

# Gender mainstreaming is more important than ever

The compounded economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic are felt especially by women and girls who are generally earning less, saving less, holding insecure jobs, or living close to poverty.



Ntombi Mhangwani

Now more than ever, businesses should be aggressive in their adoption of gender mainstreaming as a core business principle. About eight years ago, Business Engage initiated the Gender Mainstreaming Awards (GMAs) to celebrate gender mainstreaming and encourage the private sector to buy-in to achieving more meaningful representation of women in the mainstream of business.

“Celebrating gender mainstreaming is a priority, now more than ever. As the current pandemic deepens the prevailing economic and social stress, women are facing many stages of anxiety having to juggle numerous responsibilities of the home, and of the workplace where they often face unfair treatment,” says Ntombi Mhangwani, Africa Director for Integrated Marketing and Communications, and Women’s Forum Lead.

*“...if everyone in businesses recognise the value that gender mainstreaming brings, they would not only help solve underlying societal issues but also accelerate and drive their innovation agenda.”*

“Accolades such as the GMAs encourage the private sector to move beyond tabling the issue at boardroom level, to implementing it into their core business practices. This is why we have committed ourselves as a partner in the annual GMAs which are set to take place in September this year,” states Mhangwani.

The GMAs seeks to encourage the private sector to buy-in to achieving a more meaningful representation of women in the mainstream of business. “Gender mainstreaming has been on the agenda worldwide for several years, yet we understand that many companies are just starting on their journey. The awards, therefore, act as a springboard to further their achievements,” says Colleen Larsen, CEO at Business Engage.

“So far we have received nominations from both the private sector and government under various categories. We are currently in the final adjudication and shortlisting stages, leading to the virtual awards ceremony on 3 September 2020. The entire process has been done online,” states Larsen.

According to Larsen, progress has been made in recent years to implement policies that favour diversity and gender equality in the workplace, but many of the gains are now at risk of being rolled back due to the widespread Covid-19 pandemic and resultant grim economic outlook. “It is for this reason that we are advocating more aggressively for gender mainstreaming in the workplace. We are doing so by – among others – celebrating companies that embrace the representation of women in the workplace to encourage wider adoption of gender equality policies in the private sector,” she says.

Accenture states that their support of the initiative is aligned to their core business goals. “Several years ago, we set two clear goals: to achieve a gender-balanced workforce by 2025 and to increase the diversity of our leadership by growing the percentage of women managing directors to at least 25% by the end of 2020.

Today, our workforce is 44% women and the percentage of women managing directors is 24%,” states Mhangwani. “Treating our gender goals – like any other business priority – we hold leaders accountable, collect data, measure progress and publish workforce demographics across key geographies,” she adds.

For companies looking to embark on their adoption of gender mainstreaming policy, Business Engage developed a comprehensive, widely researched document that provides best practices for Gender Mainstreaming in the South African private sector. “We encourage the private sector to consider these best practices and to implement the chosen best practices in their Gender Mainstreaming endeavours,” Mhangwani concludes.

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