



18 August 2023

## Gender Equity is at the Core of Achieving an Inclusive and Sustainable Economy

Gender equity is critical for socio-economic transformation. According to UN Women, women's economic empowerment boosts productivity and increases economic diversification and income equality, in addition to other positive social and developmental outcomes<sup>[1]</sup>. While important strides have been made in addressing gender equity, many women continue to be marginalised and excluded from the economy. This exclusion has significant ramifications for our economy and society broadly as it exacerbates already existing challenges of poverty, inequality, and unemployment. The achievement of women's economic inclusion requires an in-depth understanding of the systemic and structural barriers that inhibit women from accessing opportunities. Collaboration across sectors is crucial in dismantling these blockages through co-creating and designing approaches, interventions and programmes that intentionally drive transformation and inclusion.

### **We require deliberate systemic change that places gender equity at the core.**

At the National Business Initiative (NBI) gender equity remains a fundamental agenda underpinning our social and economic transformation strategy and is supported through our various programmes and activities. We remain committed to our purpose of creating a sustainable, equitable and thriving society. In addition, we recognise that in order to achieve this we need to continue working towards addressing the barriers and challenges women face in accessing opportunities in order to successfully achieve an inclusive economy.

<sup>[1]</sup> [UN Women: Facts and Figures: Economic Empowerment](#)

One of the ways in which we achieve this is through the Installation, Repair and Maintenance (IRM) Initiative, a flagship programme of the Economic Inclusion Unit. The NBI, together with a range of partners, established the IRM Initiative to expand opportunities for job creation and retention across the industrial economy, unlocking opportunities which enable young people to embark on meaningful learning and employment journeys.

Addressing South Africa's increasing unemployment rate requires an extensive and in-depth focus on the segments of our economy that are most impacted in order to identify opportunities for intervention. The unemployment rate for women averages at 35% versus 31%<sup>[2]</sup> for men, with Black women disproportionately disadvantaged at 39,9%. A core element of IRM is ensuring that barriers to entry, the ability for women to participate, as well as behavioural challenges are addressed in the programme design and implementation. This is critical as workplaces in the IRM sector are male dominated resulting in an array of challenges that women must navigate. These challenges include women's experiences of being undermined and not taken seriously in comparison to their male counter parts, as well as being under compensated and in some extreme circumstances experiencing sexual harassment.

### **Women's economic inclusion is at the forefront of our IRM work.**

The IRM initiative has a target of recruiting and training at least 60% women in our youth employability and skills programme. Therefore, we have had to be intentional, agile, and responsive, and this has shaped our approach to integrating a Gender Equity and Social Inclusion (GESI) framework at all levels of our programme.

The aim of the GESI framework is to create an enabling and equitable ecosystem which includes:

- Developing and implementing policies, systems and processes that support an equitable learning and workplace experience.
- Working with employers to create an enabling work environment for Learners.
- Training TVET College facilitators and administrators on issues of bias and discrimination.
- Engaging with learners on issues of bias and discrimination, as well as providing on-going psycho-social support.

We have recorded tangible results of the impact of the GESI framework including, changes in attitudes and beliefs which have created an open-mindedness and commitment to supporting gender diversity in the sector, most notably amongst employers. These shifts have supported the abilities and ambitions of young women, with marked growth in self-esteem and self-belief.

#### **Case Study – Valecia Sambo, Founder of Daily Sambo Services.**

Valecia Sambo is a young SMME owner and Skills4Prosperity (S4P) Graduate under the NBI's IRM Initiative. She participated in the IRM programme and gained essential skills in plumbing, as well as client communication and relationship etiquette. During her time as part of the S4P Cohort, which included exposure to entrepreneurship, she realised that her passion lay more in entrepreneurship and self-employment. The skills and exposure she gained through the IRM programme helped her in the establishment and management of her own small plumbing business.

Valecia has shared her experiences of being a young Black woman in a male-dominated sector. She has faced discrimination with clients being sceptical of her ability to perform the same quality work as a man. Navigating these challenges have shaped her resolve to use the attitudes and

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<sup>[2]</sup> [Statista: Nearly half of SA women are out of the labour force in Q2:2022](#)

discrimination to fuel her ambition of wanting to change the narrative of women in plumbing and become the best at what she does.

Valencia's story illustrates how the IRM programme provides skills, experience, and resilience for the participants. Valencia has created job opportunities for other women in her community and hopes to continue to inspire many more.

As the IRM initiative grows and scales to achieve the ambitious targets set out in our strategy, we will continue to focus on gender equity and economic inclusion, mindful of the mammoth task ahead. We hold the belief that in order to achieve this, collaboration and partnerships are essential and therefore invite you to join us on this journey of economic and social transformation.

**For more information on the NBI's Economic Inclusion work please contact**

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<sup>[1]</sup> [UN Women: Facts and Figures: Economic Empowerment](#)

<sup>[2]</sup> [Statista: Nearly half of SA women are out of the labour force in Q2:2022](#)



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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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