

# Leading Ladies

We celebrate Women's Day on 9 August. Lisel Erasmus Kritzinger, author of *Inspirational Women at Work*, interviews some great ladies.

“We are required to walk our own road and then stop, assess what we have learned and share it with others. It is only in this way that the next generation can learn from those who have walked before them... We can do no more than tell our story”

Albertina Sisulu

**O**n 23 June 2005 President Thabo Mbeki swore Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka in as the new Deputy President of South Africa during a ceremony at Tuynhuys, Cape Town.

Mlambo-Ngcuka relinquished her position as Minister of Minerals and Energy in the cabinet to take up the post which had been the subject of much speculation since the dismissal of Jacob Zuma a few days previously.

Born on 3 November 1955, Mlambo-Ngcuka has been active in South African politics since the early 80s and held several government positions including deputy minister of the DTI prior to taking over the minerals and energy portfolio in June 1999.

Her track record as Minister of Minerals and Energy was probably one of the major factors considered by Mbeki when naming his new deputy. That and the fact that she has served with him as a member of the National Executive Committee of the ANC since 1997.

As Minister of Minerals and Energy she was proactive in ensuring that one of the pillars of South Africa's economic strength began to undergo a smooth transition from being an almost totally white owned industry to one which now has one of the more functional BEE charters in the country.

A sector dominated by entrenched interests has begun its change under her guidance. No political appointment is made

without very good political reasons, and Mlambo-Ngcuka appeals to all sectors of the country. Having spent the last five years working in a male dominated industry she has gained the trust of its captains as well as the rank and file. In particular, she ensured that the status of the women in the industry was enhanced and entrenched.

This latter aspect, whereas it may not have swayed the final decision, must have played a role especially where the woman's vote can have a decisive effect on decisions at the highest level.

Having accepted the role we expect the same dedication to the task that we have come to expect from her to date. There is no doubt that she will deliver.



Phumzile  
Mlambo-  
Ngcuka

**Maria Ramos**, who has just rescued Transnet from a train smash, had this to say in *Inspirational Women at Work*.

***What do you consider to be your greatest strength/s as a business person?***

A deep and unshakeable belief that our country has the potential and the ability to grow and develop in a way that will overcome unemployment and poverty. An understanding of what our big the challenges are and that nothing but 100 percent commitment, integrity and hard work is good enough. I think that one of my strengths is the ability to take tough decisions and see them through. Equally critical is the ability to create an environment where people have the space to think innovatively, are able to make decisions and take responsibility for themselves and are treated as professionals. Lastly, humility is important. It is important

**“The glass ceiling is in some cases reinforced with concrete. It should be understood that this is not just a social issue; it’s a business issue. Those who work to break through should realise that it’s not just for themselves, but to keep all of us competitive and make use of our human potential.”** Irene Charnley

to remember that we do not have all the answers, that the challenges are many and that the way in which you do your job impacts on the lives of many people.

***What challenges did you need to overcome in order to achieve success?***

I grew up in a working class immigrant family. From a young age I learnt that putting food on the table was hard work and that having a job was a privilege that could not be taken for granted. Bringing up four girls could not have been an easy task the focus was on education as a means of ensuring that as women we would have the basis for being independent. After matric although I desperately wanted to study there

was no money so I went to work as a bank clerk. My first encounter with corporate life was not very encouraging. The institution I worked for had a great scholarship, the only snag was that it was not open to women. I naturally challenged this policy and a couple of years later and a change in CEO the policy was changed and I was the first woman to go to university on that scholarship. I went on to complete my B.Comm and B.Comm Honours degrees at Wits University.

In business then, as now, women have to work a lot harder than their male counterparts to gain recognition and progress into middle and senior management. This is not only the case on South Africa. Women make up a small minority of members of many international structures. I sit on a number of international committees where this is the case. In fact, I am the only woman head of a treasury on the G20 (group of 20 systemically significant countries including the G8). It is a

tough world out there and women should not hesitate to take their place in it. I think facing such adversities makes one stronger.

***What helped you to overcome those challenges?***

The main instrument for overcoming such challenges is you. I had to prove to myself that I could get to university, do well and return to work to perform well. We need to believe in ourselves first, not accept mediocrity and not be satisfied with less than what we think we are worth.

***What are the guiding principles in your life and when doing business?***

In business you have to be frank, honest and carry out what you set out to do. In Finance

consistency, reliability and predictability are vital factors to your environment.

More importantly, in the public sector the commitment you make is to deliver to millions of ordinary South Africans many of whom are poor and depend on government services and on the ability of government policy to create an environment where investment and jobs are being created.

Our policies, therefore, have to be sustainable and predictable. Moreover, we live in an interdependent global world where investment, credit ratings and trade depends on these qualities. These elements are important to adopt in dealing with life as a whole. Fairness, integrity, commitment, respect for others, humility and the importance of sharing are the fundamentals.

