

The present state of gender equality in corporate South Africa

By [Nabeelah Jansen](#), issued by [MetroWired](#)

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"In my experience, while many corporates showcase a representation of women diversity, the real face of gender equality is seen in the everyday encounters of women. The facade doesn't often mirror the reality."

Women's Month seemed to take on its own underlying theme this year with a call for corporate transformation and women inclusivity echoed in every message. The confusion accompanying each published statistic is how the ongoing efforts by South African businesses, groups, leaders and influencers still dissipated into continued reports of stagnation and reductions in gender equality.

South Africa ranked 20th out of 146 countries in the 2022 Global Gender Gap Report released by the World Economic Forum, falling from our previous year's 18th position and adversely ranking 92nd in the report's first pillar – Economic Participation and Opportunity, having not met 50% of its gender equality goals this year.



Nabeelah Jansen, head of strategy at MetroWired (Pty) Ltd

Women today are simultaneously challenging numerous workplace constructs including wage equality, minimum leadership and corporate representation, the growing skills gap, decrease in Stem educated graduates and insufficient career opportunities, while struggling to maintain a leading matriarchal role in society and family.

In the background, the demoralisation that stems from gender based violence, the stand against stacking workplace odds against women, societal expectations and family pressures remain among the leading reasons why women feel that their lives are a choice between career and family, choosing to leave the workforce and never realising their career aspirations. With less than 25% of women representation in technology, we all know a woman who had the potential to lead a nation, and who felt she had to tap out. This reality is why corporates should revisit how women are represented in the organisational model.

The majority of corporates attempt and practice women inclusion, but an equity-based model prioritises diversification, instead of fitting diversification into the current mould. The difference in an equity-based model is that women are actively utilised for their gender distinctions and abilities, as opposed to shifting parts to fit women's needs into a traditional mould. A complete equity-based organisational model considers these five principles at its core: The inclusion of women in leadership beyond compliance, wage equality, developing millennial and Gen Z female voices, the ability to mentor, and acknowledging life beyond the workplace.

- **Inclusion of women in leadership roles beyond compliance**

In South Africa, it is common for women to exist as BBBEE tick boxes. In businesses where executives share trust relationships, ceding control is difficult. The opportunity cost of inducting women into leadership roles for the purpose of compliance is that women are rendered powerless with a title, never benefitting from their leadership capabilities. The differentiator in the way women lead lies in their EQ. Women rate higher than men in empathy, interpersonal relationships and social responsibility. As homemakers, women instinctively command with a delicate hand, naturally create teams, practice tough love and solve problems without coercion. Women at the helm, with freedom in decision-making lead organisations into uncharted territories.

- **Wage equality**

Efforts to increase female representation in the Stem workforce continue, yet are suppressed by the reality that that women in Stem earn 28% less than men do. Equal compensation values women, instils trust in the organisation, reduces the anxiety to provide and asserts self confidence in women's ability to perform. For women to see the value of pursuing and sustaining a career in Stem, compensation must support this goal.

- **Developing millennial and Gen Z female voices in the workforce**

New entrants in the corporate landscape battle to find relatable voices. As a result, future leaders are not challenged, or supported to confidently formulate trailblazing responses to industry challenges. Nurturing an open environment builds women leaders who are able to voice, challenge and lead topical industry discussions.

- **Who can mentor, and the ability to mentor**

Mentorship gaps exist because the responsibility is associated with seasoned leaders with a proven record. The ratio of females requiring guidance far exceed available mentors with the time, patience, willingness and training ability to act in this capacity. All women in business share a joint accountability to each coach a woman to their own level, and a joint privilege to be coached into the next level. This is how we prepare the next generation of women to become powerful mentors. The accountability of every employee (male and female) to coach plays a pivotal role in closing South Africa's skills and gender gaps.

- **Acknowledgement of life beyond the workplace**

Workplace expectations don't accurately consider the differences in a woman's role in society to their male counterparts. The role of women in Africa differ from the rest of the world as the responsibility to provide is generally considered a matriarch's duty in the family unit. Companies leading the curve in equity and diversification acknowledge this and offer flexibility, choice and benefits in educational opportunities, customisable working hours, hybrid working models and emotional support.

Relative to the world, women who have the good fortune to also be South African are surrounded by organisations, groups, leaders and influencers who want to advance gender equality. How do we move past our collective good intention to evolved working environments that accurately reflect a changed world and women's progressive place in it? Do you have a unique perspective on corporate South Africa and women? [Share your opinions with us here.](#)

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A self-taught woman in technology, Nabeelah Jansen is the head of strategy at [\[https://www.linkedin.com/company/metrowired-holdings/mycompany/?viewAsMember=true MetroWired \(Pty\) Ltd\]](https://www.linkedin.com/company/metrowired-holdings/mycompany/?viewAsMember=true). She today possesses advanced knowledge of the digital environment, with the proven ability to run large scale technical projects. She is a rare find that excels by maintaining a humble learning mentality. Her passion for creating a progressive industry environment that is built on shared value engages individuals, teams, SMMEs and corporates in ICT to encompass the best in the industry through global leaders. Founder of ICT group [\[https://www.linkedin.com/company/techfridays/?viewAsMember=true TECHFridays\]](https://www.linkedin.com/company/techfridays/?viewAsMember=true), she engages her network, leadership and foresight to build an inclusive industry, where ICT professionals from entry-level to c-suite unite in a monthly meeting of minds to inspire thought.

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