



SPEAKING NOTES FOR EXECUTIVE CHAIRPERSON DR SUNSHINE MYENDE

AWSISA WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATION

I am my Sister's Keeper –

Honouring women. Advancing leadership.

Building a sustainable water and sanitation future for all.

28 AUGUST 2026



SPEAKING NOTES BY THE EXECUTIVE

CHAIRPERSON OF THE NYDA ON THE OCCASION OF THE AWSISA WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATION – *Message of Support | ±10 minutes*

28 August 2026

Programme Director, Dr Mamohloding Maahlo;

Honourable Minister of Water and Sanitation, Ms Pemmy Majodina;

Chairperson of AWSISA Women, Ms Lindokuhle Nzoyi;

Ms Petunia Ramunenyiwa, Chief Director in the Department of Water and Sanitation;

Ms Mbali Sibiya, Chairperson of SASWYN;

Dr Maphefo Thwala, Water Sector Manager at EWSETA;

Ms Hlamalani Ndlovu, Chairperson of the BBC-BE Women Chapter;

Ms Litha Geza, Deputy Chairperson of Amatola Water;

Distinguished women leaders, colleagues, partners, sisters and young women

Good morning.

It is a privilege to join you for this celebration of women and, particularly, for a conversation that asks us to pause and remember something that can easily become distant as our responsibilities grow: the younger woman we once were.

When we are introduced as leaders, people tend to see the finished picture. They see the position, the experience, the decisions and, hopefully, the confidence that comes with having travelled a particular distance. What they do not always see is the young woman who was there before all of those things; the young woman who was still learning, still finding her voice and still trying to understand what her life might become.



When I think about my younger self, I think about a young girl from Mzinto in KwaZulu-Natal, who attended Sihle High School and later went to the University of KwaZulu-Natal. At that stage, I had ambitions, but I certainly did not have a complete picture of where those ambitions would take me.

My academic journey would take me through Psychology, Industrial Psychology and Criminology, through postgraduate study and eventually to a PhD in Criminology and Forensic Studies. But when I look back now, I realise that the most significant education was not confined to a classroom or captured by a qualification. It was the education that came from people, from difficult decisions, from opportunities that required courage, from moments of uncertainty and from having to learn who I was while I was still becoming the person I wanted to be.

If I could speak to that younger version of myself today, I would tell her not to be so anxious about having every answer.

I think young people, and young women in particular, can sometimes feel that they have to know exactly where they are going before they give themselves permission to begin. We look at people who are further along and imagine that they had a clear plan from the beginning. Often, what we call a plan in retrospect was simply a series of decisions: taking an opportunity, pursuing an interest, learning from a disappointment, listening to someone who had more experience, and then having the courage to take the next step.

I would tell my younger self that uncertainty is not evidence that you are incapable. Sometimes it is simply evidence that you are standing at the beginning of something you have not experienced before.

I would also tell her to protect her sense of possibility. There will always be people who, consciously or unconsciously, define what they believe a young woman can achieve. Sometimes those limitations are expressed through what people tell you directly. Sometimes they are reflected in who is invited into certain spaces, who is encouraged to lead, whose ideas are taken seriously, and who is expected to remain on the margins.



A young woman has to develop enough confidence in herself to understand that she does not have to inherit somebody else's definition of her potential.

But I would also tell my younger self that ambition carries responsibility. It is not enough to want to advance individually. As you grow, you begin to understand that the opportunities you receive are connected to people who invested in you, believed in you and, at different moments, made the road a little easier.

That understanding has shaped the way I think about leadership today.

In youth development, we speak often about creating opportunities for young people, but opportunity is not only about access to a programme, a qualification or a job. It is also about whether a young person can look at the world around her and genuinely believe that there is a place for her in it.

For a young woman, that can be profoundly influenced by what she sees. If she sees women leading institutions, building businesses, shaping policy, working in sectors such as water and sanitation, and making decisions that affect communities, leadership becomes something she can imagine herself doing rather than something that belongs to other people.

