that technology can solve real-world challenges.

For Msweli, engineering began long before university lecture halls. It began with childhood visits to Dunlop Tyres, where her father worked as an electrician.

"My dad used to take me to his workplace for the Take a Girl Child to Work initiative. During December shutdowns, I would also be hired to assist with

maintenance, which naturally led me to pursue engineering," she recalled.

Msweli developed a curiosity about how things worked and an interest in using technology to address everyday challenges from a young age. She enjoyed mathematics and was drawn to understanding systems and the role innovation could play in improving people's lives.

"I have always been fascinated by how technology can solve real-world problems and improve people's lives," she said.

Following the dream

Msweli's academic journey began in 2013, marking the start of a path that would see her build expertise



across electrical engineering, telecommunications, electronics and innovation. She holds a Master's degree in Electronic Engineering from the University of Johannesburg. Her research explored how drones and AI could improve airport infrastructure inspections.

Her academic foundation also includes a Bachelor of Technology (BTech) Honours in Electrical Engineering, specialising in telecommunications (cum laude) and a BTech in Electrical, Electronics and Communications Engineering, both from the University of South Africa. She obtained her National Diploma in Electrical Engineering and Instrumentation from the Mangosuthu University of Technology in 2015.

Making flying safe

Msweli serves as an Electronics Engineer at Airports Company South Africa (ACSA), managing, maintaining and improving electronic systems. These include communication systems, surveillance technologies, public address systems, flight information display systems and television distribution systems.

"The most rewarding aspect of my role is knowing that the systems I help maintain contribute directly to the safety,



security and overall passenger experience. Airports operate around the clock and reliable systems play a critical role in ensuring seamless operations," she said.

Innovation that transforms industries

Her recent achievements have placed her among South Africa's rising engineering innovators. At the 2026 Engineering Council of South Africa Industry Awards, the young engineer received national recognition for her groundbreaking project, – Automated Runway Detection Systems Using Drone-Mounted CMOS Sensors and Artificial Intelligence – an achievement that celebrates not only technical excellence but also the power of local innovation to transform global industries.

The award marked a defining moment in her engineering journey, shining a spotlight on research that bridges advanced technology with one of aviation's



most critical priorities: safety.

"Receiving this award affirmed that the long hours of study, research and perseverance were worthwhile. It reminded me that dedication and continuous learning can lead to meaningful contributions to society."

The recognition has strengthened her resolve to continue pushing the boundaries of what engineering can achieve.

"It has strengthened my commitment to advancing research in AI, aviation technology and smart infrastructure. I hope it inspires other engineers to believe that impactful ideas can come from South Africa," she added.

She explained that traditional runway inspections are primarily

visual assessments conducted by various inspection teams. The process is labour-intensive and time-consuming, and there is a risk that defects or abnormalities may be overlooked. She further noted that inspectors are required to physically access operational areas, which can temporarily disrupt airport operations by reducing runway availability for aircraft movements, while the manual nature of the process still leaves room for human error.

Her system uses an autonomous drone equipped with a high-resolution complementary metal-oxide-semiconductor (CMOS) camera. The drone is programmed to follow predeter-



Modern CMOS sensors provide high quality imaging while remaining compact and cost-effective.

mined flight paths over runways and taxiways, capturing images and video footage while using GPS technology to accurately record the location of any identified defects or anomalies.

"The objective of my research was to develop a safer, faster and more intelligent method of inspecting airport runways and taxiways," she explained.

Earlier detection could help airport teams respond before small problems become larger risks. Quicker inspections could reduce operational interruptions and support predictive maintenance based on accurate data rather than scheduled manual checks.

Reducing costs

Msweli further highlighted that the technology could deliver significant cost savings by reducing reliance on inspection vehicles, lowering vehicle maintenance and fuel expenses and decreasing the manpower required to conduct manual

runway inspections.

The idea emerged as Msweli watched drones and AI gain ground across engineering sectors. She saw an opportunity to apply both technologies to aviation infrastructure, where safety, precision and operational efficiency are critical.

"Modern CMOS sensors provide high-quality imaging while remaining compact and cost-effective. When combined with AI, they enable automated analysis of large volumes of inspection data much faster than conventional methods."

Developing the concept was not straightforward. The project required the integration of drone navigation, computer vision, AI and airport operational requirements into a practical and effective solution. Bringing these technologies together while ensuring compliance with aviation safety and operational standards presented a significant technical challenge.

"Another challenge was

ensuring that the proposed solution remained practical for real-world airport environments rather than being purely theoretical," she added.

Innovation lessons

The process, she said, taught her that innovation depends on more than technical ability.

"I learned that successful engineering innovation requires not only technical expertise but also patience, adaptability and a willingness to refine ideas through ongoing research and testing," she said.

Msweli believes that AI and drones will become increasingly important in airports locally and internationally. The technologies have the potential to automate inspections, enhance security surveillance, improve asset management and provide real-time data to support informed decision-making.

Msweli's ambitions extend beyond her Master's research, with plans already underway to

pursue doctoral studies at the University of Pretoria, focusing on AI and intelligent systems. She credits ACSA for fostering an environment that encourages learning, research and innovation.

She also hopes her journey will inspire more young South Africans, particularly girls and women, to pursue careers in engineering, science and aviation technology. This also aligns with government's 2026 Science Month theme, "Science, Technology and Innovation are for Everyone."

"Do not be intimidated by industries where women have traditionally been underrepresented. Believe in your abilities, seek mentors, embrace challenges, and remain confident in your potential," she said.

Innovation, in Msweli's view, should be measured not only by novelty, but by its ability to deliver practical solutions and meaningful benefits to society. ♦

HOW TO UPDATE YOUR ADDRESS DETAILS

01



Confirm eligibility

02



Verify Identity

03



Confirm OTP

04



Upload your ID

05



Address finder/
enter your address

06



Submit



Professor Liesl Zühlke:

Healing little hearts and advancing justice



Photo: SA Medical Research Council

Long before Professor Liesl Zühlke became one of the world's recognised women scientists, she was a curious child in Cape Town, fascinated by the mysteries of the human body and inspired by the stories of scientific pioneers.

"I have always been an avid reader and I was particularly drawn to stories of scientific breakthroughs and the lives of scientists such as Curie, Harvey, Jenner and Pasteur," she recalls, adding that as a child, she read and reread books about their discoveries, struggles and determination.

But one medical achievement captured her imagination and inspired her to pursue a career in medicine. It was the world's first human heart transplant, performed by South African cardiac surgeon, Dr Christiaan Barnard, at Groote Schuur Hospital in Cape Town in December 1967.

"[It was] my greatest source of wonder; the fact that it took place in my own city, in a hospital I could practically see from my home, made that achievement feel even more extraordinary. I think that is where my fascination with the heart began," she explains.

That early fascination would eventually become a career built around healing, discovery and justice. While she wanted to study medicine from a very young age, paediatric cardiology became the field where her many interests converged: medicine, technology, children's health, public health and social justice.

Zühlke serves as Vice President of the South African Medical Research Council's Extramural Research and Internal Portfolio. She is also a Paediatric Cardiologist in the Division of Paediatric Cardiol-

ogy at Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital and Director of the Children's Heart Disease Research Unit at the University of Cape Town.

