

Why numbers are important

By [Monique Verduyn](#), issued by [SAICA](#)

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Nyawaw Dikwayo loves numbers because they help identify developmental needs and create accountability.

For Nyawaw Dikwayo, having a good teacher made all the difference. It was when she got to grade 10 that her love for numbers and problem-solving was nurtured by an accounting teacher who helped her achieve her potential and planted the seed that would drive Dikwayo to pursue a career as a CA(SA).



“Even though I was not yet sure of what the profession entailed, I was fascinated by the subject, and I was fortunate to have an excellent maths teacher too,” she says. “I will forever be grateful that they helped to steer me in the right direction.”

Dikwayo matriculated in 2004 and completed her undergraduate studies at the University of Johannesburg. She followed her BCom Accounting qualification with a post-graduate diploma in applied accounting science from the University of South Africa.

It was while she was completing her articles at Ernst & Young in 2014 that she was exposed to the public sector and the importance of government entities in society and the economy.

“Public sector accounting plays a crucial role in ensuring accountability, transparency, and trust,” she says. “I enjoyed working in the public sector because

it gave me an opportunity to make a meaningful contribution to society and it also made me realise that auditing was not my destiny, even though the experience I gained was invaluable. I knew then that I wanted a career in the public sector, one that would enable me to give back, and to contribute to the enhancement of service delivery in the country. Because I had seen first-hand what some of the key challenges were that public sector entities face, I decided to use the strong technical background the CA(SA) profession had given me in an environment that was more aligned with my interests and where I could offer recommendations and help to develop much-needed solutions.”

Once her articles were completed, Dikwayo was offered an opportunity to join the National Skills Fund (NSF), which provides funding for skills development initiatives in higher education that are identified by the National Skills Development Plan 2030 as national priorities.

“After joining the NSF, I never looked back,” Dikwayo says. “I joined the organisation in the role of Deputy Director of Finance, and I was responsible for assisting in setting systems for the implementation of accrual accounting. The role offered me an opportunity to understand the importance of having good financial management systems in any organisation. I was also involved in the first audit cycle of the organisation where consultants were not used for preparation of year-end processes and annual financial statements, and I am proud that that the organisation received an unqualified audit opinion.”

Three years into the role she was promoted to Director of Financial Planning and Reporting, where she was required to provide sound advice on the budgeting of the organisation, and ensure that there was quality in the organisation’s financial reporting.

As a person who is always in pursuit of self-improvement, Dikwayo recently obtained a Master of Philosophy degree in Development Finance through the University of Stellenbosch. “I had reached a stage in my career where I felt I needed to upskill and expose myself to new skills. Specialising in development finance has given me the ability to contribute to

unlocking Africa's growth potential. The content of the course, the exposure to issues that affect the African continent, and the discussion of solutions that can be brought to the table was a fascinating and highly rewarding experience."

Dikwayo began the course in 2019 and had started working on her research paper in 2020 when the pandemic reached our shores. She says she was forced to learn resilience and the importance of being able to adjust and adapt to any situation.

"In addition to the restrictions that were placed on my research, the national lockdown taught me that I am able to triumph even in adverse conditions. I missed a distinction for my research paper by 2%, while holding down a full-time job and being a mother. I had to help my children adjust to online learning and I had to adjust to having them at home all the time. The experience gave me a new appreciation for my family."

On top of the challenges that lockdown brought, Dikwayo was one of the people who contracted Covid-19 and had to be hospitalised. "The experience made me truly appreciate the commitment and care of healthcare workers who became like my family when I was unable to see anyone, and they helped on the road to recovery."

From a professional point of view, she says, the pandemic highlighted the importance of the work that government does. "Everyone in the public sector had to step up," she says. "The lockdown forced us all to face the underlying issues we have as a country, particularly in terms of access to higher education. At the NSF, we relooked at how we do budgeting, and how to achieve greater value for money. It was extraordinary to witness the great work that was done by many public servants who were at the forefront of helping to manage the response to the pandemic."

Along with other professionals in the public sector, Dikwayo says, she is helping to counter the perception that there are no competent and skilled people working in the public sector who are able to execute the mandates of the various organisations.

Social impact is all about the effect on people and communities that happens because of an action, an activity, project, programme or policy. "To work in this sector, you have to be passionate about giving back, passionate about wanting to make a difference, and passionate about applying your skills set. The work we do in finance has an impact on the entire organisation and enables it to fulfil its role in the development of the country and its citizens. The National Development Plan, for example, aims to eliminate poverty and reduce inequality by 2030, and identifies the role different sectors of society need to play in reaching that goal."

In April this year, Dikwayo was appointed as the Chief Financial Officer of the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC). The mission of the SAHRC, as the independent national human rights institution, is to support constitutional democracy through promoting, protecting and monitoring the attainment of everyone's human rights in the country. It's an organisation that she is excited about joining.

"The great thing about being a CA(SA) is that the finance background and the technical skills we have acquired put us at an advantage. We can fit into any organisation because finance is the heartbeat of every single entity. Our mandate at the SAHRC is different from that of the NSF which focused on skills development but is also aligned to it as the focus is on ensuring that the human rights of every citizen are protected, and education is one of those."

In the medium term, Dikwayo says, she aims to leave her mark on the SAHRC. "In the work I am doing now, I am applying the learnings and knowledge from my Masters. So often we talk about women empowerment and equal access to opportunities. I hope to see progress on this front in our profession and all others, in our communities, and at home. There is much work to be done in both the public and private sectors to ensure that women have a voice and a seat at the table."

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