



WiM


Women in Mining (WiM)
Investing in Women

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NEWSLETTER

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Empowering Herself to Lead: **Dr Nombasa Tsengwa's Boundary-Breaking Journey to the Helm of South Africa's Mining Industry**



We had the privilege of interviewing Dr Nombasa Tsengwa, the new President of the Minerals Council, who generously shared her valuable insights on self-empowerment, work-life balance, and the role of companies in creating supportive environments for women. Her perspectives highlighted the importance of personal resilience and the need for organisations to foster spaces where women can truly empower themselves and thrive.

You've had a diverse career across multiple sectors. As a Doctor in Agronomy, what drew you to mining, eventually leading to your appointment as CEO of Exxaro?

My journey to becoming CEO of Exxaro has been shaped by a range of experiences and a desire to make a positive impact. With a PhD in Agronomy, I began my career in academia, but my passion for innovation and sustainability led me to roles in government and, ultimately, the mining sector. I've worked on projects focused on technology, development, and sustainability, which prepared me for leadership in mining. At Exxaro, I've had the opportunity to lead a company committed to transformation, diversity, and sustainability, applying my experiences to drive meaningful change.

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Empowering Herself to Lead: Dr Nombasa Tsengwa's Boundary-Breaking Journey to the Helm of South Africa's Mining Industry (continued)

What are some of the key disciplines you've adopted in your career, particularly in a predominantly male industry, that have significantly contributed to your success?

I've never allowed the fact that I am a woman to limit what I believe I can achieve. From university, where societal expectations suggested I should pursue a career in teaching or nursing, I chose a different path for myself. Entering the mining industry was no different. I did not let my gender prevent me from going underground and learning the operations at the coal face. Even now as CEO, the learning process never stops. I have been privileged to work under three astute male CEOs at Exxaro who, regardless of my gender, allowed me to occupy roles that were not necessarily traditionally assigned to women but based my career trajectory on my capabilities. Ultimately, I've learned that, regardless of where you come from, with hard work, consistency, and dedication, you can achieve whatever you set your mind to.

Have mining companies done enough to foster an environment that empowers women, and what additional measures could further support women to thrive and advance in their careers?

While we have made progress towards gender equality in the mining industry, there is still a long way to go. More women are now in various roles, including leadership, but we must create an environment where they can truly thrive.

At Exxaro, our Professionals in Training (PIT) programme is designed not only to bring women into the industry but to equip them with the skills to succeed in traditionally male-

dominated fields, such as mining engineering. However, we need to go beyond just opening doors. We must provide the necessary support, mentorship, and opportunities for advancement.

To build an inclusive environment, we need strong policies against harassment and discrimination, formal mentorship programmes, leadership development initiatives, and unconscious bias training. Setting clear targets for women's representation and tracking progress is also crucial.

Though the progress is encouraging, deeper, systemic changes are needed to ensure women have every opportunity to succeed, lead, and make a meaningful impact in the mining sector.

How can women better prepare themselves to take on leadership roles? What advice would you give to women in the mining sector or those aspiring to enter and have illustrious careers?

Self-awareness and self-confidence are essential in navigating a career, especially in male-dominated fields like mining. It's important to recognise your strengths, weaknesses, and values, and to trust in your ability to lead. Continuous learning is vital, given the evolving nature of the industry, and seeking guidance from colleagues is invaluable. Networking and mentorship have played a significant role in my growth, while resilience and adaptability enable us to turn challenges into opportunities. As women in leadership, we should advocate for diversity and inclusivity.

At Exxaro, I work to create an environment

where women can thrive, leading with empathy and integrity. Remaining focused on a meaningful purpose keeps us motivated and ensures our decisions are true to ourselves. With the right mindset and support, women can achieve their aspirations.

What are your views on work-life balance, and do you believe it is attainable?

I believe work-life balance is attainable, though it varies depending on individual circumstances and career stages. For me, it's been a journey of constant adjustment. Early in my career, I focused heavily on professional development, often at the expense of my personal life. As I transitioned into leadership, I realised the importance of balancing work and well-being.

One of the most important lessons I've learned is the necessity of setting boundaries, particularly in demanding fields like mining. Allocating time for family, self-care, and personal priorities is essential for long-term success and happiness.

During critical projects, work might take precedence, but it's important to communicate with loved ones and find a balance that works for you. Prioritising tasks and making tough decisions about where to focus your time is crucial.

I also believe organisations play a significant role in supporting work-life balance. As leaders, we should create environments where employees feel empowered to set boundaries and take time off when needed. At Exxaro, we strive to promote a culture that values both high performance and personal well-being.

