

Gender inequality continues to cost Africa billions of dollars each year

By [Sindy Peters](#)

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\$95bn - this is the average annual loss in Sub-Saharan Africa since 2010 due to pervasive gender inequality in the continent's economic activities, according to a [2016 report](#) from the UN Development programme.



[Sonwabise Sebata](#), deputy chair of the board of directors for the South African Women in ICT Forum, reiterated this staggering statistic at this year's [AfricaCom](#) during her keynote address on investing in women, and noted that one of the key sectors perpetuating this inequality is the tech industry. While opportunity in Africa's tech space is ample, to grow and enable the continent's digital economy requires extensive collaboration and greater efforts in closing the gender representation and pay gap, she said.

"Definitive data shows that companies that are gender diverse actually outperform more homogeneous companies that don't invest in women.

"It is a fact that companies that create enabling environments actually outperform [their counterparts] and their shares do better than companies that don't."

Sonwabise Sebata, deputy chair of the board of directors for the South African Women in ICT Forum



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Producing tangible results

Sebata outlined three ways to stop conversations and gatherings around gender diversity being just talk shops, rather producing tangible results.

There, firstly, needs to be a mind-shift toward greater collaboration and "realising that if you're going at it alone, you're not going far", she said. Agreeing to move as one will promote the development of an enabling environment.

Secondly, there needs to be greater focus on skills and workforce development in order to grow the pool of successful African female professionals who will employ the philosophy of "lift as you rise" in advocating for greater equality.

Lastly, Sebata emphasised that cultural thinking should be embraced and employed to inform empirical thinking in enabling transformation.



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'Conversation hasn't changed'

[Carol Bouwer](#), founder and CEO of Carol Bouwer Productions, was next to the podium, decrying the fact that no country has yet to obtain full equality, and that investment in women still needs to be on the agenda.

"I say to people all the time that I feel like, as a producer of programmes that are about affirming women, I feel that I have failed," she said, referring to her efforts through Motswako - a TV series that provides a platform for women to engage with each other with the aim of empowering, inspiring, and sharing in each other's experiences.

"When I started, the idea was that we're going to be on air for about five years, make a difference and ensure there's equality - I was dreaming because the conversation hasn't changed."



Carol Bouwer, founder and CEO of Carol Bouwer Productions



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Start working as a collective

Women are still susceptible to the "motherhood penalty", perpetuating the stereotype that women are and need to be more involved in the home environment than men, said Bouwer, noting that, "Societal norms continue to trump legislature created to address the very stereotypes that we say we're not happy with."

She encouraged women to start looking beyond the doors that remain shut, and to start working as a collective in building their own enterprises. She encouraged more women to raise their hands when opportunities are presented, and to support each other as the traditional "boy's club" has done over the years, building a sense of unity.

"I am hoping that we leave this place not only having heard inspiring words from one another. I'm hoping that we leave this place having found ways to become a collective of women that is going to change the narrative," Bouwer said.

ABOUT SINDY PETERS

Sindy Peters (@sindy_hullaba_lou) is a group editor at Bizcommunity.com on the Construction & Engineering, Energy & Mining, and Property portals. She can be reached at sindy@bizcommunity.com

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