

Closing the gender gap: Transformation in the construction sector

At the end of the third quarter of 2019, prior to the Covid-19 crisis, [only 11%](#) of the roughly 1.3 million people employed by in South African construction industry were female. While the number of men still far exceeds that of women in the sector, female representation in the construction industry has [increased by 7% over the past decade](#) from 140,000 to 150,000 from 2009Q3 to 2019Q3.



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"A recent study by the Boston Consulting Group has found that diverse companies produce 19% more revenue. Not only does diversity generate a bigger bottom line, there are a multitude of other benefits, including access to a variety of perspectives, increased productivity, improved performance, as well as heightened company reputation," says Devi Paulsen-Abbott, vice president of dmg events which will be hosting the African Construction and Totally Concrete Expo in 2021.

"Our events highlight the gaps that still remain and provide opportunities for honest conversations to be held in order to enable transformation."

Female role models

Says chief quantity surveyor at the National Housing Corporation in Tanzania Margaret Ezekiel, "The number of women in the industry is increasing, especially in the informal sector. This is because when girls see that women can succeed within the industry, they realise that they can succeed too. These days you can find engineering classes and construction sector classes with more women than previously."

Asked about the importance of female representation in male-dominated fields, chief quantity surveyor: infrastructure services - education at the Gauteng Department of Infrastructure Zanele Mabathoana says, “If you look at women, we’re the majority of the population. The construction industry has been making spaces to be occupied by the population. But who are you creating spaces for if the majority of the population do not have a say and are not included in the decision-making process?”

Mabathoana believes that industry events are crucial for engaging women as well as for disseminating information and networking. “A lot of information is shared at these events which is important for the industry at large. If women intend to be part of the industry, then they have to know what is happening within it.”

African Construction Awards

Both Ezekiel and Mabathoana are judges in the African Construction Awards – an event which is co-located with the African Construction and Totally Concrete Expo and powered by the National African Federation for the Building Industry (NAFBI). Now in its sixth year, categories include the Female Innovator of the Year Award and the Women in Construction Award.

Paulsen-Abbott shares, “It’s important to show the positive impact that a gender-balanced workforce has so we spotlight female professionals who excel in their roles and have a proven track record of implementing positive change to push the industry forward.”

She concludes, “We need to allow women to participate beyond administrative and HR functions and highlight the opportunities that are available for everyone in the sector in the sense of true transformation.”

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