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Road has not been easy^P for new public works MEC

Asanda Nini

Being "recalled" via text message while Matatiele mayor in late 2013 was one of the most painful episodes of her life and career for newly deployed public works and infrastructure MEC Ntombovuyo Nkopane.

But the provincial ANC's decision to remove her later turned out to be a blessing in disguise for the former principal and teacher.

It ushered her into provincial politics, culminating in her joining the provincial legislature a few months later in 2014, and eventually being unveiled as one of the three new faces in premier Oscar Mabuyane's revamped cabinet last month.

Born in Matatiele's Fiva location 60 years ago, Nkopane's political journey has not been easy.

The widowed mother of three was the third of four siblings who grew up under difficult circumstances, she said at her Bhisho office this week.

Both her parents had been unemployed, and at one point her family had to depend on her father's disability grant and on handouts from neighbours and relatives.

After matric, Nkopane studied teaching in Maluti, where her activism was ignited.

"This is where I was introduced to student politics and where my love for politics blossomed.

"I started working as a teacher in 1983 and joined the Transkei Teachers' Association in 1984; that shaped me as an activist in the workplace."

She was active in the structures which influenced the for-



ETHICS IS EVERYTHING:
Public works and infrastructure MEC Ntombovuyo Nkopane at her offices
Photograph: MICHAEL PINYANA

mation of Neusa, which later became Sadtu in 1989.

Nkopane led Sadtu in her region before she was also elected into SACP structures in Mount Fletcher.

While teaching in Fletcherville, she was elected to the ANC Women's League in the area.

She was later elected to the ANC regional executive committee in the then Wild Coast region, at the time encompassing areas in the now OR Tambo, Alfred Nzo and Joe Gqabi regions.

In 1999, her beloved ex-mineworker husband died.

"It was not easy when my husband died, leaving me with three children," she said.

"He was the only person who had loved and cared for me."

A year later, she took over from her late husband as the

ANC branch chair, while in 2000 she was deployed by the ANC to serve the Umzimvubu municipality.

She then resigned as a principal and focused on her council work.

Nkopane headed several council portfolios before being elected speaker in 2004.

Two years later, she was deployed to the Matatiele municipality as council speaker, before she took over as mayor in 2010.

"As a mayor I oversaw some projects and picked up that there were irregularities in the awarding of a certain tender in the municipality.

"I raised concerns and at the same time ruffled some feathers; later, a dossier was written by fellow comrades to the ANC provincial official alleging all sorts of things about me.

"That was when I was

hauled into a DC hearing by the ANC.

"However, when that verdict came out, it cleared me of all wrongdoing.

"To my surprise, a few days later I got an SMS from the province, asking me to resign as mayor.

"It was a very painful instruction and decision, but because I had the ANC's interest at heart, I obliged," she said.

"It was not long before I got a call summoning me to the ANC provincial office in Qonce."

In 2014, Nkopane made the cut to the Bhisho legislature, and was later appointed deputy chair of chairs.

She later replaced Alfred Mtisi as the chair of chairs, and she also chaired and served in almost 10 legislature committees, until she was appointed MEC.