Article by: Dimpho Moepane

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Raksha Naidoo: From Lab Technician to Trailblazing CEO and Chairperson of WiMSA

Raksha Naidoo's journey in the mining industry stands as a powerful testament to perseverance, passion, and unwavering determination. From humble beginnings to her current roles as CEO of The Particle Group and Chairperson of Women in Mining South Africa (WiMSA), her story is one of breaking barriers and inspiring the next generation of female leaders in mining. Raksha holds a BSc Degree, majoring in Pure and Applied Chemistry, and has completed a General Management Programme at GIBS, further equipping her with the skills to navigate and excel in this challenging environment.

Her remarkable career began with a simple job search, which led her to a laboratory position at a hydrometallurgical processing plant in Northern Natal. At the time, Raksha was one of only three women on-site—alongside a receptionist and a cleaner—facing not only technical challenges but also social barriers in an overwhelmingly male-dominated industry. Despite these obstacles, her passion for the work and thirst for knowledge pushed her forward.

Raksha embraced failure as a stepping stone to success, never allowing setbacks to hinder her progress. Instead, each challenge fuelled her desire to grow. With the guidance of exceptional mentors, she honed her skills and resilience, positioning herself for the opportunities that lay ahead.



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Raksha Naidoo: From Lab Technician to Trailblazing CEO and Chairperson of WiMSA (continued)

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Rising Through the Ranks

Raksha's tireless work ethic and determination to succeed as one of the few women in the organisation paid off. Her career progressed from Laboratory Manager to Production Manager at the mineral processing plant—an advancement that required her to step out of her comfort zone and tackle new challenges head-on.

Even when faced with retrenchment, Raksha's indomitable spirit did not waver. She secured a role as Technical Production Manager at a mineral services company, where her commitment to growth and innovation caught the attention of senior leadership. This marked the beginning of an upward trajectory that would see her defy the odds.

Breaking Barriers in Leadership

Raksha's journey took an unexpected yet

transformative turn when she was offered the role of Managing Director. Although initially feeling unprepared for such immense responsibility, she seized the opportunity. In this leadership position, Raksha confronted multiple forms of discrimination based on various factors such as her age, gender, and race. However, she refused to be deterred from her goals. Instead, she focused on building a talented and diverse team that drove business growth.

Her leadership ushered in a new era for the company, transforming it from a male-dominated business into an industry leader. Raksha's bold decision to acquire a major competitor led to the creation of The Particle Group, where she now serves as CEO. Her leadership style centred on inclusion and people development, has made the company a powerhouse in its field.

A Legacy of Empowerment and Leadership

Raksha's commitment to growth and empowerment extends far beyond the boardroom. As CEO of The Particle Group, she has fostered a business culture that places people at the core of its mission. This culture encourages development, champions women's empowerment, and actively engages with local communities. Her vision

goes beyond corporate success—she aims to shape stronger individuals and create a more inclusive society.

This year, under her leadership as Chairperson, WiMSA hosted its inaugural symposium—a landmark event in the South African mining sector. The symposium provided a platform for women to connect, share experiences, and discuss the future of gender inclusivity in mining, demonstrating Raksha's continued dedication to empowering women in the industry.

Raksha Naidoo's journey from a laboratory technician to CEO and Chairperson of WiMSA serves as an inspiration to aspiring leaders across industries. Her story is a powerful reminder that with passion, perseverance, and a willingness to embrace challenges, it is possible to overcome obstacles and create lasting change. In doing so, Raksha continues to pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable future in the mining industry, shattering stereotypes and empowering the next generation of female leaders.

Article by: Dimpho Moepane

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Empowering Paths to Success in the Mining Industry: The Inspiring Stories of Nomusa Bulunga and Ntokozo Gwala

The journeys of Nomusa Bulunga and Ntokozo Gwala stand out as tales of resilience and ambition. These two women have navigated their paths with impressive determination and capability, making the most of the opportunities offered by Richards Bay Minerals (RBM) to overcome obstacles and attain leadership roles. Their stories highlight how individual commitment, as well as organisational support, play key roles in nurturing progress and advancement within the mining field.

