

**ABSTRACT
PARALLEL WORKING SESSION**

GENDER

Cheryl de la Rey
Vice-Chancellor
University of Pretoria, South Africa

**Empowerment of Women and Gender Equality:
Lessons from South African Higher Education**

This presentation offers an analysis of the changing landscape of South African universities with the purpose of identifying key factors that have facilitated and hindered the promotion of women's empowerment and gender equality.

Significant improvements in women's participation and success rates were achieved within a decade. By 2000, the proportion of women in public universities was 53% and in 2007 59% of all graduates were women. The overall participation and success rates of women compare favourably with many other countries where attempts to change the under-representation of women has had a much longer history.

Having achieved these changes at the level of student participation, South Africa is now grappling with the question of how to achieve significant changes at the level of academic staff and university leadership. Based on the overall analysis, the presentation will suggest that equity-related legislation and policies are necessary but insufficient mechanisms to bring about gender equality. The changing nature of gender inequality requires progressively more innovation in the interventions that universities may undertake.