***What do you consider to be the secret of your success?***

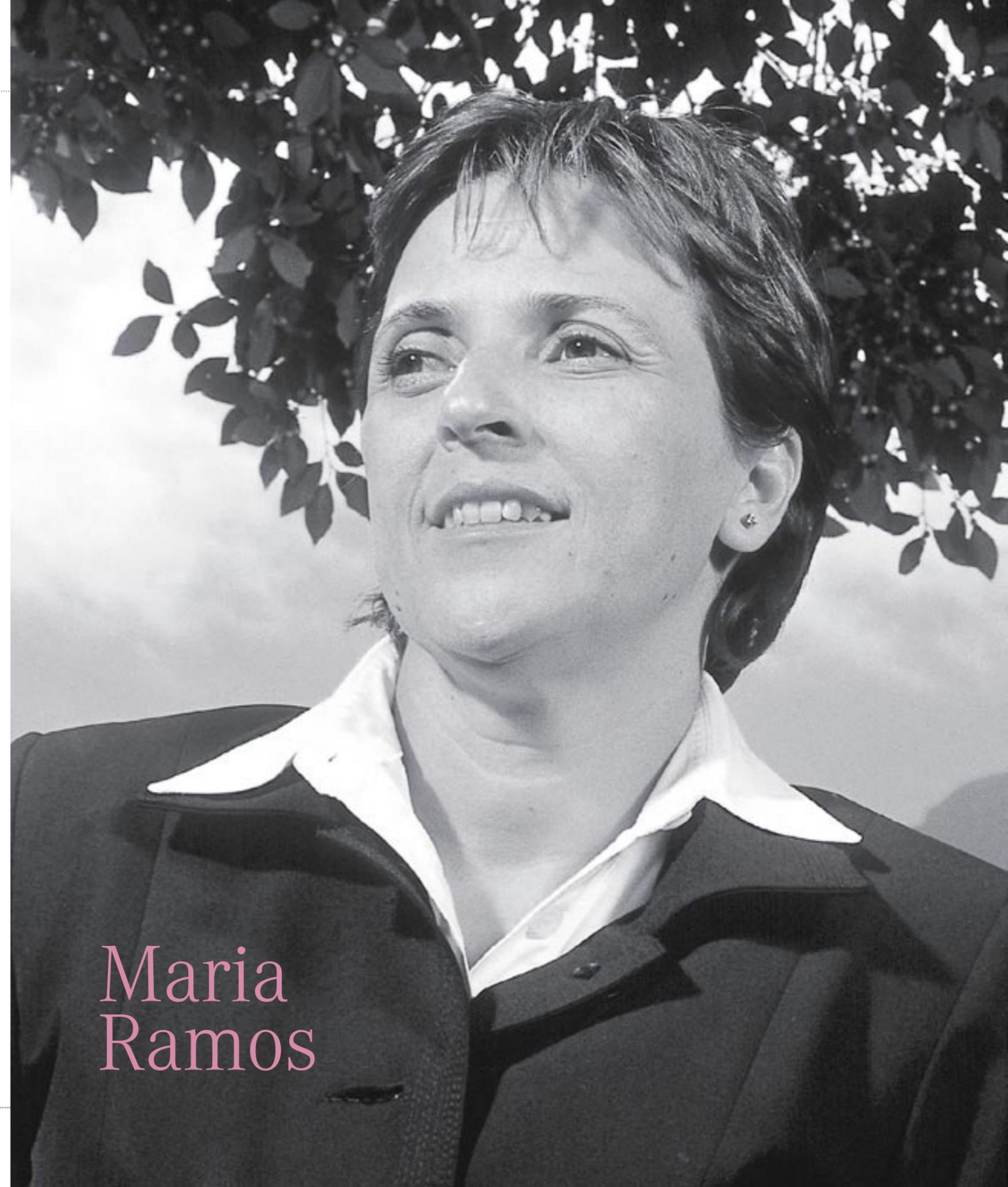
I am not sure that there are any secrets. I am totally committed to what I believe in and what I do and I work hard. Success requires commitment and hard work. You simply cannot take people or your environment for granted.

***What makes you tick?***

I think that we are shaped by our childhood and our experiences throughout life. My parents instilled in us a deep sense of humility, the culture of learning, respect and integrity, the value of a job and the importance of hard work and the importance of being independent women.

***An inspirational quote that you would like to share with other women:***

For me one of the most inspirational quotes comes from the Freedom Charter which was adopted by the Congress of the People on 26th June 1955 and which itself embodies the essence of our people’s struggle for democracy and the vision and greatness of spirit to rise above the tyranny of the time to proclaim “We, the people of South Africa, declare for all our country and the world to know: that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white ... and we pledge ourselves to strive together, sparing neither strength nor courage, until the democratic changes here set out have been won.”



**Maria Ramos**

**Bridgette Radebe** is the founder and executive chairperson of Mmakau Mining, the chairperson of the SA Mining Development Association and founder and member of the Board of Trustees of the US\$100-million New Africa Mining Fund to aid junior companies. She has this to say about the position of women in South Africa's leadership circles.

