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Author

Oliver Fuo

Affiliation

North-West University,
South Africa

Email

Oliver.Fuo@nwu.co.za

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Guest Editors

Prof L Kotze
Prof AA du Plessis

Journal Editor

Prof C Rautenbach

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I have known Professor Willemien du Plessis since I joined the North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus, as a PhD student in June 2010. In my first few encounters with her she came across as motherly and the type of professor who had very little life out of her office and books. She was always deeply immersed in work in her office, which looked more like a ransacked mini library to me. The table in her office was always full of opened books, legislation, Government Gazettes, students' chapters, and other documents that I could not decipher. I visited her office many times but never felt unwelcome. She regularly took a few minutes to crack jokes with me before talking about what had brought me to her office. Her jokes, her passion for her job and her warm reception lured me into her office regularly. I became close to her and soon we were talking about family matters: her daughter, my kids and my wife. Her free conversations with me on these matters revealed her humility, her care for my wellbeing and her ability to transcend cultural barriers.

It is a great honour to pen a commendation about the exceptional contributions and mentorship of Professor Willemien du Plessis, a truly remarkable environmental law scholar whom many of us call the mother of South African Environmental Law. As she exits the academic stage on a well-deserved retirement, I wish to take a moment to reflect on the profound impact she has had in the field of environmental law scholarship and her contribution to advancing social justice.

It is common knowledge that Professor Willemien dedicated her life to the pursuit of knowledge and the use of that knowledge to nurture young scholars, to contribute to the development of laws and policies, and to provide new scholarly insights on a diverse range of environmental law topics. As others have attested to, her research and academic work has been groundbreaking, with more than two hundred publications that have advanced our understanding of critical environmental law issues. Her development and application of the concept of framework environmental legislation in South Africa is one good example of her long-lasting academic contribution. In a 2001 publication¹ professors Johan Nel and Willemien du Plessis explored the generic features and intended outcomes of environmental framework legislation, which they used to test the extent to which these are catered for in South Africa's *National Environmental Management Framework Act 107 of 1998 (NEMA)*. Through their analysis they justified why NEMA is South Africa's environmental framework legislation. The 2001 SAJELP article by Johan and Willemien is significant as it remains the only peer reviewed publication that provides clarity on the generic features and intended outcomes of (environmental) framework legislation. In addition it is the only contribution that applied the notion of "framework environmental legislation" with reference to NEMA. My search on Google Scholar reveals that there is no other scholarly publication on environmental framework legislation in South Africa and beyond. Scholars and practitioners in South Africa commonly refer to NEMA as the country's framework environmental legislation based on the insights provided by Nel and du Plessis. Their 2001 article remains an original contribution to scholarship in the field of environmental law and governance in South Africa and it is still prescribed reading in many LLM in Environmental Law programmes in the country.

The generic features of and intended outcomes of framework legislation developed by Nel and Du Plessis in 2001 can be used to justify why two South African local government statutes key in my own field of work can be considered framework legislation: the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000; and the Local Government: Municipal Finance Management Act 56 of 2003. These Acts have almost all the features of framework legislation, and their implementation has yielded chequered results vis-à-vis their intended outcomes. Therefore, the framework of

¹ Nel J and Du Plessis W "An Evaluation of NEMA based on a Generic Framework for Environmental Framework Legislation" 2001 8 *SAJELP* 1-37.

analysis adopted by Nel and Du Plessis can be meaningfully applied to other areas of South African law.

Through her mentorship and capacity building Professor Willemien has significantly contributed to the advancement of social justice in South African and beyond. As a PhD student, Professor Willemien gave me two very generous bursaries from her personal research account. She was not my promoter! She had heard that I was very hardworking, from a poor background, and therefore needed financial support. I am just one of the countless students from all backgrounds that Professor Willemien has financially supported throughout her career. I cannot list more for want of space! Willemien has been a guiding light for countless students and colleagues from all racial backgrounds, nurturing their intellectual growth and providing the kind of mentorship that goes beyond textbooks and lecture halls. She has empowered the next generation of environmental law scholars to carry the torch forward, instilling in them a passion for discovery and advocacy. Her mentorship has been instrumental in fostering the development of leaders who are committed to addressing pressing environmental challenges and advocating a more socially just future. As Willemien transitions into retirement, her legacy will undoubtedly continue to shine brightly through the countless individuals whose lives she has touched.

The retirement of Willemien is well-deserved. She leaves behind a profound legacy that will continue to inspire and guide us all. We wish Prof. Willemien a retirement filled with joy, relaxation, and the knowledge that her life's work has made a significant and lasting difference. Her wisdom, kindness, and dedication will be greatly missed, but her influence will continue to flourish in the hearts and minds of those she has inspired.

Oliver Fuo

* Oliver Fuo. LLB (Buea) LLM LLD (NWU). Associate Professor and interim chairholder of the SARChi CLES Chair, Faculty of Law, North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa. E-mail: Oliver.Fuo@nwu.ac.za. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1442-8599>.