

Inspirational

WOMEN

CELEBRATING
PROFESSIONAL
WOMEN IN NAMIBIA

in Business
MAGAZINE

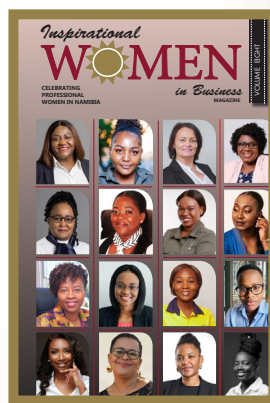
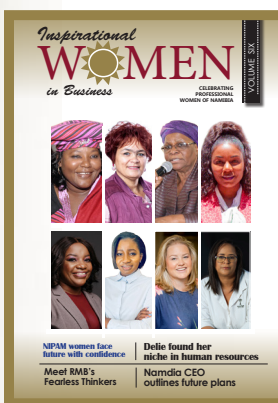
VOLUME TEN

**DIAMONDS
MADE ME
WHO I AM**
MONICA SHAPWA

**IN CONVERSATION
WITH ROBYN NAKAAMBO**

**RIDING THE WAVE
WITH YVONNE LE ROUX**

**'THE THRILL OF THE CHALLENGE,
AND THE SATISFACTION OF SEEING
HARD WORK TURN INTO REAL
RESULTS, MAKES ME TICK'**
VALERIA MBANGO



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25th ANNIVERSARY

ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM

Global Value Chains for Inclusive Development:
How Can Namibia POSITION ITS AGRICULTURE SECTOR?

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Foreword

As the hot Namibian sun approaches its peak, at IWIB Magazine we are delighted to bring you our August issue, filled with inspiring stories, innovative ideas, and powerful voices. This month, we dive into the dynamic world of women leading change, breaking barriers, and redefining success in various fields. From trailblazing entrepreneurs to visionary leaders, each page is a testament to the strength and resilience of women who are shaping the future of business.

We hope this issue not only informs but also empowers you to pursue your passions and make a lasting impact. Enjoy the journey with us, and let these stories inspire your own path to greatness.

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In this issue



NEXT ISSUE: DECEMBER 2024

IN COMMEMORATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND
WOMEN'S DAY: CONTACT US FOR BOOKINGS



Monica Shapwa
Diamond Sorter

'Diamonds made me who I am'

... NAMDIA Diamond Sorter will not give up job for anything else

MATEUS PAULUS

FOR Monica Shapwa, diamonds built her and gave her the life she could not have gotten anywhere else.

"Diamonds educated me, gave me job security and a better standard of life. I take care of my family, and I am also able to help other people. I managed to send my sister to university and take care of my unemployed mother," she says with contentment.

Shapwa is a Diamond Sorter at Namib Desert Diamonds (Pty) Ltd (NAMDIA), a cutting-edge diamond marketing and sales company, that markets and sells a portion of Namibia's unique and highly sought-after diamonds to the international market on behalf the Government of Namibia.

She was born in Walvis Bay before her family relocated to Windhoek when she was a young girl.

"This is where I started my school - from primary to high school. I grew up in Wanaheda as part of a large family, under very difficult conditions with my dad, a truck driver from Angola and my Namibian mother," she says.

She says a Diamond Sorter basically evaluates diamonds based on the four Cs – which are Clarity (the number of impurities or inclusions); Colour (which ranges from clear or no colour up to yellow); then the Cut (whether round or broken); and the Carat (weight).

"These four elements help to determine the value of the diamond. Identifying a diamond out there is not for every eye but one needs experience and knowledge of the four characteristics to identify it," says Shapwa, who has put in 20 years' experience in the industry.

Her first job after school was a diamond polisher from 2001 to February 2005 when she moved to be Assistant Diamond Security Officer before getting into diamond sorting at the Namdeb Centre. She joined NAMDIA in 2018 as a Diamond Sorter.

Explaining what happens to the off-cuts when cutting diamonds, she said: "There are no off-cuts. A diamond is cut according to a plan. It is mapped and planned, depending on what you want to get out of it.

"The gem is cut and polished according to that plan. Before the advent of advanced technology, only certain dimensions were allowed to come out of a piece of diamond," she explained.

She said there are different categories with the 4Cs in a rough piece of diamond.

"You find a stone that is a perfect round and another that is oblong because of how nature formed it. The same applies to colour but the dominant range is from clear to different shades of yellow although you also find some brown diamonds that look like charcoal," she said. Yellow is the predominant colour because of nitrogen while octahedron is the predominant shape that gives



I always wanted to do marketing and when I finished Grade 12, I was fascinated by IT and I enrolled for three months and one day a neighbour, a director at a company asked if I wanted to work for a diamond company and I needed no second invitation.

the diamond the round shape once polished.

Shapwa says growing up she had no idea what a diamond looked like. "I had read about them but never in my wildest dreams did I think I would be sitting where I am today," she said about her career journey.

"I always wanted to do marketing and when I finished Grade 12, I was fascinated by IT and I enrolled for three months and one day a neighbour, a director at a company asked if I wanted to work for a diamond company and I needed no second invitation."

She said looking at the harsh realities of how she grew up with many siblings in a 2-bedroom house, she wanted to earn money and create her own space.

"I wanted to move out of the house because I did not want to share a bedroom the way we did growing up. I love my privacy, I love my own space but because we were many, it was not possible to have it, so when the opportunity presented itself, I grabbed it and the following Monday myself and a friend were supposed to be at school, but we were at work."

Shapwa says valuating diamonds is not for the faint-hearted. One needs patience and an understanding that it works with your feelings, so when you pick up a piece of diamond and you can't connect then you are in the wrong industry, she added.

There are two sorters at NAMDIA who have to work within a small window of time to sort the diamonds.

