

# Diversity in the workplace encourages innovation

 By [Sindy Peters](#)

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With more than 10 years of experience in the built environment, associate director at Turner & Townsend Noluthando Molao has been involved in some of South Africa's more iconic projects. She was recently awarded the Women in Construction Pioneer of Innovation Award 2016.



Noluthando Molao

We interviewed Molao to find out how she was drawn into the construction industry, whether a glass ceiling exists for women in the sector, and how relevant Women's Month is in 2016.

## **Who is Noluthando Molao, and what is your role as associate director at Turner & Townsend?**

I am a driven, hardworking, career-oriented women in the construction industry. Work-life balance is important to me so I study to keep my mind stimulated, volunteer through serving at my church, discover other cultures through travelling, and enjoy spending time with my family and friends.

My role as an associate director includes the successful delivery of construction projects in the property sector and includes related infrastructure projects. I am involved in business development and am also responsible for identifying and allocating the right team structures and skills development for project teams.

I find great pleasure in implementing social and economic development initiatives through projects, and I have assumed the role of Turner & Townsend CSR representative in our Johannesburg office.

## **As winner of the Pioneer of Innovation award at this year's Women in Construction Awards, to what do you attribute your success?**

My success is as a result of a combination of continued hard work in developing my career, successfully delivering projects and supporting the business to find new opportunities. Early in my career, I purposefully put myself forward for specific types of projects so that I could build my career profile, which I've done over the past ten years.

My passion for self-development formed a good foundation for my technical abilities, and employers have provided me with the opportunity to work on iconic projects in the various sectors within the built environment. For example, I was the project manager for the construction of the new Orlando Stadium, a 40,000-seater 2010 FIFA World Cup training facility. I have also been responsible for the successful delivery of the Gautrain Station Platform Extension at OR Tambo International Airport.

I have a BSc Quantity Surveying (Honours) and a Postgraduate Diploma in Economics, Property Development and Management. I am currently finalising my research report for an MBA qualification. I also have unofficial mentors who contribute to my ability to form good relationships with my clients, managers and peers.

I served as a co-opted finance committee member for the South African Council for Project and Construction Management Professions (SACPCMP) and I am active in the development of the profession. Recently, I have submitted an application to be a mentor for the Council for the Built Environment (CBE).

■ ***What led you to a career in construction?***

When I was in matric, I was introduced to the quantity surveying profession by one of my friends who was a qualified quantity surveyor.

■ ***In your opinion, what accounts for the low proportion of women in construction globally?***

Historically, the construction industry has been dominated by men, however, the demographics are slowly changing and women's involvement in the industry is on the rise. Growing up in South Africa, my association of the construction industry was limited to labourers, men, dirt, etc. However, through career guidance awareness, I realised that the built environment is vast, that I could be a construction project manager, quantity surveyor, engineer, architect, property valuator or landscape architect. I am of the view that career awareness of the built environment is vital for informed subject selection by scholars and for the recruitment of females into the industry.

■ ***Does a 'glass ceiling' exist for women in your sector?***

Globally, construction is a male-dominated industry, but there are women at management- and executive-level in the construction industry - there could be many more.

In South Africa, there is a need to transform the industry as a whole to be more representative of the country's demographics, especially the involvement of women in the construction industry. This requires commitment from both the private and public sectors to level the playing field and to promote diversity.

■ ***Is there a female figure that has had a positive influence on your life? If yes, who and how so?***

I looked up to my mother, who had the most positive influence in my life. She was a community leader, practised as a nurse and, after qualifying from Fort Hare University, went on to become a lecturer at Dr W.B. Rhubulane Training College

for Teachers. She highly regarded education, instilled hard work, integrity and discipline in me. She raised us to believe that we could accomplish anything to which we set our minds. I still hear her instructions every day.

Advocate Thulisile (Thuli) Madonsela, the third appointed South African public protector and first woman appointee. She is a phenomenal, fearless, diligent leader who was recognised by *Time* magazine as one of the most influential people globally in 2014.

▣ ***Do you think, in 2016, it's important having a month dedicated to women in South Africa?***

I think women generally put other's needs before their own, and often the juggling act of looking after others and one's own career means we need to work harder and smarter to succeed in both areas. I think women should be celebrated, recognised and respected every day and Women's Month is a stepping stone to bringing awareness of the critical role of women in society and the workplace.

▣ ***What is your message for Women's Month?***

As women, we are nurturing by nature. I believe many workplaces mistake nurturing as weakness, however it is important as women that we bring our natural characteristics to our workplace. The diversity we bring to the workplace encourages innovation. In the construction industry, women's inputs together with men bring better construction solutions. Women can do anything, there is no limit!

## ABOUT SINDY PETERS

Sindy Peters (@sindy\_hullaba\_lou) is a group editor at Bizcommunity.com on the Construction & Engineering, Energy & Mining, and Property portals. She can be reached at [sindy@bizcommunity.com](mailto:sindy@bizcommunity.com)

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