



## MEDIA RELEASE

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### **Inspiring Change: Devising Strategies and Solutions to Achieve Gender Transformation in the Built Environment Professions**

On the 5th of October 2022, the Council for the Built Environment Board (CBE) held a webinar under the theme: “Shattering the Glass Ceiling in the Built Environment Professions” and where stakeholders joined forces across the industry online to deconstruct the barriers, identify enablers and devise strategies towards achievement of gender equality, diversity, and inclusion in the built environment.

The discussion was facilitated by Ms Prudence Madiba, Chairperson Council for the Built Environment, Women Empowerment and Gender Equality (WEGE) Transformation Collaborative Forum. The keynote address was delivered by the Honourable Deputy Minister of Public Works, Roads, and Infrastructure, Noxolo Kiviet, who was joined by the panellists namely, founder of Prana Consulting Refilwe Lesufi., BRICS Women Business Alliance Chairperson, Lebogang Zulu, Architect and Director at Colab Concepts Architects, Kirsty Ronne and Senior Lecturer at University of South Africa, Dr Allison Anthony completed the panel.

The webinar commenced with an official opening introductory remarks by Dr Dlamini about CBEs mandate and touched on the challenges facing women in the built in the environment.

Following this, was input by the Honourable Deputy Minister of Public Works Roads, and Infrastructure Noxolo Kiviet, who commenced her address by quoting Oprah Winfrey: “Doing the best at this moment puts you in the best place for the next moment”. Your environment cannot define who you are and where you are going. She reported that Oprah Winfrey faced personal struggles, however, she shattered the glass at age 19 when she became the youngest person and the first African- American woman to anchor the news at Nashville's WTVF-TV. She emphasised that the built environment must transform, and we must be obsessed about gender issues in this sector. She asserted that despite the growing need for built environment progression, women remained an untapped resource. Attracting, supporting, and retaining more women in the built environment benefits everyone by increasing the potential to develop inclusive, innovative

solutions for the complex challenges the country is facing. She urged women in the built environment to take their rightful space and obtain an equitable share of economic activity. Women need to be their own advocates, identify opportunities, and rise to the opportunity. We have the freedom to be the best versions of ourselves. Create your own opportunities (Carp Diem).

Refilwe Lesufi, founder of Prana Consulting imparted her views on “shattering the glass ceiling and career success factors for women to advance into leadership in the engineering profession”. She said women in the built environment continue to face the “glass ceiling” which refers to the invisible, yet real, cultural barriers faced by women and minorities looking to build their careers by advancing to managerial or executive-level roles.” She urged women to stop with the rhetoric and start working. Refilwe, recommended that women need to find mentors and sponsors and become role models to young girls.

Refilwe, emphasised that it is imperative for companies to understand the conscious and unconscious biases, to recruit and promote individuals based on talent and potential, encourage meaningful mentoring relationships, provide flexi-time options for all, eliminate harassment and reserve engineering work for engineering professionals. She stated that she hopes that the CBE will utilise the database of women-owned enterprises will be used by the CBE to champion the implementation of gendered procurement and will influence the reconfiguration of infrastructure-related databases to identify for the identification of the built environment enterprises. She reiterated that the sector needs to develop incentives for companies that implemented gender-inclusive procurement.

The primary focus of Lebogang Zulu’s, (BRICS Women Business Alliance) presentation was on how women can change the status quo by devising tangible strategies and solutions for dismantling monopoly in the built environment. She critically analysed and interrogated whether economic transformation has been achieved at representation and at a substantive level.

She argued that our economic system is oppressive and unjust. She reiterated that we need to practicalise transformation and move towards an export- orientated strategy. We need to examine how do we use domestic markets to develop capacity, and how do we use international markets to grow women and youth construction SMME’s.

Lebogang stated that the fourth industrial revolution has fuelled in the next wave of innovations, presenting an opportunity to address gender inequality in the built environment, preparing women and youth entrepreneurs to service an ever-increasing demand for homes and social

infrastructure. Currently, women and youth entrepreneurs are not liberated because of a lack of knowledge, access to innovation and technologies and the inability to access market opportunities.

She also presented opportunities for women and youth in the built environment to partner with the South African Chapter of BRICS Women Business Alliance on “The Innovative & Building Technologies Construction-Biz Capacity Development Programme”. The capacity- building programme is designed to transform the built environment by creating an army of technology- inclined and capable women and youth construction entrepreneurs (suppliers and service providers) to bridge the Innovative Building Technologies (IBT) construction value chain knowledge gap that is presenting opportunities for the growth and development of the construction and increase in export market trading activities.

Kirsty Ronnè prefaced her presentation by lamenting that only 271 out of 8 842 registered architectural professionals are women. She also argued that black, female- owned architectural practices are even fewer. She asked the participants if “Would cities would be different if more voices were heard?”. She reiterated that the “representation matters”: i.e., the representation of women in architecture will assist to create equitable infrastructure.

She argued that it is crucial for black women to see their black female counterparts serving as role models in the architecture. She reported that mentoring will assist in addressing the transformational challenges, as mentoring provides support and encouragement required to thrive in their careers. She then conceptualised a volunteer-based women- to- women mentoring programme. She emphasised having a strong army of female mentors and role models could help reverse the barriers women face. Mentoring is a powerful tool of support and continuing professional development are powerful tools of support, which is beneficial for both sides of the partnership in developing key skills in communication, resilience, confidence, leadership, and self- awareness. She emphasised that the benefits of women- to- women mentoring are enormous and include: 1) more motivation and self-assurance, 2) role modelling, 3) support for career progression and 4) serve as a forum for advice and sharing ideas. Kirsty called encouraged built environment professionals to champion transformation by positioning themselves as role models and mentors for younger female entrants in the skills pipeline.

The final panellist, Dr Allison Anthony highlighted that the current procurement legislations that we have are adequate but require monitoring and evaluation tools to identify gender- responsive procurement. Dr Allison Anthony has come up with great recommendations of for immediate and long-term achievable actions that can be taken by the state.

As a way forward, the CBE has made submissions on the Public Procurement Bill, towards it is a commitment of the CBE that we will affect some of the achievable solutions that it will with the submission that the entity has made, and we seek to track and evaluate the implementation thereof. The CBE will also champion gender- responsive training for the Councils for the Built Environment Professions (CBEPs) and industry stakeholders. The CBE is also reviving the Built Environment Advisory Council which will bring achievable solutions on diversity, equality, and inclusion in the sector.

**ENDS**

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**About the CBE:**

The Council for the Built Environment (CBE) is a Schedule 3A Public Entity that reports to the National Department of Public Works and Infrastructure. It is a regulatory body established under the Council for the Built Environment Act 43 of 2000 (the CBE Act) that coordinates the following six Councils for the Built Environment Professions - Architecture, Landscape Architecture, Engineering, Property Valuation, Project and Construction Management, and Quantity Surveying – and through memoranda of understanding these include Town and Regional Planning, Land Surveying, and Environmental Assessment Practitioners.

The CBE was established for the purpose of instilling good conduct within the Built Environment Professions, mobilising transformation in the Built Environment Professions, protecting the interest of the public and advising the South African Government on Built Environment related issues.

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