

FBW Group urges businesses to raise profile of female architects, engineers

This International Women's Day, celebrated annually on 8 March, the FBW Group is urging businesses to do more to showcase the work of Africa's female architects and engineers, encouraging more women that to pursue careers in construction.



Image source: Gallo/Getty

That includes forging closer links with schools and colleges to show the merits of careers in architecture, design and engineering and the role women are playing in delivering important projects across the region. Taking a mentoring role is also important way forward, says FBW which has operations in Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda.

Many of its female team members started their careers as interns and are now working in its offices across the region on major development projects.

Antje Eckoldt, FBW Group director and its Kenya country manager, said it was important to encourage young women and show them at an early age that they can be successful in the STEM subjects of science, technology, engineering and maths.

"It is also about giving them that confidence to be involved in technical studies, to help them gain more technical understanding so they realise what they are capable of achieving and that they can make their mark in these fields," says Eckoldt.

"Businesses have a role to play in that by showing what women in their organisations are achieving and by highlighting the roles they are playing and the influence they have on delivering their success. We need to get the message out in the classroom and in front of the next generation."

Too few women coming through the ranks

Antje says that there are still too few women coming through the ranks to take up senior roles in both architecture and engineering. And challenges remain in the construction industry when it comes to the acceptance of women as project

managers and leaders.



Antje Eckoldt, FBW Group director and Kenya country manager

“There is still a culture in construction that means women have to work hard to be heard and to be respected for what they bring to projects. There is still much work to do in changing attitudes on site,” she says.

Mary Rose Akii is an architect working out of FBW Group’s Nairobi office. Speaking from experience, she says being a female architect leading on a project can be challenging.

“Very often when you go out to site meetings, people expect the boss to be a man. I’ve been in meetings where people have ignored me and started conversations with a male colleague because they assume

that I am their assistant,” says Akii.

“You can’t take it personally and you have to get on with the job. You need to have that level of self-confidence and always ensure your professionalism is at the forefront of everything you do.”



MaryRose Akii, architect, FBW Group's Nairobi office

Role models to aspire to

Miriam Ofwono, project architect based at FBW’s Kigali office in Rwanda, also believes it is important to raise the profile of women in the profession to give young women role models they can aspire to.

“It’s about seeing ‘people like me’. We need to let young women see that there are successful women in architecture, design and engineering and to start more conversations about what they are achieving,” says Ofwono.



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“We also need to promote and highlight the women who are standing out when it comes to the STEM subjects. To take away any fear factor that they are too hard or not subjects female students should take an interest in.”

Ofwono, who is from Kampala and studied in South Africa, also believes the profession has its part to play in becoming more inviting for would-be female architects and that includes becoming more “diverse” in the way it approaches design.