

## END OF YEAR MESSAGE FROM THE WATERNET CHAIRPERSON, PROF. NNENESI KGABI, TO THE MEMBERSHIP.

The 23rd Annual WaterNet General Meeting, held online on the 10th November 2022, confirmed the election of Prof. Nnnesi Kgabi as the new WaterNet Trust Chairperson for the next four years, 2022 - 2026. She takes over from Prof Hodson Makurira.



**PROF NNENESI KGABI**



Prof Kgabi currently serves the North-West University (NWU) as Director: Research Support; Extraordinary Professor in the Unit for Environmental Sciences and Management at the NWU; and Affiliated Professor in the Centre for Environmental Management at the University of the Free State (UFS). Her full profile can be accessed here (<https://www.waternetonline.org/prof-nnnesi-kgabi>)

Below is Prof Kgabi's message to the members of the network.

### **Fellow Members, partners and collaborators**

Thank you for participating in WaterNet programmes this year. We have reached the end of 2022, a year I'm tempted to designate as "a year of transition" in the history of WaterNet. We started the year with the relocation of the WaterNet Secretariat from the University of Zimbabwe (where it had been hosted for two decades) to the North-West University in South Africa.

I applaud the Secretariat for its commitment to a smooth transition and continuity of the organizational operations amid the hurdles encountered with regards to the granting of work visas/permits. We are grateful to the staff, the North-West University, WaterNet Board and all who assisted in process.

I am grateful to my predecessor - Professor Hodson Makurira, who's term ended in November this year. Prof Makurira did an excellent job leading us through to the end of the WaterNet Phase IV Strategy, and the beginning of the WaterNet Phase V Strategy (2022 - 2026). I am also highly appreciative of the commitment to the success of the Network shown by the Board during 2022.

Congratulations are in order for the current, re-elected and/or newly appointed Board members.

To our Partners and Collaborators. It is with great gratitude for your input and support that we can declare 2022 a success with regards to the successful implementation of all programmes/projects. Together we have created something bigger than the sum of what each individual can create on their own. Thank you!

### **Highlights for 2022**

WaterNet seeks to build upon its strengths and evolve into a sustainable network playing a leading role in water capacity development in the SADC and East Africa region, and contributing directly to the global agenda of-

sustainable development. In 2022, the Network successfully implemented the programmes planned for the year, and achieved its goals. Thus, I will mention a few highlights namely, the WaterNet Symposium, Water-Climate Summer School, the Regional masters' programme, and the short professional training programme.

**Water-Climate Summer School** - The International Water-Climate Summer School organised by the North-West University in partnership with WaterNet and Bridging Africa, Latin America and Europe on Water and Renewable Energies Applications (BALEWARE) was held in Mahikeng, South Africa from 4 to 18 October 2022. The following countries were represented: Austria, Botswana, Cameroon, DRC, Germany, Namibia, Netherlands, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

**WaterNet Symposium** - Congratulations to the North-West University (NWU), the local organising committee (LOC) and the WaterNet Secretariat for a successful symposium. The North-West University (NWU) played its part by being the primary host of the 23rd WaterNet WARFSA/GWP-SA Symposium that took place in Sun City, South Africa from 19 to 21 October 2022. We recorded participation of more than 280 physical attendees and around 210 online participations.

**Regional Masters Programme** - We also appreciate member institutions which continued to be at the forefront of offering the MIWRRM during 2022. The success of the Masters programme is a demonstration of the good collaboration between the seven SADC universities, our international partners, and more than 70 WaterNet members, whose staff contribute to the teaching and curriculum development.

## **Vision for the Network**

My vision for the network is aligned to the theme of the WaterNet Phase V Strategy (2022 - 2026), which is, 'Strengthening human and institutional capacity for innovative, systemic and sustainable regional water solutions in a changing environment'.

