IT companies must get more women into tech roles

South African IT companies must get more women into tech roles in 2020 to help break the cycle of a male-dominated industry and fill the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) talent demand in the sector.

Noxolo Adimorah

That's the call from Noxolo Adimorah, a value adding partner at a South African black-owned and 32% women-owned digital and enterprise communications companies, Itec Tiyende.

"It feels like we're talking about this all the time, but we see little movement. It's 2020, and women remain hugely under-represented in the South African tech sector. They're underpaid, passed over for promotions and faced with everyday sexism. It's critical for the future of the industry that we get more women and girls into the sector," said Adimorah.

According to WomeninTechZA, an initiative that aims to help address the gender gap in the ICT sector, only 23% of tech jobs are held by women in South Africa: out of 236,000 tech roles, women occupy 56,000 of them. But while it's critical to improve diversity in the workplace, the industry is struggling to attract young women to the sector, says the initiative.

"Diversity is vital for the future of society and relevant technology. We can't build technology solutions for everyone if everyone isn't involved in their production. Women make up more than half the population and the workforce of the future

should be aligned with the realities if our populace," said Adimorah.

To help alleviate the problem, Itec Tiyende supports non-profit organisation Numeric, which offers after-school maths lessons to more than 2,000 learners in low-income areas in Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town, and helps train maths teachers.

More than two-thirds of the learners in the Numeric programme are girls, and in 2019, they improved their maths marks by an average of 15%. The most improved learner improved her maths mark by a staggering 62%: she started with 20% at baseline and completed the year with 82%.

Adimorah said increasing the number of students taking maths was key to young people, especially girls, being able to study and move into the IT sector. Just over 121,000 students passed maths in South Africa last year.

"Our support for Numeric is a cornerstone of our efforts to show young women that the tech industry is a viable and exciting career choice for the future. This programme helps young people reach their dreams by taking the right subjects, and seeing a pathway to a meaningful career," she said.

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