



WOMEN'S MONTH 2020

Phenomenal Woman Profile



Leading the Way in South Africa's Water Sector

A key challenge facing the water sector is its ageing workforce. This is one of the reasons that young, educated and dynamic people are needed in the sector to ensure the sustainability of this critical resource as the country strives to achieve the goals of the NDP 2030.

Suzie Nkambule is one such individual. At only 32 years old, Suzie is an example of new disruptive, young and entrepreneurial leadership driving the sector forward. A former Director at Aveng Africa, Suzie partnered with E² Investments to acquire the Aveng Water business she led within Aveng. Now as the CEO for Nafasi Water, she is playing a leading role in the field of water reclamation and desalination. Nafasi Water is making an important contribution to securing South Africa's water resources.

The EWSETA met with Suzie to find out more.

Q: *A solid education is key success factor in any sector. Tell us about your education.*

A: My early education was in Matsulu township, Mpumalanga, within the disadvantaged public school system with all of its challenges. As one of a family of seven, university study was a luxury that my parents were unable to afford as is the norm for the majority of South Africans. I had always wanted to be a Civil Engineer so that I could help to transform cities, transport networks and iconic structures. I was lucky to have done so well in matric in 2005 that enabled me to secure a scholarship funding to Wits University for my first year in 2006. During my first year, I had the opportunity to apply for the Fellowship at the Allan Gray Orbis Foundation and have been an Allan Gary Fellow ever since. At the age of 21, I completed my BSc in Civil Engineering and went into the world of work with my enthusiasm and entrepreneurial dreams.

Q: *Have you completed any further studies subsequent to your degree?*

A: Yes. In 2014 I completed my Masters Degree, Finance and Investment at the Wits Business School.

Q: *Tell us a bit about your career before assuming the role of CEO for Nafasi Water.*

A: Typically, a new graduate will start in projects and technical upon graduation and I truly enjoyed site and project engineering work. I was lucky to be on site for the construction of Soccer City and highways in Gauteng as a trainee engineer. But my curiosity over the

business of infrastructure pulled me toward business development, proposals and strategic planning very quickly.

I held various roles in Grinaker-LTA construction and Aveng Group corporate over the years working with management teams to prepare for major projects and manage risk, I worked on turnarounds for troubled projects and businesses. Much later, in 2016, I had the opportunity to lead the turnaround of the engineering cluster of businesses as the General Manager and through that discovered the opportunity in Water Technology and operations. I dedicated myself to rebuilding the team and turning the company around. Later I had the opportunity to acquire the company from Aveng, and took over in June 2019, rebranded to Nafasi Water. I am the Chief Executive with an exceptional team of engineers and other professionals who are collectively taking on the challenge of Southern Africa's water security problems.

Q: *Your professional achievements for someone who is so young are truly remarkable. What drives you?*

A: I'd like to believe I can be an impact entrepreneur who happens to be an engineer. I look for areas where focused engineering innovation and resource pooling can have a real impact on the development of Africa and pulling our people out of poverty and giving them better access to jobs and a better living standard. Water is one such service area that can enable development and we have a lot to achieve to bring the utility service quality and reliability to par so it is no longer an economic and social development constraint.

Q: *It is no secret that the water sector faces immense challenges, not least of which are the skills shortages – particularly technical skills. Nafasi Water employs 230 people across South Africa and Namibia. Things brings me to a double-barrelled question. First of all, how does Nafasi Water upskill its employees? Secondly, what actions do you think are critical to address the skills shortages faced by the water sector in South Africa.*

A: A good utility service and technology company balances professional engineering and artisanal operations and maintenance skills pools. They are complimentary and equally important. So, we focus on a technical training track for engineers, operators and artisans. For engineering professionals, priorities for us are in process, mechanical, control and instrumentation and industrial engineering.

We are always on the lookout for talented people with a water technology obsession, particularly as we aim to capacitate the local industry to lead technology development. For artisans, we are probably at the front line along with other organisations pushing for an aggressive return to technical skills training as a strategic skills area nationally. It is desperately needed, we work with the water academy and also run our own internal training for our operators.

Q: *Staying on the challenges faced by the water sector in South Africa, numerous research studies have indicated that in the next decade, South Africa is not going to have enough water to meet its needs. It is a complex challenge, but if you were to identify one or two key actions that need to be taken, what would they be?*

A: We need to get our non-revenue and water loss levels under control - it's the lowest hanging fruit to improve the situation. And secondly, with the resource availability and demand growth challenge, we must prioritise direct reuse as far as possible. These initiatives will also make all users more aware of the resource pressure and the need for a larger focus on preservation and efficient utilisation.

Q: *As a SETA, our mandate is to drive skills development in the sectors we serve. Key to this, is the role played by employers. As an employer in the water sector, what do you think employers should be doing to drive skills development?*

A: We need to advocate for more structured partnerships between employers, training institutions and the SETA, with aligned regional goals and programmes.

Q: *Another key mandate for the EWSETA is career guidance. What advice would you give to a young person currently in high school?*

A: Inform yourself, understand all the options and don't box yourself in based on lack of information or awareness. The careers in utilities range from the sciences, engineering, operations and technical skills. Find your preference and go for it, opportunity exists in all of them and we certainly will need more of this going forward.

Q: *It has been such a pleasure to meet with you and thank you for the time you have afforded us. In closing, please share your favourite motivational quote with our readers.*

A: "Luck is where opportunity meets preparation" - Seneca

About Nafasi Water

Nafasi Water is a Water Technology and Utility Services Company in Southern Africa, with a focus on water reclamation and desalination technology for application in complex industrial and wastewater systems. Nafasi Water began its journey in 2003 to develop, implement and operate world-class industrial water re-use and treatment projects.

As a black-owned South African leading water technology and water utility service company, Nafasi Water partners with industry, government and local communities to provide sustainable solutions to broader water security challenges.

Through combining innovative technology with the funding and delivery of world-class water and wastewater treatment projects and services, the company aims to sustainably reclaim water affected by industrial and human activities.

Nafasi Water's ultimate goal is to help preserve the precious volumes and water of Sub-Saharan Africa, while ensuring access to alternative sources of water for potable and industrial use.