**NEWS ARTICLE**

AECOM lauds its women engineers as part of INWED 2023 celebrations

**21 June 2023:** In celebration of [International Women in Engineering Day (INWED)](https://www.inwed.org.uk/) on 23 June, globally trusted infrastructure consulting firm [AECOM](http://www.aecom.com) is showcasing the important role that women play in the company. Its commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion enables it to better anticipate its clients’ needs, understand the challenges facing the communities it serves, drive innovation that propels the industry forward and realise its purpose of delivering a better world.

Held under the banner of the Women’s Engineering Society (WES), INWED celebrates its 10th year in 2023, yet again promoting the amazing work being carried out by women engineers across the globe under the theme of ‘Make Safety Seen’.

Even though she has only been at AECOM for five months, **Debbie Govender** has already worked on three major projects in railway engineering. She says it has been intense as it has involved a lot of work in a relatively short space of time. With a BSc and MSc in Civil Engineering, she has a decade’s experience at a major parastatal under her belt, working in geotechnical, railway design and project and programme management.

Her move to the private sector was prompted by a desire for a more rounded engineering experience, including exposure to international projects, which is AECOM’s forte. “It is good to learn how things work in other countries and know that we are able to apply our local skills and expertise around the world,” says Debbie.

What keeps her passionate about her job and the industry is the opportunity to address real-world problems and challenges. The importance of the passenger rail system in South Africa is underpinned by the fact that people need a cost-effective way to move around the country.

“What keeps me motivated is gaining more knowledge by being involved in infrastructure projects that stand to play a vital role in empowering local communities and the quality of life and economic development of the country,” says Debbie.

Commenting on the INWED 2023 theme of ‘Make Safety Seen’, Debbie says it is vital for engineers to integrate safety and environmental considerations into their designs. “It is changing the mindset from a traditional focus on the bottom line and pushing for the most cost-effective design to now where we have to think much more about the people factor.”

Her message to young girls contemplating a similar career path is to “pick a career that makes you excited to get up every morning. Working in engineering, especially in this country, makes you feel you are making a difference, improving lives, and making South Africa a better place for all to live in. It is challenging and interesting. You should just go out there and do your thing, as it is a great career path.”

Only at AECOM for eight months, structural engineer **Sean Moodley** has experience in water and wastewater treatment plants and highlights the opportunity of being able to work on multidisciplinary projects. “That exposure to different disciplines is fascinating, especially seeing how other teams work and communicate.”

Sean says young girls contemplating a similar career path are often intimidated by the title of ‘engineer’. “There is a need for soft skills in the industry and a shift towards more human-centred design. What is so interesting is that lived experience is always so different for everyone. Do not undersell the value of empathy in engineering, as this is in the very DNA of human-centred design. You must be able to put yourself into the shoes of the end users while you are designing. That is such a valuable skill and a critical way of how we will continue to design into the future.”

**Nina Otto**, a technical director in engineering management, has extensive experience with town planning and project management and is used to working with large teams that change constantly according to project requirements. This includes multi-disciplinary teams including civil, structural MEP engineers Quantity Surveyors, architects and even land surveyors.

It allows for a flat management structure at AECOM that focuses on competency and experience and is very open to inclusion and diversity and offering equal opportunities to all. Nina says her interest in a science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) career was inspired by the fact that her father was a civil engineer who worked on the landmark Lesotho Highlands Water Project.

“I think my personality made me gravitate to project management. Due to the multidisciplinary nature of town planners, we are quite good at understanding and synthesising a lot of information from other disciplines. Women tend to be very good collaborators who generally communicate well, which is a definite strength,” she concludes.

***Ends***

**Notes to the editor**

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**AECOM Contact**

Lucy McLane

Communications Manager, Strategy & Growth, Middle East & Africa

Phone: +971-58-575-6364

Email: [lucy.mclane@aecom.com](mailto:lucy.mclane@aecom.com)

Website: [www.aecom.com](http://www.aecom.com)

**Media Contact**

Thobile Ndlovu

Account Executive  
NGAGE Public Relations   
Phone: (011) 867-7763  
Cell: 073 574 2931  
Email: [thobile@ngage.co.za](mailto:thobile@ngage.co.za)  
Web: [www.ngage.co.za](http://www.ngage.co.za/)

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