



7 July 2023

Supporting International Women's Day - Embracing Equity Campaign 2023: *Female Business Leader's Stories of Hope*

Background on the NBI & GIZ Partnership on International Women's Day (2023)

Embracing Equity as a call for action, has never been more relevant, nor more pressing. The **National Business Initiative (NBI)**, together with our partner; the **Transparency, Integrity, and Accountability Programme (TIP)** of **Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)**, embarked on a collaborative digital campaign to profile *Female Business Leader's Stories of Hope*. This initiative was launched on International Women's Day 2023 to profile the stories and experiences of prominent female business leaders, focussing on why greater equity is a matter of urgency, especially as a crucial lever for achieving sustainable social and economic development. Through this important campaign, we profiled four phenomenal female business leaders who are active ambassadors of anti-corruption, ethical leadership, and gender equity within their respective organisations.

NBI's Social Transformation work has focused on issues of inequality and exclusion and how corporates can address these issues, both internally and in relation to broader society. Our work is central to accelerating change management within business, understanding systemic barriers that drive an ecosystem of change, as well as enabling trust across stakeholders. We have facilitated bold discussions about meaningful transformation in the workplace and co-created practical initiatives to achieve an inclusive and transformed workforce. Our vision is to help enable businesses to be valuable contributors to the wider economy and society, ensuring a cohesive and equitable South Africa.

The four female leaders who shared their leadership journeys and experiences of how they have navigated various challenges in the workplace are:

1. [Allegro Dinkwanyane \(Founder & CEO: Orgella Group\)](#)
2. [Bolawana \(Mags\) Shivanda \(Founder & CEO: Digital Shero Media Group\)](#)
3. [Zanele Mthembu \(Chairperson: Sisters Working in Film & TV- SWIFT\)](#)
4. [Gale Shabangu \(Chief Transformation Officer: Mediclinic Group\)](#)

We particularly wanted to tap into the tenacity of these women in establishing start-ups, and how they contribute to society beyond the corporate boardroom.

As of early April 2023, the videos from the interviews had obtained a total of 24,771 views and 1,010 engagements (likes, reactions, shares, reposts and comments) across GIZ's LinkedIn and Instagram^[1].

Embracing and Embodying Gender Equity: The Wider Context

International Women's Day was born out of the very first National Women's Day in New York on February 28, 1909. Since then, organised women's movements have gained momentum globally. Through active mobilisation and lobbying for change, these movements have been instrumental in influencing the equality landscape. Hard-won rights, such as the right to vote, the right to work, the inclusion of gender as a human right, have all come a long way- but not far enough.

South Africa remains one of the most unequal economies and societies in the world and needs to urgently transform in terms of economic inclusion and social cohesion, by striving for an economy that is inclusive, equitable, competitive, and sustainable. By developing the institutional capacity to support social and economic transformation, we can build a South African society that is characterised by high degrees of trust. Embracing and ensuring equitable outcomes for women, including in the workplace, lies at the centre of this issue.

Women in the workplace generally face higher levels of discrimination, sexual harassment, and intimidation than men. The National Business Initiative's (NBI) **Gender Pay Gap study** showed that the pay gap between men and women ranges from 9% to 35%, which results in a quantifiable amount of R72.44 to every R100.00 earned by men.

In South Africa, women carry the responsibility for households, families, and communities disproportionately, and yet, still remain underpaid. According to Statistics South Africa, 52% of women live in poverty compared to 46.1% of men.^[2] This is particularly alarming when considering that in South Africa, 42.6% of households are headed by women and have a 10% higher likelihood of falling into poverty^[3]. The implications of this on our society and economy are concerning, particularly in addressing the challenge of poverty and inequality. It is for this reason, and many others, that issues such as corruption, gender-based violence and the gender pay gap remain a crucial global and local issue.

Women in Leadership - Sharing the Journey

The NBI and GIZ (TIP) International Women's Day campaign explored the leadership journeys of four female leaders, from across a variety of industries and companies. Their reflections on what gender equity and ethical leadership means to them are also reflected in the NBI's commitment to promoting gender equity and advancing

^[1] GIZ-South Africa LinkedIn and Instagram: @allegro_d, @mags_shivanda, @socialimpactfilms

^[2] Statistics South Africa (2023): Five facts about poverty in South Africa. Accessed 23 June 2023. Available: <https://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=12075>

