

200 schoolgirls hear how the sky is not the limit at Coronation's inspirational Women's Day event

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In celebration of Women's Day this August, Coronation welcomed 200 schoolgirls from 20 schools at two exciting events. The girls were all finalists in an essay competition that asked them to write or video their views on the challenges that face young women in South Africa.



Dr Danielle Wood

The event, in its third year, is designed to expose them to female role models who have succeeded in their fields of endeavour, and to ignite their personal ambitions. The events, held in Johannesburg and Cape Town, gave the girls, who are mostly from disadvantaged backgrounds, the unique opportunity to hear about the extraordinary life and work of guest speaker Dr Danielle Wood, a renowned US space engineer and development scholar.

Kirshni Totaram, Global Head of Institutional Business at Coronation and host of both events, believes exposing bright young girls to stories such as Danielle's will make them more aware of the world of opportunity available to them if they dream big, work hard and persevere. "I want every one of these girls to recognise and celebrate their value and potential," said Totaram.

She went on to say that global society is at a crossroads, with hard and necessary questions being asked about how we treat women, how we treat immigrants, and how we treat our planet. And, despite great advancement made by women in the past two decades, so many women are still left behind, carrying the twin burdens of social prejudice and the duty of unpaid work that limit or destroy the contribution that women can make to this world - on their own terms, sharing some of the challenges of her own journey to success.



Kirshni Totaram

Wood is the Director of MIT's Space Enabled Research Group in the US, which was established to address the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and develop ways to use advanced space technology to solve mankind's most pressing social development issues. She combines her role as a pioneering space engineer with her compassion for humanity – addressing issues that touch us every day in South Africa, such as poverty alleviation, healthcare, social justice, natural resource management, conservation and climate change.

"The future of space is exciting, and space technology can be used to improve the quality of life on earth by helping us to monitor resources such as water and vegetation, and to provide communications services to rural and remote communities. At MIT Space Enabled Research Group we use the Sustainable Development Goals to collaborate with innovative leaders from communities around the world and ensure that the benefits of space research are spread equitably and ethically," said Wood.

She shared her personal experiences of failure and success, encouraging the girls to not only be diligent and focused in what they want to achieve, but also urging each and every one to not be afraid to ask for help along the way, and to make their own choices in life, based on what is best for their own personal fulfilment.

In order for the girls to become financially independent, Totaram challenged them to start saving from a young age, live within their means and invest wisely, outlining the importance of financial independence. "No woman should be dependent financially on another party. If you are financially free, you are free to stay or leave any situation – you are at choice every step of the way," she told the girls.

Totaram, who has been with Coronation for 19 years, is a strong advocate for women empowerment and diverse and inclusive workplaces.

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