**NEWS ARTICLE**

AECOM celebrates UN #InvestInWomen theme on International Women’s Day

**6 March 2024:** Achieving gender equality and women’s wellbeing in all aspects of life is more crucial than ever if we want to create prosperous economies and a sustainable planet. Therefore [International Women’s Day](https://www.un.org/en/observances/womens-day) is being celebrated on 8 March under the United Nations’ theme ‘Invest in women: Accelerate progress’. Globally trusted infrastructure consulting firm [AECOM](http://www.aecom.com) celebrates the achievements of three incredible women:

**Zanele Tlabakoe, Technologist: Structures, AECOM**

Zanele joined AECOM in 2017 as an Assistant Project Manager after obtaining her National Diploma in Civil Engineering from the University of Johannesburg. She was afforded the opportunity to be an Assistant Resident Engineer on the boiler island scope at a major power station project. “Being able to witness construction activities firsthand for me was a significant highlight and filled my ambition to make a more meaningful contribution to the field.”

After completing her Bachelor of Technology specialising in Structures, she transitioned into a Resident Engineer role and embarked on managing site supervision activities. This transition marked a significant milestone in her career as it afforded Zanele the opportunity to take on greater responsibilities to ensure successful execution of works on-site. Since then, she has joined the structures design team as a Technologist and is delving into the intricacies of design work.

Mentorship and candidacy programmes inculcate a culture of success in the company, with the result that Zanele is well on her way to being registered as a Professional Engineering Technologist with the Engineering Council of South Africa. In addition, AECOM offers programmes such as performance management to evaluate performance, provide feedback and develop employees. Zanele highlights that AECOM has been instrumental to her growth and development.

“I personally have benefited from an AECOM bursary when I pursued my postgraduate diploma in Project Management in 2022,” adds Zanele. “Overall, I am grateful for the diverse experiences and opportunities that AECOM has provided me.”

Zanele stresses that inclusivity and diversity are a priority at AECOM, as well as addressing more subtle forms of discrimination such as unconscious bias. In terms of work/life balance, AECOM has flexible working arrangements. “These arrangements demonstrate AECOM’s understanding of the diverse needs of its employees and its dedication to creating a supportive and accommodating work environment.”

Most of her time has been spent on-site, which remains quite male dominated. “Due to AECOM being forward-thinking and having programmes like mentorships in place, I was able to seek out opportunities where I could engage with people with similar experiences,” highlights Zanele.

“I established meaningful relationships with individuals whom I looked up to, finding inspiration in their stories. Fortunately for me, most of them took me under their wing and advised and fostered me to overcome those challenges,” adds Zanele. “I was advised to always keep my head high and treat everyone equally, so with hard work and dedication, I earned the respect of everyone.”

Her message to young girls contemplating a similar career path is that while it is not easy and does present challenges, these can be overcome. “You are strong and capable. Do not be afraid to ask questions. Make mistakes and keep learning every day.”

Zanele says the IWD 2024 theme of #InvestInWomen is a call to address existing gender disparities and create a society that is more inclusive and equitable. “By investing in women, I believe we are empowering them to achieve their full potential, to the benefit of communities and society as a whole.”

**Michelle Lawrence, Civil Engineer: Buildings + Places, AECOM**

Michelle has been in the industry since 2015 and joined AECOM in its Buildings + Places business unit in 2019 as a Civil Engineer. She has worked on numerous international projects as a design engineer and manager.

She is an expert in Dynamo, a powerful visual programming tool that integrates with Autodesk Revit building information modelling (BIM) software. It allows architects, engineers and designers to create custom workflows, automate repetitive tasks and manipulate BIM data in a more intuitive way. “It has revolutionised workflows and significantly reduced design to save costs and improve quality, resilience and sustainability,” says Michelle.

AECOM provides a highly supportive environment for both team members and management. “I have access to growth and development tools such as our mentorship programme and monthly soft skills sessions. There is a level of freedom to take ownership of your own career path and define things for yourself.”

Michelle says the IWD 2024 theme of #InvestInWomen accelerates progress in terms of new ways of thinking. “Women provide fresh ideas and different perspectives,” she says. “In turn, I encourage and teach others as my way of giving back to AECOM and the broader industry itself.”

**Terisha Naicker, Process Engineer: Water, AECOM**

With a decade of engineering experience behind her and a Bachelor of Science in Chemical Engineering, Terisha specialises in process design and consulting in the water and wastewater sector. She has had vast exposure working with expert engineering teams from diverse backgrounds. “I pride myself on being meticulous and dynamic, enabling me to effectively contribute to a wide range of projects,” she says.

Terisha highlights that AECOM has aided her growth and development by providing access to several tools and resources, including internal training and externally accredited training courses. Her team holds weekly growth training sessions to optimise its service offering, which the global team can tap into. Specialised mentorship and guidance are also provided.

“Furthermore, I have had the privilege of travelling internationally to visit sites associated with some of the projects I am working on. I believe these opportunities have improved my ability to think proactively and refine my communication skills to navigate language barriers and enhance my resilience in my innovation and decision-making capability,” says Terisha.

The company draws talent from across the globe, allowing it to embrace individual perspectives to shape innovative solutions. “Fostering daily collaboration among resources in different office locations on various projects allows us to better respond to client needs in terms of delivering optimal solutions,” says Terisha. It is an environment where individuals feel valued and respected, with monthly team catch-up meetings and team-building sessions to keep the team on its toes.

Terisha says the IWD 2024 theme of #InvestInWomen signifies advocating for and empowering women across different spheres of life. “Achieving gender equality in scientific fields for example, can significantly advance societal progress,” she concludes.

***Ends***

**Notes to the editor**

To download hi-res images for this news article, please visit <http://media.ngage.co.za> and click on the AECOM link to view the company’s press office.

**About AECOM**

AECOM is the world’s trusted infrastructure consulting firm, delivering professional services throughout the project lifecycle – from advisory, planning, design and engineering to program and construction management. On projects spanning transportation, buildings, water, new energy, and the environment, our public- and private-sector clients trust us to solve their most complex challenges. Our teams are driven by a common purpose to deliver a better world through our unrivalled technical and digital expertise, a culture of equity, diversity and inclusion, and a commitment to environmental, social and governance priorities. AECOM is a Fortune 500 firm and its Professional Services business had revenue of $14.4 billion in fiscal year 2023. See how we are delivering sustainable legacies for generations to come at aecom.com and @AECOM.

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