

## **INTERNATIONAL DAY OF WOMEN IN MINING 2022 – ADDRESS BY MS VANESSA NAICKER (CHAIRPERSON: MINERALS EDUCATION TRUST FUND) ON 15 JUNE 2022**

Representatives from the South African government, sis Nolitha, distinguished speakers, my fellow women in mining, Good Morning.

It is a real privilege and honour to be part of today's important event.

I would like to share some candid perspectives on the attraction and retention of young women to the mining sector, and the challenges we face.

Let us start with some statistics. Data supplied by the Minerals Council shows that the number of women working in the sector has increased significantly in the past 15 years – from around 11,400 back in 2002 to 56,691 in 2019, which represented about 12% women in mining in SA, and despite Covid I would think that number is largely tracking positive with latest data suggesting that women in mining in SA is edging closer to 15%. But that is still a long way to the council's Women in Mining Leadership forum target of 40% women representation in mining in the medium term. And if we look broader than SA, a McKinsey company study done in 2021, shows that women represent an estimated 8 to 17 percent of the global mining workforce.

So why is it that we still have this low labour force participation of women in mining.

### **Let's start by considering the attraction of women to mining**

Women are attracted to both technical and non-technical roles in the mining sector. In fact, most entry level roles attract close to parity female candidates. And many entry level roles are being filled by women, and on balance this ranges from 30-50% across a range of early career professional roles. In fact, what is comforting to see especially from a Minerals Education Trust Fund (METF) standpoint is that female representation in core industry feeder disciplines such as Geosciences, Mining Engineering and Metallurgy and Processing are tracking close to 40% females at our universities across the country. So great strides are being made in creating the early talent pipelines. I need to add, that the mining industries continued support and contributions to the METF remains critical, and allows the fund to continue playing a bridging role between industry and academia and thereby ensuring the continuity of core feeder disciplines for the sector. Your support ensures continued sustainability of quality academia skills for our country, with the benefactor being young people at our countries universities.

When we speak to young people their attraction drivers to the mining sector include:

- structured early career development and opportunities for continued professional growth,
- competitive pay and benefits,
- work variety, and
- the opportunity for travel.

And interesting these factors remain consistent across mining regions and countries.

So why do women leave mining?

Well, it would seem that the reasons that initially attracted them to the industry do not do so anymore. Some of the reasons often provided include:

- Work is no longer intellectually stimulating
- There is a perception that there are fewer advancement opportunities for women compared to their male counterparts, particularly in technical and managerial roles. There is also a perception that operational experience is rated more highly than advanced qualifications in mining when it comes to promotion in technical and leadership roles
- There is a perception that operational experience and mentorship are not as actively created for women as it is for men, and women struggle to access the same “stepping stone” operational roles as men do in the same organisations.
- Women feel that they do not necessarily have the strong mentorship and just as important is that women who have spent a considerable amount of time in the industry, so more tenured women, feel that sponsorship is also lacking to help bridge the divide on the perceived lack of skills to advance their careers.
- Often, I find that women who are in technical fields in the industry make huge investments to further their qualifications. Note that this driven by their need to advance their careers. They then feel let down by the investment as it often goes unnoticed and is therefore undervalued and underutilised. This causes further frustration due to skill set mismatch and ties to my first point of work becoming less stimulating.
- An interesting phenomenon also, is that retention seems to be better with tenured women than junior colleagues. Maybe the more time we women spend in the industry, we become assimilated.
- And not to forget, the mining sector has one of the highest median gender pay gaps of any industry, in the UK this is estimated at about 25%

## **So how do we move forward in creating impactful change:**

There is no silver bullet or quick fix. What is required is a systematic approach to attraction, retention, and promotion.

Firstly, be unapologetic about setting parity goals **for attraction** and perhaps even be discretionary in favouring women in early careers recruitment to build and secure talent pipelines. Target women much earlier, start at schools and universities.

**With retention**, the key issue for women is that with time they feel that work is less and less interesting; that the organisational culture is not what was sold to them: it is not diverse enough, not agile enough nor inclusive and there is a perceived lack of career advancement. Now these comments are not new, we have heard them before, so why haven't we been listening and acting with intent?

How can we be more deliberate and intentional?

Some thoughts:

- Consider job rotations and secondments, with strong mentorship and sponsorship support. This will not only lead to talent retention but an amazing opportunity for your talent to gain deep understanding of the business.
- Be more inclusive – at the heart of this is the need for leadership to actively change the organisational culture in mining, it starts with some of the basic provisions that need to be made available in the workplace to make women feel safe, be it women only change rooms and ablution facilities; safe sleeping accommodation for women on site; and most importantly there needs to be a zero tolerance policy on discriminatory and non-inclusive behaviours.
- As mentioned previously lack of advancement opportunities can drive women out of mining. Sponsorship and “stretch opportunities” are required to support women in achieving promotion.

And lastly, communicate more, be transparent and share examples of good practice, challenges, and achievements shamelessly.

Let's Make Mining Matter.

Thank You

Ms Vanessa Naicker (Chairperson: Minerals Education Trust Fund)

15 June 2022

ENDS