**NEWS ARTICLE**

AECOM helps build sustainable legacies for Women’s Day

**01 August 2023:** In celebration of [Women’s Day](https://www.gov.za/speeches/womens-day-2023-11-nov-2022-1542) on 9 August, globally trusted infrastructure consulting firm [AECOM](http://www.aecom.com) highlights three exceptional women making inroads. The company’s commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion enables it to better anticipate its clients’ needs, the challenges facing the communities it serves, drive innovation to propel the industry forward, and realise its purpose of delivering a better world.

**Liliana Lopez Ortiz, Associate Geotechnical Engineer, AECOM**

Liliana conceives, plans, and researches solutions for diverse geotechnical projects. She is also involved in team selection and shepherds projects through to completion. “Most importantly, I grow and mentor the young geotechnical engineers and geologists that are onboard.”

Liliana is a passionate civil engineer specialising in geotechnical engineering, with 20 years’ experience in Latin America, South and Central Africa, the Middle East and Oceania. Her extensive project experience ranges from small to large scale in sectors like water, mining, commercial and industrial developments.

Having worked at AECOM for over a decade, Liliana considers it a privilege to be able to work in a global, diverse and vibrant environment that shows one different perspectives. “AECOM has an inclusive culture and a supportive, multicultural environment. The opportunities afforded by working at such a global company in terms of experience and exposure is a real boost to one’s career,” says Liliana, who started out as a Senior Technical Engineer and has developed her skillset and strengths ever since.

When it comes to the role of women in engineering, Liliana says gender should be irrelevant, and “our focus must solely be on expertise, creativity, and innovation. Nevertheless, you do realise how little representation women have in my field, rooted to stereotypes, gender biases, and insufficient encouragement for women to pursue STEM careers.”

This means women in engineering “do have to go the extra mile to prove themselves” and to convince their male counterparts they are equally capable. “I try to focus on what I can contribute positively to any situation. I do find that AECOM excels at affording women equal opportunities. However, as a society, we do need to learn to remove labels and work with the strengths of every single person.”

Open communication channels are important for all employees to maintain their well-being, quality of life, and productivity. AECOM has an ongoing campaign to promote a healthy, balanced workforce. “The flexibility to work from home means we get to spend more time with our loved ones and get our work done at the same time,” says Liliana.

What keeps Liliana passionate about engineering is contributing to and providing technical solutions for challenging and impactful projects that change people’s lives and have a greater influence on society.

“One of the biggest contributions that I can make as an engineer and as a woman is being able to be part of the solution to the challenges we face on a daily basis and inspire the upcoming generation of women who want to be part of this industry,” says Liliana.

**Anneri Maritz, Transport Engineer, AECOM**

Anneri started out as a bridge engineer and has since become an integral part of the transportation team, from technical work to developing design proposals and documentation and managing a range of projects, including construction supervision. She has a Master’s degree in transportation, specialising in pedestrianisation.

“AECOM is a great company to gain experience in different roles. You get to explore all disciplines in the civil engineering sector, which is important when commencing with your career. This affords you the opportunity to determine where your passion really lies and what you need to achieve in terms of career progression. I have gained the experience and insight to become a better professional and to grow as an individual as well,” says Anneri.

She concurs that the industry remains male dominated, right from her civil engineering classes at university. “But that does not put a dampener on the experience I have of the industry as a woman. You gain valuable knowledge and learn how to work with an array of different people.”

For Anneri, being a woman is not necessarily an advantage or a disadvantage. “I think it does have its challenges when it comes to breaking the traditional stereotype of a civil engineer. However, given my experience, it is not really something that keeps you from advancing as an engineer.”

To be a good employee, a good engineer, and good at your technical capabilities, Anneri says you must be a balanced person. “It is a priority in my life to achieve this balance as it is essential for my professional and personal development. My objectives serve to renew my energy constantly. What better way to progress than to constantly set yourself goals? Also, if you have external hobbies, it allows you to focus on different aspects of your life and keeps you motivated.”

What keeps Anneri passionate about civil engineering “is to see the difference that infrastructure makes in the physical world we live in. It is a way of indirectly giving back and caring for the communities in which we operate. Being a caretaker is a role often ascribed to women. However, there are different ways of caring for people, some ways more obvious than others. This is what makes me passionate about my role as a woman in the civil engineering industry.”

**Thandiwe Siyakatshana, Bridge Engineer, AECOM**

Thandiwe started her career at AECOM legacy company BKS as a bursary student and has never looked back. “I have been with AECOM for a long time. It has been interesting to see how the industry continues to evolve and adapt, including the type of projects I get to work on.”

The experience has allowed Thandiwe to develop into a fully rounded professional engineer. “You are exposed to a lot of big projects and a pool of multinational resources drawn from different regions and skillsets, so it has been great.”

Thandiwe adds it has often been daunting, “not only being a Black woman in the engineering field, but in any STEM-related career for that matter. There are unique challenges due to underrepresentation and historic disparity.” A related issue is the lack of role models to aspire women to break the glass ceiling in the engineering industry.

“It is always better when you know someone has achieved something that it is indeed possible for you to emulate them.” Thandiwe has faced such challenges by focusing on networking and mentoring to gain as much experience as possible. She concurs that AECOM promotes a good life and work balance, especially for women, by allowing for a remote or hybrid work model. “It gives you clear boundaries and allows you to cope with the different responsibilities and duties of home and career life.”

As a woman, Thandiwe asserts that her simple presence at a project meeting shows diversity in action at AECOM. “Breaking barriers being in a historically male dominated field can also be very empowering. You are always motivated to challenge stereotypes to create a more inclusive work environment. Obviously overcoming such adversity is highly fulfilling, especially as you get the chance to empower others to pursue their ambitions and goals,” she says.

“Engineering is an exciting profession as it affords you the opportunity to be able to design and build infrastructure that creates a sustainable legacy for communities and society. My message to other women is to embrace their identities and to be as authentic as possible, which is key. Let that be a source of strength and inspiration to pursue all your own dreams and goals,” concludes Thandiwe.

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**Notes to the editor**

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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 $13.1 billion in fiscal year 2022. See how we are delivering sustainable legacies for generations to come at aecom.com and @AECOM.

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