

## **From practical to strategic – Gender mainstreaming**

*"Gender mainstreaming can simply mean integrating women at the top, without confronting the fundamental issues of gender equality. If there is no gender mainstreaming we will be tinkering and tailoring but we will not be transforming. I don't think we will achieve anything."*

- Sheila Meintjes, Professor and gender activist, University of Witwatersrand

**T**here are some women decision-makers that do not hesitate to fly the flag for gender equality wherever they may be. Nandi Mayathula-Khoza, Member of the Mayoral Committee (MMC) responsible for Community Development in the City of Johannesburg is one of them. As Mayor of Soweto, Speaker of the City of Johannesburg and in her current executive post in which she has championed a Women Development Strategy (WDS), Mayathula-Khoza has made it her business to empower women councillors and promote gender equality through the work of the largest municipal council in Southern Africa.

From her 13<sup>th</sup> floor office overlooking the busy train station and high rise offices of Braamfontein, Mayathula-Khoza laughs that she has grown with local government in South Africa, and made sure that gender is part of that growth in whatever corner she has occupied.

"I have served in all the different roles of local government - legislative, the executive, ceremonial," Mayathula-Khoza reflects. "Wherever I have been I have used my space to empower women because of the triple oppression of race, gender and class that the majority of women in this country have experienced. We have an important role to play in transforming local government which has been predominantly white and male. I have tried to get other women on board; to share that vision."

A veteran of the Soweto student uprisings against the teaching of Afrikaans in black schools in 1970, Mayathula-Khoza cut her teeth in the South African National Civic Organisation (SANCO) in which "I was identified as a cadre who would be part of local government and make a difference by virtue of being involved in the struggle for democracy and knowing civic issues at community level."

Elected as a councillor on the Proportional Representation (PR) or list system in the first local elections in 1995, Mayathula-Khoza chaired the powerful tender committee in which she spearheaded a new affirmative action procurement policy. This involved provision for ensuring that the benefits of City contracts extended to all previously disadvantaged groups, including women. "Over



Nandi MayathulaKohoza

the years we have seen more and more women winning tenders. I know that this has contributed to the quality of life not just of these women but also of the communities that they serve," she noted.

In 1997, Mayathula-Khoza rose to be mayor of the Southern Metro Council of Johannesburg, covering the sprawling former black township of Soweto where she grew up. "In those days the mayoral post was a ceremonial one, but I tell you I made good use of that space; not just kissing babies and shaking peoples hands. I made it a developmental role. I began to mobilise and form people into a community; to become part of a forum. I called in members of the Executive Committee and asked what impact local government is making; how we are improving the quality of life; how we can become not just recipients of development but participants as well."

Mayathula-Khoza's passion for advancing the status of women led her to "mobilise women in the sector, in Soweto, Orange Farm and Lenasia. I strongly believe that you can't represent people if you don't involve them. We involved groups of women, and asked how they wanted to be assisted." The list was long: employment, skills, poverty alleviation and a host of basic needs. It opened the eyes of the first time politician to what is meant by gender mainstreaming at local level.

In 2000, Mayathula-Khoza found herself Speaker of the City of Johannesburg, a new post that included being responsible for the capacity building of councillors. Among her first moves, she created a women's caucus in the City (see Box 26) that later served as the steering committee for a unique capacity building project on Gender, Communications and Local Government (see Case study seven). This project resulted in a draft gender policy for the City.

Following the 2006 elections, the community activist found herself deployed to the executive, responsible for a range of portfolios including heritage, human development, poverty alleviation and social cohesion: tasks that "I am really passionate about."

Mayathula-Khoza is aware that the City needs a comprehensive gender strategy that encompasses internal transformation as well as service delivery (see Case Study nine). But she has used her space to drive a Women Development Strategy (WDS) as part of the human development portfolio of her work. "This time around," she explained, "I do not have responsibility for the empowerment of women councillors as I did as Speaker. But I am responsible for the empowerment of women in the community, so I am able to pick up from where I left. I continue to make good use of whatever space I have."