

Levelling the playing field and changing the narrative

Women have gradually integrated into the mining industry since 1996 when the South African government rejected the International Labour Organisation (ILO) convention of 1935, which prohibited women from working underground. Although women held positions in other-above ground roles, due to their gender they have faced numerous challenges in this male-dominated industry.



Refilwe Mkhize and Tintswalo Mukansi of Mxcorp

In addition, opening up mining to women was reinforced by Mining Charter of 2002 and other legislation which required a 48% representation in the industry.

Despite 20 years of transformation, women still face far greater challenges than their male counterparts and still have to fight for equal opportunities in the workplace, say Tintswalo Mukansi, terminal manager at the Mixcorp Tutuka Power Station and Refilwe Mkhize, commercial and compliance manager at Mixcorp.

“It has always been that women in high positions are seen as not deserving compared to our male equivalents. You spend your entire career proving that you are worthy of your position, not only to our male colleagues but the entire industry. While you’re proving your worth you have to deal with career crippling injustices such as the lack of mentoring and career development opportunities, sexual harassment and balancing work and family time, one of the challenges of working mothers irrespective of industry,” says Mukansi.

Sparking an interest

More and more women are joining the workforce and changing the narrative of mining being the reserve of men only, this leap has brought a significant change to the future of female youth who plan to enter any currently male-dominated industries.

“However, the reception of us being part of the workforce is still not at the level where it should be. Mining companies need to provide equal opportunities for women, especially youth by introducing programmes for tertiary leaving students which are inclusive and provide internships that will shape future women in mining. It is one thing to have a women's league in mining to acknowledge and support women already in mining however to spark interest for the youth and tertiary students or graduates we must give women exposure and appoint them in leadership positions,” says Mkhize.

Boasting over 19 years of experience with heavy haul company, Transnet, transporting goods throughout South Africa and overboarder within the SADC region, Mkhize believes she is the change she wants to see in the industry, and calls on all women who aspire to join any male-dominated industries, to do so with determination.

“ Always remember that the difference starts with you - as a woman you want to exert change or see the change you need to be that change first. ”

Women today are very independent, string willed and competitive. With such an attitude and an aptitude for mining and engineering, no door should be shut on our faces simply because we are known to be the weaker gender, says Mukansi.

“Organisations from mining industries should be given opportunities to be part of our schooling programmes and use their aptitude skills to guide our youth towards career opportunities within this sector. There is a lot we all can benefit from including young women in this industry as they exhibit fresh modern ideas,” she says.

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