She is internationally recognised for her work on childhood-onset heart disease, particularly rheumatic heart disease (RHD) and congenital heart disease. She is also celebrated for advancing research, advocacy and capacity building in Africa.

An honour for African science

In June 2026, she was officially honoured at the UNESCO

Headquarters in Paris as the 2026 laureate for Africa and the Arab States in the L'Oréal-UNESCO For Women in Science International Awards. While the event was a global celebration of scientific achievement, for her the moment belonged to the children, families, researchers and institutions that have shaped her journey.

"It felt quite surreal to be representing not only South Africa, but also Africa and the Arab States, on such a prestigious global platform," she added.

For Zühlke, the significance of the award lies in the attention it brings to diseases that have too often been overlooked.

"On a personal level, this award is profoundly meaningful because it shines a global spotlight on RHD and congenital heart disease – conditions that disproportionately affect

children from underprivileged backgrounds and vulnerable communities," she explained.

Her work has always focused on children whose health is shaped not only by biology but also by poverty, geography, healthcare systems and inequality.

A disease of inequality

Although RHD is preventable, it continues to cause suffering and premature death among children and young adults, particularly in low-resource communities.

"RHD is, at its core, a disease of poverty, inequity and injustice. It has largely disappeared from high-income countries, yet it remains entirely preventable," she explained.

The disease exposes the unequal realities of healthcare, she said, adding that diagnosis often

comes too late when permanent damage to the heart valves has occurred. Treatment can require painful monthly penicillin injections, while cardiac surgery remains inaccessible for many who need it.

"RHD has rightly been called a barometer of social injustice because it persists not only in low- and middle-income countries, but also in inadequately resourced communities within high-income countries, highlighting stark differences in diagnosis, management and care," she emphasised.

For children living with RHD, the impact extends far beyond the heart. It can affect education, play, family life and future opportunities. It can lead to heart failure, stroke, arrhythmias, embolic events and premature death while also placing families under severe financial pressure.

The burden also follows girls into adulthood, with serious consequences during pregnancy and childbirth for women living with advanced valve disease.

Research rooted in real lives

At Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital, Zühlke's clinical work has kept her research firmly connected to patients and families. She describes herself as "inherently a clinician-scientist" – someone whose research questions emerge from real-world challenges.

"The questions I ask are, therefore, not abstract; they arise from the children I see, the barriers families face in accessing care, the limitations of health systems, and the urgent need to generate evidence that can improve diagnosis, treatment, follow-up and outcomes in real-world settings," she said.

This commitment led her to establish the Children's Heart Disease Research Unit, dedicated to conducting, supporting and empowering children's heart disease research with Africa's needs at the centre.

Her research has addressed critical clinical and public health questions across the RHD pathway. She has also contributed to clinical trials and provided

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The burden also follows girls into adulthood, with serious consequences during pregnancy and childbirth for women living with advanced valve disease.

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scientific and technical support to countries seeking scalable, context-appropriate solutions.

Yet some of her most meaningful work has been in advocacy, which is aimed at the eradication of the disease.

That advocacy contributed to the 2018 World Health Assembly resolution on rheumatic fever and RHD and to ongoing efforts to translate global commitments into policy, implementation and improved clinical practice.

Zühlke's broader research also spans congenital heart disease, HIV in adolescents and cardiac disease in women of childbearing age. What connects these areas, she explained, is childhood-onset heart disease, vulnerable populations and the relationship

between inequality, social determinants of health and health outcomes.

"This stark contrast illustrates why these fields are inseparable from questions of equity, access and justice in health," she said.

Science, Technology and Innovation Minister, Dr Blade Nzimande described her recognition as "a source of profound national pride".

Zühlke is of the view that South African scientists have the capacity, talent, courage and determination not only to thrive, but to change the world through their unique solutions.

Lifting as she rises

For her, scientific success is incomplete unless it creates opportunities for others. Capacity

building, one of the areas for which she was recognised, is deeply personal. Her own journey as a clinician-scientist and research leader was challenging, particularly while completing her PhD and building a research career as a mother of young children.

She says her mentor gave her a principle that continues to guide her: "lift as you rise".

"I have tried to emulate that principle in my own work," she said, adding that she believes meaningful capacity development requires support for clinician-scientists, gender-sensitive infrastructure and equitable resources for researchers and health professionals in all settings.

Her message to young girls in

South Africa who are uncertain about whether they belong in science is clear: "We are taking up our rightful places in science, medicine, and research. Your voice, your questions, your curiosity and your perspective matter. And above all, always remain true to yourself."

But above all, she wants the voices of those most affected to shape the future.

"Most importantly, I would like to see the voices of people living with and affected by RHD elevated and included in planning so that they can help inform research programmes, policy and practice," she concluded. ❖



NATIONAL WATER ACTION PLAN

Cutting water losses

Work is already underway to reduce water losses:

- Metros supported to fix their water utilities and invest water revenue into maintaining water infrastructure.
- Licensing changes to ensure water service providers meet minimum requirements for delivering water.
- Some municipalities entering into partnerships with capable utilities to provide water, such as Rand Water and Emfuleni.



THE PRESIDENCY
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

An action plan

to end the water crisis once and for all

Last week, I spoke about our commitment to give effect to the constitutional right of access to water for all South Africans, with particular reference to

communities that have remained underserved.

This past week, we released the National Water Action Plan which sets out our government's determination to ensure that every community in our country has access to a reliable supply of quality drinking water, no matter where they live.

For too many South Africans, turning on a tap has become an act of uncertainty.

In too many cities, towns and rural areas, water disruptions have become a fact of life. Families cannot cook or clean.

Children

cannot wash. Shops and businesses have to close. We are determined to change that.

The National Water Action Plan sets out a clear, focused programme of immediate interventions and far-reaching reforms to address the root causes of water supply failures in many municipalities.

Our main priority lies in implementation, clear responsibilities and accountability. The National Water Crisis Committee, known as WATERCOM, will meet regularly to oversee implementation, track progress and hold the responsible departments and public entities accountable for delivery.

Just a few years ago, we faced a similar national crisis in electricity. By acting boldly to implement reforms, improve Eskom's performance and enable massive investment in

new generation capacity, we brought an end to load shedding.

We are now applying that same approach to water.

South Africa is a water-scarce country. We must continue to invest in dams, pipelines, treatment works and other bulk water infrastructure to secure our long-term water supply.

The immediate challenge, however, is not mainly a shortage of rain or a lack of dams. The problem is that municipal water systems are not being properly managed, maintained and financed.

In too many municipalities, revenue collected from the sale of water is used to fund other municipal functions. This leaves too little money to repair pipes, replace pumps or employ qualified engineers and technicians.

As a result, on average across the country, close to half of all the water pumped never



reaches paying customers. It leaks out of broken pipes, is stolen or is simply never billed for. That is water that has been treated at great cost and then lost, along with the revenue that should have paid for maintenance.

We cannot build our way out of the crisis if we do not properly maintain and manage the infrastructure we already have.

The National Water Action Plan will address the root cause of this crisis by changing the way that water services are delivered.