"We do secondary sorting at NDTC where we buy our diamonds. Before they are delivered here, we go to NDTC to inspect our allotment. NDTC present us seven lots with similar values and we go through those lots and choose one that will yield a high return in the shortest time.

According to Shapwa this is to avert incurring high interest charges and to maximise returns on investments.

She says the Namibian diamond industry employs more women than men to the ratio 60:40 unlike in countries like India.



“When we travel to see clients, they are surprised to see a team of female executives because to them the diamond sector is dominated by men. In Namibia we broke that barrier a long time ago, and at NAMDIA, most portfolios are held by women,” she said.

According to Shapwa, while she holds an Honours Degree in Marketing from NUST, diamond sorting requires on-the-job training.

“Not even an Honours Degree can teach you that skill,” she noted, adding that the pricing strategy is determined by economic conditions, political conditions and market conditions during recession and wars, yet people want to attach tertiary degrees to the work.

Shapwa explained that while lab-grown diamonds had impacted the industry in some way, the situation was now under control because the prices of synthetic diamonds have proven to be unsustainable.

She said at the beginning the price of lab diamonds was high but it has been going down gradually and people who understand diamonds would not buy a synthetic diamond when they can get the real natural thing that would maintain value, as opposed to lab grown diamonds that depreciate in value.

Shapwa says during her spare time she is involved in sports as a football

director of Ongos Sports Club.

“I was also a member of the Namibia Sports Commission, and I played netball and basketball. All my family loves sport and my daughter plays football.”

Her advice to women is to follow your heart. “Unfortunately, these days there are not many opportunities and people are forced to take whatever comes their way. Turn around whatever opportunity you get into something that you love, like I did,” she advised.

Shapwa said if she had the power to change anything, she would ensure the government gets more of the diamond resources because she has seen the impact that diamonds can have.

“The diamond industry must build something tangible for everyone to see. At the moment the diamond proceeds go into government coffers and is used in the economy from there and you cannot say which is diamond proceeds, which is not.

“Diamond proceeds should build district hospitals, schools and other tangible infrastructure outside government programmes for people to see and appreciate the industry,” she said.



Robyn Nakaambo

Entertainment TV Presenter of the Year Award Winner
at the 2024 Basadi in Music Awards in South Africa

In conversation with Robyn Nakaambo

**ENTERTAINMENT TV PRESENTER OF THE YEAR AWARD
WINNER AT THE 2024 BASADI IN MUSIC AWARDS IN SOUTH AFRICA**

Can you please introduce yourself?

Robyn Nakaambo, Vivacious Public Relations Practitioner, Businesswoman, Television and Radio personality, Brand Influencer, Tedx speaker and MC with over 15 years' experience in the Media Industry has impeccable work ethic and embodies characteristics such as hard worker, self-determined/reliant, confident, well-articulated and flamboyant.

Congratulations for receiving the Entertainment TV Presenter of the Year award at the 2024 Basadi in Music Awards in South Africa. Can you briefly explain what this Award is about and a little about your journey to the award, how you got there, who was important to the process.

Thank you, the Basadi in music awards is geared at celebrating women in the media industry in Africa. This was the 3rd installment of the annual event, I got introduced to the awards last year when I was invited to host the official red carpet of the event. I networked and represented Namibia so well that I got on their radar. Long story short, I received an email informing me I was nominated in this category. I accepted the nomination, lobbied for votes and emerged victorious. My family and Purpose Partner were very important in this process as they supported me every step of the way, but above anything else my faith in the Almighty truly kept me grounded and sane.

What inspired you to become a TV presenter?

In my first year at university I started my media career as a radio presenter on campus radio and eventually became a sensation on commercial radio. This platform then allowed me to expand my territory by becoming an Master of Ceremonies and TV presenter. My portfolio has since grown in leaps and bounds and I've now added being a Brand Influencer and being a seasoned Public Relations Practitioner.

What type of shows have you hosted in the past

I've been hosting Whata'Lifestyle on the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation since 2016. Prior to that I hosted Trustco Star Performer.

How do you handle viewer feedback, both positive and negative?

I take positive feedback to heart and allow it to water me whereas with negative feedback I analyse it to see whether it's constructive criticism or whether it's from someone that's trying to break me down. I appreciate constructive criticism but don't entertain negativity. I guard my mental wellbeing relentlessly and don't compromise my happiness.

Can you describe a time when you had to improvise on air? If any.

One generally needs to improvise on air when doing live



Dream big, work hard and always strive to be a version of themselves. Never compare your journey to someone else's and always have a heart of gratitude. Last but not least, be kind to strangers as you don't know what they are dealing with.

productions. This has happened in the past during MC'ing live events, where the autocue would malfunction and you would be required to adlib.

Have you been confronted with gender-related roadblocks in your career?

No not so much.

What is your greatest strength and weakness?

My biggest strength is my humility and the ability to read a room and people which guides me on how to engage them.

My weakness is that I am impatient.

What do you like doing in your spare time?

In my spare time I enjoy spending time with family and friends, travelling, working out and cooking.

What would you like remembered about you?

My ambition and impeccable work ethics.

What is one message you would give to your fans?

I would like to encourage my fans to dream big, work hard and always strive to be a version of themselves. Never compare your journey to someone else's and always have a heart of gratitude. Last but not least, be kind to strangers as you don't know what they are dealing with.

Thank you



Yvonne Le Roux

Founding & Managing Member of Elite Employment

Riding the wave with Yvonne Le Roux

In Namibia, where the sun kisses the desert and the winds carry whispers of ambition, Yvonne Le Roux stands as a beacon of inspiration. As the Founding & Managing Member of Elite Employment, Yvonne has spent nearly two decades shaping the landscape of executive recruitment in Namibia. What started as a leap of faith in 2005 has evolved into a remarkable journey of resilience, growth, and success.

