



Celebrating women in science: From packer to seafaring scientist

With most South Africans focused on SONA or more parochially, when the lights are coming back on or going off again, the UN's Day to recognise Women and Girls in Science (Saturday 11 February) largely slipped by unnoticed.

Beneliza Noarises thinks that's a pity because she believes more women should be pursuing their dreams – even if that means pushing back the boundaries in traditionally male-dominated fields, including science.

Thankfully times have changed since women at Harvard University weren't allowed to look through telescopes, only do calculations, but societal prejudices, poverty, and education systems that are sometimes lacking still denies opportunities to many aspirant female scientists in southern Africa.

In spite of this Noarises has grabbed every glimmer of a chance to not only build a scientific career but to do it in the traditionally male-dominated fishing sector, where she's a sea-going quality controller for Erongo Marine, a subsidiary of Africa's largest fishing company, Oceana.

A job as a packer at Cadbury was an unlikely start to a scientific career, but a foot in the door was all she needed.

After a few months she was promoted to quality support assistant. It was here that she was first exposed to product development and, importantly, the scientific rigors of food-quality testing.

Her aptitude and enthusiasm led to the company supporting her studies at UNISA where she obtained a higher certificate in total quality management. She also added certificates in microbiology for non-microbiologists, internal auditing, FSSC 22000 awareness, research, development and quality amongst others. Sometime later the Safety Health Environment and Quality manager resigned and Noarises was offered the job in an acting position.

"Even with the fear in the back of my mind, I knew this was an opportunity to prove myself and that I was capable and deserving. I took on the role and ran the department successfully for two years."

It was a great start to a career that had begun as an 18-year-old unqualified packer, but she would have to navigate some storms before getting her career back on track. In 2014 the company closed and Noarises was retrenched.



Benelize Noarises on one of the fishing vessels where she works as a quality control scientist.

Undaunted by the temporary setback, she got another job as a quality assurance officer at another company where she worked for seven years, before going to sea as one of the quality controllers in the Oceana Group in 2021. She is the only woman working in the fish processing area, with responsibility across two horse mackerel fishing vessels where she grades fish, assesses them according to quality standards, checks the weights of the frozen blocks are correct, verifies the temperatures from receiving to end product, maintains the hazard analysis critical point control (HACCP) system, monitors for non-compliance and reports her findings.

"It's a male-dominated industry and it's easy to be intimidated. Working at sea has taught me to be strong, confident, resilient and willing because as women we always have to prove ourselves.

"Our career choices should not be limited by our gender. More women, especially women of colour, are taking up their rightful places in the field of science and other sectors previously mainly the preserve of men. This becomes a virtuous circle because it shows other girls and women their dreams are obtainable." – Oceana Group

Ka bontši bja maAfrika Borwa a tsepeletše go SONA goba go feta parochially, ge mabone a boela a tuka goba a tima gape, Letšatši la UN la go lemoga Basadi le basetsana ka go Mahlale (Mokibelo wa di 11 Hlakola) bogolo le ile la thelela ka go se lemogwe. Benelizq Noarises o nagana gore seo ke maswabi ka gobane o dumela gore basadi ba bantši ba swanetše go ba ba phegelela ditoro tša bona-le ge seo se bolela go kgoromeletša morago mellwane mafapheng ao ka setšo a laolwago ke banna, go akaretšwa Saense. Nourishes o thomile mošomo wa gagwe bjalo ka mophuthedi wa motšweletši wa malekere wa Cadbury eupša lehono ke rathutamahlale wa go sepela ka lewatleng wa Oceana Group.

Translated into Sepedi by Prof. Walter Matli.