

Govt honours women in water

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RUSTENBURG: Fifty women, who risk life and limb to pick up litter on the banks of the Swartkops River in the Eastern Cape, have been recognised for their efforts to improve their community.



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The Swartkops Adopt a River Project won top prize in the Adopt a River category of the glittering 2014 Women in Water Awards held in Rustenburg on Friday night. The project was also walked away with R100 000 in prize money.

Water and Sanitation Minister, Nomvula Mokonyane and Deputy Minister Pamela Tshwete presented the awards to women-led or initiated or implemented water projects.

The awards serve as a vehicle for the department to appreciate and recognise the good work done by women and the vital role they play in the water sector. It also encourages communities to learn about water management and change their attitudes for the better.

The awards had four categories including water conservation, adopt a river, education and awareness, as well as community development.

Speaking to SAnews after receiving a large trophy and cheque, project member Phibby Mhlontlo from Magxaki, said it was exciting that their efforts were being noticed by the Minister.

The project started in September 2013 with the help from the department. The group initially received a stipend of R1 200, which has since been increased to R1 800 from last month.

However, Mhlontlo said that for the group of 50 women, the project was about more than getting a small salary but doing what was best for their community - which is seeing their river free from pollution and litter.

She admitted that it was not easy to clean the river as it was filthy and the women find all sorts of unwanted things inside and face the added hazard of snakes.

"People throw blankets, furniture, plastics, sewerage and even dead dogs. However, we enjoy cleaning it and when you are busy and in the middle of the river, you sometimes forget that the river might sweep you away.

"It is satisfying to see a clean river with big fish swimming inside," she said.

The 59 year-old said winning the award would encourage them to work harder.

Commending hard work

Addressing the awards ceremony, Minister Mokonyane commended all the nominees for taking it upon themselves to not be overwhelmed by their circumstances but to rather see opportunity at every turn.

She said the women had looked their challenges in the face and refused to be oppressed by the lack of facilities that was around them.

"This is truly the spirit of our great South African nation. These amazing women went further, actually appreciating the water that is available around them and for the community they live in."

The Minister said government was well aware of the awful sight some of them encountered.

"We know what you've experienced and we see what you did to pull yourself out of those difficulties. You made conscious decisions not to be overwhelmed but to find solutions to the challenges that ordinarily, would have led to people giving up," said Minister Mokonyane.

Women at coalface of challenges

The Minister said that women were at the coalface of the challenges of a lack of water, adding that at times they might have access to water but the quality was not the greatest.

She also emphasised that the awards must not be just about the ceremony but lessons learnt must impact upon all such that they become a way of life.

"We need to take these lessons and ensure that they truly become best practice and a way of life.

"The idea of "no drop" has to truly be just that - no drop must be wasted. We have to better understand water management and ensure a change a change of attitude towards this crucial resource," the Minister said.

Other groups who walked away an award was the Botjha Community Based Organisation which won in the education and awareness category, the Mosadi Tshwene Project which won in the water conservation category, as well as the Re a Dira Home Based Care which scooped the first prize in Community Development category.