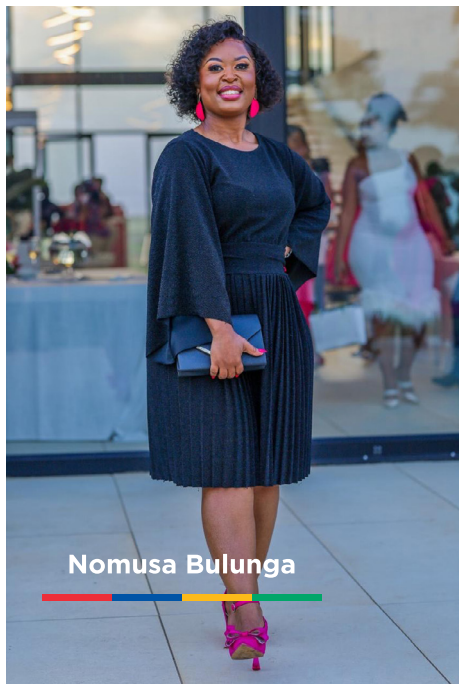
Nomusa Bulunga: Leading the Way with Skills Development and Education

Nomusa Bulunga's professional path showcases the power of learning and education in shaping one's career journey. She kickstarted her career through the Imbokodo programme at RBM, which aimed to address gender disparities within the mining sector. Starting as a Serviceperson and later progressing to become an Artisan specialising in Instrumentation Mechanism work, Nomusa's story characterises her willingness to tackle challenges head-on. Despite the sacrifices and the demanding nature of the apprenticeship programme, she remained determined in her pursuit of professional growth.

The support she received from RBM played a pivotal role in her development as a professional. Nomusa fully embraced the training and educational opportunities provided by the Imbokodo programme, including Instrumentation Trade Theory, which was supported by a scholarship. This proactive attitude, coupled with her experience across various RBM activities, significantly enhanced her technical skills and self-assurance.

Nomusa's journey to becoming an Instrument Mechanician was defined by her commitment to learning - she earned

a National Certificate in Engineering and participated in Programmable Logic Controller (PLC) training sessions. Her success in a male-dominated sector that values expertise underscores the importance of not only acquiring technical knowledge but also demonstrating competence and dependability to earn recognition and trust.



Nomusa Bulunga

She advises women starting in the mining sector to focus on education, seek help whenever needed, and work on communication skills. Nomusa's story is a reflection of the endless opportunities for growth and learning available to those in the industry who are committed and prepared.

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Empowering Paths to Success in the Mining Industry: The Inspiring Stories of Nomusa Bulunga and Ntokozo Gwala (continued)

The Journey of Ntokozo Gwala: From Trainee to General Manager

Ntokozo Gwala's professional journey tells a captivating story of progress and strategic development. Starting as a trainee in Chemical Engineering at RBM in 2006, Ntokozo quickly recognised the importance of blending hands-on experience with academic learning. Her active involvement in on-site tasks and projects, including supervising test operations for facility setups, equipped her with the essential technical skills and operational insights needed for managerial positions.

In 2010, Ntokozo took on the role of Plant Metallurgist at the Mineral Separation Plant, focusing on enhancing efficiencies. Her performance and commitment saw her advance through various roles, including Smelter Furnaces

Superintendent and Integrated Planning Lead. These experiences broadened her understanding of the company's operations and ultimately paved the way for her current role as General Manager for Smelting, Processing and Logistics in 2022.

Ntokozo openly discusses the challenges she faced when transitioning into a leadership role, particularly with regard to navigating new social dynamics with former colleagues. To overcome these challenges, she adopted a fair approach by treating everyone equally and holding them accountable for their actions. She also emphasised the importance of refined communication skills, particularly active listening, which were crucial in her leadership transition. These skills enabled her to clearly articulate her vision and build trust with her team members.

Ntokozo's advice to women in the mining industry stresses the importance of staying focused and dedicated while continually seeking knowledge and improving one's career prospects. She expresses her gratitude to RBM for the support provided, which included sponsoring her MBA education and providing mentorship opportunities, and she highlights the significant role organisations play in fostering professional growth. Ntokozo remains committed to guiding and inspiring future female leaders, and advocating for initiative and proactive career management.

Article by: Dimpho Moepane

Nomusa Bulunga and Ntokozo Gwala's experiences demonstrate how education and perseverance can help women overcome obstacles in the mining sector, especially when supported by targeted programmes and institutional backing. They have not only achieved personal milestones, but have also highlighted the importance of such initiatives in promoting gender equality within this demanding field. As they pave the way for future generations, their stories illustrate the opportunities for advancement and success that women can find in mining.

Ntokozo Gwala

Empowerment as a Shield: Can Strengthening Women's Independence Reduce the Risk of GBVF?

