



THE SIGNIFICANT ADVANCES MADE IN GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT OVER THE YEARS

The South African society is crying out for transformation to rectify the wrongs of the past. Part of the outcry is for the age-old-phenomenon of gender inequality to transform. Gender inequality is experienced differently across different cultures. It is also very evident in our built environment sector being male and white dominated. The need for transformation, definite marked change in form, nature and appearance is truer than ever before.

Women have worked very hard to break into the mainstream sectors of the economy, and even harder to gain recognition. Challenges experienced by women in the built environment varies from stereotypes and victimisation. To bring about equal and long-lasting change in the status of women in the sector the legislative and regulatory reforms and micro-level interventions within the built environment are essential. Even more so, every citizen must apply common courtesy, deal with their expectations and pre-conceived opinions, have understanding and accept the role of women in society as this will go a long way in bringing about transformation.

As part of the South African government's response and initiatives to increase the participation of women, youth, and persons with disabilities in the economy, several initiatives and programmes have been introduced into the public sector for compliance such as affirmative action and Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) amongst others.

The Council for the Built Environment (CBE) hosted a Transformation Indaba in 2019 which resolved that Transformation Collaborative Committees (TCC) be established in response to government's priorities to address policy constraints and associated processes hindering transformation in the Built Environment. To that effect, the Women Empowerment and Gender Equality (WEGE) together with the Health, Safety, Public Protection and Universal Access (HSPPUA) TCC are such initiatives aimed at addressing the quest for an increase in women's participation, issues of health, safety, and universal access standards in the Built Environment.

The WEGE TCC is led by Ms Prudence Madiba, who was born and raised in Seshego, outside Polokwane. She is a Senior Manager at Eskom's Generation, Control, and Instrumentation Engineering Department. As a champion of women empowerment in the Built Environment, she chose an engineering career when joining the University of KwaZulu-Natal which had partnered with the Limpopo Government to recruit for different science programmes in efforts to increase the provincial uptake and skills build up programme. "My life was shaped by strong women in my family; my grandmother, and my mother, who pushed boundaries in their chosen fields of medicine, teaching, and theology. The values they taught us was to promote a culture of learning and striving for excellence" says Madiba.

The Health, Safety, Public Protection and Universal Access (HSPPUA) TCC is led by Ms Mandisa Pepeta-Daki, who currently serves as a Councillor on the South African Council for Architectural Profession's Fifth Term Council since 2019. She established her company, Qhakaza Africa Consulting, in 2004 at the age of 24 years and has actively been the first worker, Managing Director and Principal for over 18 years. Pepeta-Daki says, "The leadership opportunities in the Built Environment has made me understand the responsibility of every seat that I occupy. I stand representing even those who are not present at that table". Pepeta-Daki further emphasises that there is a great need for awareness as vast contraventions are being perpetuated against women and persons with disabilities.

IS THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT BUILDING BACK BETTER FOR WOMEN'S IMPROVED RESILIENCE?

To answer this question, three key factors are required: visibility, reporting and monitoring. Ms Madiba's perception is that there are good initiatives such as the WEGE platform to deal with pipelining and training of both women and youth in various Built Environment organisations. If implemented and monitored correctly, they can assist in turning around the picture and increase the participation of women and youth.

There have been efforts, however evidence of exclusion in regulations when it comes to universal access towards women exists. Women will fall pregnant in their lifetime; therefore, universal access standards and implementation should cater for such. Awareness and corrective measures must be in place to address the issues identified, says Pepeta-Daki.

"The resilience of women in the Built Environment can be improved by constantly creating platforms which provide support structures to ensure that empowerment programmes targeting women are not only launched but are also sustained and made successful. There must be a continuation of influence on economic policies that support the development of women, and these policies must be shared with women in the Built Environment, to showcase role models and create mentors to increase pipeline to give hope", says Madiba.

"We must ensure that women have access to opportunities, in that even in difficult conditions, they are afforded meaningful opportunities and sustainable contribution to mentor the younger generations . I believe young girls and women who join the built environment need to find committed mentors to guide them towards professional registration", Pepeta-Daki adds.

The industry must take on a gender mainstream approach that promotes gender equality, inclusion, and plans and budgets to address power imbalances and stereotypes of what women can and cannot do. Furthermore, a significant difference for women in the Built Environment can be achieved through key drivers such as agility, collaboration, innovation, talent attraction and retention.

Madiba's message for young girls who want to pursue a career in the Built Environment is, "The built environment presents limitless opportunities for us to continue to challenge the status quo and prove yet again that yes, we are enough. There are many career options cutting across all sectors of the economy and endless opportunities for you to develop your own stream and invent your own technologies. The advancement of technologies, together with the uptake of the fourth industrial revolution, has made it easier to participate in the economy and still achieve other desires, e.g., family, etc. The figures still favour our male counterparts but remember that it is up to us to not let the woman of 1956 down. Governance and policies are there to support us, so let us continue to make a difference".

Pepeta-Daki's message to young girls who want to pursue a career in the Built Environment is, "The Built Environment is for leaders, game changers, trailblazers, and community builders; all decisions that you make affect and impact lives. It will create spaces where people play, live, walk, sleep, drive, therefore their safety will be in your hands. By learning and mastering your craft, you can be part of this dynamic space and profession. We invite you to this beautiful field to learn and master your craft. There are mentors who have gone before, willing to hold your hand and usher you to Mastery. We are waiting for you".



To contribute towards improving resilience and the empowerment of women in South Africa, the CBE will host a series of webinars on Women Empowerment and Gender Equality (WEGE).

The inaugural webinar will be hosted on 05 October 2022 under the theme **"Shattering the glass ceiling"**.

The webinar series will speak to key focus areas of empowerment, leadership, capacity building and interventions to Amplify the Role of Women in the Industry.