



science & innovation

Department:
Science and Innovation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Dr Tozama Qwebani, Programme Officer for Africa and Overseas Partnerships at the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf).

Ambassador HE Ms Ayşegül Kandaş, Turkish Ambassador to the Republic of South Africa.

Mrs Hasna Tizaoui, Diplomat at the Embassy of the Republic of Tunisia .

Ms Kristin Laura, from the UK.

Our Acting Director General, Daan Du Toit.

Prof. Sarah Mosoetsa, CEO of the Humans Sciences Research Council (HSRC).

Ms Anneline Morgan, Chief Director for Overseas Bilateral Cooperation at the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation (DSTI).

Special Participation: Women in Science Diplomacy Association (WISDA).

Ms Eudy Mabuza, Senior Science and Innovation Representative, Brussels, Department of Science, Technology and Innovation

All ladies present in this platform from different institutions.

I want to extend my greetings and that of the Department as a whole to this Webinar. I must express my excitement to be accorded this opportunity to address this important webinar for women in science, as we are ending the important month of women in South Africa.

It is exciting to me to witness that as women we are fighting for our rightful place under the sun in all sectors where we are under-represented. The struggle for fair women representation is not limited to the under-class women, but for all women, such as in the corporates, politics, academia, in traditional institutions and even in faith-based institutions.

The quest for representation in science diplomacy by women globally is a legitimate one and as government, we will play our part, in pushing back the frontiers of patriarchal dominance. One thing about patriarchy in the modern societies, especially in higher places, it is sophisticated, it does not shout; it does not articulate itself in the open, but its footprints and tentacles are visible to see. Those amongst us who are pushing hard against it, can easily be coopted to shut the door for other women, and a lot of gaslighting against those women who are pushing hard.

These struggles for women are just similar across the board.

The primary objective of this webinar is to discuss the challenges surrounding the promotion of gender inclusivity within the science diplomacy framework. Through this platform, viable tactics and strategies that can be employed to foster a greater sense of gender equality in the field of science diplomacy will be explored. Additionally, the webinar will underscore the profound impact that effective science diplomacy can have on enhancing and increasing the participation of women in the scientific community.

The theme of the Webinar: **Empowering Women in Science Diplomacy: Overcoming Barriers and Shaping a Gender-Sensitive Agenda** is as compelling as the struggle against women oppression as a whole in our different societies. I want to take the opportunity to thank Science Diplomacy Capital for Africa (SDCfA) for hosting this Webinar working with the Department. Science Diplomacy has immense potential to address global challenges. Women remain significantly underrepresented in the field and there are many men-made barriers that restrict their full participation. As women we must be unapologetic in demanding gender inclusiveness in the science diplomacy. As women, we have stake in the diplomacy and therefore we must assume an activist role in pushing back the frontiers of gender imbalance.

As the picture stands, the overall leadership representation of science diplomacy is still unfairly in favour of men and this is crucial in terms of the overall outlook, decisions taken and gendered programmes. The edifice that is not gender balance, reproduces a mirror image of itself; the system perpetuates itself without any counterbalance. Women in science must stand up and say without fear or favour that: Enough is enough – Nothing about us, without us!

It would be important for this Webinar to spend time in probing creative ways to de-centre some cultural age-old barriers as well, causing the numbers of women not rising to the occasion on science fields and science diplomacy.

These gender stereotypes are not geographically bound, but are universal. One Nobel Laureate Physiology Scientist Françoise Barré-Sinoussi in 2008, speaking in 2008, to her audience she said “*Certain people discouraged me, saying [science] was not a good career for women. That pushed me even more to persevere*”. It was as if Sinoussi took a wise advise from another women in science, Nichelle Nichols, a NASA Ambassador who told her audience that “Science is not a boy’s game, it’s not a girl’s game. It’s everyone’s game”

This Webinar must strengthened networks and partnerships among women in science and diplomacy. We must hold each other’s hand and reinforce each other nationally and globally. The role of science diplomacy in advancing women's participation in science, particularly in leadership positions, and fostering international collaborations that prioritise gender equality is fundamental in the dialogue of this webinar.

By promoting gender equality and women's empowerment on the international stage, countries can foster stronger partnerships and create more effective solutions to complex issues. This involves ensuring that women are represented in decision-making bodies and have equal access to resources and opportunities. It also means championing gender-sensitive policies and initiatives that promote diversity and inclusion at all levels of society

But we answer another question, how do we mobilize progressive men within the field of science as partners in the quest for equality. Our engagement today must also speak to the forging of all alliances with the like-minded men.

The future belongs to us as women. The leadership in science and diplomacy belongs to both men and women. I am very confident that we will win this battle as we did in government leadership representation, in the judiciary and in parliament. Together we can move the needle.

Science diplomacy is a key tool in advancing women's participation in STEM fields and leadership roles by promoting collaboration and knowledge-sharing among countries and stakeholders. Through initiatives that bring together scientists, policymakers, and leaders from diverse backgrounds, science diplomacy can provide women in STEM with opportunities to exchange ideas, access resources, and build networks that support their professional growth.

As the Department of Science, Technology and innovation, we are taking up seriously, in the next 5 years a campaign to promote STEM subjects in schools. At the centre of this, is the girl child that must be channelled towards science and mathematics subjects. We need to produce a cohort and a new generation of young women in science. Minister Nzimande had agreed that I will lead this government exciting project.

In this regard, I want to wish you a very successful webinar and fruitful engagements. I have no doubt that the calibre of the women of substance present here in this platform will find lasting solutions that will take this struggle forward.

We are looking forward to the decisions of this webinar. As the line Department, we will be a solid partner in the struggle for equitable representation in the science diplomacy.

Thank you.