

'Own your space, be unapologetically you' - Nosiseko Biko of Danone SA

By [Robin Fredericks](#)

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Nosiseko Biko, head of cycles and procurement at Danone Southern Africa (SA) is responsible for the strategic sourcing and supplier development/ management spend for the company (milk, raws, packs and goods and services).



Nosiseko Biko, head of cycles and procurement at Danone Southern Africa

Her career at Danone, which began in the planning department back in 2011, has spanned 14 years, marking her as a seasoned professional in her industry.

This Women's Month, we caught up with Biko as she shares a bit about her journey, what she loves most about the industry, and shares future trends to look out for.

Tell us a bit about yourself and your background?

I am a 37-year-old married woman and a mom from a small town in the Eastern Cape called Butterworth. I moved to Johannesburg in 2000 when I was in Grade 10 to complete my high school studies as my parents believed I would have better opportunities in Johannesburg.

I matriculated when I was 16 and went on to do my BCom Marketing Management degree and Honours in Logistics Management at the then Rand Afrikaans University(now UJ APK).

I had always wanted to study law so I also completed my LLB degree while working. I enjoy running, at least three to four times a week and going on solo dates at spas or restaurants (anyone who is a mom will understand this).

■ *What's your role at Danone Southern Africa and your main responsibilities?*

I am the head of cycles and procurement at Danone Southern Africa. I am responsible for the strategic sourcing and supplier development/management for the company which includes milk, raw materials, packaging as well as goods and services.

■ *What do you love most about working in the agriculture sector?*

My parents have cows, sheep and chickens, so, I am very aware of the hard work that goes into this sector and how those working in this sector do this because they love it and because of not money or prestige.

Looking at the high unemployment levels in this country, I really think this sector has the potential to create a lot of SMMEs and job opportunities if given the right support.

■ *How can the public and private sectors help facilitate the participation of more women in the agriculture sector?*

Women inherently work to develop the communities they are in so it's not about being given special treatment but more about being given opportunities to work in the sector without any gender prejudices.

■ *Where do you believe the value lies in a diverse, inclusive work environment, particularly in terms of gender representation?*

We cannot achieve anything if we all work with people who look and think like us. The beauty of a diverse and inclusive work environment is that it allows people from different backgrounds and gender to express themselves and raise ideas or topics that would have not been raised if they were not included.

For example, women tend to bring loyalty, compassion, empathy, hard work and discipline to the work environment. Danone is deliberate about its transformation and under our sustainability goals, Impact Journey, we have a goal to uplift people and the community. One of the key performance indicators here is to close the gender pay gap in senior management by 2025.

■ *Your thoughts on the evolving role of women in leadership and the significance of mentorship?*

The evolving role of women is to ensure that they provide opportunities for the next generation. We should all be working to create visibility and spaces where younger women can feel represented and aspire to get into these roles and even do better than us. Mentorship and Sponsorship is key to ensuring that the women coming into the working world feel seen, supported and even guided where necessary.

■ *Do you think there is enough female representation in the industry?*

No there isn't enough women representation in the agricultural sector. We need to build a future for agriculture. That is why we were so pleasantly surprised at our first visit to Ncora Dairy where we met Sinokuphila a farm manager with 10 years of farming experience, Nandipha a 26-year-old acting dairy manager to name but two.



Danone's Women in Dairy programme looks to tackle food security

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These women are passionate about farming. They have been exposed to it their entire lives and simply need guidance to create their own opportunities. Women in agriculture are currently not the norm and this is why Danone is so proud to be working with Ncora Dairy and hopes to see many more women going into farming.

■ Based on your experience, what advice would you give to women pursuing a career in agriculture today?

It is important to go into agriculture for the right reasons and to understand that like most careers you will have to work your way up the ranks but with discipline and high work ethic anything is possible.

■ What future trends do you predict for the sector?

The main concern for all of us is sustainable farming and I predict that this will continue to be a key focus for the sector.

■ What message do you have for women this Women's Month?

Owning your space, be unapologetically you (whilst being kind and empathetic to other people's struggles and challenges) and lastly let's work together with men to create a South Africa that we are all proud to pass on to our children and grandchildren.

ABOUT ROBIN FREDERICKS

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