

full steam ahead

Real results excite Ayanda Mngadi, and that is why her role at the South African Maritime Safety Authority presents the same rewarding challenges faced by any ship's captain. By KERRY DIMMER

Why on earth would a parastatal feel

it necessary to promote and reinvent itself? One can point to many state-run enterprises that have little desire to market their brand other than in a reactive sense. But this is certainly not the case with the South African Maritime Safety Authority (Samsa).

Ayanda Mngadi believes wholeheartedly in Samsa's turnaround strategy that was introduced when the current CEO, Commander Tsietsi Mokhele took the reins. It made her decision to join the organisation as its executive head of Corporate Affairs three years ago very easy. She is now part of the leadership that is creating a personality for Samsa and redefining its character in the maritime space.

Perhaps, as a University of Natal graduate in psychology, she was attracted to the idea that an organisation might want to, by its own admission, rise from a befuddled past. Her interest might also have been due to her considerable experience from working in other state-operated departments like the ministries of Public Enterprises and Transport.

While both reasons were valid, Mngadi could also not ignore the appeal of breaking into the male-dominated world of ship captaining and introducing the value of maritime to ordinary South Africans. It was an industry of which Mngadi had little knowledge and that presented new challenges for her.

'The transition wasn't impossible for me,' she says. 'My expectation of what I needed to do, judging by Samsa's turnaround strategy, was to interpret and give shape to the conceptual key deliverables. And in a closed industry like maritime, or even mining for that matter, it usually works to an advantage to have an "outsider's" perspective.'

Traditional industries such as the maritime sector, have historically been male-dominated across all levels, but most prominently in leadership roles. This is why Samsa has taken the initiative to redress gender imbalances within the industry.

The amount of women found in Samsa's management committee has more than doubled since 1998, which is when their turnaround strategy was introduced.

This highlights Samsa's commitment to advancing women in the traditionally male-dominated environment. It's not just about fixing the past or for the kudos of being an equitable employer either. It's about adding value, which for Samsa translates into economic power.

With the wide range of careers on offer in maritime and the training Samsa provides, the organisation is heralding the entry of a feminine touch which, contrary to old-fashioned thinking, is going to make it stronger, not softer. Of course, the fact that Mngadi is a woman was not the reason

for her appointment at Samsa but it has added a fresh dynamic to the position.

For Mngadi, the strength of her business unit lies in the fact that 80% of the staff complement comes from the private sector, people who have considerable experience in promoting big brands.

'In my mind, if you are going to reposition an authority in the minds of the people of its country, then you need to do something that is outside of government. You have to make it appealing to everyone.'

It starts with understanding the value of maritime that has, for South Africa, a 58% impact on the GDP of the nation.

'The standards and services provided by ports have a direct bearing on international trade,' Mngadi explains. 'What Samsa has successfully done is to ensure that everything that is related to global laws of trade that are administered through the UN International Maritime Organisation (IMO), are adhered to.'

'As a result, you find that a large percentage of Samsa representatives hold very high positions in technical committees that are part of the UN body. This means that at the core of Samsa's business ethos, integrity and credibility have become a force propelling the business culture and practice.'

This is important because, as Mngadi emphasises, it informs the country's expectations of Samsa and turns maritime powers

Samsa has taken the initiative to redress gender imbalances within the industry



Mngadi is optimistic about the development of the South African maritime sector and its empowerment of previously marginalised people

into a benefit for ordinary citizens. Addressing the potential of maritime as a career is one aspect of this benefit, but more importantly it goes to redressing the 1993 government sale of its own maritime fleet.

One of Samsa's biggest drives is to assist the provinces that host ports to look at and create a maritime economy. This translates into what is being done for education, for skills, for empowerment and for overall business health. This and the fact that it's home to the continent's busiest port, Durban, ultimately positions South Africa as a maritime power, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa.

Samsa has now achieved the goal of becoming a business centre of excellence, a one-stop shop for maritime administration, and a solutions provider for matters from ship registration and protection of life and property at sea, to building and ship repair.

'Maritime is a complex matter,' says Mngadi. 'The industry had become used to a silent Samsa in the past, and had the impression that because it was an authority it had to be obeyed. Samsa is enjoying acknowledgement as an entity that solicits opinions, listens and addresses problems from the industry, and it has strengthened the relationship with critical maritime industry players.'

'Our relationship with the industry goes way beyond levy administration, it goes to the advice we can elevate to the decision makers in government about how we make the sector better.'

The fishing communities are also an important stakeholder in Samsa business

delivery and mandate. One of the main objectives in this regard is to give meaning to the social interventions of maritime to these communities. Jeffreys Bay, which is along the east coast of South Africa and where there's an informal settlement of subsistence fishermen, is such an example.

'In the pursuit of developing upstanding corporate citizens, Samsa's intentions to intervene are unambiguous. These interventions, of course, will be a joint effort with other relevant government entities that will provide identified services in addressing such issues,' says Mngadi.

'Communities like Jeffreys Bay are often overlooked but because they are generally registered with Samsa as boat owners or fishermen we have made it our responsibility to facilitate those processes that often fall outside of government intervention.'

'We don't necessarily do what social development does, but we make sure that we bring attention to their problems and assist in the social upliftment of the communities in which they live.'

Samsa also promotes maritime studies by investing in various schools and universities. Mngadi is optimistic about the development of the South African maritime sector and its targets on the empowerment of previously marginalised people.

She points out that in order for South Africa to cement its position as a maritime nation, there needs to be buy-in from young South Africans who are still in the process of deciding on their career path. With this in mind, Samsa promotes maritime investing

in developments. The perfect example is the growth in the number of young women who are currently in the Samsa cadet programme.

Few institutions include maritime as a study option, largely as a result of the sale of the South African fleet, which in turn caused the closure of an extended industry like ship maintenance and repair.

Samsa hopes that such opportunities will be revitalised and mainstreamed into educational programmes as it moves on its path to bolster maritime transport.

Samsa's success as a business is mirrored in Liberia and Senegal as the model for maritime authority excellence. Its training programmes extend well into other African countries, many of them endorsed by the IMO.

Samsa has also offered sister countries the opportunity to plug into its long range identification technology, a cutting-edge system that allows a country to monitor shipping activity within 200 nautical miles off a coastline. For many African states, this system is not a financially viable option. It's this type of co-operation that results in Samsa being looked at for leadership.

'In the same way that mining was all the buzz 15 years ago,' says Mngadi, 'maritime is where new energy and activity is being created. I know it's like poetry, but this is really what it is for me – my team has the energy to sail this long mile. I believe in my spirit, and it tells me this work is important because it's where my country's heritage lies.' **AD**