

# How women in construction are vital to the sector's growth

As [reported by Stats SA](#), many sectors in South Africa, including construction, are facing a downturn. In fact, the report states that construction, mining and trade are in recession with a 3.2% decline being the biggest quarterly fall in economic activity since 2009.



Desirè Paterson, assistant to the executive director of the Master Builders Association Western Cape (MBAWC)

In order to turn this around, a definite change is needed to uplift and grow these sectors by opening opportunities via transformation amongst other initiatives.

## Promise of transformation

“It may seem like an over simplification, but we believe in the promise of transformation, which is a lengthy journey that aims to even the playing field for all demographics in South Africa, including women,” says Desirè Paterson, assistant to the executive director of the Master Builders Association Western Cape (MBAWC).

“According to the Construction Industry Development Board’s [Quarterly report \(October 2018\)](#), the construction industry is largely seen as a male-dominated industry, a fact that has remained reasonably consistent over the past eight years or so, with a recorded breakdown of around 89% male and 11% female,” says Paterson. “Although, historically, this industry may have been built on the backs of many men who were passionate about building and growing our country, women can bring a different point of view to any boardroom table (or construction site) and with different points of view comes

change.”

## Women's voices in construction

The MBAWC spoke to several female members of the industry to gather their advice for other women wanting to pursue a career in construction:

“Firstly, what women need to flourish in this industry is exposure to it and this should start at primary school level with career guidance classes. Years ago, women shied away from construction, but today we have female quantity surveyors, architects, designers and even female builders,” says Avril Kariem, office and HR manager at Frost International.



Avril Kariem, office and HR manager at Frost International and Melissa Kotze, health and safety officer at Dekon Projects

Melissa Kotze, health and safety officer at Dekon Projects, agrees. “Being a respected member of this industry is not all brawn and heavy lifting – although I would say construction is better suited to people ready to be active on the job,” she says. “Skills in mechanics, engineering, bricklaying, health and safety, electricity and painting, for example, are a foot in the door for anyone wanting to enter the construction industry – and don’t tell me women can’t do this – we’ve been doing this for years.”

Portia Cleinwerck, head accountant and company administrator of Pinelands Development Company (non-profit company) and Sunpark West Coast Properties, believes that, in a male-dominated industry, it is hard for women trying to ‘break ground’ with their male counterparts.



Faith Mabena, director of Nokhanya Services and Portia Cleinwerck, head accountant and company administrator of Pinelands Development Company (non-profit company) and Sunpark West Coast Properties

“It may sound trite, but we simply have to persevere and believe that anything is possible,” she says. “If this is your purpose, set goals, persevere and you will achieve it. Stay true to who you are as a woman and always be humble in everything.”

“Unfortunately, as a woman, sometimes you have to work twice as hard to be recognised and prove yourself, but never give up no matter how hard it gets. If you put your mind to it, any industry can be yours to own,” points out Faith Mabena, director of Nokhanya Services.

“It is for this reason that women need to support each other,” says Caitlin O’Riley, evaluator, marketing manager and national sales support at Derbigum Manufacturing. “Construction is a broad industry that can be open to many people from different backgrounds, but it is vital for it to be inclusive so that men can see how women’s style of working can bring a

good a balance into the mix.”



Christelle Bown, president of the Association of South African Quantity Surveyors and Caitlin O'Riley, evaluator, marketing manager and national sales support at Derbigum Manufacturing

## Unique female qualities

Christelle Bown, recently appointed as the second female president of the Association of South African Quantity Surveyors agrees with this sentiment. “My experience through the years is that to a large extent, the support is there. One will always find less supportive individuals but, just like men, we as women have to earn respect. We can achieve this, not by talking like men and acting like men, but by applying our own unique female qualities to benefit projects.”

The MBAWC believes that it is vital to continue to carve a path for women in construction. “We aim to clear the road and bring equal opportunities to every person who is driven to succeed in our arena,” says Paterson.

“We believe in our hidden gems and know that with the right support and due respect, women like these listed above can help us realise true transformation while bringing the industry back to life,” she concludes.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>