

Thought leadership  
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## **An inclusive approach to encouraging women in energy: The time is now**

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The recent national focus on gender mainstreaming and women empowerment has been inspiring to see. As companies across all industries in South Africa showcased their strong female talent during August – “Women’s Month” – I was encouraged to look beyond just the media frenzy and think about how we can maintain the momentum, practically. I believe that promoting women in the energy sector has wider benefits for the sustainable development of our society, so how can we aid this agenda?

Having a financial background, I have experience across a multitude of sectors. However, none have excited me as much as the energy sector. There is incredible potential here to make progress towards the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Bringing our focus in the energy sector to SDG 5, Gender Equality, creates further opportunities to achieve other goals and ultimately achieve that “*better life for all*” that we are striving for.

Achieving gender mainstreaming and fostering women entrepreneurs in the energy field opens the doors to achieving several other SDGs such as: SDG 7, Affordable clean energy; SDG 8, Decent work and economic growth; SDG 9, Industry, innovation and infrastructure; SDG 11, Sustainable cities and communities; SDG 12, Responsible consumption and production; SDG 13, Climate action.

So how do we progress? The simple answer is, *together*.

There is no room for separation of efforts when it comes to gender mainstreaming. While it is female-focussed, men must be part of the process. The energy industry is traditionally male dominated, so to exclude men from our transformation efforts would be setting ourselves up for failure.

We must all be open to learning from those who are different from us. We cannot succeed in separation. If I was not open to being mentored, supported, and empowered **by both men and women**, I would not be where I am today.

The other aspect of this inclusive approach is to encourage collaboration across the energy value chain as well as peripheral industries. No one organisation can do anything on its own- we must work together to change the conversation.

This is not to say that the conversation isn’t already changing. South Africa is putting much effort towards creating an empowering and enabling environment for women in business. According to the Mastercard Index of Women Entrepreneurs, there is a growing positive change in the cultural perceptions of women as it relates to business. We are now ranked 15<sup>th</sup> in the Women’s Advancement Outcome and have moved from 35<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> in rank based on how supportive our environment is to women entrepreneurs.

At the same time, we are seeing policies and legislation arising from the government which are set to create many business opportunities in the energy sector. Recent examples are the EPC Regulations which require buildings to be energy-audited by accredited energy services companies (of which there are few – for now), as well as the 100MW self-generation announcement which is sure to see a rise in private renewable energy projects.

From suppliers, to researchers, manufacturers, financiers and so much more, there are almost endless opportunities for new business. We must collaborate to encourage women into filling the gaps. The time is now.

# Ends

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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).