Yvonne's entry into the world of recruitment was anything but conventional. With a background in logistics and no formal HR training, her venture into executive recruitment began with a spark of curiosity and a touch of daring. During a visit to the UK in her early twenties, Yvonne observed the efficiency of recruitment practices and thought, "Why not bring this to Namibia?" Her approach was bold and simple: "What's the worst that can happen?"

Despite juggling a full-time job and the demands of starting a new business, Yvonne persevered. Her commitment paid off, and she eventually took on Elite Employment full-time. She bolstered her practical experience with formal education, completing studies in Human Resources and earning an MBA.

Balancing her career and personal life, Yvonne finds joy in her roles as a mother of two and an advocate for animal welfare. As Vice-President of the Namibian Animal Welfare Association (NAWA), she dedicates her efforts to improving the lives of animals across Namibia.

Recently, NAWA's vet team, supported by the Project Donkey team, undertook an outreach trip to Gobabis and Witvlei. They provided crucial services, including the sterilization of 35 cats and dogs, vaccinations for 61 equids, and treatment for 155 dogs and 10 cats. Yvonne's passion for animals, especially horses, has been a lifelong love affair, with cherished memories of sharing her first horse with a friend and working at stables in Cape Town to follow her passion.

Reflecting on her journey, Yvonne credits her parents for instilling in her a strong work ethic and resilience. Her mother's zest for life and her grandmother's indomitable spirit, despite



Yvonne's advice to those navigating their careers is both practical and profound. She believes that even in the absence of a mentor, inspiration can be found everywhere. "You cannot lay down and say this is my fate. There are always opportunities to overcome obstacles," she asserts. For women in leadership, she acknowledges the additional sacrifices and challenges, particularly in balancing family and career. Yet, she views these as challenges rather than barriers.

significant hardships, have been key influences. Yvonne's optimism and positivity are traits she attributes to her family's influence, saying, "I try to remain positive, no matter what. There is a solution to every problem, you just have to look hard enough"

Yvonne's advice to those navigating their careers is both practical and profound. She believes that even in the absence of a mentor, inspiration can be found everywhere. "You cannot lay down and say this is my fate. There are always opportunities to overcome obstacles," she asserts. For women in leadership, she acknowledges the additional sacrifices and challenges, particularly in balancing family and career. Yet, she views these as challenges rather than barriers.

Her entrepreneurial journey in recruitment and HR, begun at the age of 26 despite having no HR background, she defied even her own expectations on her entrepreneurial journey and continues to be a beacon to those around her. With Namibia's unofficial unemployment rate standing at 57.75%, Yvonne emphasizes the importance of perseverance and visibility in the job market. A polished CV, a positive and upbeat life attitude, and thorough preparation for interviews are essential to making a lasting impression.

For younger job seekers, Yvonne offers practical advice: be punctual, present yourself well, and be honest about the fit between your skills and the job you're applying for. Consider volunteering or interning as initial valuable steps toward gaining experience and making valuable connections.

In a career often dominated by men, Yvonne finds that her presence as a woman frequently offers unique advantages. Her journey is a testament to the power of determination, adaptability, and the courage to embrace opportunities.

As Yvonne Le Roux continues to ride the wave of her career, she remains a trailblazer and a role model, proving that with passion, resilience, and a willingness to take risks, dreams can become a reality. "Find something you are good at. Take the leap. Believe in yourself. Try,"

Recently, NAWA's vet team, supported by the Project Donkey team, undertook an outreach trip to Gobabis and Witvlei. They provided crucial services, including the sterilization of 35 cats and dogs, vaccinations for 61 equids, and treatment for 155 dogs and 10 cats.







My job is a mix of constructive challenges, redefining the definition and description of a pro vice chancellor in research, innovation and business development, position which has been well described previously in an academic setting. I am driving a change in research acceptance and understanding, involving students from first year, showing them that research is at the base of any progress in a society as advancing science and knowledge.

Cristina Stefan

Pro Vice Chancellor Research, Innovation and Business Development at University of Namibia (UNAM)



'I believe in people and am inspired by those who are determined to make a change'

Who is Ms Cristina Stefan

Cristina Stefan is currently the Pro Vice Chancellor Research, Innovation and Business Development at University of Namibia (UNAM), a paediatric oncologist, global oncology advocate, mother and wife.

I am someone who loves challenges, hardworking and loyal. I am told that I appear extremely confident and strong despite deep down being sensitive and soft-hearted. I believe in people and am inspired by those who are determined to make a change. I am a mother who adores her daughters and who at times, might have been too strict. I believe in changes, inherited most probably my mother as an educator and I am driven by results. I am extremely creative and have a mind for business. I am passionate about equity and rights and wish that I could contribute that the most unfortunate have a better life.

We are told that yours is a combination of impressive academic credentials with a wealth of practical, high level experience in this sector. Tell us more about that?

i.Tell us more about your job and what drives and inspires you

My job is a mix of constructive challenges, redefining the definition and description of a pro vice chancellor in research, innovation and business development, position which has been well described previously in an academic setting. I am driving a change in research acceptance and understanding, involving students from first year, showing them that research is at the base of any progress in a society as advancing science and knowledge.

I am on a mission on changing the perception about research and researcher jobs as being fulfilling and highly impactful. The same applies to innovation.

Namibians as most Africans have a high level of creativity and innovation, however very few dare or believe in building their own businesses. My role in this context is to offer them, to all young students, postgraduates and academic staff, the tools needed, the knowledge and the skills to get their ideas to take off and start their own businesses and become the entrepreneurs whom we so much need.

Namibia has a good number of women who have made it in business, and the one common thread among their success stories is that it did not come easy. Did this hardship befall you as well?