The Water Services Amendment Bill currently before Parliament will establish a clearer separation between the municipality's role as the authority responsible for

water and the role of the operator that actually delivers it, so that both can be held to account.

Water service providers will be required to obtain operating licences based on their technical, managerial and financial capability. Municipalities will only be able to appoint providers that meet the required standards and can demonstrate that they are capable of delivering reliable water and sanitation services.

Where a municipality is failing, unwilling or unable to provide an acceptable service, government will intervene in accordance with the Constitution and the law to provide the required services to our people. Where necessary,

another capable water utility will be appointed to run the service in the municipality's place.

The plan will also reform the way municipal water services are financed.

Through the Metropolitan Trading Services Reform Programme, the country's eight metropolitan municipalities are being supported and incentivised to ring-fence their water revenue. This means that money collected for water and sanitation must remain within the water utility and be reinvested in infrastructure, maintenance and improved operations.

Municipalities will also receive more technical support. We will bring in additional funding by



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South Africa is a water-scarce country. We must continue to invest in dams, pipelines, treatment works and other bulk water infrastructure to secure our long-term water supply.

partnering with private investors and lenders, and by paying contractors according to results delivered.

Mobilising private finance and expertise does not mean surrendering public responsibility for water. Water will remain a public good and the state will continue to protect public ownership, affordability and universal access. The purpose of these partnerships is to bring additional resources and expertise into a sector where the investment need is far greater than government grants alone can meet.

We will act firmly against the corruption and criminal net-

works that are benefiting from irregular water contracts and damage to infrastructure.

We are not starting from scratch.

Over the last few months, work has been underway to implement the action plan. This includes immediate interventions in poorly performing municipalities, including, for example, water boards helping struggling municipalities to drill boreholes and provide emergency supply.

Grant money has been redirected to the worst-performing municipalities. Legal action has been taken against dozens of municipalities that have violated the National Water Act.

With the passage of the National Water Resources Infrastructure Agency Act, South Africa will for the first time have a specialised agency to develop, operate, maintain and finance national water resources infrastructure.

Another key reform that we have implemented is the establishment of six Catchment Management Agencies across the country. These agencies will protect and manage our major water systems, bringing control of water closer to local communities.

We are channelling more funds from national government into water infrastructure. Through national grants, we are investing R24 billion a year in municipal water and sanitation, with around 800 projects underway nationwide. Additional funding is being mobilised for municipal water infrastructure through a mix of financial instruments and public-private partnerships.

Through our programme for unserved rural communities, 71 borehole projects have already been completed in Mpumalanga, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape, reaching roughly 30 000 households that

previously had no access.

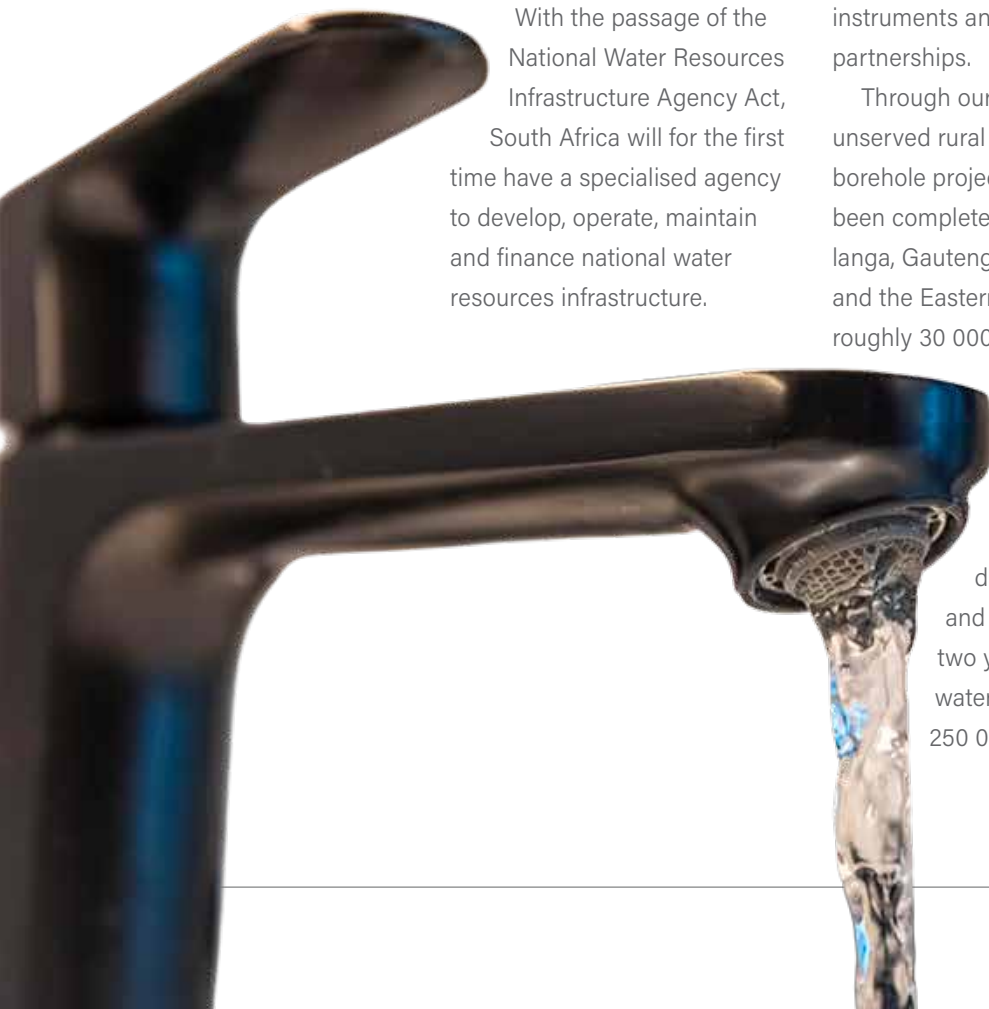
Between 80 and 100 more boreholes will be drilled this year, and 500 over the next two years, extending water to around 250 000 households.

Larger projects are also moving ahead. To give a few examples: in the uMkhanyakude District Municipality in KwaZulu-Natal, R1.3 billion of grant-funded projects will improve the reliability of water services to over 130 000 households. In Thembisile Hani Local Municipality in Mpumalanga, a R2 billion project will provide access to 65 000 unserved households. This project is 80% complete. In Limpopo, mining companies are funding half of a R26 billion pipeline project that will reach 180 000 households.

In Emfuleni, Rand Water has partnered with the municipality to create a new water utility called the Vaal Corporation Water Utility. This will result in a professionally run and financially self-sustaining water service provider that will provide greatly improved water services in a struggling municipality.

In developing the National Water Action Plan, we have had extensive consultations across all relevant national departments and entities, provincial governments, municipalities and water boards.

Everyone is committed to the successful implementation of the plan and to ending the water crisis in our country once and for all. ♦



70 Years
1956 – 2026
COMMEMORATION



WOMEN'S DAY '26

EMPOWERED WOMEN EMPOWER NATIONS

From classrooms to capability:

Building an ecosystem for public sector training

Public sector capacity and capability development remains one of government's key priorities. Since 1994, the institution responsible for training public servants has evolved from the Public Service Training Institute (PSTI) to SAMDI, then to PALAMA and, ultimately, to the National School of Government (NSG).