^[3] Statistics South Africa (2023): Population of working age in South Africa from Q1 2019 to Q1 2022, by gender. Accessed 10 May 2023. Available: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1129143/population-of-working-age-by-gender-in-south-africa>

gender equality. Learning important lessons from each of their personal and professional journeys, we explored the opportunities and challenges for advancing gender equity in South Africa:

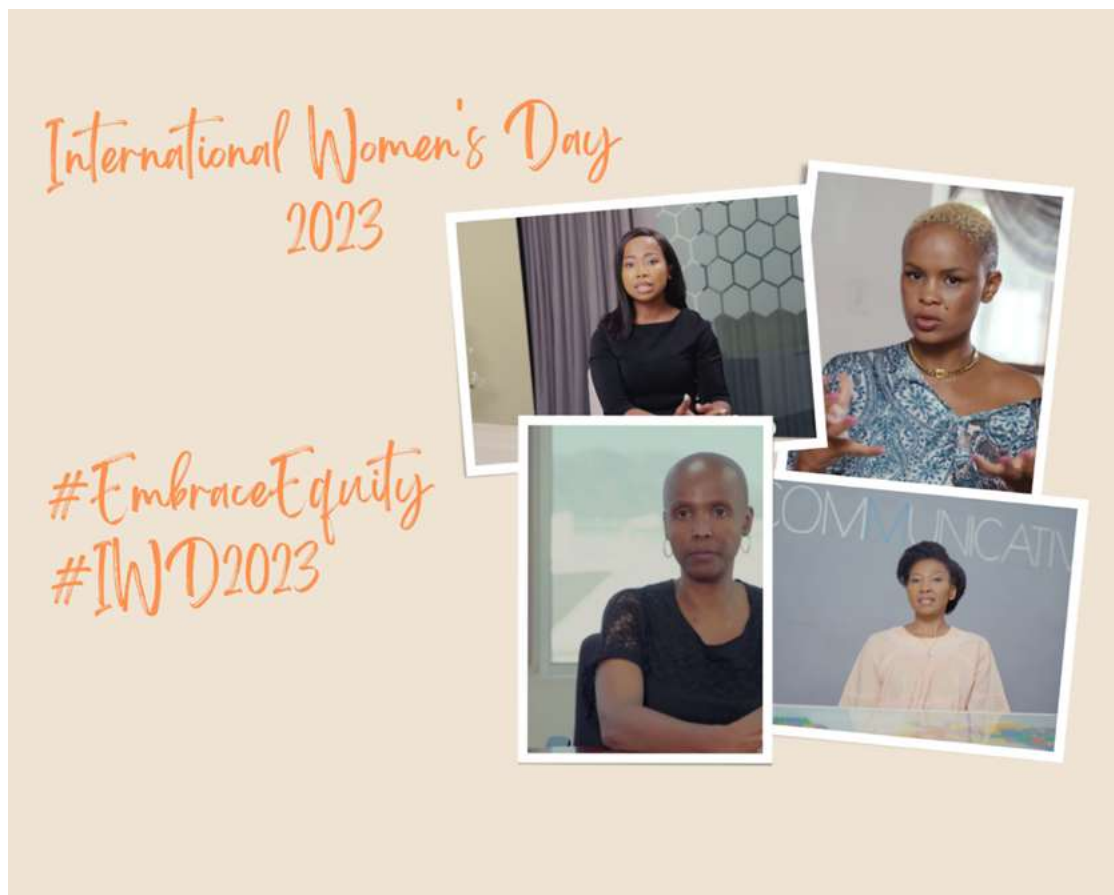
Key Quotes from the Video Series:

Allegro: “Being a woman in a leadership position is definitely different from being a man in a leadership position...just based on gender, you are already differentiated. It’s still relatively new to see a woman in power, some people are intimidated. Some people are irritated by that.”

Bolawana (Mags): “There is space for all kinds of leadership. I used to look down on [soft leadership] qualities...I used to think I need to be more aggressive- KPIs, goals [but] it was not working for me- it was giving me so much stress.”

Zanele: “The greatest challenge I’ve faced along the way was being a black woman in South Africa. Being ethical starts with yourself- you have to be honest, you have to have integrity, you have to be trustworthy. It’s okay, you are not in a race with anyone. If anything, you have to focus on your own race.”

Gale: “For us as leaders to be able to meet our objectives, we [therefore] need to make sure that we have leaders who are capable of making the right decisions. Fairness requires you to think about context; equity requires you to think about context, how do you then change the decisions in order for us to get different results and ultimately drive the optimal diversity that we are looking for in our organisations.”



What does ‘Embracing Equity’ Mean in Practice?

