

Water is everyone's business - Dean Muruven

 By [Sindy Peters](#)

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At every level, we are all responsible for the quality of the environment in which we live and its sustainable use. Dean Muruven, strategic water source areas programme manager at WWF-SA, however, has made a career of it. Currently working towards completing a Doctorate in Environmental Science, Muruven does important work in the sector in striving to ensure a water secure future for all South Africans.

We interviewed him to find out what drew him to environmental work, his thoughts on sustainable resource use, and what Youth Month means to him.



Dean Muruven, Strategic Water Source Areas Programme Manager, WWF-SA

Tell us a bit about what you do at WWF-SA.

I have the task of helping secure South Africa's strategic water source areas. I work closely with government and the private sector to catalyse changes in policy and approaches to doing business differently that will lead South Africa to a water secure future.

What drew you to the environmental field?

I was at a government primary school in KZN and one of our rare excursions was to the then Natal Sharks Board and we had a marine biologist tell us some really interesting facts about sharks that we did not know. I remember with great clarity the moment when the plight of the sharks struck home. We were looking at pictures of the sharks trapped and drowning in nets and it dawned on me then that as human beings, we are responsible for the destruction and so must also have the power and ability to make a difference.

So that was the moment I knew I wanted to do something different!

Today's generation has the monumental task of ensuring a paradigm shift away from business as usual. How do we ensure sustainable development is implemented meaningfully across sectors?

There has to be an acceptance that with climate change, we are facing a new normal, and to drive this paradigm shift we

need to rethink how we view the world. From my perspective, one of the most fundamental things that has to change is how we utilise our natural resources, we need the decision-makers to realise that investing in a river that delivers the water to our homes is just as important as investing in the dam infrastructure.

After all, sustainable development is all about some for all forever.

■ ***What are some of the resource challenges, particularly in terms of water, future generations will face?***

The drought that is currently gripping large parts of the country has brought some of these issues to the surface. South Africa is a water-scarce country with most of our water already allocated, so that's not going to change. We are at a tipping point in the water sector and we need a paradigm shift sooner rather than later to change the way South Africans value water. Changing our mindset and value system is arguably one of the most difficult challenges that we will face.

■ ***What are the best ways for us to approach these challenges?***

Well, we need to be brave and bold and prepare for a changing world. We can start by securing and investing in the areas that deliver the water to our homes; we need to not just use the word 'innovate', but bring in technology innovations to scale, and most importantly, we need to do this together as water is everyone's business.

■ ***Young or old, who inspires you?***

A difficult question... I tend to draw inspiration from people around me at different times. I am fortunate enough to work for WWF where we wake up every day to try and save the planet - an ambitious bunch! But there are some amazing people at WWF all across the world who keep me motivated and inspired.

If I had to pick an external person, it would be Sir Alex Ferguson (you can probably guess I'm a football fan and the team I support), but on a serious note, he now lectures at Harvard on leadership and his story of success is something that inspires me.

■ ***What does Youth Month mean to you?***

It is a great time to celebrate how far we have come as a country, but also an important moment to reflect on those who gave so much to get us where we are. It also serves as a reminder that we have so much more to do to close the growing inequality gap in South Africa, as I hope to see a future where, at the very least, we are all given the best possible opportunity to succeed.

■ ***As a young South African, to what do you attribute your success?***

Having people who believe in you along the way is a major factor. During the early part of my life that was my parents; I grew up in a community where success was measured by whether you became a doctor or lawyer, so that belief allowed me to pursue a different path. Later on in life that belief came from my wife when I made a career change, and most recently, it's the belief in my ability by the head of the WWF Freshwater Programme.

Having someone who believed in me and my ability has given me the confidence to succeed.

■ ***Any words of encouragement for those wanting to follow in your footsteps?***

Well, my first bit of advice would be to forge your own path and find something you love. That may take a while, but it will be worth it. It was Steve Jobs who said: "As with all matters of the heart, you'll know when you find it!"

Challenge yourself and keep pushing the bar. You will probably encounter many people who will tell you why your idea or approach will not work, but only you know what you are capable of achieving, so keep pushing the bar!

Dean Muruven is currently employed by WWF South Africa where he leads a programme around the protection of South Africa's water source areas. This involves a collective effort in bringing together corporates, government and civil society to achieve a water secure South Africa. Muruven holds a Masters in Environmental Science and is currently working towards completing his doctorate.

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