The success for me is attributed to be aligned with own beliefs, to be able to stand up after a knock down, to persevere and continue fighting/believing in your dreams. There are many factors which contribute to one's success: in my case it was my family who believed in me and continued to support me all the time. I also believe that I was fortunate enough to have my mother who always encouraged me and believe that I can get anything if I believe enough and work towards getting in.

I am not sure that I managed always to have a balance between being a mother and following my career goals but I hope I inspired my daughters and made them believe that everything is possible if you want it from your heart and are prepared to work for it. Nothing can stop you and finally you will be able to get it, no matter what.

Will you safely say that you have successfully managed to align your personal goals with that of the college? If yes, how did you achieve that feat? If no, what are the challenges?

Currently, I have not managed to align personal goals with that of the university as I am very much driven by results, I see lots of opportunities and need for change and I am very tough on myself. I need to continue learning that obtaining results could be good but being able to bring all together and sustain change might be much harder. It takes time and effort and perseverance as I will need to inspire many others.

There are those who have known with unfailing certainty what they wanted to be when they grew up—and then there are the rest of 'us.' In which group are you and how many other 'wrong turns' did you make before arriving here? What are the 'lessons learnt' if any?

When I was 2, definitely I wanted to be on the stage (as an actress) and then be a chef as I liked very much cakes, a few years later I was dissecting mice on the 3rd floor where the apartment, where I lived with my parents, was.

I continue enjoying being on the stage but giving lectures and talking to the conferences, I no longer eat sweets and continue to enjoy medicine and innovation

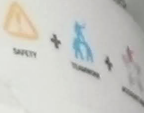
What are some of your daily challenges, on the job, and how do you circumvent them?

The major daily challenges are related to the enormous number of meetings, long, inefficient number of lost hours which prevent progress, thinking and initiatives. On my side, I encourage empowerment and the ability of taking decisions, of being accountable for one own's actions. Others are related to the need of "moving fast", to keep up with the current times or even better, to be one step ahead, we no longer do things the same way as we did them 30 years ago, those times are long gone, we need to be flexible, re-adjust, re-invent every moment if we want to be successful.

Finally, what is your advice to that women out there, who harbour dreams of becoming successful in corporate leadership, but believe that it is too late for them?

It is never too late, as long as you are alive and continue to have dreams, it is never too late. Believe in yourself as there is no one there who could help you more than yourself. You have you and make the best of who you are and who you would like to be!

 **NAMDEB**
A NAMIBIA DE BEERS PARTNERSHIP
**MINING
FOR GOOD**

TO BE THE POWER


Deoné Strauss
Senior Geologist

'I was inspired by an innate passion for geography and a keen interest in sciences'

If you had to introduce yourself in an elevator pitch, what would you say?

I am Deoné Strauss, a senior geologist at Namdeb with over five years of hands-on geoscience experience. My background spans both diamond and non-diamond exploration, giving me a well-rounded experience in the field. I excel in many technical and analytical aspects required in mineral exploration and evaluation, ensuring the successful management of geological projects and the optimization of resources. My dedication and hard work are complemented by a passion for continuous learning and innovation.

Beyond my professional life, I am a proud mom and wife who enjoys baking and spending time in nature. This balance enriches my perspective and fuels my commitment to sustainability and community-focused projects. I look forward to contributing my skills and passion to drive success and innovation at Namdeb.

What inspired your current career choice?

My career choice in geology was inspired by an innate passion for geography and a keen interest in sciences during high school. The intrigue of understanding the Earth's processes and the excitement of hands-on scientific exploration fascinated me. Initially, I hadn't considered geology specifically, but when my dad suggested I pursue mining engineering, I explored my options and found that geology offered the perfect compromise. It allowed me to blend my love for geography and scientific inquiry with practical applications in the field. This decision has led me to a fulfilling career where I can continually explore, learn, and contribute to our understanding of the natural world.

As a professional working in the mining industry, what excites you most about your work?

As a female geologist in the mining industry, several unique aspects excite me. The opportunity to break new ground and make significant contributions in a traditionally male-dominated field is incredibly empowering. Discovering new mineral deposits and understanding geological formations while paving the way for other women in the industry brings a sense of purpose and pride.

The industry is also evolving, and being part of that transformation is thrilling. I'm excited by the chance to champion diversity and inclusion, advocating for equal opportunities and fostering a more supportive environment for women. Fieldwork offers a unique blend of adventure and professional challenge, proving that women can excel in demanding and remote locations just as effectively as their male counterparts.

Mentoring young female geologists and taking on leadership roles enables me to influence the industry positively, inspiring the next generation to pursue their passions fearlessly. The technological



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advancements in the field, which are leveling the playing field, also excite me, as they open new avenues for women to showcase their expertise and innovation. Ultimately, what excites me most is not just the work itself, but the opportunity to reshape the industry, challenge stereotypes, and create a more inclusive future for all geologists.

How do you experience equal opportunities in your workplace?

I appreciate Namdeb's commitment to equal opportunities, which fosters an inclusive and supportive environment. This focus on merit-based recognition and career advancement ensures fair acknowledgment of hard work and dedication. Professional development programs and a diverse, collaborative culture further enhance creativity and innovation, making my workplace dynamic and inspiring. Additionally, Namdeb's emphasis on employee well-being, through initiatives and support systems, underscores their dedication to our holistic development. This commitment drives me to achieve my best and feel valued for my contributions.

Being a female professional working in a mining industry, do you encounter any gender bias related challenges and how do you handle them?

As a female geologist at Namdeb, I've had a positive experience where gender bias has not posed a significant challenge for me. Instead, I've found that my unique perspective as a woman can be an asset in this field. My approach to problem-solving, communication, and collaboration often stands out, helping me to build strong relationships with colleagues and stakeholders. This has made it easier for me to get the support and resources I need to succeed in my projects.