Recent legislative amendments have given the NSG something none of its predecessors possessed: a statutory reach into local government. The question now is whether the institution has the capacity to translate that reach into impact.

To understand why capacity development has been so difficult, one has to consider what the democratic South Africa

inherited in 1994. The new public service was built by integrating a fragmented state comprising the former tricameral parliamentary administrations, four provinces reconfigured into nine, the self-governing territories and homelands, and a local government system that had evolved along separate and unequal lines. Each brought its own institutional culture, standards, systems and interests.

Closing the gap

No amount of structural integration was going to close that gap on its own. The 1994 *White Paper on Reconstruction and Development* recognised this, identifying the creation of a single public service as both a governance and development challenge,

with education, training and retraining central to the transformation project.

What was required was sustained investment in public sector capacity and capability development. It was this recognition that gave rise to the institutions that followed. In many respects, the scale of the integration challenge faced in 1994 mirrors the capability and capacity challenges confronting the public sector today.

Each institutional reconfiguration since then was intended to address the same challenges identified in the 1998 *White Paper on Public Service Training and Education*: training was fragmented and poorly coordinated, provision was neither needs- nor outcomes-based and much of

it was not fit for purpose. The Presidential Review Commission reached a similar conclusion, finding that SAMDI was competing with other training providers instead of setting standards and building system-wide capacity.

Although the institution changed its name three times, the underlying challenge remained. It is tempting to view the 2025 amendments as merely the latest iteration of that cycle. They are not, but only if they are approached differently. Two developments over the past year help explain why.

The first is empirical. The Chandler Academy of Governance's 2026 *Global Survey on Public Sector Training*, covering 27 institutes across Africa and beyond, found that public service

training institutions are evolving from course providers into strategic partners in reform. Although 96% reported awareness of emerging challenges, only 56% believed their structures could respond effectively and just 45% considered their systems future-ready. The gap between awareness and readiness is the real finding, and one the NSG recognises in its own evolution.

Building a capable state

The second development is legislative. The 2025 amendments to the Public Service Act of 1994 and the Public Administration Management Act of 2014 replaced the NSG's founding mandate with a far more expansive one.

The message is clear: public service training institutions can no longer see themselves solely as training providers but as agents of change in building the capable state envisaged by the Constitution.

The amended legislative archi-

ture closes that gap. The NSG can now provide education and training to local government and state-owned entities, prescribe compulsory programmes across all three spheres of government, conduct assessments and award qualifications and part-qualifications directly.

The amendments also enable the NSG to partner with training institutions, higher education institutions, continuing education providers and private training organisations.

Local government challenges

That expanded reach is most urgently needed in local government. South Africa's 257 municipalities employ nearly 295 000 people and carry primary responsibility for service delivery. Yet the Auditor-General's (AG) consolidated audit outcomes for 2024/25 show that only 39 municipalities achieved clean audits, while 100 received qualified or adverse audit opinions.

The AG's findings point to a

consistent underlying problem: weak institutional capability and poor governance. At an administrative level, these shortcomings continue to drive poor financial reporting, regulatory non-compliance and unstable municipal finances. Persistent skills and capacity gaps remain central to the challenge, pushing municipalities towards costly reliance on consultants.

The NSG's expanded mandate was, however, not accompanied by a corresponding budget increase, requiring it to diversify revenue streams and make difficult trade-offs.

The amendments partly address this challenge by requiring accounting officers to budget for compulsory education and training, while making the

NSG the sole provider of these programmes, thereby creating a measure of revenue certainty.

The NSG must design, cost and deliver the required training programmes, provide departments with cost information timeously to support budget planning and ensure that training delivery takes into account infrastructure availability, literacy levels, language needs and existing competencies.

Incorporating local government

The principle of shared accountability is now being extended to local government but from a much harder starting point.

Unlike national and provincial departments, which generally have established training budg-

The amendments also enable the NSG to partner with training institutions, higher education institutions, continuing education providers and private training organisations.



ets, systems and administrative capacity to monitor compliance, many municipalities – particularly smaller and rural ones – still have limitations.

The NSG will therefore not simply replicate its existing training at municipal level. Instead, it is developing a dedicated local government training portfolio, with programmes such as Nyukela, the compulsory pre-entry programme for senior managers, among the first to be adapted.

A widening mandate

The NSG's mandate now extends beyond formal education and training. It includes facilitating strategic planning and change management, as well as identifying, analysing and responding to skills and capacity needs across the public sector.

The institution now plays a broader ecosystem-building role through initiatives that support traditional leaders, empower youth, induct boards of state-owned entities and develop the capabilities of elected representatives and public servants at all levels. Its work also includes hosting international and continental conferences, producing peer-reviewed knowledge products and supporting private-sector engagement with government.

With programmes delivered in several African countries, the NSG has become a strategic partner in shaping governance and public-sector capability across the continent.

In his 2026 Budget Speech, Finance Minister Enoch Godongwana identified state capacity as one of the four pillars of fiscal consolidation. This should reshape the NSG curriculum. From trade law and economic diplomacy to strategic foresight, climate resilience and disaster management, these are the competencies that a capable state will require to advance South Africa's development agenda.

Perhaps the clearest sign of where NSG is heading is the idea of the training institute being an "observatory of the state." A good example of this is the Observatoire de l'administration publique at Quebec's École nationale d'administration publique, which studies how states reform and adapt, monitors public administration reforms across different jurisdictions, and identifies emerging trends in governance and public management. It also produces research, publishes on public policy and management and examines governance challenges within Quebec itself.

The model is interesting be-

cause it separates two functions that are usually conflated: building public servants' capability through training and studying the state itself as a living institutional system. So, what gets taught must be grounded in continuously updated evidence, not a static curriculum.

The groundwork has been laid

Elements of this function already exist within the NSG, although they are yet to be formally defined or resourced. These include the *African Journal of Public Sector Development and Governance*, a peer-reviewed, open-access journal published under the auspices of the African Management Development Institutes' Network, and the NSG's masterclass series, which connects public servants with leading South African and international scholars and practitioners.

The institution is also engaged in this work through its participation in the OECD Network of Schools of Government, which connects it to the international community of practice informing assessments such as the Chandler Good Government Index.

Formalising an "observatory of the state" role would consolidate these existing activities into a dedicated institutional function.

Such an observatory would generate continuous research and strategic intelligence on institutional performance, capability gaps, governance reforms and emerging trends across the public sector. These insights would, in turn, inform what is taught, to whom and at what stage of a public servant's career.

This also reframes the NSG's role within the ecosystem. Beyond coordinating and delivering training, it should serve as a source of evidence and insight, helping public training institutions, universities, SETAs, professional bodies and civil society organisations identify capability gaps and target interventions more effectively. ♦



Dino Poonsamy,
Chief Director: Strategy
and Systems, NSG



SADC Industrialisation Week

The SADC Industrialisation Week will promote industrialisation, regional integration, investment and economic transformation within the SADC region.