**What do you consider to be your greatest strength/s as a business person?**

Hard work, attention to detail, being a good organiser, ability to delegate, vision and commitment, perseverance.

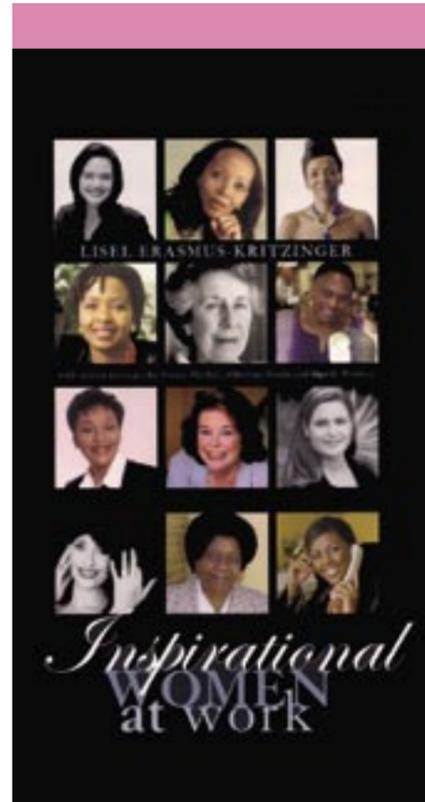
**To what would you ascribe your success?**

My role models – my parents, my sisters and the late Marina Maponya. At home, we were all coached and mentored to be entrepreneurs from an early age. Both my parents were entrepreneurs running retail businesses in the North West, and my childhood was steeped in the principles of management, financial planning and business culture. At my Catholic boarding school, the nuns taught me the values of discipline, sacrifice, compromise and perseverance. I also think the circumstances, which we were exposed to from an early age in my community, of having to fight against exploitation, acted as a catalyst in provoking rebellion against the system. It gave us a fighting spirit, and we grew up with a passion to correct the wrongs we were witness to. I entered the mining industry because I wanted to be in a position to correct the non-payment of mining royalties to my, and other, communities.

**What challenges did you need to overcome in order to achieve success in life?**

The legislation prevailing at that time made everything a challenge for us. The quality and nature of my education was critical in order to overcome the 'bantustan education' system, which is why my parents sent me to a private school – for which they had to obtain special permission. Tertiary education was also a problem, because of my race. Wits University accepted me, but the apartheid authorities would not allow me to study in a 'white' institution and banished me to the University of the North. The Group Areas Act prohibited freedom of movement, so my

parents planned that the children were born in Johannesburg, although we were living in a rural village in the North West. If you were born in Johannesburg, you qualified to be registered to live and work in Johannesburg.



Lisel Erasmus Kritzinger is the author of five business communication books and successfully completed *Inspirational Women at Work* a publication containing the life stories of 52 South African women – their lives, the challenges they faced in life and in business and how they make a difference in our country today. Currently she is identifying more inspirational stories to be told in the next publication, *Inspirational Women at Work II*.

To order your copy, phone LAPA publishers on 012-401 0700 or contact the author on [www.inspirationalwomenatwork.com](http://www.inspirationalwomenatwork.com). Ask for your special LEADERSHIP Women's Day Discount during the month of August.

**How did you overcome those challenges?**

In terms of legislation, I just simply defied it and became a mining entrepreneur against all odds by purchasing shares in a company that was already doing contract mining.

I became business development director, and increased my share of the business by bringing in new contracts. I also had a supportive family, to whom I had to turn for my initial finance, because the banks were not prepared to help me when I started.

In terms of skills, my partner taught me everything he knew about mining. When I went on my own, it was very tough at times, particularly the first 6 months. I was very determined and I worked very hard. I had to innovate, I had to negotiate – and I discovered I had to be better than anyone else because I was a woman in a male business and industry environment. But I also discovered that if you are good, men accept you.

**What do you consider to be the secret of your success**

My determination and drive.

**An inspirational quote that you would like to share with other women:**

'I've walked that long road to freedom. I have tried not to falter; I have made missteps along the way. But I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb. I have taken a moment here to rest, to steal a view of the glorious vista that surrounds me, to look back on the distance I have come. But I can rest only for a moment, for with freedom comes responsibilities, and I dare not linger, for my long walk is not yet ended.' Nelson Mandela.

**Who is your role model in business/life - somebody you would have liked / like to meet and share a few learning moments with?**

My parents and the late Marina Maponya. I would have loved to have met Nobel Peace Laureate and political activist from Burma - Daw Ang Sang Suu Kyi, but sadly her planned visit at the time of the International Women's Forum conference in SA was cancelled as she was placed under house arrest.

I am fortunate to have met and spent many learning moments with Nelson Mandela. Every time I meet him, I live through a new inspiration – he revitalises me.▲

Bridgette Radebe