Moreover, my presence in a traditionally male-dominated industry has often sparked curiosity and respect, allowing me to leverage my gender to foster open communication and effective teamwork. By focusing on my strengths and maintaining a proactive attitude, I've been able to navigate the industry successfully, demonstrating that competence

and dedication are the true markers of success, regardless of gender. My experience shows that with the right mindset and skills, being a female in the mining industry is advantageous.

What institutional and societal changes need to be done for women to get more empowered?

Promoting equal opportunities for men and women begins at home by challenging traditional societal norms, teaching boys to cook and girls to change tires, and fostering women empowerment from a young age. I am grateful for the progress made by institutions and society in enhancing gender equality through increased representation of women in leadership roles, targeted mentorship, and robust anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies. Namdeb exemplifies this by fostering a supportive work environment that emphasizes work-life balance. However, I recognize that this may not be the case at many other companies. Enhancing support across all organizations is crucial for a universally supportive environment for all employees.

How do you balance your personal life with your professional commitments?

I am fortunate to work in an environment where my direct supervisor and managers actively promote a positive work-life balance. They encourage us to refrain from working after hours and to take leave when necessary, fostering a culture that values our well-being. This support is crucial, and it is complemented by their confidence in my ability to deliver high-quality work on time.

I prioritise tasks as they are assigned and manage my time efficiently during working hours to ensure I accomplish my daily objectives. Additionally, my role offers flexibility through remote work options and flexible hours when absolutely required, allowing me to meet both professional and personal responsibilities effectively. I am also supported by an incredible network, both at work and home. My colleagues understand and support my lifestyle as a mother,



while my family respects and accommodates the demands of my profession. This robust support system enables me to maintain a harmonious balance between my career and personal life.

What role has mentorship played in your career, and who has been a particularly influential mentor for you?

Mentorship has played a pivotal role in my career development, providing me with the guidance and support needed to navigate the complexities of my profession. I heavily rely on the mentorship of my parents and husband when making critical decisions. Their advice is invaluable because they have my best interests at heart and strive to offer objective perspectives. Moreover, their support extends beyond mere advice. They also step in for me in prayer, which is a significant aspect of my decision-making process. This spiritual support helps me to feel grounded and confident in my choices, knowing that I am seeking the best path forward. The combination of their practical guidance and spiritual encouragement has been instrumental in my career progression. It has enabled me to make well-informed decisions that align with my personal values and professional goals. This holistic mentorship approach has not only empowered me to excel in my role but also fostered a balanced and fulfilling career.

How do you stay up-to-date with current trends and developments in your field?

As a registered SACNASP and GSSA member, I stay up to date with current trends and developments in the mining industry by actively participating in professional associations like the Geological Society of Namibia and attending key industry conferences, also promoted by training and development by Namdeb. I try to enhance my expertise through online courses and certifications, and I read scientific journals to provide guidance when I face a challenge in the workplace. I use LinkedIn not only as a networking site but also as a key tool to stay updated on the latest developments in the mining industry. The platform allows me to engage with peers and experts globally, fostering interactions that provide valuable insights into industry trends and advancements. These professional exchanges are essential for keeping abreast of what is happening in the mining sector worldwide.

Knowing what you know now, what would you tell your younger self?

As a high school student, there's often a great deal of uncertainty about the future. It is crucial to stay committed to your academic performance, as this dedication opens opportunities for university admission, regardless of the degree you choose to pursue. Additionally, take the time to job shadow during high school; this experience will help you gain clarity and conviction about your career aspirations. Whilst university life is enjoyable, it also demands hard work and perseverance. It's essential to have a genuine interest in your field of study, as there will be challenging times. Don't take life so seriously. Failure is a natural part of the learning process and contributes to character building. The key is to never give up.



**Ndapewoshali
Prudence Shipandeni**
Process Manager



'I find great fulfillment in collaborating with a dynamic and inclusive team'

Everyone's unique insights contribute to our collective success

If you had to introduce yourself in an elevator pitch, what would you say?

Hi, I'm Ndapewoshali Prudence Shipandeni. I am a Process Manager with a decade of experience in leading successful mining production teams, and I am also an aspiring leadership coach. I am passionate about making a tangible impact in the Namibian mining industry.

What inspired your current career choice?

My career choice was significantly shaped by the environment I grew up primarily in mining towns, which naturally led me to this field. Furthermore, my current surroundings have instilled in me a deep appreciation for people and a commitment to helping everyone reach their full potential. So, without sounding cliché, it feels as though mining chose me.

As a professional working in the mining industry, what excites you most about your work?

The mining industry is a field where diverse perspectives are increasingly recognized as valuable. Working on practices that enhance safety, efficiency, and environmental stewardship is immensely rewarding. I find great fulfillment in collaborating with a dynamic and inclusive team, where everyone's unique insights contribute to our collective success. Witnessing the tangible results of our efforts, such as improved resource management and reduced environmental impact, is truly inspiring and underscores the importance of our work.

How do you experience equal opportunities in your workplace?

I appreciate how Namdeb fosters an inclusive environment that values and encourages diverse perspectives. This commitment to equality is evident in the company's policies and practices, which promote fair treatment and career advancement for all employees, regardless of gender or background.

Being a female professional working in a mining industry, do you encounter any gender bias related challenges and how do you handle them?

As a female professional in the historically male-dominated mining industry, I occasionally encounter gender bias-related challenges. To address these, I focus on maintaining high professional standards, building supportive networks, promoting open communication, staying informed on best practices in diversity and inclusion, and remaining confident and resilient. By employing these strategies, I aim to foster a more inclusive and equitable work environment and pave the way for future generations of women in the industry.

What institutional and societal changes need to be done for women to get more empowered?