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REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

A **NATION** THAT **WORKS** FOR ALL



From counting the crisis to shaping solutions: key lessons from the 2026 Public Economics Conference



Photo: National Treasury

National Treasury Director-General Dr Duncan Pieterse in conversation at the Public Economics Conference.

South Africa's youth employment challenge cannot be solved by a single intervention, institution or policy. That was one of the clearest messages to emerge from the Government Technical Advisory Centre's (GTAC) 2026 Public Economics Conference, which brought together policymakers, economists, researchers, practitioners and students to explore one of the country's most pressing public policy challenges.

Held under the theme, "Counting the Crisis: Data, Evidence and Solutions for Youth

Unemployment in South Africa," the three-day conference took delegates on a journey from understanding the problem, to evaluating policy responses and finally preparing for the future of work.

Opening the conference, GTAC Acting Head Ronette Engela set the tone by saying: "Good policy starts with a good understanding of the problem, before we jump to solutions we need to understand the nature of the challenge."

Finance Minister Enoch Godongwana described youth

unemployment as a national challenge requiring coordinated action across government and society.

"Youth unemployment is not a concern for one department, institution or sector, it is a national challenge that requires a national response," he said.

Looking beyond the unemployment rate

The conference challenged delegates to rethink long-held assumptions about South Africa's labour market.

Presentations from Statistics South Africa, SARS and leading researchers demonstrated that understanding employment requires multiple data sources. Together, these provide a richer picture of how young people move through the labour market and where policy interventions can have the greatest impact.

The keynote address by Professor Haroon Borat, Director, Development Policy Research Unit at the University of Cape Town encouraged delegates to look beyond headline unemployment figures. His analysis

suggested that South Africa performs relatively well at creating formal sector jobs compared with many emerging economies, explaining that labour regulation and wage levels do not adequately explain the country's exceptionally high unemployment.

Instead, he argued that barriers preventing the growth of the informal economy deserve much greater policy attention.

"We are unable to close our labour market not through traditional mechanisms but because we have too few people in the informal economy."

The discussion was reinforced by presentations highlighting the scale and resilience of South Africa's informal economy. Speakers argued that millions of livelihoods remain poorly reflected in official statistics, underscoring the need for policies that recognise and support informal economic activity alongside formal employment.

From diagnosis to implementation

Having established a shared understanding of the challenge, the conference shifted its attention towards solutions.

A recurring theme throughout the second day was that South Africa's youth employment challenge cannot be addressed through isolated programmes

alone. Delegates repeatedly emphasised the importance of stronger policy coordination, sustained economic growth and rigorous evaluation of existing interventions.

Professor Justin Visagie from the Southern Centre for Inequality Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand argued that discussions often focus too heavily on preparing young people for work while paying insufficient attention to whether the economy is creating enough jobs.

"We have this big gap between what we need from the formal economy and what it can realistically deliver," he said.

The conference also explored growing evidence on active labour market programmes, employment tax incentives and the role of social protection in supporting labour market participation. Rather than viewing interventions in isolation, speakers emphasised the need for policy coherence.

One of the conference's highlights was the discussion on the Basic Package of Support, an integrated approach that helps young people overcome multiple barriers to employment, including transport, work readiness, psychosocial support and access to opportunities.

Programme leaders from the Presidential Employment Stimu-

lus, Harambee, the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention and YearBeyond shared lessons on implementation, scaling and supporting young people into sustainable livelihoods.

Preparing for the future of work

The conference concluded by exploring how artificial intelligence, automation and digital innovation are reshaping the global labour market.

Drawing on different research, speakers argued that success in this changing environment will depend on continuous learning and developing both technical and social-emotional capabilities.

Dr Hannah Liepmann, a researcher from the International Labour Organisation, explained that technology is more likely to transform jobs than eliminate them altogether.

"Most jobs will be transformed by technology rather than made redundant," she said, adding that employers are increasingly seeking workers with well-rounded and adaptable skills profiles.

Panellists stressed that South Africa's response to rapid technological change must go beyond digital skills training. They emphasised the importance of fostering adaptability, critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, while also ensuring af-

fordable and equitable access to digital infrastructure.

Hanlie de Bod-Leaf, Chief Information Officer of Harambee reinforced this view, highlighting the urgent need for skills development that extends beyond technical competencies.

A shared evidence base for better policy

Across three days, the conference demonstrated that meaningful progress requires coordinated action across economic policy, education, labour market institutions and social support.

The overarching message was clear: solving youth unemployment begins with understanding it properly. By grounding policy in evidence, evaluating what works and preparing young people for an evolving economy, South Africa will be better positioned to expand opportunities for the next generation. ❖

Scan the QR code to access all the presentations and research from the conference.



SA, UN sign five-year cooperation framework to drive inclusive development

Minister in The Presidency responsible for Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, Maropene Ramokgopa, says the signing of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF)

reaffirms South Africa and the UN's shared commitment to building a more inclusive, prosperous, resilient and just society.

Speaking at the signing ceremony in Pretoria recently, Ramokgopa said the agreement

marks the beginning of a new phase of cooperation focused on delivering measurable improvements in the lives of South Africans.

"Your involvement shows that sustainable development cannot be achieved by government alone. It needs collective leadership, shared responsibility and lasting partnerships," she said.

The Minister thanked government departments, provincial and local governments, organised business, organised labour, civil society, academia and development partners for their contributions to developing the framework.

"Today's ceremony marks an important transition. The signing of the cooperation framework confirms our shared vision. It represents something even more significant: our collective readiness to shift from planning to action, from commitments

to measurable outcomes and from aspirations to real improvements in the lives of our people," added the Minister.

Supporting national development goals

She said the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) places great importance on ensuring that international cooperation supports South Africa's national development goals, strengthens institutions and delivers better outcomes for citizens.

Ramokgopa noted that the framework comes at a pivotal time in the country's development journey, following the adoption of the Medium-Term Development Plan (2024 – 2029).

"The Plan focuses on faster and more inclusive economic



Minister in The Presidency for Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, Maropene Ramokgopa and United Nations Resident Coordinator Nelson Muffuh holding the signed United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework.

growth, sustainable job creation, poverty reduction, improved public service delivery, infrastructure development, energy security, strong institutions and a developmental state that puts citizens at the centre of governance," she explained.

She added that government's ongoing programme of structural reforms, including Operation Vulindlela, infrastructure investment, improvements in the energy and logistics sectors and efforts to create a more competitive economy, is aimed at unlocking South Africa's long-term growth potential.

"Achieving these reforms requires capable institutions, technical expertise and strategic partnerships. The UN is a key partner in this journey."

Aligning with country goals

Ramokgopa said the cooperation framework has been deliberately aligned with South Africa's national planning framework.

"This alignment reflects a principle that South Africa has consistently supported – that development cooperation must be nationally owned, country led and aligned with domestic priorities rather than dictated by external agendas."

She explained that the framework will serve as the primary platform through which the UN Development System will support South Africa over the next five years through policy advice, technical assistance, innovation, institutional strengthening, knowledge sharing and strategic partnerships.

The framework also reinforces South Africa's commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the African Union's Agenda 2063.