The theme, “I Am My Sister’s Keeper,” speaks to a responsibility that I believe becomes greater as we gain experience and influence. We should not only ask whether we have succeeded. We should also ask whether our presence has expanded what is possible for another woman.

At some point in every woman's journey, somebody gives her something that cannot be measured on a CV. Someone gives her confidence. Someone shares knowledge. Someone makes an introduction. Someone recommends her when she is not in the room. Someone says, “You should apply for this,” or “You are ready for this,” before she is completely convinced herself.

And when we become the women with experience, relationships and influence, we have an opportunity to create those moments for others.



That is why I think remembering our younger selves should not simply make us nostalgic. It should make us more conscious of the women who are still standing where we once stood.

It should make us ask: What would I have needed at that stage of my life? Who would I have needed to believe in me? What door would have made the journey different? And, now that I have some ability to influence another woman's journey, what am I prepared to do?

Because the future we want for women will not be created simply by talking about it. It will be created through the relationships we build, the opportunities we share, the institutions we strengthen and the choices we make when we have the ability to make room for somebody else.

That brings me to the activity I would like to leave with you today.

I want us to think not only about the younger woman we were, but about the dreams we are still carrying and the responsibility we have towards one another's dreams.

I would like each of you to write down one dream for your future. It can be a personal dream, a professional ambition, something you want for your community, or something you want to see change in the world around you.

Once you have written it down, I would like you to pass that dream to another woman.

For a moment, you are entrusting something personal to somebody else. The person receiving it may not know you well. She may not know the history behind the dream or everything it represents. Yet you are trusting her to hold it for a moment.

And I think there is something powerful in that. Because our lives are shaped by what happens when we trust one another. We need people who will hold our confidence, who will challenge us honestly, who will encourage us when we doubt ourselves, and who will sometimes see possibilities for us that we cannot yet see for ourselves.



But trust also creates accountability. So, when you receive another woman's dream, I want you to ask yourself: What is within my power to do that could help create the conditions in which a dream like this becomes possible?

Perhaps it is knowledge that you can share. Perhaps it is an introduction you can make. Perhaps it is an opportunity you can create. Perhaps it is mentorship, encouragement or simply being the person who reminds another woman that she belongs in the room.

You may not be able to fulfil the dream for her, but you may be able to help make the road towards it a little wider. And I think that is what it means, in practice, to say, “I am my sister's keeper.”

It means that I recognise that another woman's future is not separate from the future we are building together. It means that I understand that leadership gives me not only influence, but responsibility. And it means that I do not want to be remembered only for what I achieved, but also for the opportunities, confidence and possibilities that became available to others because I was there.

As we do this activity, I therefore want us to hold two women in our minds: the younger woman we once were, who had dreams before she knew how they would unfold, and the young woman who is coming behind us and who is still waiting to discover what her own future can hold.

Perhaps our responsibility as women leaders is to make sure that she does not have to dream smaller simply because she has not yet seen what is possible.

I am grateful for the woman my younger self was - not because she had everything figured out, but because she was willing to learn, to grow and to keep becoming. And I am equally conscious that the journey does not end when we reach a position of leadership. In many ways, that is when our responsibility becomes greater.



So, as you pass these dreams from one woman to another today, I hope we will see them not simply as pieces of paper, but as a reminder of what we owe one another: trust, honesty, opportunity, encouragement and the willingness to make room.

May we continue to build a future in which the young women watching us today do not have to ask whether there is a place for them in leadership. May they be able to see themselves in the institutions, industries and decisions that shape our society, and may they inherit not only the achievements of the women who came before them, but the confidence and opportunity to take that work even further.

Thank you for allowing me to share this moment with you, and thank you to AWSISA for bringing women together in a space where we can honour our journeys, affirm one another and, importantly, dream forward together.

I wish you a meaningful Women's Day celebration and a future in which every woman has the opportunity not only to realise her own potential, but to help another woman realise hers.

Thank you very much.