

Recognising the role of women in construction year-round

Acknowledging the contribution of women in construction during Women's Month in August and beyond is important in ensuring gender diversity and equality in this typically male-dominated sector. This says Grinaker-LTA, a tier-one, 100% Black-owned construction company.



Esethu Mancotywa, CFO, Grinaker-LTA

Managing director Bheki Mdlalose explains: "For example, our chief financial officer Esethu Mancotywa, and executive director: commercial Tracey Smith, bring their unique skills, talents and experience to our executive management team and to our company as a whole.

"Furthermore, while we are proud to celebrate and acknowledge women in August, we do in fact acknowledge the vital role played by the women of Grinaker-LTA every month, with Esethu and Tracey leading the way as role models."

Deep financial experience - and a fresh, constructive approach

Mancotywa is a chartered accountant who holds an MBA from the Gordon Institute of Business Science. She is a seasoned finance professional with over a decade of experience in investment banking and private equity, including pan-African experience.

Having joined Grinaker-LTA in 2021, she says, "Taking on this role as CFO of Grinaker-LTA has been one of the highlights of my career to date, as is my role as deputy president of the Black Management Forum (BMF).

"I am so pleased to be able to leverage these two positions to have a positive impact on other women in business, and in the construction sector. I am passionate about highlighting my belief that – as I was taught by one of my longstanding mentors - one should also 'have a view' and play a proactive role at work and in managing one's career path."

She adds: "My advice to women across South Africa seeking to achieve their career goals is to do the groundwork, become technically proficient in your chosen path, take a stand when necessary, know what you are talking about – and do not be afraid to voice your opinion!"

Mancotywa notes that the recent consolidation of the construction industry has created a smaller pool of construction majors, which has potentially changed the overall dynamic of the industry.



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Exclusion from the construction 'inner circle'

"In my opinion, I believe that women have historically been potentially excluded from certain roles within the construction 'inner circle' - however we are seeing that this is changing. I strongly advocate for more gender diversity and equality in

business in South Africa in general, including within the construction industry.”

While it is true that construction is not for the fainthearted, Mancotywa says that she has received enormous support across the business, while also being encouraged to forge her own path.

“I do believe that women in general are skilled at communicating and display high levels of empathy. I would encourage women in the construction sector to become more visible by promoting their skills, and more confident about voicing their opinions. For my part, I am thoroughly enjoying getting to grips with the construction sector, and I look forward to being part of a company that I believe is going from strength to strength.”

A leading light in the local construction industry



Tracey Smith, executive director: commercial, Grinaker-LTA

Tracey Smith is well-known as a highly sought-after and respected powerhouse in South Africa's construction industry, with enormous wisdom to share in helping to inspire and empower other women in the sector. With nearly three decades of experience in the commercial management of – amongst others - manufacturing, power generation, infrastructure and mining sector construction projects, Smith also has a particular interest in helping to elevate other women in industry.

“Grinaker-LTA's positive culture and working environment is a great cornerstone for female employees, providing them with the right foundation from which to execute their duties confidently, and to drive gender diversity,” she says.

“As a veteran of the local and pan-African construction sector - self-taught ‘from the ground up’ throughout my career - I am proud that the women in this company are valued, respected and recognised.”

Smith notes that within commercial construction management, she has generally played a role that has involved “fighting risk”.

“I am required to deal with compliance, commercial and legal aspects within the organisation, which can be very challenging,” she explains. In addition to the management of risk and compliance, she comments that her ability as a ‘closer’ is supremely important, and, in her opinion, sometimes difficult to find in the construction industry.

“I believe it is one of the reasons I have been head-hunted many times throughout my career – because I am both skilled and experienced at starting projects and pushing the project through to final commissioning and close-out.”

Smith believes that this speaks to an excellent trait of women in general: their ability to follow through to the end.

“Add to this a woman's ability to multi-task,” she notes, “as well as being meticulous, and good at administration, and we see that women have different strengths to men. However, these can be complementary and work together for the benefit of all.”



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Always lessons to be learned

With regards to her love of the construction industry, Smith enthuses: “There is never a day that goes by when I do not learn something new. Every structure that is built has a different scope and requirements: its design, the site where it is situated – there are always lessons to be learned. For me, this is representative of the construction industry itself. There are always new factors to be negotiated and new lessons to be learned – it is an ever-changing and evolving sector.”

“I am extremely enthusiastic about a mentoring programme for women that I am working on together with our human resources department,” she notes. “When we consider that women in construction around the world, including in South Africa, tend to make up far less than 10% of the workforce – with even fewer women actually working on-site - I am committed to helping to further the careers of those women who would like to progress within the construction sector, but who may otherwise lack the confidence to do so.”

Smith’s advice to those women who wish to embark on careers in construction is typically down-to-earth as she explains: “Start at the bottom and try to master every single function or discipline – be it in the office or on site.”

"Having devoted my career to the construction industry, my advice to women who wish to enter this sector today is as follows: ask questions, believe in yourself, take opportunities that are presented to you, and above all else: remember that no one owes you anything.

"If you want something that is worth having, then you need to make the effort to go after it: nobody else will do it for you. And yet, despite this being a tough industry, the rewards are well worth it!" Smith concludes.

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