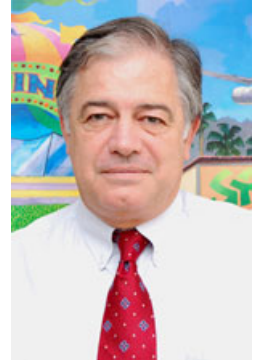


# Women to the fore!

The CA(SA) is becoming a powerful vehicle for gender transformation in South Africa.

As business leaders and consultants, with roles in government and big business or as entrepreneurs, Chartered Accountants South Africa [CAs(SA)] increasingly find themselves in powerful and dynamic positions. It is not only the possibilities open to CAs(SA) that have evolved, the qualification itself has become a great tool for gender empowerment in South Africa.

From 2004 to 2014 there has been an increase in the number of females who qualified as CAs(SA), compared to males, a shift that is prevalent regardless of race. Not only are these young female firebrands helping to narrow the skills gap - which is so essential to South Africa's growth - but they are bringing gender diversity to our boardrooms and senior management teams. "There is a strong positive correlation between diversity of make-up and company success" says Brett Bowes one of the founders of Board Barometer "Boards need age diversity, gender diversity and skills diversity if they are to make better decisions. I have no doubt that the South African Institute for Chartered Accountants (SAICA)'s racial and gender transformation efforts will lead to better governance and greater corporate success in South African corporates. The same will hold true of parastatals and government departments."



"There is a strong positive correlation between diversity of make-up and company success" says Brett Bowes.

The ranks of the chartered accountants have traditionally been dominated by white males, so this change is a great example of how active transformation efforts can create positive and constructive change. The fact that SAICA has achieved this without compromise to standards is a great example of what needs to be done in many other sectors of our society.

"It (being a CA(SA)) is wonderful for women," says Chantyl Mulder, Senior Executive: Professional Development, Transformation and Growth, SAICA.. "When I was studying, there were only five girls and we were discouraged because they said that it was a man's profession - but now women can pick and choose. Being a CA(SA) gives them the skills and provides a springboard for whatever they decide or wherever they want to end up."

## Sister Act

A great example of this gender transformation effort is to be found in Kuhumelela, an accounting and advisory firm owned by three sisters (Althea, Susan and Jaqui Lapoorta) and situated in Cape Town. All three are qualified CAs(SA) and bring a wide array of skills and experience to the enterprise. "We come from the Northern Cape, really humble beginnings...but my father always told us that we could achieve whatever we wanted. That whatever a man could do, we could do." says Althea of their upbringing and motivation.



The ranks of the chartered accountants have traditionally been dominated by white males, but things are changing. (Image: Wikimedia Commons)

Founded in 2010, Kuhumelela punches far above its weight in terms of its client base (which includes PetroSA, the City of Cape Town, The University of Stellenbosch and The Western Cape Provincial Treasury) - whilst remaining true to a strong empowerment ethic, particularly for woman.

## Trailblazers

The Lapoorta sisters are not alone. They are following the trailblazer Lindani Dhlamini, a CA(SA) who started and heads up SekelaXabiso - a firm that is black owned and trains and employs people primarily from historically disadvantaged

backgrounds. SekelaXabiso employs close to 300 people, generates revenue in excess of R240m and is gunning for R1bn

by 2020.

Even further ahead on her path is Nonkululeko Gobodo, Executive Chairwoman of SizweNtsalubaGobodo (SNG). Gobodo began the journey towards becoming a CA(SA) in the 1980s, when black female CAs(SA) were unheard of. In 2011 she piloted a merger to create SNG - now the fifth-largest practice in South Africa, with 55 partners and more than 1000 staff, serving some of the largest corporations in the country.

These examples serve to highlight that not only is the CA(SA) a great career choice in itself, but that it presents special opportunities for young women who want to make a difference in the world, and want to do it quickly. The profession also stands as a beacon to others for both racial and gender empowerment. So, while we do have a good story to tell in our short 20 years of democracy in this country, there are some really outstanding stories. South Africa needs to celebrate this success story, and young women who have dreams of making a difference would do well to keep their Mathematics marks above 50%.

And for those young women who don't have the means but do have the determination to succeed, the Thuthuka bursary scheme with over 1,000 students in its pipeline is one of the most successful programmes of its kind - operating through 12 accredited universities. The bursary fund provides for fees, accommodation, books, mentorship and even a monthly allowance to help students settle in.

Can anyone remember who said it was a man's world?

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