In recent years, organizations have made strides in promoting STEM education for women, which is a positive start. Additionally, addressing gender bias through training is crucial, we come from different backgrounds and expect people to work harmoniously together, this is not always possible due to unconscious bias and unwillful ignorance. Providing mentorship programmes and networking opportunities can further support



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women's career development. Moreover, challenging traditional gender roles and promoting positive representations of women will encourage shared responsibilities both in the workplace and households. By implementing these changes, we can create a more equitable environment where women can thrive and contribute fully to all aspects of society.

How do you balance your personal life with your professional commitments?

Balancing my personal life with professional commitments involves several key strategies. I prioritize important tasks, set clear boundaries between work and personal time, and remain flexible to accommodate varying demands. Additionally, I prioritize self-care through activities that help me relax and recharge. And, most importantly I have a very good support system allowing me to thrive both personally and professionally.

What role has mentorship played in your career, and who has been a particularly influential mentor for you?

Mentorship has played a pivotal role in my career, offering guidance and valuable insights that have significantly shaped my professional growth. A particularly influential mentor for me has been Charlton Kurz, who has provided not only practical advice and encouragement but also challenged me to think strategically and pursue opportunities beyond my comfort zone. His support has been instrumental in helping me navigate through complex challenges, build confidence, and achieve my career goals.

How do you stay up-to-date with current trends and developments in your field?

To stay current with trends and developments in my field, I engage in continuous learning through webinars, read industry publications, networking with individuals in my field, follow relevant online resources.

Knowing what you know now, what would you tell your younger self?

I would advise my younger self to balance ambition with self-care and appreciate the journey as much as the destination.



Winnith Schrywer
VEYA ICT Managing Director



‘African women have a unique ability to turn nothing into something’

Can you please introduce yourself? (you may tell us about your name and family, education and career)

My name is Winnith Schrywer, born in Windhoek – so daughter of the soil. I completed my BCompt via Unisa years ago, so I studied and worked at the same time; which both grounded me and instilled the discipline in me that was required for my future. Of course I didn’t know it the time. I am a mother to an 18 year young man who is on his way to start his own journey to University and couldn’t be prouder. My career span took many twists and turns over the years, from financial companies, to hospitality to logistics – so my exposure has been vast. From working to JSE listed companies to working for entrepreneurships. In itself this has fundamentally prepared me for my own entrepreneurial role.

What is your business about and what is your role?

On 1st October 2016, a significant corporate action

resulted in Gijima Information Technology Services undergoing a name change to VEYA ICT. This transformation was driven by Gijima’s transition to being 100% beneficially owned by Namibians.

The name “VEYA” holds great significance as it translates to “we have come” in a Namibian vernacular. This word carries a deep meaning, symbolizing the long-awaited establishment of an indigenous ICT leader that Namibians have yearned for over the years. VEYA ICT has embraced a clear mandate within its vision and mission to spearhead the pursuit of ICT service excellence in Namibia. This commitment serves as a catalyst to elevate the standards within the Namibian ICT sector.

I am proud to be leading this wonderful team as their Managing Director

What’s new at your business? Products etc

We firmly believe that there exists a symbolic relationship between enhanced service delivery and professional development. So we

focus in the development of Namibians in ICT projects in country, whether it be an ERP or infrastructure project. We specialize in SAP implementations and supporting the Banking Sector in Namibia.

Do or did you have a woman leader as a mentor or are there specific women who inspired you and why?

I know in this question most people say their mothers – and in my case this happens to be true as well – but because my mother embodies the construct of being an African woman. The African woman has this unique ability to take nothing and turn it into something. And I have watched my aunts to do exactly the same thing. As with any child that grew up during the apartheid era – my story is no different. But it was always my mother and our aunts that kept us safe, that nurtured, that fed, that educated – even at times when they had no resources to do so, whether that was emotionally or financially or physically. To this day I stand astounded at their achievements – and they never got accolades, or even expected them – they were just graceful every step of the way – and remain so to this day.

What do you think helped you the most to make a career as a woman? What's the biggest factor that has helped you be successful?

I had a very good support system. But also I had and still have a very good friend that keeps me accountable. With that said, I have never been afraid of mentors; past or present or future. There are no better teachers than those that have done this before and have the stripes to prove it. Your mentors may and must change based on where you are on your journey. And probably most important – don't be afraid to fall – as long as you fall forward. I think once I had unburdened myself from the fear of failure – success showed up.

As a female leader, what has been the most significant barrier in your career? Have you been confronted with gender-related roadblocks in your career?

This is a strange question for me to answer. I think if you don't understand that gender-related roadblocks and barriers are an absolute given because you had the audacity to get on this road, you shouldn't be on this road in the first place. You cannot progress if all you are doing is looking for are roadblocks or barriers. They are there – they will always be there – yours is to identify your objective and work to achieve it. The rest doesn't matter in the bigger scheme of things. And nothing shuts up like performance. What I do not like is the sexual harassment that young women still face in workplace. This needs to change.

What mistakes have you made along the way and what did you learn from them?

I cannot have it all. I cannot be an excellent mother, an excellent daughter, an excellent business woman – all at the same time and all in equal measure. I will fail. But not all of them carry the same importance every day. So I need to find a way of managing my own expectations. I am a woman in a man's world.....and I cannot change that which is natural for now. It is still a man's world – I

accept that. Mine is to chip away at that philosophy and make it more gender neutral. At the same time – I am meant to be a woman, and every time I have tried to play the man's game – I have failed. My biggest successes have come when I remained true to my nature.

What are some patterns you've noticed over the years about women at work, and things they could be doing better to advance their careers?

I think we shy away from what it takes to get to where you are. Every successful woman that I know has a story of pain and sacrifice behind that success. What is currently causing me concern is that women feel entitled – and forget the burden that they carry for generations that are to come after them. Today I stand on the shoulders of giants. Mine is to make the journey of women who come after me a little easier than my own. I find that women today are working backwards and not forward – we are forgetting that even though our paths have been made easier, the work is far from over. We have a long way to go to still have women accepted in top positions, and be welcomed in boardrooms. So once we get there – failure is not an option. And we may fall – but fall forward. If we always keep that in mind – the rest will fall into place as a natural consequence.