"As we strive to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), we understand that our national priorities and our global commitments reinforce one another," she said.

Ramokgopa stressed that the success of the framework will ultimately be measured by its impact on people's lives.

"It will be measured by whether young people find meaningful work; whether communities gain access to reliable public services; whether women and vulnerable groups have better economic opportunities; whether institutions become more capable, ethical and responsive; whether inequality decreases and poverty declines and ultimately whether the quality of life for all South Africans improves.

"This demands disciplined implementation. It needs evidence-based policymaking. It requires stronger monitoring and evaluation. It requires accountability, and most importantly, it requires partnership."

More than a formal agreement

In his opening remarks, UN Resident Coordinator Nelson Muffuh said the signing represents more than a formal agreement.

"It reaffirms a deeper commitment that the decisions we take, the partnerships we build and the resources we mobilise translate into real improvements in people's lives.

"This means that our commitments must be felt in homes, schools, workplaces and communities and in the opportunities available to every child."

Muffuh described the cooperation framework as "a programme of action" that will guide collaboration with greater focus, discipline and urgency as the world enters the final stretch towards achieving the SDGs by 2030.

He noted that while progress has been made globally, it remains too slow.

"Only 36% of measurable targets are on track or making moderate progress, nearly half

are advancing too slowly and others have regressed since 2015.

"The message from New York is clear: the SDGs continue to work where political will, sustained investment and cooperation come together but they are not moving fast enough, evenly enough or inclusively enough," Muffuh said.

The signing ceremony marked the start of a five-year partnership between South Africa and the UN to support the country's national development priorities and accelerate progress towards the SDGs.

Covering the period from 2026 to 2030, the cooperation framework sets out the strategic direction for collaboration between the South African Government and the UN system, reaffirming a shared commitment to inclusive economic growth, reducing inequality, strengthening institutions, protecting the environment and ensuring that no one is left behind.

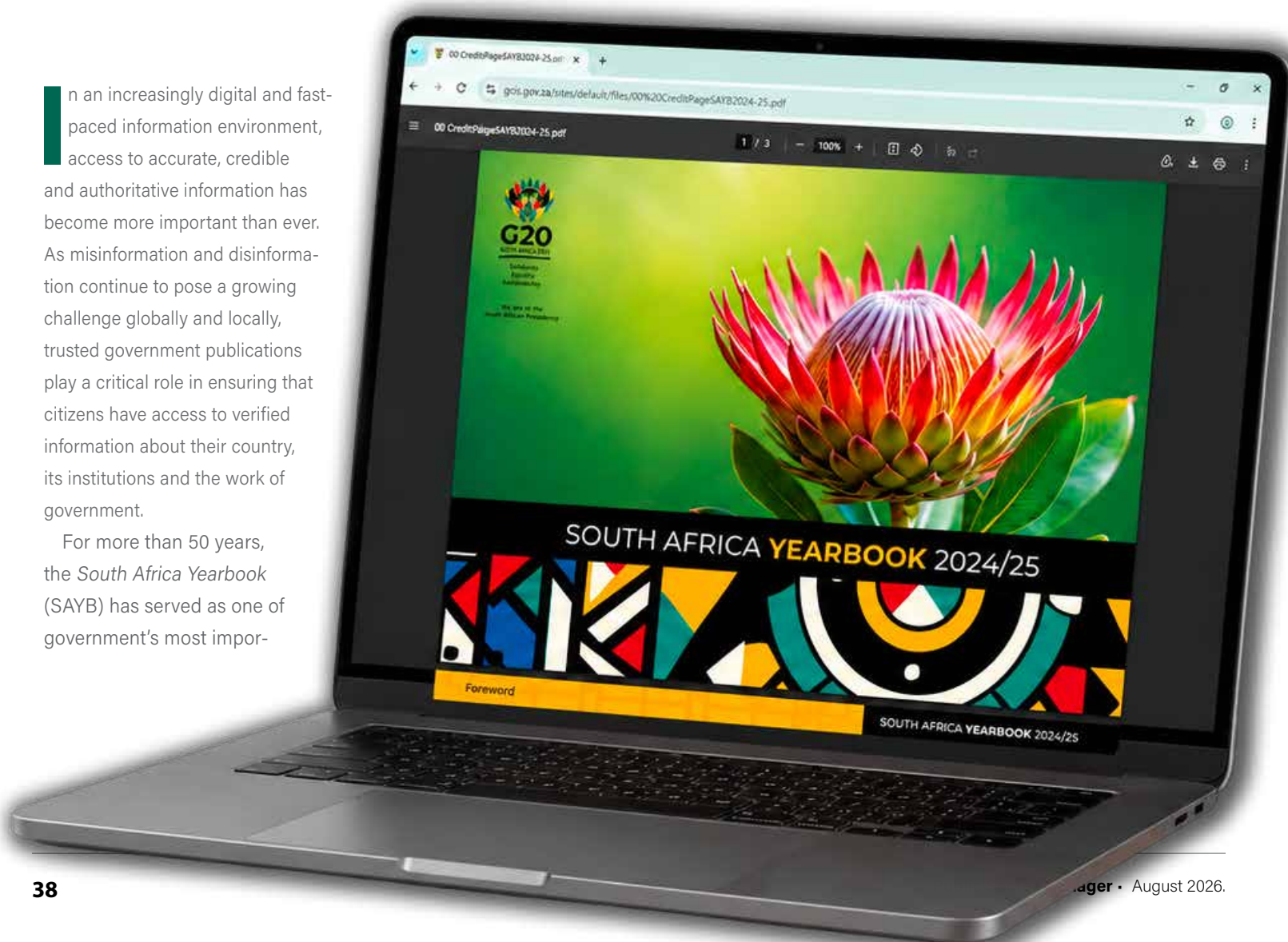
Among those attending the ceremony were Health Minister, Dr Aaron Motsoaledi, senior representatives from national government, civil society organisations, foundations, members of the diplomatic corps, UN entities and development partners. ❖

South Africa Yearbook:

trusted information in a changing digital age

In an increasingly digital and fast-paced information environment, access to accurate, credible and authoritative information has become more important than ever. As misinformation and disinformation continue to pose a growing challenge globally and locally, trusted government publications play a critical role in ensuring that citizens have access to verified information about their country, its institutions and the work of government.

For more than 50 years, the *South Africa Yearbook* (SAYB) has served as one of government's most impor-



tant reference publications. By providing reliable information on South Africa's governance, economy, society, policies and development priorities, the SAYB supports transparency, accountability and informed public participation. In an era where information can be shared instantly and often without verification, the SAYB remains a trusted source of facts, context and continuity, helping to strengthen public understanding and trust in government information.

Since its introduction in 1974, the SAYB has evolved from a printed annual reference publication into a comprehensive digital knowledge product. It provides authoritative information on government programmes, society, the economy, public institutions, national priorities and South Africa's development trajectory. In doing so, it supports the public's right to access information that is timely, accurate and easy to understand.

The evolution of the SAYB

Following the advent of democracy in 1994, the SAYB assumed a broader role. It had to reflect the country's constitutional democracy, emerging public institutions and government's

commitment to development, transparency and public participation. The focus moved from simply documenting the State to providing information on policies, government programmes, achievements and opportunities that have a direct impact on people's lives.

