

The empowerment of women is key to success in tough economic times

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From township entrepreneurs to corporate leaders, this Women's Month, the UCT Graduate School of Business will be hosting several prominent events focussed on empowering and promoting women in business at all levels in the economy.

In tough economic times, gender diversity could make the difference between success and failure, says Dr Linda Ronnie, Associate Professor at the UCT Graduate School of Business (GSB).

"Gender diversity has been linked with creativity as well as increases in productivity and the bottom line. It helps organisations maintain a competitive edge," she says. "It's puzzling therefore that only 29% of senior roles in South Africa are held by women."

Dr Ronnie, a long time champion of women empowerment, is one of several individuals at the GSB who are committed to advancing women in business. And this Women's Month, the school is dialling up its efforts, hosting several events to support women at all levels in the economy.

First off, the GSB Solution Space in Philippi will host women leaders and entrepreneurs working in the surrounding communities of Philippi, Nyanga, Gugulethu, Mitchells Plain and Khayelitsha, along with GSB students, alumni and the school's broader network, for a Learning Lunch on 8 August.

Ndileka Zantsi, Solution Space-Philippi Programme Coordinator, comments that it is a fitting event to kickstart the GSB's Women's Month activities, because it speaks to the school's ambition to spark transformative impact.

Established two years ago, the GSB Solution Space is the first official university site in a township community. It offers students and stakeholders a place to meet and engage beyond the traditional spaces of the university.

"The vision of the GSB Solution Space in Philippi is to be a catalyst in enabling an ecosystem for inclusive development across sectors, to be a bridge across the divides in our country, so it is appropriate that we kick off women's month with this focus on the empowerment of women working on the margins of the economy, who have a great deal to offer in terms of creativity, innovation and unique insights," says Zantsi.

Dr Judy Dlamini, founder of the Mbekani Group, will be sharing insights from her recent book on female leadership, *Equal but Different* and, as part of the event, two scholarships for the GSB's Developing Women in Leadership programme, running at the school in August, will be awarded.

The GSB has always led change in African business and was one of the first business schools in the country to launch a leadership development programme targeted exclusively at women - more than a decade ago. Today it has two short courses catering for women at various stages in their career: the Executive Women in Leadership Programme; and the Developing Women in Leadership Programme.

"These courses are transformative, and seek to give women the tools to build confidence, develop a leadership presence, and build relationships to help them better manage their various roles and responsibilities," says Kumesheene West, Director of Executive Education at the GSB.

"We are thrilled to offer two women from the community of Philippi and surrounds a chance to join us on this year's

programme. Not just because we believe we have things to share with them but because their presence will add immeasurable value to the class as a whole in terms of facilitating rich and authentic discussions and that give birth to new ideas and identities,” she says.

Other GSB events planned for Women’s Month include the Prominent Women’s Speaker Series in Johannesburg on 14 August and a discussion in Cape Town on 22 August headlined “Women’s Perspective: Business Disruption and the 4th Industrial Revolution”, where GSB alumni will share their experiences.

A highlight of the month is the annual, student-led Women in Business Conference on 17 August. All profits from this event are channelled towards a scholarship for a woman to study at the GSB.

High-level speakers including Professor Shirley Zinn, former Group Head of Human Resources at Woolworths, Mimi Kalinda, Co-founder and MD of Africommunications Group, Makoma Lekalakala, Director of Earthlife Africa, Dr Gaby Prinsloo and Naadiya Moosajee, Co-founder of WomEng, will address the theme: “From passion to action: Changing the world we live in”.

Newly inaugurated UCT Vice-Chancellor, Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng, will also be speaking at the conference.

“We believe it is symbolic that UCT’s new Vice-Chancellor – a woman at the top of her game - will be joining us at this special event,” comments West.

“Women’s Month provides us with an opportunity to celebrate the success of women but also to hold each other accountable to push for more women in top roles throughout the economy so that we can break through the 29% mark,” says West. “And while we know that there are many systemic issues to change, there is also much that we can change at a personal and interpersonal level to accelerate this shift.”

As Dr Makgathi Mokwena, a therapist and leadership development expert who co-convenes the Developing Women in Leadership programme at the UCT GSB, says, it is important that women don’t feel they need to wait until the system changes before they can advance.

“We don’t need to settle for being on the receiving end of a system that doesn’t serve us well. We need to advocate for change, take steps to develop our skills and support each other. We need to be the change we want to see in the workplace.”

For more information about the UCT Graduate School of Business’ Women’s Month events visit:

www.gsb.uct.ac.za/womens-month.

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