Why do you think companies would benefit from having more women at the top?

I think like with everything in life men need women and women need men. It is what gives balance in this world. What I found is that companies with a too aggressive approach at some point burn out ie they lose market share or their product lines become irrelevant. Companies that have too soft an approach in general move too slow, and inevitably don't take required risks when opportunities exist – and they too fail. Once we realize that companies need BALANCE, the question of benefit is not very logical – because a need is a MUST.

What advice would you give to the next generation of female leaders?

You stand on the shoulders of Giants. You are the now the next Giant. It is a privilege – not a burden

You are undoubtedly busy, how do you take care of yourself and maintain a good mental health?

I make a conscious decision to switch off. I don't get this right on my best of days. But life has taught me that mental health is not a myth. I solo travel – to places where people would rather not go – you tend to view your own life through a new lens of appreciation. And you push your own boundaries as to both your physical and mental capabilities. It's where and when I re-balance.

How should women support other women in their organizations?

STOP celebrating her failures louder than you celebrate her successes. In fact – celebrate her Successes, but hold her accountable for her failures. There is a difference. And her sex life has nothing to do with you! This is just a narrative that we feed for men not to be held accountable for their own transgressions.



Bank of Namibia



What makes me tick is the thrill of the challenge, and the satisfaction of seeing hard work turn into real results. Like the bus that Keri Washington talks about, I believe you pray to catch the bus, but you have to run to catch your bus, too —nothing is handed to you on a silver platter.

Valeria Mbango

Director: Strategy, Project and Transformation

'The thrill of the challenge, and the satisfaction of seeing hard work turn into real results, makes me tick'

Please tell us more about yourself?

I am a young professional hailing from the humble streets of Oshakati. My journey began in a place where the sun would set, and we'd still be playing outside, only to return home for the occasional bum-whipping for staying out too long. I didn't like wearing shoes back then, but those dusty streets gave me my roots, my strength, and my resilience. Today, I stand as a Namibian professional with a strong academic foundation in Industrial Engineering and Project Management. My humble beginnings have taught me that success is not a matter of luck but of hard work, resilience, and the courage to stand in the arena, even when the odds are stacked against you. I'm privileged to have moved from consulting to financial services and now to the public sector, where I serve at the Bank of Namibia. It's a big responsibility, but I show up every day with the determination to make a difference.

What makes you 'tick'? What motivates you to excel in everything you do? What are you passionate about?

What makes me tick is the thrill of the challenge and the satisfaction of seeing hard work turn into real results. Like the bus that Keri Washington talks about, I believe you pray to catch the bus, but you have to run to catch your bus, too —nothing is handed to you on a silver platter. I'm passionate about continuous growth, both personally and professionally. I collect wins and milestones, no matter how small, because each one pushes me to aim higher and dig deeper.

Do you have a female leader/ mentor and how have they inspired you and why?

Over the years, I have drawn inspiration from many remarkable women who have crossed my path and some admiring from a distance. Each one brought something different to the table—be it their eloquence, balance between career, family, and spirituality, or their unwavering authenticity. I'm particularly inspired by women like Indra Nooyi, Angélique Kidjo, and Sheryl Sandberg. My sister Tonata and Anne Juuko and Mercia Geises, closer to home, showed me the power of determination. Monica Geingos, our former First Lady, unknowingly influenced my career trajectory with her words about stepping into the public sector. "the belly of the beast", to contribute to solving our nation's complex problems. It's a reminder that we all have a role to play in our country's future.

You can be seen as an inspirational (and successful women) in your industry. Do you have some advice for other women coming from your own experiences?

One of my favorite quotes comes from Theodore Roosevelt's "The Man in the Arena": "It is not the critic who counts... the credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena." My advice to other women is simple: Always try. Step into the arena, even if it scares you. Be persistent, be daring, and don't be afraid to fail. You'll make it eventually if you refuse to quit. Keep your attitude positive, and always believe in yourself. Success is about resilience and grit, not just talent. Talent will indeed get you through the proverbial door, but your attitude, discipline, and determination will ultimately lead to your success.

What do you do to relax? Do you have any hobbies or activities that you do in your free time?

I find relaxation in different forms. Exercising is something I love, though I admit consistency can be a challenge. It helps both my body and mind. Spending time with friends and family, traveling, spa days, and even indulging in a bit of shopping brings me joy. But lately, I've also discovered the peace of enjoying my own company at home. With a demanding job like mine, sometimes the best way to recharge is to simply be still.

As the Director of Strategy, Projects, and Digital Transformation at the Bank of Namibia what is your role?

In my current role, I oversee the strategic formulation process, lead digi-

tal transformation efforts, and manage the Innovation Hub as well as the Project Management Office at the Bank of Namibia. I moved from the private sector to establish this function at the Bank three years ago, and it has since created significant value and impact. The support I receive from our leadership team, the entire organisation and the dedication of my team are the reasons behind our success. It's not easy, but nothing worthwhile ever is.

Tell us more about the Instant Payment Solution BON is planning to launch?

The Instant Payment Project is a game-changer for Namibia. This initiative aims to introduce a real-time instant payment system that will enable both banks and non-banks to collaborate in ways that were not possible before. It's about more than just technology; it's about financial inclusion and ensuring that all Namibians, no matter where they are, have access to fast, reliable, and affordable financial services.

It's about leveling the playing field by providing equal access to financial services across the nation. The solution is not just about speed and efficiency; it's about transforming how business is done in Namibia, supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and reducing the reliance on cash transactions, which can be costly and insecure. The system's design also considers the realities of our rural areas, allowing for offline transactions through USSD codes and ensuring that even those without consistent internet access can benefit. This initiative is truly about harnessing the power of digital transformation to drive national development and bridge economic disparities.

