

WiMS: Women marine scientists share their stories

| By Obakeng Molelu

In celebration of International Women's Day on 8 March, the network of Women in Marine Science (WiMS) shares stories here about women doing remarkable work in their research and community empowerment initiatives in the western Indian Ocean (WIO) region. Over the past ten years, WIOMSA has seen an increase in the number of female participants in the marine sciences, especially early career ocean professionals.

The women's stories are from different disciplines, including conservation and marine monitoring, mangrove conservation, smart port cities, oceanography and physical chemistry. We salute these women and many others in the WIO as they #BreakTheBias and advocate for gender equality today for a sustainable tomorrow.

Island conservation and marine monitoring team | By Nasreen Khan, Seychelles

I have a small team of three; two other women, Vanessa Dufrene and Jaymee Clarisse, and one male Said Harryba. We belong to the Island Conservation Society and we manage the conservation on the third largest island in Seychelles, called Silhouette Island.

I am employed as the Conservation Officer and am very proud of my female team members and their "go-getter" work ethic. This was the first year the two female rangers conducted marine monitoring. Despite them having to upskill very quickly, I can proudly say that we were successful in completing our marine monitoring for this season.

On each dive, the team collected data to determine the abundance, diversity and condition of reef-building scleractinian hard corals, level of coral recruitment, as well as selected reef-associated macro-invertebrate groups, including fish point counts and incidental sightings of large predatory fish species.

The information gathered will add to our long-term data and provide insight into changes occurring in the ecosystems; identify key environmental threats related to climate change and other anthropogenic pressures; and assist in determining management actions needed.



Nasreen Khan with Vanessa Dufrene, Jaymee Clarisse and Said Harryba



Risper planting mangroves with local community members

Peri-urban communities in mangrove restoration | Risper Oteke, Kenya

Coastal communities value mangroves as key ecosystems that provide significant support to their livelihoods. This has made mangroves part of their cultural heritage. In Kenya, I work with peri-urban communities to restore the degraded Tudor Creek in Mombasa, using a participatory approach to ensure better governance.

Between 2019 and 2020, I assisted the community in restoring 8 hectares of mangroves. My passion for community resources management has provided me with an avenue to pursue more research about

the sustainability of peri-urban communities with mangrove dependent livelihoods within the creek from a gender perspective.

I consider the restoration of degraded sites as a process and not a one-time activity. You should have the community at heart, listen to their story and share your insights so that you can involve every actor in the restoration. Working with young people and women has really enlightened my scope of community engagement in conservation.

OceanWomxn and SuperScientists breaking the bias

University of Cape Town, South Africa



OceanWomxn fellows, from left, Wanjiru Thoithi, Kolisa Sinyanya, Philile Mvula, Thando Mazomba, Faith February, Sizwekazi Yapi and Lerato Mpheshea.

The fellows of the Advancing Womxn programme (OceanWomxn) in the Department of Oceanography at the University of Cape Town, all experienced primary, secondary and tertiary education without having role models that looked like them. Yet, they followed their dreams and overcame several barriers, including financial challenges, being first generational researchers, racial and gender discrimination, and “imposter syndrome”, to do research in various fields of oceanography (read more at <https://oceanwomxn.co.za/news/>).

The fellows are now #BreakingTheBias and becoming the role models they lacked. Young children and the youth can now be inspired by the OceanWomxn and other scientists through the SuperScientist Programme (read more at <https://www.superscientists.org/>).



SuperScientists was developed to inspire young people and help them see themselves in the faces and life stories of scientists working today.

Through outreach campaigns and science communications in various forms, OceanWomxn are promoting gender equality.