



SOUTH AFRICAN JUDICIAL EDUCATION JOURNAL

VOLUME 6, ISSUE 1, 2023



10 YEARS
2011 - 2021



SOUTH AFRICAN JUDICIAL EDUCATION JOURNAL

VOLUME 6, ISSUE 1, 2023



This journal is published under the auspices
of the South African Judicial Education Institute.

Published: July 2025

ISSN: 2616-7999

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TRIBUTE TO AKHO NTANJANA



Why should young and promising eagles suddenly perish and be taken away from us forever? I am gutted and unable to understand why.

Akho Ntanjana was on a meteoric rise – he was excelling in his career and slowly transforming into a trailblazer in his own unique way. He was a quiet, focused, forward looking young man and destined to reach great heights.

Akho worked tirelessly on the accreditation of this journal by the Department of Higher Education and Training – a long and arduous process. The receipt of the accreditation letter made him smile – he was relieved and fulfilled when he achieved his objective. He reminded us all that the real work was about to begin to maintain the accreditation.

Akho will be sorely missed by his SAJEI colleagues, the SAJEI Editorial Board members, the authors, the JUTA team and, more specifically, by his mother, wife, and siblings. May his soul rest in peace and rise in glory.

DR GOMOLEMO MOSHOEU

Production editor

Well done, Akho!

You have run your race; now, it is for us to take the baton
and continue on your well-defined route.

Thank you for being our guiding light.

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Enhancing Judicial Excellence

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The *South African Judicial Education Journal* is published by the South African Judicial Education Institute (SAJEI), Office of the Chief Justice. The mandate of SAJEI is to provide judicial education to aspiring and serving Judicial Officers in order to enhance judicial accountability and transformation of the Judiciary.

The journal is intended to consist of contributions, articles, case notes and book reviews. The views expressed by the authors or contributors do not reflect the views of SAJEI and Editorial Board.

The Editorial Board invites unsolicited articles on topical issues relating to judicial education and the Judiciary. It may, in its discretion, accept articles that do not strictly deal with judicial education. The Editorial Board reserves the right to edit articles and circulate for double-blind peer review.

This journal is accredited by the Department of Higher Education and Training.

Currently, the journal is not for sale. Requests for PDF electronic copies should be sent to SAJEJ@judiciary.org.za.

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A LIFE OF PURPOSE

MS HLALELENI KATHLEEN MATOLO-DLEPU

I have lived a life with a purpose ensuring that there are transformation initiatives in the legal profession. I progressed from a law student to a founder of a legal practice, through thick and thin.

It may be 100 years since women have been permitted to enter the legal profession, but I think there is a consensus that many more hurdles remain that need to be overcome before we can claim that the legal profession has truly achieved equity and inclusion. I have done the little I can alongside many other powerful and influential women in this profession to lay a foundation for future generations to build upon. My greatest hope is that they will take the baton and see this journey to finality. They will bring the legal profession and this country to the state of a transformed constitution that it so desperately desires to achieve.

In my 35-year career in the legal profession, I have had access to several opportunities, some are alluded to in this short note. I have also been afforded opportunities to sit on various governance structures and occupy leadership positions. My experience in each of these roles has contributed to my abilities as a teacher and mentor to my candidate attorneys. They have shaped not just me, but also the way I engage with my colleagues, the way I run my practice, and my vision for the future.

Being asked to write about oneself seems like an arbitrary task in a society that lauds humility and 'keeping a low profile'. Like most women, I hardly, if ever, talk about myself or my achievements. It is often perceived as arrogant and boastful, and nobody wants to be associated with those characteristics. I hope that by sharing my story, I will encourage future generations to champion causes that they believe in, and further encourage those that will bring the legal profession and this country to the state of a transformed constitution that it so desperately desires to achieve.

I come from humble beginnings, have experienced the vagaries of apartheid, forced removals, and witnessed the denigration of my parents' abode. These memories are ingrained in my mind and they have left an indelible mark on me. Because of the harassment by those in authority, I was moved from Northern Transvaal to Soweto which led to me being proficient in several languages – there is always a silver lining in a dark cloud.

In Soweto, I crossed paths with political stalwarts such as Abraham Onkgopotse Tiro who instilled the importance of being proud to be black

and standing up to injustice. At university, I enrolled for a BCom and had to change paths due to a statistics course as I was never one for numbers.

I ended up enrolling for a BProc, this was the first time I saw the disparity in gender representation in the legal profession there were very few women in my classes. Lectures and exams were often disrupted on campus due to student protests, making it nearly impossible to complete a qualification in record-time. However, I persisted and completed both my BProc and my LLB. By the time I completed my LLB, there were only five women in the graduating class.

Upon completion of my LLB, I served my articles with the late founding member of the Black Lawyers' Association (BLA). Most candidate attorneys came from the historically black universities, and we made it a point to support each other. This is when I was first introduced to the BLA. Candidate attorneys back then either had to be members of the BLA or the National Association of Democratic Lawyers (NADEL). What I observed in my early career was the tendency of our colleagues to relegate women lawyers to secretarial work and family law matters. It didn't take long for me to realise that if I wanted opportunities, I was going to have to create them.

Before I established the practice Molefe-Dlepu Incorporated, I attempted to do so twice before together with other women who are now on the bench. As the saying goes, 'we fall to get up and not to lie there for good', a lesson I would like to share with young women lawyers. We almost exclusively briefed women advocates. In almost 30 years of practice, Molefe-Dlepu Incorporated has remained true to its core objectives having trained more than 30 women candidate attorneys.

In 1994, I was admitted as a conveyancer, an unusual achievement for a black woman lawyer back then. My own experience with forced removals as a child prompted a passion for land rights and ownership. Throughout my career, I made it my mission to stand for elections in every lawbody that I was a part of. After joining the BLA as a candidate attorney, I rose within the ranks. I served as a Branch Treasurer, General Secretary, and Vice-President. Also, I participated in the National Forum on the Legal Profession which culminated in the promulgation of the Legal Practice Act and the establishment of the Legal Practice Council.

Some of my career highlights include being appointed as the first chairperson of the Legal Practice Council, being a presidential appointee to the Judicial Service Commission, my nomination in the Lifetime Achievement category of the Justitia Awards in Austria, my Lifetime Achievement award from the WOZA Women in Law Awards, and my recognition as one of the Most Influential People of African Descent in the Law and Justice Edition to name a few. My most recent and most significant achievement has been the drafting and passing of the Legal Sector Code.

What I learned is that as women we need to look out for each other just like our male counterparts do, otherwise women will not occupy positions of power. Serving on governance structures provided an opportunity to mobilise women lawyers and put gender issues in the spotlight. All these experiences allowed me to champion transformation across gender and racial lines in the legal profession and ensure that more women take up leadership in the voluntary organisations in the legal profession.

Having seen the challenges that young women lawyers are still facing in entering and surviving in this profession, I recently established an accredited training organization, Basadi ba Molao, with a colleague to train pupil Advocates and candidate Attorneys. Basadi ba Molao has a networking group where women practitioners exchange ideas and experiences.

In the context of the 100th anniversary of women being permitted into the legal profession, I saw the request to write this note as an opportunity to shine a light on the milestones women have achieved in this profession. I believe my story to be one that covers the full spectrum of the human experience, from pain to joy, from hardship to prosperity, and from trial to triumph. I have experienced it all.