Who will it benefit?

The Instant Payment Solution is designed to benefit a wide range of stakeholders across Namibia. First and foremost, it will empower the unbanked and underbanked populations, particularly those in rural and remote areas, by providing them with access to fast, reliable, and affordable financial services. Additionally, the solution benefits the entire financial ecosystem by promoting greater collaboration between banks and non-banks, reducing dependency on cash, and ensuring that Namibia's payment infrastructure remains competitive in a globalised economy. Ultimately, this initiative supports the broader goals of financial inclusion, economic growth, and sustainable development for all Namibians.

How does this fit into Vision 2030?

Namibia Vision 2030 is about transforming our nation into a prosperous and industrialized country with a high quality of life for all citizens. The Instant Payment Project aligns perfectly with this vision by promoting access to financial services, especially in underserved rural areas. It's about creating opportunities for all Namibians to participate fully in our economy, regardless of their circumstances. It's about unlocking the boundless opportunities and reimagining an inclusive economy that works for the prosperity of all Namibians.

When will we see this implemented?

The goal is to have the Instant Payment Solution live by the last quarter of 2025. We are currently working closely with both the banking and non-banking sectors to co-create a solution that meets the needs of our entire country. Collaboration is key, and we're committed to making sure this solution reaches every corner of Namibia.

Do you have anything you think we omitted which you might need to add?

I have been given an opportunity to contribute to making Namibia a better place, and this is something I relish each day. It's indeed a privilege to serve my country in my own little way. I often observe a lot of pessimism from my fellow youth, but our track record as a nation equally shows that we have more going for us than against us. Yes, we have challenges, but those are not insurmountable. All we need to do is roll up our sleeves and be in the arena in whichever field or occupation we find ourselves. Therein lies our collective success as a nation.

rienga®



Dr Esperance Luvindao

Survivors & Thrivers: The Namibian Doctor Changing The Language Of Digital Healthcare

There is a certain hard-nosed resilience that comes with being a female entrepreneur in the medical space. Dr Esperance Luvindao had many hurdles and naysayers in her journey but is working to ensure quality healthcare actually reaches everyone.

“Well, I am no longer under 30,” Dr Esperance Luvindao laughs on the Zoom call with FORBES AFRICA.

For years, even before she made the FORBES AFRICA 30 Under 30 list in 2022, this Namibian medical professional has been working on solutions aimed at assisting patients throughout Africa’s semi-rural areas and suburbs to gain access to prescribed medication without having to travel long distances or suffer out-of-pocket health costs through conventional modes.

The Health Policy Watch estimated in 2021 that just over 50% (about 615 million) of people on the continent have access to the healthcare they need. The report further noted that “the continent’s quality of health services is generally poor and the family planning needs of half the continent’s women and girls are unmet”.

In a fact sheet released by the World Health Organization (WHO), there were only 3,894 health training institutions in Africa in 2018, of which 2,128 (55%) were owned by the public sector, 1,351 (35%) by private for-profit sector entities and 415 (11%) by private not-for-profit entities. The sheet went on to state that there is still “much work” that needs to be done to get countries to a point where they achieve universal health coverage (UHC) and access to quality healthcare.

This is why Luvindao plans to launch her innovation MENGA, a digital health solution.

With the idea of releasing the burden of state hospitals by reducing queues, her biggest challenge has been legislation. To fully release MENGA to the public in Namibia, Luvindao says there needs to be forward-thinking legislation on telemedicine in the country. “On the patient end, you don’t need internet connectivity for this, which sets us (her health solution) apart,” Luvindao says.

“I think about two years ago, I did a TED Talk exactly on this model, and I said, ‘what if you could consult your doctor without even using the internet, [with] using a messaging system or USSD code’. We built this model around meeting people at their point of need because a lot of patients in informal settlements or semi-rural areas do not have access to the internet.”

What also inspired Luvindao to venture into digital healthcare was



I think about two years ago, I did a TED Talk exactly on this model, and I said, ‘what if you could consult your doctor without even using the internet, [with] using a messaging system or USSD code’. We built this model around meeting people at their point of need because a lot of patients in informal settlements or semi-rural areas do not have access to the internet

her experience with patients around their sexual reproductive health.

“Every single time, we went and did outreach for our copper IUCD (intrauterine contraceptive device) clinics, we had to use an interpreter to explain that a copper IUCD has a string or it does not have any hormones. And oftentimes, I figured that there’s no word for hormone or progesterone in a lot of these African languages.” On the continent, according to WHO, contraceptive use is low – 2020 WHO data showed that only 56.3% of women living in a relationship or married used modern methods for family planning, compared to more than 75%, on average, in the rest of the world. Despite the increase in contraceptive use over the past 30 years, many women (43.7%) on the continent still do not have access to modern contraceptive methods.

“So, I said ‘this is where we have to start’,” Luvindao adds. “We need to start educating people in a language that they understand. Otherwise, we’re just trying to soothe ourselves again. So, we started translating our material into native languages.”

Although this has been a journey that has sometimes been challenging for the young doctor, her mission has remained steadfast and strong.

“It sounds clichéd but I believe in impact,” she says with a big smile. “There are things you can change and there are things you can’t change. But when I look at it, the impact is worth so much more... If I can change someone’s life, I will say to myself, ‘this is the reason why I’m doing it’. So, for me, that is a motivating factor.”

-Forbes Africa



A NAMIBIA DE BEERS PARTNERSHIP



OUR MINING EFFORTS ARE FOR THE GOOD OF OUR COMMUNITIES

We work with our stakeholders to ensure that communities thrive, sustainably, through enabling quality healthcare and education.

At Namdeb, we are about more than mining.
We are about mining for good.