

Women need to stand together in driving the gender equality agenda

 By [Sindy Peters](#)

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Meet [Nana Madikane](#), a qualified chartered accountant with over 15 years' experience and a partner at PwC South Africa. She's also a member of PwC's South Market Area leadership team responsible for driving the firm's diversity and transformation strategy in Southern Africa.



Nana Madikane, partner/director at PwC South Africa, transformation and diversity & inclusion leader - PwC South Market Area

We interviewed Madikane to find out more about her role, some of the successes at PwC in terms of its diversity and inclusion goals, and where the value lies in an inclusive work environment, particularly in terms of female representation.

■ ***Tell us more about what your role as a transformation and diversity & inclusion leader at PwC entails.***

Coming from very humble beginnings has positioned me very well to execute on the transformation and diversity & inclusion strategy, as I've experienced being in a position where there's lack of opportunities, hence I'm passionate about providing opportunities to those who would ordinarily be excluded based on their background, geography, race or gender.

My role also entails me being a main driver of female-focused programmes within the firm, aimed at accelerating the development of females and increasing the pool of females eligible for leadership roles. In addition, I'm a role model to many young black females in the firm, and have been instrumental in driving mentorship initiatives for young females with potential, as well as mentoring young girls.

My most important role though is raising two confident future female leaders who know who they are, who are true to their values and have compassion and passion to help others in need.

■ ***What have been some of the successes at PwC in terms of its diversity and inclusion goals?***

Our biggest success for me personally was in October 2016 when our firm attained Level One BBBEE contributor status for the first time through driving enterprise development programmes focusing on small black-owned and black-female-owned

businesses. From a firm perspective, we have gradually increased the number of female representation in the leadership structures through focused initiatives to accelerate development of females for future leadership roles.

As a firm, we started our D&I journey in 2006 and we have learnt that unless you tailor the business case and make it resonate, your strategy will not work. Our globally consistent approach to diversity articulates why diversity is a business imperative and all of our people around the world understand this strategy. We know that there is no single silver bullet for D&I and that it takes many different approaches and interventions to change culture. Our biggest focus at the moment is on unconscious bias as we believe this to be the number one barrier in creating a truly inclusive culture. Our focus is also on getting people to understand that respecting difference and valuing difference are two separate things.

Our new partner admissions and promotions are always looked at from a gender and race perspective to ensure we have a healthy balance between male and female promotions, as well an appropriate level of ACI representation. We also ensure we have accountability at the top, and our local CEO is definitely a true gender diversity champion. I also sit on the leadership team in my capacity as transformation, diversity & inclusion leader which reinforces just how seriously this is taken in the firm.

■ ***Where does the value lie in a diverse, inclusive work environment, particularly in terms of female representation?***

Research shows that companies that embrace diversity are better performers than those without a diverse workforce. Diversity and inclusion strategies have become a tool for attracting talent, giving organisations a competitive edge over those that don't have diversity at the top of their agenda.

If we look at the [20th PwC CEO Survey](#), CEOs listed innovation as their number one priority in order to realise their company ambitions, however, they're struggling to find the creativity skills they need to achieve this. Other softer type skills include problem-solving, adaptability, creativity and leadership – a move away from the traditional masculine type skills of the past to those that can be considered more feminine traits.

■ ***In your opinion, in South Africa's private sector, are we making steady enough strides in women empowerment and closing the gender pay gap?***

South African private sector trends show encouraging advancement in gender diversity, and this is driven mainly by the right tone at the top from senior leaders in corporates. We've also recently seen the Johannesburg Stock Exchange's listing requirement that a board of directors of a company should have a policy on the promotion of gender diversity at board level and that this should be reported to shareholders in their annual report.

While the trends show a move in the right direction, it is undeniable that the pace of gender diversity is not as fast as we would like it to be. We still have an unacceptably low number of female representation in senior leadership structures on boards, whilst the number of women in the workforce globally is increasing. We're also seeing an unprecedented trend that shows that there is a healthy pipeline of highly educated and confident females coming up the manager ranks. Companies should therefore focus on implementing deliberate strategies to retain these females and accelerate their development for

future senior leadership roles.

■ ***Is there a female figure that has had a positive influence on your life?***

I'm inspired by many leaders from different walks of life, backgrounds, geographies, generations and cultures. I'm mostly drawn to resilient females, females that stand for change and challenge injustice, be it in the social space or in the workplace.

I've been influenced by the older generation of women such as my grandmother who passed on four or so years ago who imparted wisdom on to me. I've been influenced by the life stories of my peers who showed so much tenacity and overcame a lot to be where they are as great young leaders. I've also been influenced by a number of female entrepreneurs from disadvantaged backgrounds who've built businesses from nothing and without any backing and support, who are beacons of hope in their communities.

I've looked up to influential female leaders who have climbed corporate ladders in male-dominated environments, as well as influential women making impacts for the wider society and standing for social justice. I'm intrigued by people's life journeys and stories – whether it's that they're a leader of a multinational firm, or a leader in their community or family. There are many lessons to learn from many different leaders for many different reasons.

■ ***What is your message for Women's Month?***

I recently participated in the [SheEO SleepOut](#) that happened recently, and the experience reminded me of the power of women when united for change. Whilst strides are being made globally to drive the gender equality agenda, we are nowhere close to where we should be. It is also becoming obvious that the pace of change will continue being very slow without the right level of female representation in decision-making structures, whether in industry or government.

We need to stand together as women and drive change, by putting our hands up for seats on leadership tables. We need to challenge bias practices and double standards in our workplaces. We need to do our bit to drive change in whatever space that we are in. We need to stand together and stand behind initiatives that seek to build confident girl children who believe in their own abilities and know that they can achieve anything that they put their minds to.

ABOUT SINDY PETERS

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