



Press Release

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Immediate Release

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**Encouraging and empowering women in energy:  
SANEDI drives a change in workforce demographics**

As Women’s Month draws to a close, it is important to highlight how sector-specific initiatives can help make it easier for women to enter traditionally male-dominated environments. The “Women in Energy” initiative has been embraced by the South African National Energy Development Institute (SANEDI), as they incorporate gender mainstreaming into achieving their mandate of promoting energy efficiency and driving research and development in the sector.

Celebrating the strong women in SA’s energy industry and recognising the importance of women role models, 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.

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:

- Valeri Geen, local coordinator for the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO).
- Ashanti Mogosetsi, Project Manager: Standards & Labelling Programme at SANEDI.
- Devaksha Maharaj (Pr.Eng), owner of Ikigai Engineering.
- Simangele Shange, co-founder of Accruetech Energy (Pty) Ltd.
- Lethabo Manamela (CA)SA, interim CEO of SANEDI.

The thought provoking webinar was organised by a committee of SANEDI’s young minds, which included Nqobile Ngcobo, Vulani Ngoveni, Wendy Jali, Nandipha Mkhuma and event facilitator Simphiwe Mokonza – a chemical engineer working for SANEDI’s IEE project.

Simphiwe has been mentored by Ashanti since joining the organisation, and was recently celebrated as one of BizCommunity's "rising stars under-35".

### **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, Valerie 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," Valerie 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."

Having been mentored by Valerie previously in her career, Ashanti 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 Ashanti. 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."

Devaksha agreed with Ashanti and added 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." Devaskha has personally undertaken educational initiatives for young children in order to drive this kind of change.

Approaching the issue from a different angle, Simangele 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 this inspiring event, SANEDI interim CEO, Lethabo 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.

SANEDI looks forward to seeing progress in the energy sector, which is destined to happen as efforts towards ‘generation equality’ pay off and lead to a more transformed and equal energy industry which is conducive to the success of women and their STEM capabilities.

Ends 887 words

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### **About SANEDI**

The South African National Energy Development Institute (SANEDI), established by the Government, directs, monitors and conducts applied energy research to develop innovative, integrated solutions to catalyse growth and prosperity in the green economy. It drives scientific evidence-driven ventures that contribute to youth empowerment, gender equity, environmental sustainability and the 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution, within the National Development Plan (NDP), through consultative, sustainable energy projects. For more information, go to [www.sanedi.org.za](http://www.sanedi.org.za).