The digital era has changed how people access, use and share information. Citizens now consume and exchange content through websites, search engines, social media, messaging applications, online news services, data portals and artificial intelligence tools. Information is available instantly, across multiple devices and platforms and is increasingly interactive.

The information environment is, however, also crowded and in some instances unreliable. This makes the SAYB more relevant than ever, as it provides verified information, context and continuity in an environment often shaped by speed, opinion and misinformation.

Embracing digital technology

Technology has also changed how the publication is produced, accessed and used. Digital publishing enables users to download, search and share content more easily. Features such as

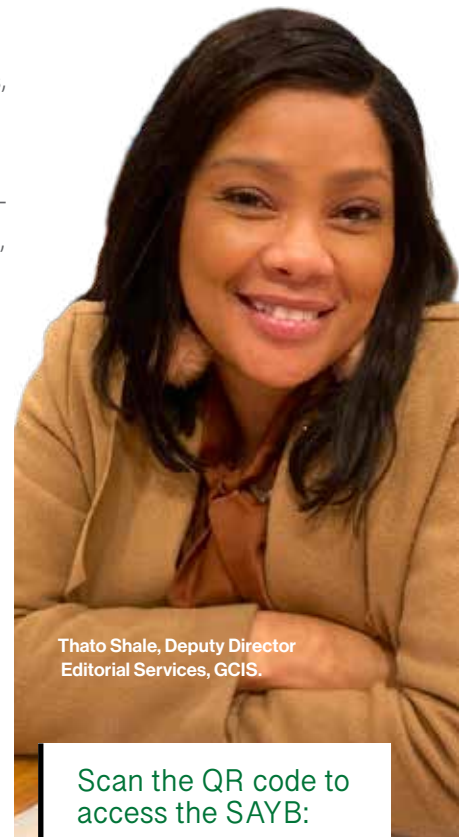
online archives, infographics, QR codes and multimedia content allow users to move seamlessly from a general overview to more detailed information.

Viewed through the Government Segmentation Model, which recognises that different audiences have different information needs and preferences, the SAYB primarily serves an informed and information-seeking audience. This includes government communicators, educators, learners, students, researchers, policy analysts, public representatives, civil society organisations, business, labour, investors, diplomats and international stakeholders.

It also serves citizens who require accurate, reliable and comprehensive information about South Africa, its institutions, policies and development priorities.

For government communication, this change presents both opportunities and responsibilities. Government information can reach larger audiences faster than before. However, it can also be distorted quickly. As the custodian and coordinator of government communication, the Government Communication and Information System provides strategic leadership, promotes coherent government

messaging and strengthens public access to information on government policies, plans, programmes and achievements. The SAYB gives communicators a common reliable factual base from which to communicate service delivery, national priorities and the progress being made towards improving the lives of South Africans. ♦



Thato Shale, Deputy Director
Editorial Services, GCIS.

Scan the QR code to
access the SAYB:



Women's Month showcase:

Bold African fashion for confident women

As South Africa celebrates Women's Month, PSM magazine shines the spotlight on Ledikana Creations, a proudly South African fashion brand that showcases the beauty, strength and elegance of women through contemporary African garments and accessories.

Founded by Mapholo Ratau, Ledikana Creations combines authentic African fabrics, craftsmanship and modern design to create timeless pieces that celebrate culture and womanhood.

Shwe Patchwork Dress: R4 500

This dress is made from 100% cotton, authentic shweshwe fabric and different shweshwe prints in patches. It is currently available in pink or blue.



D.T 4 Piece Shweshwe Nyebelese Dress – orange/green: R5 399.99

This four piece nyebelese dress comes in a set that includes a dress, apron, headwrap and skirt.



LO Halter neck dress: R999.99

LO Halter neck dress is a Tshivenda inspired print made of cotton material.

** Prices correct at the time of publishing.*

For more information about Ledikana,

visit: www.ledikana.com

Email: info@ledikana.com

Call: 011 684 1049, 011 390 1071 or 066 138 1070.

You can also visit the stores at Melrose Arch and O.R Tambo International Airport.

A taste of *Mediterranean elegance*

This month, we feature a refined Mediterranean-inspired dish by Executive Group **Chef Victor Johnson** of Club Como Modern Mediterranean. Renowned for its award-winning cuisine and elegant atmosphere, the Johannesburg restaurant brings the timeless sophistication of Italy's Lake Como to South Africa's dining scene. Chef Johnson shares his delectable Grilled Sole with Cauliflower Purée, Broccolini, Baby Onions and Lemon Caper Sauce – a beautifully balanced dish that combines fresh flavours, delicate textures and contemporary culinary flair.



Ingredients

Grilled sole:

- ⦿ 250 g dressed sole fillets
- ⦿ ¼ teaspoon fish spice
- ⦿ 1 teaspoon lemon juice
- ⦿ 1 teaspoon olive oil
- ⦿ Pepper
- ⦿ 3 baby onions

Cauliflower Purée:

- ⦿ ¼ onion, chopped
- ⦿ 500 g cauliflower
- ⦿ 1 clove garlic
- ⦿ 2 tablespoons olive oil
- ⦿ 1 celery stalk
- ⦿ ¼ teaspoon salt
- ⦿ ¼ teaspoon pepper
- ⦿ ½ cup vegetable stock
- ⦿ ½ cup cream
- ⦿ 1 medium potato, peeled and chopped



Caper sauce:

- 3 tablespoons butter
- 1 teaspoon onion finely chopped
- 1 tablespoon cream
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon capers
- Salt and pepper
- 1 teaspoon dill

Method Grill sole:

- Season the sole and baby onions with fish spice and a drizzle of lemon juice. Place them on a hot flat-top grill and cook, turning the fish occasionally, until it is golden brown and cooked through. Finish by seasoning with salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste.

Cauliflower Purée:

- Heat the olive oil in a saucepan over medium heat. Add the onions, celery and garlic and sauté until softened and fragrant.
- Add the cauliflower and po-

tatoes, stirring well to coat them evenly in the onion, garlic and celery mixture.

- Pour in the stock and cream, then bring to a gentle boil. Cook until the cauliflower is tender and fully cooked through. Season to taste with salt and freshly ground black pepper.
- Remove from the heat and allow the mixture to cool completely. Transfer to a blender and blend until smooth and creamy.

Caper sauce:

- Heat the butter in a saucepan over medium heat. Add the onions and capers and sauté until the onions are soft and translucent.

- Stir in the cream, lemon juice and dill, then season with salt and pepper.
- Bring to a gentle boil and

simmer for 2 – 3 minutes, allowing the flavours to combine and the sauce to thicken slightly. ❖

To serve

Spread the cauliflower purée across the base of a serving plate and arrange the baby onions on top. Place the grilled sole over the purée, then finish with a generous drizzle of the lemon caper sauce. Garnish with a fresh lemon wedge and serve.

Wine pairing

This elegant seafood dish pairs beautifully with a chilled glass of white wine which complements the delicate flavours of the sole and the bright citrus notes of the sauce.