A report from Social Watch on Poverty Eradication and Gender Justice in South Africa reveals that over 60% of women in the country are living below the poverty line, with a significant number of households in disadvantaged areas led by women. This economic disparity between genders has contributed to South Africa becoming one of the most unequal societies globally.

Gender inequality is being tackled through worldwide initiatives, such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5, which aims to promote gender equality globally. The link between gender inequality and Gender-Based Violence & Femicide (GBVF) is highlighted in South Africa's National Strategic Plan (NSP), which underscores the importance of economic empowerment in Pillar 5 as a key strategy in addressing this issue. The fundamental belief is that empowering women economically can help reduce their vulnerability to GBVF.

The mining sector, historically dominated by men, is now making concerted efforts to encourage more women to join through initiatives like Women in Mining (WiM). Currently, women make up 16% of the mining workforce, with this figure rising to 19% in companies that are members of the Minerals Council, according to Mining Review Africa. Ensuring the health and safety of women in mining has become a priority, as gender diversity and inclusion are key components of the WiM strategy aimed at empowering women. This commitment to gender equality is further reinforced by the Minerals Council's 7 Foundational Measures, which guide the industry's approach to creating a more inclusive environment. Despite ongoing challenges, such as the gender pay gap, the mining sector in South Africa remains one of the higher-paying industries. This suggests that women in mining achieve financial independence, earning competitive incomes that contribute to their economic empowerment. Contrary to common belief, financially independent women who serve as primary

earners may actually face a greater risk of intimate partner violence (IPV) than those who are not economically empowered. This might seem counterintuitive, as financially empowered women have the means to leave abusive situations. However, studies suggest that "confident and accomplished women, who tend to excel in every aspect of their lives, may tolerate abuse for extended periods due to concerns about appearing vulnerable or unsuccessful." This implies that the pressure to maintain an image of strength and success can sometimes prevent these women from seeking help or leaving harmful relationships.

Research has not conclusively proven that empowering women economically leads to a decrease in GBVF. There are instances where accomplished women might be seen as challenging traditional notions of masculinity and patriarchy, potentially provoking aggressive reactions from abusive partners.

While these studies may not directly target the experiences of women in the mining industry, they offer valuable perspectives on the broader conversation around empowering women in society. It is crucial to understand that economic empowerment is not a complete solution to addressing GBVF and discrimination. This article does not suggest that empowering women is unimportant in the fight against GBVF and discrimination; rather, it argues for a more nuanced approach to avoid portraying empowered women as invulnerable to mistreatment. There must be a concerted effort to educate and engage boys and men in fostering respectful relationships with empowered women. Exploring the dynamics of power between men and women is essential for nurturing allyship.

To effectively address gender-

based violence and discrimination against women, it is essential to involve men in discussions about women's empowerment. This approach shifts the focus from women discussing women's issues in isolation to creating a more inclusive dialogue that involves everyone, regardless of gender. Embracing feminism means advocating for choice and granting women the independence to make decisions based on their preferences and needs, rather than being constrained by external factors. It is crucial to empower women holistically, ensuring they have the freedom to make choices that align with their desires, rather than feeling forced by their circumstances.

Article by: Lindokuhle Zwane



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Breaking the Rock of Doubt: Conquering Imposter Syndrome

In South Africa's mining sector, many women face numerous barriers. Overcoming misconceptions in a predominantly male environment, with high stakes, can be daunting. Despite their achievements in this field, many women struggle with imposter syndrome - a condition that is both common and debilitating. This article explores the complexities of imposter syndrome, its effect on women in mining, and strategies they can use to overcome it and flourish in their careers.

Understanding Imposter Syndrome

The term "imposter syndrome" was coined in 1978 by psychologists Pauline Clance and Suzanne Imes. It describes a psychological state where individuals doubt their accomplishments and fear being exposed as "frauds." Those affected often attribute their success to external factors or luck, rather than acknowledging their abilities. Persistent feelings of inadequacy and the belief that they are not as competent as others perceive them to be are key features of this phenomenon.

Why Women in Mining Experience Imposter Syndrome More Often

Women in the mining industry face particular challenges in a historically male-dominated field. Although strides have been made towards gender equality, women are still underrepresented, especially in leadership and technical roles. This lack of representation can exacerbate feelings of isolation and not belonging.

Imposter syndrome can manifest in different ways, such as perfectionism, self-doubt, and feeling like an intellectual fraud. Those who experience it often seek validation, question their achievements, and fear being "found out."

