

## Achieving Gender Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion in the Built Environment Professions

*The Women Empowerment and Gender Equality Transformation Collaborative Committee (WEGE TCC), spearheaded by the Council for the Built Environment (CBE), promotes the participation of women in the built environment in the South African economy and fair treatment in their areas of work.*

Despite the strong business case for gender diversity in the built environment, the gender representation, advancement, and retention of women in the sector remains an elusive dream with the latest figures released by StatsSA showing that women make up more than 50% of the South African population; however, only 13% of registered persons within the built environment professions were women in 2021.



Mr. Msizi Myeza, Chief Executive Officer at the CBE

“Like any other professions in the country, the built environment sector is facing serious challenges: Slow pace of transformation, ageing personnel, shortage of critical skills and high unemployment rates, especially amongst our youth. It is therefore important for the sector to take strides and develop strategies on how best to address crucial issues identified in the skills pipeline strategy for the built environment, especially gender representation, participation, and retention”, says Msizi Myeza, CEO at the Council for the Built Environment (CBE).

Various studies corroborate that while it is important to raise alarms about the slow pace of transformation, the gender gap in the built environment commences in primary school and that is where we must intervene. Moreover, a report by the African Academy of Science revealed that by primary school the belief of ‘girl jobs’ and ‘boy jobs’ are already entrenched, meaning that the gendered school curriculum also influences girls’ and boys’ future career choices. A growing body of evidence indicates that female attrition in built environment professions occurs increasingly at the point between tertiary education completion and career transition.

Globally, statistics show that women exit architecture, engineering and construction professions at a higher rate compared to their male counterparts and females leave within the first five years post-graduation. In 2014, the Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA) reported that 70% of the women who graduated with engineering degrees left the profession after starting their careers because they felt isolated in their jobs. Numerous studies confirm that women who leave the professions had limited access to career advancement and were dissatisfied over remuneration than those who persisted. Other major obstacles that women encounter in the workforce include sexual harassment, inflexible work practices, lack of sanitary facilities on construction sites and the masculine culture of the industry.

“The CBE believes achieving gender equality in the built environment requires a multi-pronged approach, combining hard and soft laws, strategies, including setting of targets, that are enforced and monitored. Therefore, the alignment between South Africa’s economic, gender, and procurement policies becomes instrumental for the attainment of transformation in the built environment. CBE also believes that this can be achieved through the formulation of gender sensitive policy frameworks and interventions to improve the working conditions of women”, adds Myeza.

The work of the *Women Empowerment and Gender Equality Transformation Collaborative Committee* is anchored around creating a diverse and inclusive built environment, by building the pipeline of female talent throughout the skills pipeline, identifying support for female entrepreneurship, advocating and promotion of gender inclusive policy and procurement, facilitating the representation and participation of women in key decision-making structures, coordination of coaching and mentorship initiatives and through the creation of platforms for strategic partnerships and networking.

Interventions that bolster women’s feelings of belonging in the built environment are critical at post-secondary and early career levels, long term career development, career re-entry programmes which encourage women to resume their careers after taking a break to start a family, mentoring professional coaching and professional development and flexible work practices are also critical for the development and retention of women.

In conclusion, Myeza says, “The Council for the Built Environment encourages built environment professionals and councils to champion transformation by positioning themselves as an agent for the change we desire to see in the profession.”

For more information on the Council for the Built Environment, and the *Women Empowerment and Gender Equality Transformation Collaborative Committee*, visit [www.cbe.org.za](http://www.cbe.org.za)