**PRESS RELEASE**

AECOM champions diversity and development at LHWP Phase II

**World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development promotes sustainable development**

**20 May 2022:** The [World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development](https://www.un.org/en/observances/cultural-diversity-day) on Saturday 21 May not only highlights the richness of the world’s cultures, but also the essential role of intercultural dialogue for sustainable development. Global trusted infrastructure consulting firm [AECOM](http://www.aecom.com) believes that an inclusive culture is a dynamic, active, and intentional environment that increases individual and organisational performance by creating opportunities for all employees to achieve their full potential.

With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by the UN in September 2015, and the resolution on Culture and Sustainable Development adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 2015, the message of the World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development is more important than ever. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals can best be achieved by drawing upon the creative potential of the world’s diverse cultures and engaging in continuous dialogue to ensure that all members of society benefit from sustainable development.

AECOM fosters a workplace free from discrimination, harassment and provides equal opportunities in all areas of employment. A key aim for the business is ensuring all employment practices are objective and free from bias, are based solely on work criteria and individual merit and meet the broader company objectives.

In celebration of the UNESCO World Day, AECOM is highlighting its long-term involvement with Phase II of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project (LHWP), a transboundary water resource management scheme under development by the governments of Lesotho and South Africa.

The water-transfer component of LHWP Phase II consists of the construction of the 165-m-high Polihali Dam in the Mokhotlong district of Lesotho. AECOM is overseeing the design and construction supervision of a portion of the advance infrastructure known as the Polihali Western Access Road (PWAR).

This includes a new 55 km road (PWAR) and the rehabilitation of the 96 km Northern Access Road, which will provide a permanent access road to the new Polihali Dam site. Major construction elements of the 23-month contract include three new concrete bridges from 60 m to 90 m long, 15 new major culverts, gabions and reinforced concrete retaining walls.

With a total of 50% of women working on this project, Project Manager **Eric Van Sciver** notes how the female professionals working on-site have made a significant contribution to the project and he identifies the positive impact diversity has on AECOM projects. He says: “They have all played an instrumental role in the team and have had a major impact on our success. We are stronger, smarter, and better because of our differences. Drawing from a wealth of diverse backgrounds and experiences unlocks better collaboration across our company and better enables us to understand our clients and each other.”

In line with AECOM’s Sustainable Legacies strategy, all projects strive to leave positive and lasting social impacts. On this project, one aspect of this included liaising with the local Basotho community, keeping them informed of progress and ensuring their ongoing buy-in into this major infrastructure project, one of the largest of its kind in the world. **Thandiwe Siyakatshana**, an inspector on the western portion, says that being in a different country also meant a different way of working.

“We interacted with the local community a lot, as it is not only the technical and engineering scope of a project of this magnitude that is important, but also the softer issues of liaison, empowerment, and sustainability,” says Thandiwe.

**Karlushka Mothilal**, an inspector for the construction supervision of the concrete and layer works and contract administration, highlights that AECOM’s scope of work is of huge benefit to the local community. “The PWAR road links the local community to a clinic, church, and various schools in the area. In addition, the road design gives the children a safer and improved terrain to walk to school every day,” says Karlushka.

“Many of these children and community members have never seen construction activity of such magnitude before. Our hope is that some become inspired by what we are doing and pursue careers of a similar nature. Our team also got involved at a local community level by assessing specific needs at various schools and arranging donations for a shoe drive, for example. It was a combined effort of the entire professional team, including contractors, consultants, and subcontractors,” says Karlushka.

**Karien van Heerden**, an assistant resident engineer, adds that up-and-coming young professionals were earmarked for on-site training and have subsequently assumed responsibility for some of the digital tools deployed on the project, including drones and GIS. “Our Basotho appointed secretarial assistant learned a lot about the innovative technologies that we adopted,” she points out. A personal achievement for Karien was accumulating sufficient practical experience while on the project to complete her professional registration as an engineer.

Noting the above women’s achievements, Eric adds: “All three women went above and beyond their duties to assume responsibility for other aspects of the project. These women, and all the women working on this project, are proving that this industry is no longer a male-dominated sector.”

Commenting on the progress to date, Eric says practical completion of AECOM’s scope of work is expected towards year end. “This is only a small part of phase two of the overall project. There will be activity in the region for the next three years easily with the construction of the dam and the tunnel itself,” he concludes.

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#AECOM recognises female professionals who have made significant contributions to its LHWP Phase II scope of work for over two years to date. World Day for Cultural Diversity for #Dialogue and #Development

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**Notes to the editor**

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

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