

Moving towards real empowerment in mining

Although more women are now involved in the mining, it remains a largely masculine domain, and still lags behind many other industries when it comes to inclusion.



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“This includes a masculine ideology and behaviour that women often have to adapt to if they want to progress. By contrast, I have had the privilege of working with a woman in an executive position at a major mining company – where the experience was quite different. It was a positive affiliation with our communication showing mutual respect for each other’s position and field of expertise,” says Ndomupe Masawi, principal environmental scientist at SRK Consulting.

Mentoring

She says that the mining industry in South Africa – indeed Africa as a whole – had made great strides in the inclusion of women, with African mining companies ranking high in terms of women in executive positions and on company boards.

“We do, however, need to do more for ourselves to make sure that the changes are not superficial and temporary. Women in executive positions need to support women at junior levels through mentoring and career guidance, so that women can be represented from the field to the boardroom,” Masawi says.

Sue Reuther, the company’s principal environmental consultant, is involved in the International Women in Resources

Mentoring Programme (IWRMP). “The programme gives mentees the chance to identify, discuss and address specific concerns and ways to improve their careers. The mentees also engage with high-powered individuals in the mining industry, gaining valuable insights and confidence from their alternative views and perspectives.”

She was convinced the mining sector was already developing a more inclusive culture, with ever decreasing tolerance towards intentional or unintentional discriminatory behaviour.

Progressing past token appointments

The industry was slowly progressing past token appointments, says Lisl Fair, principal consultant in sustainability at SRK Consulting, and moving toward a more progressive state where women are appointed for their skills and ability to stand their ground.

“Some positions are still being highlighted as the ‘apex’ of inclusivity, such as underground workers and engineering positions. I believe an environmental or social scientist – who is able to voice her opinions and advise senior male mining executives – deserves just as much recognition for advancing in a traditionally male-dominated environment,” she says.

Creating opportunities

Success in empowering women is steadily progressing in the right direction, says Vassie Maharaj, director, partner and principal consultant in social risk management and stakeholder engagement at SRK Consulting.

“Gains in this area are evident in the fact that several of our female consultants are often sought out by our mining clients to play leading roles in engineering, compliance and performance assessment projects. Their in-depth knowledge of certain mining operations and their understanding of mining-related legislation is held in high regard – and is widely acknowledged by clients, colleagues and industry peers alike.”

“We actively encourage and afford opportunities to women to achieve growth and development in mining-related careers, including engineering and various fields of environmental and social science,” she says.

More than half of the company’s associate partners are women, creating a strong pipeline of women into the partner group, the highest decision-making body in the company with respect to strategy and operational matters,” says Vis Reddy, SRK Consulting managing director.

“Women have held board and partner positions at SRK since the 1980s. We encourage women employees to take leading positions in projects, and many are project managers supervising some of our major projects.”

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