

Encourage women to join mining sector

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The tailing stacker separating the minerals from the soil at a titanium mining base in Kwale on September 17, 2014. FILE PHOTO | NATION MEDIA GROUP

In Summary

- Direct participation of women along the value chain of large-scale mining projects is less than 10 per cent globally while those in management and leadership positions are at a dismal five percent.
- To create a safe space for women to prosper in mining, industry players must abandon old human resource models.

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Despite the progress made globally in promoting women's participation in the labour force, gaps exist in traditionally male-dominated fields such as the extractives industry, which includes the mining and oil and gas sectors.

The gaps are particularly acute in mining, which has, for the better part of its centuries-old history, been characterised by policies and regulations that deny women the same opportunities as men. Until the 1990s, for example, legislation strictly forbade

women to work underground in South Africa.

While such archaic laws no longer exist, some of the attitudes that inspired them linger. In some cases, women in mining are subtly stereotyped as intruders into a male domain. They are inevitably subjected to more layers of scrutiny before securing key roles, dimming their prospects of upward mobility at the workplace.

INNOVATIVE MODELS

To create a safe space for women to prosper in mining, industry players must abandon old human resource models — which have achieved limited results in integrating women into the workplace — and take a leaf from younger players pioneering innovative models.

Of the workforce at Kwale Mineral Sands Project, Kenya's largest mining operation, where Base Titanium has been mining titanium since 2013, 16 percent are women, with those in management positions 30 percent. Even in economies with a history of affirmative action, few mining firms come close.

Collectively, titanium ores accounted for 58 percent, or Sh13.6 billion, of the country's Sh23.7 billion mineral earnings in 2017, surpassing other key mineral exports, according to data from Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS).

A 2017 study by Adam Smith International and International Women in Mining shows the direct participation of women along the value chain of large-scale mining projects is less than 10 per cent globally while those in management and leadership positions are at a dismal five percent.

DIVERSE ROLES

Base has strong linkages with key industry stakeholders, such as the Association of Women in Extractives in Kenya (Aweik), which provides advanced training to women in the extractives sector. The training is critical since the percentage of women pursuing science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) courses in Kenya is small, mirroring the situation in most countries.

This also opens an opportunity for to fill the massive skills gap the local mining sector faces. Not only because 75 per cent of jobs in the future for will require skills in Stem-related fields but many young women will need to be well versed with these skills so as to not miss out on jobs.

More emphasis is being placed on inclusive business practices, where women get equal pay, are involved in decision making and work under conditions that are suited to their unique and diverse roles in their families and society.

Going forward, only those companies with human resource policies that give women an equal chance will maintain their social licence to operate.

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