

The value of women in waste

The remarkable women who serve on the council for the Institute of Waste Management of Southern Africa (IWMSA) are showing how influential and much needed women in waste are.



Prof Suzan Oelofse (left) is president of the IWMSA and serving alongside her are Margot Ladouce (middle), chairperson at the IWMSA Western Cape branch, and Nomakhwezi Nota (right), chairperson at the IWMSA Eastern Cape branch.

Prof Suzan Oelofse, research group leader for waste for development at the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research's (CSIR) Natural Resources and Environment Operating Unit, joined the IWMSA in early 2006 and has been the president since 2013.

Margot Ladouce, head of Research and Development - Solid Waste Disposal at the City of Cape Town, has been a long-standing member of the IWMSA since 2005. Nomakhwezi Nota, managing director at AMN Environmental Pty (Ltd), realised her passion for the waste industry in 2008 when she joined the CSIR, hitting its full potential in 2013 when she started environmental consulting in East London.

"Women are much needed in the waste industry and with more and more women pursuing careers in waste management - on every level - I envisage a radical shift over the next few years towards an ethical, innovative and compliant industry," says Oelofse.

Increase in membership

Since joining the IWMSA in 2014, Nota took the initiative to spread the IWMSA's involvement in more Eastern Cape towns, other than East London and Port Elizabeth. She and her team achieved great success with an approximate 10% increase in membership from organisations and individuals with a hunger to learn more about waste management.

In the Western Cape, Ladouce took on the challenge of organising the IWMSA's flagship conference, WasteCon. WasteCon2014 proved to be a huge success with over 450 delegates in attendance. The conference attracted key players in the waste management industry, ultimately facilitating dialogue and participation between government and industry players.

Frequenting industrial sites early on in her career, Oelofse describes how she could not understand why the heaps of waste could not be used for something else. "The thought that all waste generated is in essence the result of consumer demand and consumption, made me realise how unsustainable human activities are and thus my passion for waste management was born."

Waste is a resource

"Waste should be seen as a resource," Ladouce adds. "Through proper management and processing, waste can add value and can be used to benefit and make a noticeable difference to the GDP of South Africa. This can be done through implementation of waste to energy, anaerobic digestion and composting technologies. It is also a vehicle to create opportunities for entrepreneurs."

Nota mentions that although waste management was not explicitly mentioned in the initial presentation of millennium development goals (MDGs), the targets and indicators identified for the MDGs clearly show important links between waste management and the MDGs. "These links are indicative of how better management of waste can lead to improvements and poverty reduction aimed at achieving the set MDGs.

"Significant proportions of populations depend on waste management for their livelihood, and there are opportunities for more employment generation as services extend to cover the rapidly-growing populations globally. Proper waste management has a significant impact on the lives, health and surroundings of humans and the environment," explains Nota.

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