

Can SA's Silicon Valley crack the gender inequality code?

Recent reports indicate that South Africa is establishing its own 'Silicon Valley'. From tech giants like Amazon and Panasonic increasingly opting to set up headquarters in the country, to local start-ups hiring as a result of growth, many career opportunities in the tech space are becoming available to South Africans. However, the country is still faced with a large skills gap with an even larger disparity when it comes to women.



Source: [Unsplash](#)

This is according to Riaz Moola, CEO of HyperionDev, a tech education provider, who says that women account for only 13% of South African graduates in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields and hold a mere 23% of tech jobs.

“Nowadays, it is much easier for women to pursue careers in tech with the growth of online bootcamps making studying more accessible. This is enhanced by the availability of part-time courses, the ability to learn remotely, along with the provision of mentorship and one-on-one sessions to help students to be job-ready by the time they complete their studies.”

Crisis-proof careers

Moola notes that employment in STEM occupations suffered smaller declines than non-STEM occupations during both the Great Recession and Covid-19, which suggests that employment in this sphere is relatively resilient.” With women and their employment opportunities being disproportionately affected by the pandemic, STEM offers a way for them to almost crisis-proof their careers.”

Chanelle Bosiger experienced the fallout from the pandemic first-hand. In April 2020 she lost her job as an e-commerce sales manager at an online retailer that was implicated financially by the lockdowns as it relied greatly on the tourism industry.

With developers being in higher demand in the wake of the pandemic, she participated in a full stack web developer bootcamp to pursue her interest in technology and change her career trajectory.

Bosiger has since regained employment as a junior software engineer. She points out that women are severely lacking in her field. "As a woman, I wonder why this is still the case when tech is a field for everyone."

Ensuring future employment

"Not only are the number of STEM jobs growing at a faster rate than other occupations, but these jobs continue to rank higher on the pay scale too[vii]" says Moola.

This was the motivation behind Amy Marais' decision to further her tech skills. "I knew I needed to be in a field where the demand for work was high and ever-growing." Prior to completing a full stack web developer bootcamp, she was a student and part-time sales consultant and is now on her way to becoming a software developer.

Busisiwe Ngubane-Webster's decision to upskill herself from accountant to data analyst was also based on her fears of unemployment. Despite being skilled and capable, she felt that the job market in her industry was overly saturated and competitive. This, combined with a desire to increase her salary and switch up her career, saw her pursuing a more stimulating profession that would provide better growth opportunities.

"President Ramaphosa has set South Africa a goal of being 'a nation that has fully harnessed the potential of technological innovation to grow our economy and to uplift our people' by 2030. If the country is to attain this, we not only need to close the digital skills gap but the gender gap within it too," concludes Moola.

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