Several factors contribute to imposter syndrome in women working in mining:

- 1. Stereotypes and Biases:** In male-dominated environments like mining, women may encounter gender-based biases and stereotypes that lead to feelings of insecurity and doubt. These preconceived notions can undermine their confidence and discourage them from asserting themselves.
- 2. Performance Pressures:** With fewer women in the field, many feel an increased need to prove their worth. The imbalance in representation often leads to self-doubt, as women strive to meet unrealistic performance expectations.
- 3. Lack of Representation:** The industry's scarcity of female mentors and role models can make it harder for women to visualise their success. Without visible examples of women overcoming challenges, it can be difficult to see a clear path to achievement.
- 4. Societal and Cultural Norms:** Women's self-perception is often influenced by societal and cultural norms surrounding gender roles. These expectations can sometimes conflict with their professional goals, adding another layer of difficulty.

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Strategies for Overcoming Imposter Syndrome

Though prevalent, imposter syndrome can be managed. Here are some strategies for women in mining to combat these feelings and build their confidence:

1. **Identify and Reframe Negative Thoughts:** Women need to recognise and challenge negative thought patterns. Instead of attributing success to luck, they should acknowledge their skills and hard work.
2. **Celebrate Achievements:** Women should make a point to celebrate their accomplishments, big or small, as this helps build self-esteem and combats feelings of inferiority.
3. **Challenge Preconceptions:** Women in mining can push back against biases and assumptions in the workplace by advocating for diversity and inclusion, both for themselves and their peers.
4. **Pursue Professional Development:** By seeking opportunities for continuous learning - through acquiring new skills, certifications, or participating in industry events - women can increase their sense of competence.
5. **Practice Self-Kindness:** Imposter syndrome is often linked to perfectionism. Women need to understand that mistakes are part of learning and growth. By embracing imperfections, they can relieve the pressure to constantly excel, leading to a more balanced approach to performance.



Imposter syndrome is a significant hurdle for many women in South Africa's mining industry, but it need not be an obstacle to success. By understanding its nature, recognising its effects, and taking steps to counter it, women can rebuild their confidence and claim their rightful place in the industry. As more women rise to leadership and make their mark, the mining sector will continue moving toward a diverse and inclusive future. Encouraging women to overcome imposter syndrome not only advances their careers, but also strengthens the industry by fostering a more dynamic and innovative workforce.

Article by: Dimpho Moepane

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Forging my Path: Empowerment and Growth in the Mining Industry

Resilience, determination, and a strong commitment to personal growth have been at the heart of Mosa Kgopane's inspiring journey within the mining industry. Her path is marked by empowerment, where each challenge has become a stepping stone, allowing her to redefine her course and take control of her future.

Mosa's story began when she graduated from the University of Johannesburg with a BA in Corporate Communication, ready to dive into a world of opportunity and innovation. "In 2011, I embarked on my mining career through a community recruitment initiative called 'Sisonke,' starting as an Assistant Communications Officer. This role provided the foundation for my career, and I soon transitioned to a permanent Communications Officer position," she shares.

Understanding that adaptability was key to her success, Mosa embraced a shift into the role of Skills Development Officer. She saw this not only as a challenge but also as an opportunity to broaden her professional horizons. This period in her life was defined by her commitment to ongoing self-development. She pursued further studies, achieving both a B-Tech in Project Management and a Postgraduate Diploma in Business Administration, thanks to the company's study assistance programme.

I found that continuous learning was the catalyst for my career growth, driving me forward with renewed focus and ambition.

Mosa's career has taken her through a variety of roles, each offering valuable lessons and experiences. Returning to Corporate Affairs, followed by a promotion to Senior Corporate Social Investment Officer, allowed her to apply the wide-ranging skills and knowledge she had gained over the years. "Every position presented new challenges, but rather than seeing them as roadblocks, I viewed them as

chances to strengthen my resilience and deepen my commitment to lifelong learning," she explains.

Her journey is a powerful example of the impact self-empowerment can have. Mosa has come to realise that obstacles should not be viewed as hindrances, but rather as opportunities to discover one's true abilities. "By prioritising education, nurturing personal development, and constantly seeking new ways to grow, we open ourselves up to boundless possibilities and achievements that far exceed our initial expectations."

Today, Mosa is pursuing her MBA, a personal milestone that underscores her ongoing dedication to excellence and continuous improvement. Her story serves as a poignant reminder that no challenge is too great to overcome. She believes that with patience, perseverance, and a resolute thirst for knowledge, anyone can transform their future, turning it into a canvas of endless opportunities to empower themselves to reach new heights in any field they choose.

Article by:
Dimpho Moepane



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