

Women in Tech: The tide is turning

By [Leanne Gordge](#)

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The 2018 World Economic Forum (WEF), themed 'Creating a Shared Future in a Fractured World' placed the issue of gender equality firmly on the global agenda for this year. This followed findings produced by the 2017 WEF Annual Global Gender Gap Report, which estimated that global gender parity may now be over 170 years away.



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From a local perspective, South Africa was seen to make good progress toward gender parity. Of the 144 countries indexed in the report, South Africa ranked 19, with the overall gender gap between men and women standing at 24,4%. The report also said South Africa was 68% of the way toward gender parity.

The report ranked South Africa 5th on the G20 group of countries with the highest progress toward gender parity; behind France, Germany, the United Kingdom and Canada respectively. And while South Africa's progress in the subcategory of Economic Participation and Opportunity has increased from 55% in 2006 to 65% in 2017, it still ranks 89th globally in this regard.

The facts therefore indicate that South Africa is making strides toward economic gender equality – albeit at a turtle's pace.

What about technology?

The opportunities for women in the ICT sector will not only benefit of the overall gender equality mission – it will benefit the ICT sector as a whole.

PwC economists estimate that if the gender gap in both representation and pay gap were to close by just 10%, South Africa could achieve an additional 3.2% in GDP growth, and a 6.5% reduction in the number of unemployed job seekers.

Strides have been made

Therefore although strides have been made to advance women in tech, more needs to be done.

The ICT industry is still very male-dominated, but I do not believe this is due to a barrier to entry. In South Africa, the proportion of females to males who graduate with STEM-related (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) degrees is out of kilter. Women are underrepresented in maths and statistics (4:5), ICT and technology (2:5), as well as engineering, manufacturing and construction (3:10), according to WEF statistics. As a result, there is a significantly smaller pool of female STEM talent, restricting the potential of South Africa's overall technology sector.

The tech industry boasts many exceptional female leaders. Brenda Niehaus, for instance, was Group CIO of Standard Bank for many years before retiring last year. I had the privilege of meeting Amanda Dambuza, the CEO of Uyandiswa – a black-owned company providing project management and business analytics consultancy services. What an inspirational, down-to-earth, dynamic woman.



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There are many, many examples of women like this in the ICT sector, and not one of the women I've met in this space are less deserving to be where they are than their male counterparts.

It is therefore crucial to celebrate these female role models and bring attention them, especially for girls at a young age. Initiatives in which females in ICT or other STEM-related careers speak to schoolchildren can be powerful in the formative years for both boys and girls.

As the PwC 16 Nudges for More #WomenInTech report says, cultivating an interest in STEM fields must start as early as possible - at school and in higher education, for example. From an early age, behavioural design can help through de-biasing classrooms, changing how our children are taught, as well as through celebrating counter-stereotypical role models - and having worked in the tech department of an education institution early in my career, I agree.

Conclusion

The tide is turning, but there are still too many challenges facing women in today's workforce – particularly in the ICT sector.

For example, while there are exceptions, I believe that the majority of men in technology will still earn higher salaries than their female counterparts working in the same or similar positions. And while there are women holding executive positions, these are still very male-dominated. PwC found that Women currently hold 19% of tech-related jobs at the top 10 global tech companies, relative to men who hold 81%. In leadership positions at these global tech giants, women make up 28%, with men representing 72%.

Yes, you are still going to encounter the stereotypical, biased view (from some men and women), that men are more technically-minded, less emotional, more capable, etc. than women are – and we aren't going to change the view of these

people. Women must continue to know their own strengths and use them to get results.

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