Guided by a reflection on the previous strategies and periodic reviews, and the successes and challenges and/or limited success in actual implementation thereof, the Phase V Strategy seeks to address contemporary issues including global trends on digitization and reliance on virtual platforms, thus requiring adoption of new approaches to capacity development (including online interactions), engaged research and innovative solutions and improved income generation approaches in the sector. The evident changes in the global and regional water sector due to the new challenges (including the pandemic and similar situations) coupled with the need to maintain consistent supply of water (sufficient quantity of quality) in the face of merging pollutants and continued deterioration of the water treatment and supply systems also informed the strategic focus.

Thus, I “dream” of an agile, globally recognised Network, playing a leading role in the development and implementation of sustainable water (and to an extent climate) solutions in the SADC and beyond. I dream of a Network which is consistent in its communication, advocacy and capacity strengthening role for the membership. I am cognisant of the fact that dreams do not materialise without strategies, and strategies do not materialise without well-defined goals and priorities.

## **Priorities for the network**

As you might be aware, the goals set for the Phase V Strategy are as follows: 1. Utilising and expanding regional capacity for degree and non-degree education in IWRM, 2. Addressing key challenges and providing relevant solutions through a dedicated collaborative research agenda aiming for impact, 3. Becoming the “go-to” source of expertise and knowledge on IWRM in Southern and Eastern Africa, and 4. Increased ownership of WaterNet members and SADC member states in the running and operations of the WaterNet business.

Based on the strategic goals, my priorities will revolve around the following principles- Advocacy and Visibility, Effectiveness and Sustainability, and Impact and Quality.

## **Effectiveness and Sustainability**

**Participatory management** - The Secretariat will continue to render its services during Phase V but will consider the secondment of staff from member institutions and increased decentralisation of tasks in order to work towards financial sustainability. This will include requests for members to coordinate specific Network collaborative projects and report accordingly.

**Digital transformation** - There is also a great need to reimagine the Secretariat and Network operations and processes, culture and membership interaction and experiences to meet the changing networking and collaboration requirements in the digital age.

**Monitoring and reporting** - I also intend to work with the Board on the strengthening of the monitoring, reporting and accountability for all projects/programmes. Some of the improvements are to include reporting formats, frequency of reporting, critical reading, verification, and translation of reports to ensure dissemination and contribution to real life solutions.

## **Advocacy and Visibility**

***The Annual Symposia*** - WaterNet will continue to work with international and regional organisations such as the IAHS, GWPSA, and other like-minded organisations in order to successfully co-convene the annual symposia during Phase V. However, we should not stop with the symposium because this a crucial moment for WaterNet to have a ‘seat at the Table’ whenever water related matters are being discussed and decisions made.

We have not been audible and visible enough within the relevant communities of practice in the continent and on international platforms.

**WaterNet Alumni** - I strongly believe that today's generation has an unquenchable thirst to address the socio-economic ills of the age, including water and climate challenges. Thus, a database of water experts (members in particular) with their skills should be developed in the course of Phase V, and the alumni role and/or scope revisited to leverage their influence, and maximise their engagement.

**Communication platforms** - We also need to improve our communication platforms e.g. our website to make it "eye-catching", informative and interactive, and use more digital media platforms to showcase the members' projects/programmes and achievements.

### **Impact and Quality**

The Vision of WaterNet carries an implied yet intelligent message of research impact - "...contributing to the equitable sharing and sustainable utilisation of water resources for poverty alleviation, economic development, human wellbeing and environmental security." As a Network, we should work towards encouraging, evaluating, recognising and rewarding excellence shown in the form of quality conference papers, articles, and other research outputs with different kinds of impact including: awareness, attitudinal, economic, social, policy, cultural and health impacts.

Finally, I believe that, with the changing paradigms of higher education and scientific research which hold no space for silos, WaterNet needs to embrace and strengthen partnerships and adoption of multidisciplinary approaches for sustainable solutions in the water-climate space. Let us take heed of the words of Ryunosuke Satoro - "Individually, we are one drop. Together, we are an ocean."

Wishing you a blessed and joyful holiday season. May this be a refreshing time for all. Hope you return in 2023 with renewed enthusiasm and commitment to make a difference in the water sector within the continent and beyond.

*Shalom,*

**Prof Nnenesi Kgabi, Pr.Sci.Nat.**  
Chairperson of the WaterNet Board