Top 3 South African national parks for winter game viewing

As the South African winter air falls upon our mountains and fills our valleys, the once vibrant wilderness transforms ever so subtly. Crisp morning air embracing your skin, filling your senses with natural aromas and a tranquility like no other.

The rich African sky is decorated with fine mist that promises to lift later on in the morning, raising the curtain on a new day and a new adventure. It is here, amidst the silence, that the soul of the South African outdoors begins to reveal itself in a unique, breathtaking way.

The first hints of sunlight pierce through the frosty air, casting a pale gold hue on the frost-kissed grass. In its stillness, despite the cold, the landscape begins to come alive. Each blade of grass glistens in the morning light – a glimmer

of hope that temperatures are rising soon.

Brush the frost off your boots, and let us set out on a journey across three of our hand-picked national parks that are perfect for winter game viewing experiences.

Game viewing delight in Kruger National Park

Kruger National Park is a vast wilderness situated in the north-eastern corner of South Africa, offering a pure African bush experience for all those who are lucky enough to grace the park with their presence. The park spans across the Limpopo and Mpumalanga provinces, and borders Mozambique and Zimbabwe.

Kruger is renowned for its abundant wildlife, which



becomes even more visible in winter. The reduction in natural bushveld owing to lower seasonal rainfall, along with the dry weather, lure animals to the waterholes, providing excellent game viewing opportunities.

All members of the Big Five – the lion, leopard, rhinoceros, elephant and Cape buffalo – can be found here. Cheetahs, wild dogs and a host of herbivores, including impala, zebra and giraffe, can be seen roaming the wilderness. The little five also adorn the park's grounds. These are the Buffalo Weaver, Elephant Shrew, Leopard Tortoise, Ant Lion and Rhino Beetle.

Additionally, over 500 common, rare and endemic bird species inhabit the park. The Big Six of the birding world to look out for are the Ground Hornbill, Kori

Bustard, Lappet-faced Vulture, Martial Eagle, Pel's Fishing Owl and Saddle-bill Stork.

Other winter experiences

Kruger National Park presents a variety of winter experiences. Game drives are a staple, with both day and night drives offering unique wildlife viewing opportunities, with warmth to be found beneath blankets atop Land Cruiser vehicles and hot chocolate the reward at the end of your safari.

The cooler temperatures make bush walks particularly enjoyable, providing the opportunity to get up close to nature. For a different perspective, consider taking a hot air balloon ride over the park at sunrise. Kruger National Park also offers 4x4 Trails

and 4x4 Eco Trails, Mountain Biking, bird watching and golf. For the curious, the Elephant Hall at Letaba Rest Camp is a great place to learn more about our incredible South African giants.

The Honoured Big 7 at Addo Elephant National Park

Located in the Eastern Cape, Addo Elephant National Park is the third-largest national park in South Africa and stretches from the semi-arid Karoo area in the north around Darlington Dam, over the Zuurberg Mountains, through the Sundays River Valley, and down to the coast between Sundays River Mouth and Bushmans River Mouth.

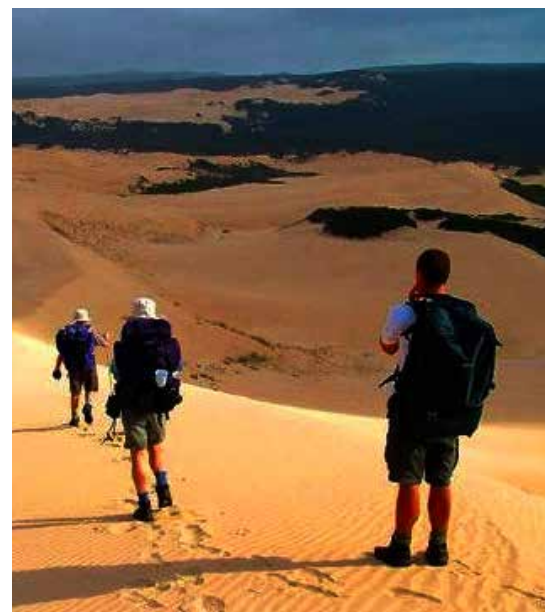
True to its name, Addo Elephant National Park is home to

hundreds of elephants, offering ample opportunities to observe these gentle giants in their natural habitat. It's also one of the few places where you can see the Big Seven – the Big Five, along with Southern Right Whale and Great White shark off the coast of Algoa Bay.

The winter months provide excellent viewing opportunities as animals gather near water sources, and the park's diverse landscapes make it a hotspot for a wide variety of bird species. With up to 450 bird species inhabiting the park, birdwatchers will be in their element.

Other winter experiences

For those seeking adventure, the Bedrogfontein 4x4 Trail presents a combination of breathtaking





views and historical relevance. This 45-km trail is situated between the Kabouga and Darlington areas of the park and



offers an unforgettable journey through areas of significant Anglo-Boer War battles and sites of ancient rock art.

Nature walks and hikes are another fantastic way to explore the park's distinct biomes, each home to unique flora and fauna. The Alexandria Hiking Trail, a two-day circular trail stretching over 32 km, provides an immersive experience of the park's landscapes.

Marine enthusiasts will appreciate the park's coastal section between Sundays River Mouth and Bushmans River Mouth. Here, you can bask in the sun on one of the warmer winter days,

relax on the sandy shores and enjoy a picnic. Alternatively, book a chartered cruise from the Port Elizabeth harbour and go in search of marine wildlife such as the southern right whale and great white shark. The Bird Island and St. Croix Island in Algoa Bay are vital breeding areas for marine birds like Cape gannets, African penguins and rare roseate terns.

Marakele National Park

Make a day trip to Marakele and enjoy the spectacular scenery.

In winter, expect to encounter a host of mammals such

as elephants, Black and White rhinos, leopards, lions, brown hyenas, and a vibrant antelope population. Sable, kudu, eland, impala, waterbuck, tsessebe and smaller species all occur in the park. Moreover, Marakele forms part of the world's largest colony of the endangered Cape vulture, so keep your binoculars at the ready for these magnificent birds.

Marakele also offers morning and sunset bush walks and a two-night 4x4 eco trail. For a breathtaking sunrise, a drive to the Lenong viewpoint on top of the Waterberg Mountains is a must. ❖

Handy information

- Pack warm clothing. South African winter days can be sunny, but temperatures can plummet in the early mornings and late afternoons, especially on game drives. Remember, the colour of your clothing can affect game viewing, so opting for natural tones will help you blend in with the surroundings. Green, brown, khaki, and olive are perfect for blending in with the environment.
- Essential items to pack include a camera, binoculars, a torch, sunblock, sunglasses, hiking shoes, and any personal items necessary for your comfort.
- At Kruger Park, ample cafeterias and restaurants are available for casual dining throughout the park. For a truly unique dining experience, consider booking a boma or bush braai at any of the rest camps. View a list of restaurants.
- Addo Elephant National Park also offers a variety of restaurants, including a Cattle Baron Grill & Bistro.
- Marakele National Park does not have on-site shops, restaurants or fuel stations, so be sure to pack in any supplies you might need or buy them in Thabazimbi before nightfall. Despite this, you can cater for yourself with the braai facilities.