

Growing opportunities for women, youth in energy sector

Celebrating the strong women in SA's energy industry and recognising the importance of women role models, the South African National Energy Development Institute (Sanedi) recently hosted a Women in Energy Leadership event which encouraged women and youth to take up space in the energy sector. The virtual meeting sought to create awareness and highlight the growing opportunities for women and youth to pursue a career in sustainable energy, entrepreneurship and leadership.



Source: Gallo/Getty

Under the United Nation's theme of 'Generation equality: Realising women's rights for an equal future', the event featured five inspiring women who presented on different aspects of the energy sector, with the sole purpose of inspiring women to take up science, technology, engineering and mathematics (Stem) subjects. Currently, women make up just 28% of the global Stem industry workforce. Presenters included:

- Valerie Geen, local coordinator for the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (Unido),
- Ashanti Mogosetsi, project manager: standards and labelling programme at Sanedi,
- Devaksha Maharaj (Pr.Eng), owner of Ikigai Engineering,
- Simangele Shange, co-founder of Accruetech Energy, and
- Lethabo Manamela (CA)SA, interim CEO of Sanedi.



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26 Aug 2021



Creating a better life for all

At its core, achieving women's empowerment in the energy sector comes down to a need for education, mentorship, and a breaking down of gender stereotypes. Progress in this regard stands to see a better future for women – and also a more

successful and sustainable energy sector which creates a better life for all. Demonstrating this, Geen highlighted the importance of economic empowerment of women in a sustainable energy future, and said that gender inequality is a major constraint to economic growth.

“Changing the energy industry requires a change in key policies. A recent Unido study uncovered the need for more intentional support for gender equality in the green industry. Policies are currently not geared towards promoting opportunities for women,” Geen said. The study found that 77% of women in green entrepreneurship are unaware of green industry policies and programmes which might support them. “Driving awareness is key. Equally important is our drive to close the gap in Stem education. This starts by promoting Stem career options to children from a young age.”



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Workplace mentorship

Having been mentored by Geen previously in her career, Mogosetsi reiterated the importance of workplace mentorship: “Mentorship programmes are key initiatives that we can use to cultivate women in energy. This leads to improved professionalism, communication skills, improved emotional intelligence and the retention of industry talent. Great things can happen when women support each other,” said Mogosetsi. She encouraged attendees to take the lead in their own organisations, to formulate proper mentorship programmes. “In this way, you can play your part in closing the Stem gender gap.”

Maharaj agreed, adding that women must stop retreating from getting involved in Stem-related activities. “Women think it is a man’s world, but this thinking needs to change. Women are perfectly capable of tackling technical occupations. We need to see better women representation, and this starts with promoting Stem fields to children at a young age, where girls are exposed to engineering and mathematical principles and the careers they lead to.” Maharaj has personally undertaken educational initiatives for young children in order to drive this kind of change.



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Remain open to learning

Approaching the issue from a different angle, Shange reminded attendees that women must remain open to learning from men in the workplace. “There are very few established women leaders in the industry, so we must learn from anyone we can – if they have the information and skills that we need to acquire.” She said women must learn as much as they can, and move beyond excuses to transform the SA energy sector.

Wrapping up the event, Manamela explained the key initiatives which Sanedi is undertaking to promote gender mainstreaming and women empowerment. “You are in the right country to make it as a woman entrepreneur in the energy sector. South Africa is doing a lot to create an enabling environment for women,” she said.

She added that her key takeaway from the event was that women need to work together to ensure that a better life for all is achieved. “We must be enthusiastic and say, ‘what can I do to be a part of the solution?’” She commended her fellow presenters who have stood up against oppression, overcome challenges and persevered to become role models for other women in the sector.

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