



Gender, Work & Organization Conference

28-30 June 2023 | Stellenbosch | South Africa

GENDER, WORK & ORGANIZATION



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Gender, Work and Organization

13th International Interdisciplinary Conference

28-30 June 2023, Stellenbosch, South Africa

Conference theme

Marginalized gender identities - how can intellectual activism transform work and organization?

CALL FOR COLLABORATIVE EVENTS

COLLABORATIVE EVENT TITLE:

Unlocking potential - Creating jobs and improving lives for women through the greater Cape Town water fund

COLLABORATIVE EVENT COLLABORATORS:

Festus Zulu, The Nature Conservancy
Jennifer Allport, Partner
Louise Stafford, The Nature Conservancy

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About the Greater Cape Town Water Fund

The purpose of the GCTWF is to protect biodiversity and to help improve water security for the Greater Cape Town region and the adjacent Palmiet-Bot Basin (a critical water source for the City of Cape Town and local communities) through the removal of non-native plants which have aggressively infested the watershed.

A study led by The Nature Conservancy (in 2017) found that these invasive plants steal more than 55 billion litres of water each year from the catchments that supply the region's water. The most problematic species are trees which consume far more water than native fynbos vegetation comprised of small, flowering plants with shallow roots.

By removing and preventing the return of invasive plants, the Greater Cape Town Region could regain those litres—up to a two-month's supply of water each year—back into the system within six years. Simply by maintaining the cleared areas, these gains could double to 100 billion litres a year within 30 years—at only one-tenth the cost of alternative options such as desalination, groundwater exploration, water reuse, and additional dams.

However, this research found that to reclaim the most water, efforts need to be focused on the hardest to reach places in the watershed. Invasive trees are thriving in the steep, rugged mountainous areas, hogging precious rainfall before it can reach rivers or replenish groundwater stores.

The GCWTF started as a pilot project in 2018, with 10 women. They had never cut down a tree or applied herbicide. Removing invasives is hard physical work and, traditionally, a job from men. The GCTWF wanted a different approach, focusing on empowering through employment - not just a wage.

The training each beneficiary receives equips them with the skill set to successfully clear invasive alien plants from key catchment areas. These are sustainable green jobs with training to improve their future employability in the environmental sector.

On the success of this initial work, the GCWTF has grown to create over 570 green jobs, complemented by environmental skills training. As the work of the Water Fund has moved into the hard-to-reach mountain slopes, the team has trained over 120 specialized high-angle technicians. In total, the GCWTF has employed over 250 women and supported 54 in specialized high-angle technician (HAT).

Mampho Malawu, 38, is one of these HAT and before training, had never hoisted a chainsaw in her life. Or climbed a mountain. Or spent the night camping in a tent. But she was excited about the prospect of this job. “I had no idea how to cut trees,” she says, recalling her first day with the Greater Cape Town Water Fund (GCTWF).

“I had no idea why it was done—or why women would do this kind of job. I never thought I would last.”

But Malawu did more than last—she flourished. The former store clerk has learned wilderness safety, firefighting, trail clearing, and rope skills—and she became an expert at operating a chainsaw. Today, Malawu can afford to send her son to a good school, and she supports her extended family, including her mother, sister, and three children.

In turn, Malawu is helping to change the future of Cape Town, a city that made headlines in 2018 for its severe water shortage. To help prevent a future crisis, the city invested in a range of solutions, including the work of the Greater Cape Town Water Fund (GCTWF).

This is why Malawu's journey with the GCTWF brought her via helicopter to the region's highest peaks, and she found herself dangling from a cliff wall, wielding a chainsaw to address the thick-trunked thirsty, invasive pine trees. She is part of the biggest catchment restoration operation in South Africa. After demonstrating her natural leadership skills, she became the first woman leader of one of these high-angle crews.

Women in the Lead

Malawu is just one of the many women who are on the front lines of the GCTWF, solving Cape Town's water crisis.

The GCTWF has created over 570 green job opportunities in a region where unemployment is nearly 30%. These jobs include women and young adults recruited from disadvantaged local communities. Women make up 44% of the workforce, and youth 29%. To date, these beneficiaries have been impacted through green jobs, skills development, and training, with more than 1,700 dependents benefitting indirectly.

Female-headed households benefit from project resources with at least 60% of those in skills training are women.

"There is no work for a certain gender. This work we are doing is really important and anyone can do it," Malawu says.

Yet the GCTWF is working to ensure that that livelihood benefits are sustainable and can increase. This skills development and training also improves their employability in the environmental sector.

With the aim of developing small-to-medium enterprises to enter the specialized remote access market. The GCTWF is supporting the establishment of and providing ongoing mentoring to woman-owned microenterprises that provide specialized services, including rope access, firefighting, fire break maintenance, and footpath maintenance.

The GCTWF has created opportunities for 15 SMMEs (small, medium, and microenterprises). Of these, two SMMEs provide high angle rope access services including the first woman-owned business providing this highly specialized service.

A Socioeconomic Survey conducted in November 2020 depicts the tangible improvements in the lives of 240 individuals employed through the GCTWF.

Sustainability Impact to Date

"One must know that cutting down invasive alien trees will have an impact. You are not only doing it to provide for your family, but for the environment and the whole world," says Malawu.

"Everyone is dependent on water and by removing these invasive alien trees, water scarcity issues can be minimised."

In just three years, the GCTWF is reporting results that hold promise for a sustainable future: Water Security. More than 11 billion liters are being returned each year to the regional water system, providing more than five million people with improved water security. Biodiversity Protection. More than 58,500 acres (27,000 hectares) of water-hogging invasive plants have been cleared, making way for restoration of the region's native fynbos.

In a remarkable vote of confidence for nature-based solutions, the City of Cape Town recently pledged \$4.25 million over three years to support the GCTWF. A global first, the city is leading the way—and providing hope—for other communities facing water challenges.

Looking Ahead

In the years ahead, the GCTWF expects further progress. By 2025, more than 135,000 acres (54,300 hectares) will be cleared, returning 55 billion liters of water a year—an extra two months' supply—to the people of Cape Town. And these water benefits are expected to nearly double to 100 billion liters per year by 2045.

"Day zero was a wakeup call and offered an opportunity to integrate Nature Based Solutions and engineering options for long term water security." says Louise Stafford, director of Source Water Protection for TNC. "The Greater Cape Town Water Fund became a model for collaboration between government, NGOs, and the private sector. By focusing on furthering the skills of local women, we are increasing the impact and co-benefits of our work."

TNC is working with other cities in South Africa to replicate the water fund model, drawing on valuable lessons learned from over 43 water funds globally. The GCTWF success inspires cities in other countries in Africa and elsewhere in the world to adopt the tool.

Malawu and her team in the field help to power the progress for Cape Town and to create this powerful model that is inspiring other cities. The learnings and successes of the GCTWF will create more jobs opportunities for women elsewhere and greater water security for many more millions of people.

“To all women, we must stand up and be brave to do any kind of job which will enable us to unlock our potential,” she says. “There is nothing we cannot do. I am proud of what I am doing and the positive impact I have on the environment. I am a happy woman.”

Request for Inclusion in Conference

Showcasing the GCTWF in this conference will help reach other entities to follow the lead of this example, and embrace putting women at the center of solving enviro challenges and tangibly improving their lives today and for the long-term.