Even though our interviewees were a diverse group of women in terms of age, background, and industry occupation, they shared common experiences of advancing gender inequity in their leadership positions. In summary there was recognition that:

- Equality is a long-term goal where the playing field is levelled and is not something that can be reached overnight.
- Equity on the other hand, recognises the nexus between age, gender, race, class inequity and inequality. Therefore, any changes that are made to advance gender equity must recognise the differences and nuances within this context, if we want to drive performance. Depending on the context, what works in one situation will not necessarily work in others.
- Gender equity cannot be treated as one dimensional or universal. There is a direct link between having diverse and inclusive organisations and business sustainability. This is an important lever in achieving short-term wins towards achieving longer term, sustainable equality. Bridging the gap for women means recognising intersectionality and practicing equity, without which there can be no equality.
- Seeking out and building alternative leadership cultures is critical. This implies challenging traditional male-dominated (patriarchal) ethos of aggressiveness and instead, promoting a more feminine leadership ethos which is embracing, nurturing and understanding.
- Gender Equity is central to ethical leadership as a key factor in leading inclusively and elevating diversity, which contribute to leading with transparency, accountability, and integrity.

As a society, we are just beginning this journey; there are still strides to be made going forward.

The NBI's Contribution to the Gender Equity and Ethical Leadership Corporate Context:

Through our Social Transformation programme, the NBI offers innovative and pioneering services that facilitate re-orientating companies towards placing equity at the centre of their strategy and operations. The NBI's Social Transformation work focuses on developing an intersectional approach to issues of inequality and exclusion and how corporates can address this, both internally and in relation to broader society. Leadership is a critical lever to achieve change and drive transformation. Our achievements over the years include:

1. Creating safe spaces for corporate leaders to engage on important transformation issues that tackle both the personal and organisational commitments of driving transformation through our range of CEO Dialogues, Thought Leadership Series and Intergenerational Dialogues.
2. Integration of Gender Equity and Social Inclusion into the NBI's Economic Inclusion, Township Economy and Environment/Climate Finance Acceleration projects. The NBI is intentional in integrating Gender Equity and Social Inclusion (GESI) throughout all its programmatic work, as we believe that these are wider areas of transformation that have meaningful gendered impacts.
3. Fast-tracking workplace transformation through the development of practical tools such as the Transformation Blueprint & Maturity Curve assessment and the Gender Pay Gap Research (and its related Gender Index), which measures and aims to bridge the pay disparity gap between male and female workers.
4. We have produced research on LGBTQI+ experiences in the workplace and a '**Pride in Belonging Edu-Series**' ^[4]

5. The development and launch of the Ethical Leadership and Anti-Corruption online training platform to raise awareness around the nuances of corruption as a fundamental challenge to achieving social and economic transformation.
6. Co-chairing the Gender Based Violence & Femicide (GBVF) Working Group which takes forward the National Strategic Plan on GBVFR, a strategic plan for driving action on this important topic.
7. Generation of timely knowledge through NBI Thought Leadership on GBV, gender equity, nation building, social cohesion and inclusive justice topics.

Our current offerings include, but are not limited to, the following mechanisms for advancing equity, inclusion, responsible business and ethical leadership:

- The **Transformation Blueprint and Maturity Curve** process tool, which assists companies to assess their level of transformation, in order to effectively embed more inclusive policies and practices within their organisations.
- The **Gender Pay Gap and implementation of the Gender Index**, which calculates the statistical variances in pay and remuneration across gender, race, age and other critical indicators.
- The **Ethical Supplier (Ethics Coalition for Business)** project, which aims to fast-track the inclusion of diverse SMMEs into the economic mainstream to boost the Township economy. This project advances the urgent need to build higher levels of trust and accountability into the ethical practices of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMMEs).

Beyond the Organisation | A Call to Action:

Corporates have a critical and central role to play in contributing to society-wide transformation. To do this requires a shift in mindset and practice from basic compliance and tick-box exercises to bold and courageous decision-making and culture changes. These include but are not limited to gender equitable policies, shifting organisational cultures to reflect principles of diversity, equity and inclusion, and promoting spaces for authentic leadership to arise.

We are very grateful to the leaders featured in our IWD 2023 campaign who inspire us to believe that ethical leadership and gender equity is indeed possible.

Click [here](#) for an overview of the profiles of our four female leaders.

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The National Business Initiative (NBI) is an independent and voluntary coalition of South African and multinational businesses launched in 1995 by the then President, Nelson Mandela.

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