

# Maths opens doors for a career in science

**LYNNETTE JOHNS**

Staff Writer

A GROUP of young women has heard how many professional doors could be opened for them if they pursue a maths qualification after school.

The annual Women in Mathematics mini-convention is designed to boost interest in maths as a subject, and to indicate to girls what they could use maths qualifications for.

Hosted by the Science Learning Centre for Africa at the University of the Western Cape and held in honour of Women's Month, the programme is the brainchild of centre director Shaheed Hartley.

It is held annually, and includes 100 maths pupils from previously disadvantaged communities across the city, brought to hear stories of how hard work and dedication have reaped dividends.

Yesterday, the girls listened to professionals such as Professor Anusuya Chinsamy-Turan, a palaeontology professor at UCT, electrochemist Dr Lindiwe Khotseng, who is working on a project to see the use of hydroelectricity in transport and homes become a reality, and astronomer Dr Bonita de Swardt.

Hartley identifies female scientists who have made their mark against enormous odds to speak to the girls at the annual convention.

Khotseng is a product of Gugulethu High School who studied further at the UWC before completing her PhD at Stellenbosch University.

Chinsamy-Turan wanted to become a science teacher at a time when only boys were encouraged to do maths and science.

Yesterday she shared some of her story with the girls, telling them her father encouraged his three daughters to be independent women who



**PAYING ATTENTION:** Lentegeur High pupils, from left, Jeralda September, Wendy Silekwa and Gouwa Damon, listen closely to astronomer Dr Bonita de Swardt, second from right.

PICTURE: MJOUSI MADELA

could support themselves.

Chinsamy-Turan told them many women successfully juggled families and careers, and urged them to take responsibility for their own futures.

"Stay focused, do the best you can. Enjoy what you do and the rest will fall into place, but you have to work towards it, then bursaries and scholarships will come and make themselves available to you," Chinsamy-Turan said.

Khanyisa Balfour, managing director for Engen's community social investment programme, said they wanted to increase the number of girls on their bursary programme.

One way to do this was to ensure that more girls took maths and science for matric, she said.

"Often children don't see women of colour in positions like this," Balfour said of the professionals the girls met yesterday.

"These are ordinary people from humble beginnings.

"They show our girls what can be done."

Nwabisa Sotashe, 18, a Grade 10 pupil at Matthew Goniwe High, said she was planning to study medicine.

"Today I learnt so much, I was really motivated," she said.

Yesterday's programme had opened her eyes to the number of careers available to maths and science pupils, she said.

"It was good to learn about different careers and to know we can do anything if we have maths."

lynnette.johns@inl.co.za