

Growing the role of women from drawing boards to construction sites



By [Bongani Dladla](#)

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The greater participation of women in the construction sector will only be achieved through positive initiatives that will result in culture changes and the creation of equitable work environments.



Bongani Dladla, CEO of the Construction Industry Development Board

There are valid concerns about the low levels of women ownership of construction companies in South Africa and a stagnating trend in the allocation of contracts. There is a similar need for accelerated movement through the grades for women who are already registered with the Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB).

These trends were, no doubt, aggravated by the general sharp decline in construction activities experienced during the pandemic period.

This also highlights the need for steps to be taken to realign public sector spending on construction towards transformed contractors, especially women and the youth.

More than a 'game of percentages'

But the participation of women should be more than just a 'game of percentages'. It goes to the heart of the broader debate about how investments in infrastructure can contribute to the economic transformation of South Africa and address critical challenges relating to unemployment, poverty, and inequality.

It is, thus, not only important to remove the structural barriers which prevent women and the youth from participating fully in an industry which is so often labelled as "male-dominated".

We must go beyond this to create an industry in which the undoubted skills and talents of female entrepreneurs – who have as much potential as their male counterparts – are recognised, celebrated, and rewarded.



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CIDB programmes

At the CIDB we are fully committed to a vision of a transformed built sector that is inclusive and contributes to a prosperous South Africa. The organisation continues to play a pivotal role as a regulator and catalyst for transformation in the construction industry.

Higher levels of participation by female contractors and a greater share of work allocated to women-owned enterprises are among our key priorities. One such initiative was the establishment of the ERWIC awards which focus attention on the

empowerment and recognition of women in construction. Through this we have created an important forum for women to build platforms and networks which will realise opportunities for future growth.

Through our flagship BUILD programme we are focusing on skills development and training to support contractors in achieving higher levels of accreditation which will enable them to bid for larger contracts. Moving forward, we will ensure that women will be primary beneficiaries of training and skills development programmes.

In partnership with other participants in the construction sector the CIDB also wants to pursue further initiatives which can advance the growth of women-owned enterprises.

- We need to reach prospective participants in the industry at a much earlier stage through educational programmes that focus on STEM subjects – science, technology, engineering, and mathematics – and a stronger emphasis on entrepreneurship.
- We have to create a conducive environment within the construction sector which encourages women to pursue careers in the industry. Women should gain wide-ranging experience within the practical work environment to prepare them for managerial positions later in their careers.
- Together with women, we must design dedicated training programmes which recognise the barriers faced by female participants and offer sustainable solutions. In addition to technical construction skills, these programmes should also focus on areas such as costing, accounting, labour relations and marketing.
- We must provide clear policy guidelines to all infrastructure clients on gender bias procurement and development.
- We have to engender a greater awareness about public sector support programmes that can be accessed, especially through the Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA) and the Small Enterprise Finance Agency (SEFA). In line with government's 'war on red tape' it should streamline bureaucratic processes that might hinder access to finance or technical support.
- We should strengthen mentorship programmes which will enable female entrepreneurs to tap into networks of support and experience. Mentoring provides a protective environment within which emerging entrepreneurs can learn, experiment – even fail on occasions – but, eventually, grow.



Recognising the role of women in construction year-round

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Post-pandemic recovery plan

There is no doubt that construction plays a vital role in the post-pandemic economic recovery and reconstruction. This was a recurring theme at successive international investment conferences hosted by the government over the past three years and is at the core of strategic initiatives to revitalise infrastructure and move towards sustainable energy solutions.

The National Infrastructure Plan 2050 sets out a long-term programme to build, manage, and maintain the infrastructure which will drive economic and social transformation. This consists of extensive investments in public sector infrastructure projects which will stimulate activities in the private sector.

The CIDB will continue to be a key player in these initiatives. Through our programmes and initiatives, we will continue to promote the contribution of construction in the South African economy and society.

We are confident that, as many of these projects move from the drawing boards to the actual construction sites, the participation of women in the industry will continue to grow.

ABOUT BONGANI DLADLA

Bongani Dladla is the CEO of the Construction Industry Development Board.

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