

Introducing our newest IDI Board Member: Ms Tsakani Maluleke

Appointed to the IDI Board in November 2020 and attending her first meeting on March 25 2021, IDI is delighted to welcome Tsakani Maluleke, South Africa's Auditor General, to the Board.

The Board meeting is far from being her only 'first'. She is the first woman to hold the position of Auditor General in the supreme audit institution's 109-year history, and she was also the first female deputy Auditor General.

Her background as a Chartered Accountant spans more than 20 years, with experience in both the private and public sectors, and in areas as diverse as auditing, consulting, corporate advisory, development finance, investment management and skills development agencies. She is currently the non-executive chairperson of the board for the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA).

Tsakani's career is motivated by a passion to actively contribute to advancing black men and women in the accountancy profession. She has pursued this passion through her work with various organisations including Business Unity South Africa, African Women Chartered Accountants, and the Association for the Advancement of Black Accountants of Southern Africa (Abasa), of which she is a past president.

Her commitment to service excellence and ethical leadership and her contribution to transformation has been recognised and awarded by the Presidents of ABASA, AWCA and Black Management Forum (BMF). Tsakani is a fellow and moderator of the African Leadership Initiative and the Aspen Global Leadership Network.

As part of IDI's week of gender focus following International Women's Day on 8 March 2021, and in a year of COVID-19 challenges, Tsakani answered a few questions posed by IDI (and other media!).



As a leader, how do you manage gender balance, equality and diversity issues?

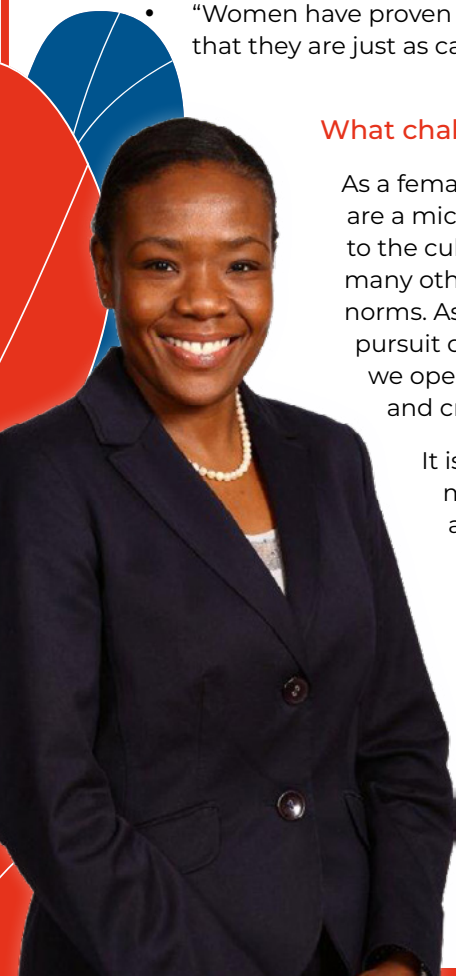
- "If you want to make a success of diversity and gender issues, you need to create a compelling vision and you need to do something about it. This success is determined by institutional strategic alignment rather than only "relying on others" to further your agenda." – PAFA engagement
- "I put people at the centre of what I do, not just people internally in terms of the work that I do every day, but also I worry about the impact of my work on other people that I don't see" – AG interviews
- "Women have proven over and over again that if given the chance, often even half the chance, they prove that they are just as capable" - Morning Live interview

What challenges have you faced as a female SAI leader?

As a female SAI leader, one of the key challenges is that SAIs do not operate in a vacuum and are a microcosm of the society within which they operate. Our cultural contexts give definition to the cultures of our institutions. Thus, it takes longer for organisations such as mine and many others to shift towards embracing the modern profile of a leader outside of the cultural norms. As a female leader, this provides no easy answers but requires patient yet deliberate pursuit of the changes you wish to see and committing to transform the culture of institutions we operate in to uphold the values of equality for all its people regardless of race, gender, age and creed.

It is well documented that females in society work extra hours daily compared to their male counterparts when all their other responsibilities are considered - as mothers and caretakers of households. Given the slow shifts in the cultural context, female leaders have that much more additional responsibilities to hold it all together – which (with privileges) is made possible through building a support structure that ensures all demands that would be directed at the female leader are attended to. This is a personal challenge I have also had to and still navigate as a female leader.

Another challenge of leadership - unrelated to gender but close to my heart - is to be able to lead and call others to the level of personal growth and transformation that you require of yourself. It is hard for leaders to ask others to go where they haven't gone themselves.



What particular challenges have you faced as a SAI leader during COVID-19, and have there been positive experiences or results?

The demands on our organisation to uphold the highest levels of professionalism, in delivering our mandate to strengthen democracy by enabling oversight, accountability and governance in the public sector, have never been more pronounced than during the COVID-19 pandemic. Society and the economy were at their most vulnerable and there was a clear cry for transparency and accountable governance – particularly given the state of emergency that was declared in the country, which poses challenges to the control environment across government.

Our auditors had to respond swiftly, decisively and creatively to the rapidly changing context. This period confirmed to us what we already knew in terms of the value of integrating our multi-disciplinary skillset for impactful auditing and of collaborating with key institutions and other social actors that help us to expand the accountability circle. As a result, our COVID-19 special audits were well received by stakeholders and the public and have set an example of ways in which we could deepen our relevance as a SAI in the pressing and most urgent societal issues of our day.

This value was delivered at the most trying time for societies across the globe, right to the individual level of each citizen, including our very own people. Our most important concern was that our people were safe and felt supported during a very trying season, and this support involved ensuring that our Office and staff could function effectively under lockdown conditions, to promoting employee assistance services to ensure they walk the difficult journey with our people.

Whilst this season also reflected the resilience of the human spirit in our people and leaders all round, we recognise that the effects of this will be long lasting and we remain resolute at putting our people first.

What overall lessons have been learnt from COVID-19 in general and as a female leader?

The resilience that the pandemic unleashed is something that we can build upon and is a reflection of the strength that we require to build forward. In case there were any doubts, the institutions that are relevant now and in the future are ones that are humane in their character, ethical in their culture and truly grasp their significance and role in society.

Knowing our organisational purpose across all levels of our organisation really gave us fuel to persevere, even when the going got tough. It has also reaffirmed that this is indeed our endowment as an institution and one we need to keep alive, more so now than we've ever done before.

Any words of advice to increase female leadership in IDI and in SAIs?

SAIs are tasked to protect democracies and as such, a higher performance standard is rightfully expected of them. They need to lead by example and be a model that society can emulate.

The deliberate focus on diverse and inclusive leadership at SAIs and a specific focus on female leadership is not only responsive to the expectations of society but is an ethical and responsible thing to do.

The uncertainties and complexities that will continue to characterise our present times call for a willingness to do things differently to what we have always done before, and that involves really taking advantage of the diversity dividend. This is not only the right thing to do but a core part of a SAI remaining viable and relevant to the societies it seeks to serve.

We can truly really do better, TOGETHER.

