

She Is Forestry launches video series on women making their mark in the forest sector

In celebration of Women's Month in South Africa, She Is Forestry SA has launched the first four videos in a series aimed at inspiring the next generation of girls to stay in school and study forestry and the numerous career opportunities it provides.



Source: Supplied

She Is Forestry SA, a non-profit forestry organisation promoting and uplifting women across the forest and forest product sector, launched the videos at their annual Women in Forestry webinar on 3 August. Their aim is to produce a series of videos showcasing all the potential careers found within forestry and related industries, from growing trees in a nursery to ensuring they reach maturity in a plantation while safeguarding the environment on which forestry relies.

Commenting on the initiative, Jane Molony, executive director of the Paper Manufacturers Association of South Africa (PAMSA) adds: "As our sector looks to build its talent pipeline, initiatives like this one expose youngsters to a world of opportunities using a green, renewable resource – farmed trees – to support the economy, deliver goods to society and build communities."

Celebrating female forestry

"People still have a 1970s view of forestry, that it is a male-only career path. This simply is not true," explains Makhosazana Mavimbela, executive director of the Forest Sector Charter Council. "We have women working in every single conceivable role within the sector, from operating heavy machinery to conducting world-class research. Women populate our HR, communication, finance and marketing positions, they manage plantations and nurseries, mills and lumber yards. Women own forestry businesses, contractor operations and small forestry-related enterprises. In short, there is a wealth of forestry opportunities just waiting to be explored."

Each video follows a single woman as she discusses her role and the career path she followed. The women also explain some of the challenges they have faced along the way and how they have circumvented them.

"The beauty of the videos is that high school learners watching them will be able to relate to the women they see on the screen. They are women who have come from rural communities and had to work hard and overcome obstacles to get where they are today. They are a testament to what belief, determination and discipline can deliver, making them powerful role models for future generations to aspire to," explains Forestry South Africa's communication consultant, Katy Johnson, who was involved in the commissioning and production of the videos.

The videos came from a request made by several of the principals from the schools that She Is Forestry SA supports, which were experiencing high dropout rates among female scholars. They felt career advice about the potential avenues open to women and positive role models already living these careers might help the girls to see the array of potential paths open to them, and help to decrease the numbers dropping out.

Expanding forestry value chain

While a career day at each school was an option, it would not have been sustainable and would, therefore, have a limited reach. Thus, it was decided to commission videos that will be hosted on She Is Forestry SA's YouTube channel ShelsForestrySA, and made publicly available. That way, any school, organisation, individual or group could access them and be inspired by the exceptional women and abundant career avenues found within the forestry sector.

"While these first four videos focus on quite obvious forestry careers – forester, nursery manager, forestry researcher and forestry contractor – we plan on commissioning many more videos to cover all the potential forestry career avenues, from environmental auditing to accounts, pulp processing to wood science and beyond," says Johnson.

"While this is a forestry initiative, She Is Forestry SA directors include government officials who will be taking this to their colleagues in education and suggesting this could be an initiative rolled out across other sectors. We believe forestry should be a trailblazer for something bigger, a multi-sector initiative to promote science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) subjects to women and girls across the country by using real and relatable female role models," she adds.

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