

Nissan SA HR leader Asha Sivenath



By Imran Salie

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Meet Asha Sivenath, Nissan South Africa's human resources general manager for talent management. Sivenath has more than 20 years of experience in HR, having worked for leading companies like South African Breweries, as well as the Department of Trade and Industry.



Asha Sivenath | image supplied

As part of Women's Month, we caught up with Sivenath to find out more about what Nissan South Africa is doing to support women in the automotive workspace. Here she also talks about her role as a leader in the sector and what needs to be done to change gender representation.

■ ***Tell us about yourself and your career***

I come from humble beginnings and have always been driven to do my best and put passion and energy into whatever I do. I have always had a passion for watching people's growth and development.

The two decades in the human resources space, as well as the individuals who played a positive role in my growth and development. I was honoured when earlier this year I assumed the responsibility for talent management for the Nissan Africa Regional Business Unit (RBU).

■ ***Discuss your role as a female leader in talent management in the automotive industry***

This is an exciting time to be in this space. With Africa being identified as the last frontier of growth, I'm honoured to be

amongst the team of individuals who support the nurturing of talent as we transform to become a more inclusive sector.



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With Nissan's intentional drive to nurture diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), the focus is on supporting talented women to assume leadership roles within Nissan. Much of this is done through actively coaching, mentoring and supporting these future leaders through Nissan South Africa's various talent initiatives and training and training and development programmes.

■ ***How is Nissan South Africa supporting females in the automotive workspace?***

As a business, we appreciate the importance of a diverse workforce. This belief is best seen in the commitment to removing unconscious biases, maintaining a workplace that is inclusive, and creating opportunities for women to showcase their knowledge and skills.

To ensure fairness and sustainability, this commitment is encapsulated in our people-centric policies and employment equity targets aimed at increasing overall female representation. The goal is to have 25% of women represented in leadership roles by 2025. To make this a reality, Nissan has further ensured that the range of training and development programmes includes a 50/50 gender split, creating an environment for rising stars in the company to flourish.

Programmes such as career development planning, talent management, succession planning, and mentorship of female employees and prospective graduates looking to enter the sector, best demonstrate Nissan South Africa's role in supporting women in this automotive manufacturing space.

These programmes include the Nissan Graduate Trainee Rotation Programme aimed at attracting and accelerating the development of female graduates; the Engineering Career Ladder which increases female representation in engineering fields; and several leadership programmes to make technical trades more appealing as potential career paths for women, highlights our long-term view of developing a strong talent pipeline.

Since 2017, an investment upwards of R56m has gone into the training and development of female employees, resulting in representation in senior management positions.



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■ **What do you love the most about working as a woman in the automotive industry?**

It has to be working with many passionate, talented and diverse individuals. Over the years, I've come to understand the power of building healthy relationships with my associates. This is critical in working together to co-create a relevant career development plan which allows the individual to reach their full potential.

Travelling to other Nissan markets across the globe has provided me with the exposure to see some first-in-class ways of operating, positively benefitting everyone I work with. Lastly, it has to be the ability to collaborate with other women from across the Nissan Africa, Middle East, India, Europe (including Russia) and Oceania region.

■ **Gender representation is still not perfect in the auto industry. What do you think can be done to change this?**

Will is the first step. I've already spoken about the measures that Nissan South Africa has in place. Understandably we are not alone in the commitment to ensure the representation of women in influential positions: our fellow industry associates are too. This is a big positive.

This will together with progress people-centric policies will enable the realisation of an inclusive environment for all who operate in it. I've already spoken to the engagements we have with graduates to help them understand the many exciting opportunities.



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■ **Can you share some personal tips for getting to the top in your industry?**

It is important for women entering or transitioning into this industry to understand that their path is limitless and that if they are driven, they will reap the rewards.

Having a voice and taking up space are also important. Being informed and knowledgeable of the business as well as your subject matter will showcase your passion for the industry and the business.

It's important to drive one's own career path. Together with one's manager, creating a development plan will assist with a structured programme for your learning and development.

Lastly, the automotive manufacturing industry is open to all who are determined to grow along with it.

■ **What advice would you give to women that want to work in the automotive sector?**

Knowledge is power. Acquire as much knowledge and skills as possible. Don't forget about the human touch though. So be sure to also network with others who have been in the space for longer and stay on top of industry trends.

■ **What words of advice/inspiration/motivation do you have for females this Women's Month?**

Anna Freud is said to have once said: "I was always looking outside myself for strength and confidence but it comes from within."

This is important because it highlights the possibilities that exist within a diverse and inclusive workplace where everyone is encouraged to show up as their most authentic selves.

ABOUT IMRAN SALIE

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