**PRESS RELEASE**

Candidacy programme puts young women on upward path at AECOM

**21 June 2022:** In celebration of [International Women in Engineering Day (INWED)](https://www.inwed.org.uk/about/) on 23 June, trusted infrastructure consulting firm [AECOM](http://www.aecom.com) is showcasing its candidacy mentoring programme. The programme plays a vital role in ensuring newly employed graduates and experienced young professionals attain professional registration.

Completing her studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, **Viashna Soma** started her career at AECOM in February. “I feel like I am still on a learning curve as I am straight out of university. Obviously, my highlights are to come. However, every day is a learning experience, and I am enjoying it.” Commenting on the candidacy programme, Viashna says she is well on her way to registering as a candidate engineer with the Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA).

Currently she is embarking on a training programme to acquaint her with her responsibilities at AECOM, as well as its corporate culture. “It has been interesting to date, and I have discovered a penchant for design work.” Viashna adds that working part-time for AECOM for four years during her studies gave her an appreciation of the company’s global standing. “It is a truly great place for anyone to commence with a career in engineering.”

**Karien Van Heerden** graduated with a B.Eng. in Civil Engineering from the University of Pretoria in 2015, followed by Honours in Water Resources Engineering. She was the recipient of an AECOM bursary for both degrees and also did part-time work while studying. “This was quite exciting because we were working on the Gauteng Freeway Improvement Project (GFIP) at that time. I was lucky to be able to stand by the roadside while they were casting asphalt in the middle of the night.” Karien has now been at AECOM for seven years and achieved her registration as a professional engineer in March.

A career highlight to date has been her involvement with the Polihali Access Road project as part of the Phase II infrastructure for the Lesotho Highlands Water Project. “It was definitely a highlight for me to be given the opportunity to go to such a remote site and see construction happening and a bridge being built from the ground up, and one day being able to go back and drive over the bridge with my family and say this is what we achieved.” Karien attributes her success at AECOM to the excellent mentorship provided throughout the candidacy programme.

**Ntsako Masangu** obtained her Bachelor’s in Civil Engineering from the University of the Witwatersrand in 2015, followed by her Master’s in Engineering Management from the University of Johannesburg in 2019. Barely a month at AECOM, Ntsako says she has been struck by the diverse range of projects the company is involved with. “Another highlight which is something that could be taken for granted is the warm and friendly working culture I am greeted with every day.”

In order to fast-track her professional registration, Ntsako works closely with her mentor and manager on the candidacy programme. She is already excited at being afforded the opportunity to be involved with the design work on five interchanges for a major road project. “I can definitely see this as being an early career highlight for me.”

Commenting on the challenges she faces, Viashna says it was starkly apparent when she went to site for the first time that she was the only woman in a room of men. “I am quite short and small and just had to not be intimidated. As much as woman empowerment is punted, it is kind of scary when you are in that situation. I had to learn that if I felt something was right to put my ideas forward and to show that I am there to be taken seriously because I do know my job.”

Karien points out that effective communication is key to manage project deadlines and client expectations. “If you feel less confident in yourself, then that can affect communications. Being underrepresented, women struggle to assert themselves and communicate clearly. You have to be clear and concise and not stand back.”

Ntsako’s brief stint is indicative of the prevailing culture at AECOM, which favours diversity and inclusion across the corporate and social realm. “On a personal level I have had a good experience to date. My gender has not played a major role in making my job that much more difficult. This is because I am fortunate to be at a company that is not gender biased. However, it is not lost on me that globally there are women in male-dominated environments who feel the need to work harder to be afforded the same level of respect as their male counterparts.”

Viashna adds: “If you have the qualifications, you have an equal opportunity at getting the role, irrespective of gender. It is gratifying to see this as a young woman myself just starting out on my own career.” Karien points out that diversity at AECOM extends all the way to senior management and even board level. “There are a lot of women who are role models to me because of the positions they are in and which I know I can aspire to in my own career,” she concludes.

INWED from the Women’s Engineering Society (WES) celebrates its ninth year in 2022. Figures as of June 2021 indicate that only 16.5% of engineers are women. INWED gives women engineers around the world a profile when they are still hugely under-represented in their professions. As the only platform of its kind, it plays a vital role in encouraging more young women and girls to take up engineering careers.

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**Notes to the editor**

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**AECOM Contact**

Faye Bastow

Director, Marketing & Communications, MEA

Strategy & Growth

Phone: +971-2-613-4410

Cell: +971-56-996-3851

Email: faye.bastow@aecom.com

**Media Contact**Rachel MegkweNGAGE Public Relations Phone: (011) 867-7763Fax: 074 212 1422Cell: 082 562 5088Email: rachel@ngage.co.za Web: [www.ngage.co.za](http://www.ngage.co.za)

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