

LexisNexis CEO recognised in 9th Gender Mainstreaming Awards

Issued by [LexisNexis](#)

23 Sep 2021

Videsha Proothveerajh, CEO and chairperson of the Board of legal technology company, LexisNexis South Africa, was named runner-up in the Inclusive Leader: Large National/Pan African or Multinational Company category of the 9th Gender Mainstreaming Southern Africa Awards, held in September 2021.



She was among the top six regional candidates who went on to represent Southern Africa in the awards, which are an initiative of Business Engage with sponsors including Accenture, Absa and Barloworld. The winner in the category was renowned African scholar, His Excellency Prof. Dr. Ambassador Tal Edgars.

Proothveerajh said, "It is a great honour to have placed second in these prestigious awards, designed to encourage the private sector to achieve more meaningful representation of women in the mainstream of business."

"I would like to applaud all 73 companies who entered from Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and Cape Town, as well as the 23 regional finalists and winners who have made such commendable strides in flying high the flag of gender transformed corporates in South Africa."

Gender transformation slow

The latest research into the legal landscape of South Africa conducted by LexisNexis in partnership with the Law Society of South Africa (LSSA) shows that women remain in the minority in the legal profession in South Africa. Measuring ownership by gender, in 2016, 53% of firms were owned by men; 20% were fully female and 27% had mixed ownership. Five years on and the needle has shown some encouraging movement with 47% of firms being male owned; 27% now being fully female owned and 26% with mixed ownership.

The 2021 report found an even spread when it comes to decision making but less than twenty percent have a so-called strong majority of decision-making power. Essentially men still make most of the decisions in the legal sector.

Proothveerajh, who over the last 20 years has worked for high-profile ICT companies, including EDS, Microsoft and Intel and run her own business focused on business strategy, has been recognised for championing change in the South African technology and leadership spaces where women remain under-represented.

Among workers with disruptive technical skills, women represent only 14% of professionals in cloud computing and engineering, 28% in data and AI, and 36% in product development according to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report for 2020.

Appointed as the first woman CEO to lead LexisNexis South Africa in 2019, Proothveerajh is continuing her mission to level the playing field for women who currently represent only 10% of South Africa's CEOs.

Under her leadership, LexisNexis South Africa has achieved 67% female representation on its board, 56% female representation in senior management, 43% in top management and employee surveys have shown that 83% of the workforce believes that the organisation is serious about diversity and inclusion.

"If we truly want to uplift our societies and our economy, we need to collectively pave a way for a future where women are seen as equal. And women must also raise their hands and be counted," says Proothveerajh.

Accolades

Her impressive list of accolades includes: the most influential Woman in Business and Government for ICT in Africa; a Forbes change maker in Africa; one of the 50 most inspiring women in South Africa as part of the global Inspiring Fifty initiative and among the 'Africa 50' of Leaders in Data Centres and Cloud, driving change in Africa.

A recent accolade for LexisNexis was being recognised among the Top Gender Empowered Companies in the Business Support Services sector of the Standard Bank Top Women Awards programme in 2020.

The company follows the lead of global parent RELX, implementing a policy that recognises the importance of inclusion to the future of the business, championing diversity, gender equality, equal pay and a company-wide mentoring programme.

The company is making a deliberate effort to create opportunities for women and to hire women where opportunities exist and where it finds the right skillsets. It is also building communities that support women to thrive and overcome barriers, including involving women at work in mentorship programmes, creating an environment where it is safe for them to share, learn and overcome some of the ingrained prejudices against them.

Among the numerous initiatives launched since Proothveerajh took up the reins are an LNSA Women's Network (a peer support platform to empower women in the workplace and personally), Advance-U (a learning and development initiative), a review of maternity, parental leave and work from home policies and Women in Tech Conversations (a mentoring forum where leading women in the tech space share their insights). LexisNexis has also designed and launched a graduate programme targeting young women from previously disadvantaged backgrounds.

"It's not just about helping women advance. It's also about assisting individuals from all marginalised groups who don't always have a voice or who are not always recognised for the leadership attributes they possess," Proothveerajh adds.

LNSA is striving to create a gender-neutral workspace where employees are supported and empowered to develop their full potential, regardless of their sexual orientation or disability status with initiatives such as LGBTQI, Unconscious Bias Workshops and various Employee Resource Groups.

Proothveerajh believes that enabling people to bring their 'whole' selves to work ultimately strengthens the organisation, increases competitiveness and enhances business performance, and that allowing everyone's voice to be heard enables more innovative decision-making.

Within the broader community, this mother of two (a son and a daughter) has always grasped opportunities to be an instrumental change-maker on issues close to her heart. At LexisNexis she combines her passion for empowering women and the girl child, with the company's purpose of Advancing the Rule of Law.

Enhancing the potential of the African continent by advancing the rule of law is the legacy she wishes to achieve during her time at LexisNexis South Africa.

Proothveerajh has an MBA from the University of KwaZulu-Natal specialising in Advanced Strategic Management. She is also a certified SAP and ITIL consultant, an accredited NLP coach and has a Postgraduate Diploma in Business Management and a Bachelor of Commerce degree.

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