

PRESS RELEASE

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New network addresses urgent need for professional women

Acting on the need for women's unique role within the energy sector in South Africa, Marlene van Rooyen, longstanding Editor of Walls & Roofs in AFRICA, founding Editor of 25Degrees and WATER360, formed the newly launched SA Women in Energy Network (SAWIEN).

This much anticipated launch was held at the picturesque Forum Homini Hotel and Roots Restaurant, Letamo Game Estate in Gauteng on 26 August 2014. A dynamic range of prominent female industry players within the energy sector attended to what turned out to be a highly successful launch.

SAWIEN is a networking organisation focused on bringing together women in the energy sector to foster entry by other women into the energy space and their advancement by capacity building, information sharing and creating a network of worthwhile contacts in the sector.

The network aims to create opportunities for women in energy by providing a platform for networking with like-minded persons and provide exposure of all levels of success achieved by individuals and to give exposure to up-and-coming talent, while fostering career and leadership development, as well as the potential for career advancement through the network. This initiative is sponsored by the British High Commission in Pretoria.

On the day of this exciting launch, Marlene warmly welcomed the diverse group of women to SAWIEN, exuding her excitement to be surrounded by such talented, powerful ladies in the audience. "This initiative is close to my heart and I am so happy and privileged to be able to share this day, and this initiative with you," she says. "The role each of us play as individuals in the energy landscape is emphasized through the formation of SAWIEN. Women can and must play an active role in the planning, producing, supplying and managing of energy. There can be no sustainable energy for all unless we tap into the energy, engagement and expertise of women. We can bring about change and we are doing so! There is power in unity."

She goes on to highlight that SAWIEN is the culmination of numerous conversations and input from industry and a dream realised for her, a woman with a passion for energy, climate change and South Africa. As such, she has a vested interest in the industry. "This network offers us a space to connect, to have conversations around challenges we face, to support and offer advice and for us to grow, not only individually, but to take stewardship of the next generation of career women emerging in the energy sector," Marlene said, adding: "Networking is about building relationships that can result in solutions."

Before introducing the first speaker of the day, Marlene excitedly shared another exciting initiative, The SA Women in Energy Award. This prestigious award celebrates extraordinary women and validates them for their hard work in advancing the energy landscape. The recipient will have shown great commitment and dedication, and recognises an outstanding exemplar in the local energy industry.

The debut recipient for this annual award went to Lisa Reynolds, Sustainability Director at Saint-Gobain and Chair of the SABS Technical Committee, who has been instrumental in strategy, direction and construction of energy efficient standards in South Africa, “She is determined, resolute, tenacious and fair,” notes Marlene. “The industry, and South Africa as a whole, is a better place for her extensive contributions.”

After the hand-over of this award, Marlene went on to introduce the speakers for the day, who are all women driven by their passion for the industry sector. The speakers of the day comprised of Danae Dholakia, Political Counsellor from The British High Commission in Pretoria, Lisa Reynolds, who had been awarded the SA Women in Energy Award, and Faith Mkhacwa, Project Manager, NCPC, SA.

First speaker of the day, Danae, discussed the United Kingdom’s role as funder for this event, and how they truly believe in both South Africa and the UK’s joint climate change, energy work and the combined goals in empowering women. It is for this reason that they are pleased to support this new and important initiative.

“Even though South Africa has a strong women in energy focus, there is a need for exposure of less publicised achievements and successful women,” Danae highlights. “Women are scattered across industries within the sector – this network will bring them together under an all-inclusive umbrella. This forum provides networking for women specifically in a male dominated environment, furnishing advice on career strategy and general knowledge sharing to capacitate women in South Africa.”

She goes on to say that the UK has been a strong player in the local energy sector and a proponent of capacity building and knowledge sharing, and is seen as a neutral and objective partner with huge credibility in South African society.

Marlene went on to introduce Lisa Reynolds, who has carved out a phenomenal career to date - a career that sets a notable standard. As such, Lisa is truly an inspiring example to other women seeking to achieve ongoing success and growth within the energy sector. Lisa’s honest and forward approach while addressing the audience on her own experiences as a women driven by a passion to excel, caused for peels of laughter, as everyone focused intently on every word she said.

As is often a concern for women who try to achieve a work-family balance, Lisa highlights that everyone needs to find their own balance in life, and her experience has taught her to focus on quality as opposed to quantity.

In terms of this industry, she goes on to say that women can change the energy sector for the better. “People with vested interests get things done, but there has to be checks and balances,” Lisa notes. She aptly captured the essence of women’s role in the energy sector by reminding them that they will get what they are willing to put up with. “But most important is your sense of humour!”

Another inspiring leader within the energy industry who addressed the large network of women at SAWIEN is Faith Mkhacwa. She offered a brief insight into her career progression to date, and her drive to succeed, regardless of the challenges, is embedded in her dedication to renew the mind-set that strong, educated women often have to lose their femininity in order to achieve what their male counterparts achieve.

“Women are unique in that they trust their intuition and great relationship builders,” she says. “So too, women understand the power of giving. My advice for other women in the energy sector is to never underestimate themselves or their potential. Women can change the industry for the better.

Access to energy has created a multitude of opportunities for women in this industry. We have to encourage women to be ambitious and rise above this male dominated field."

Faith firmly believes that passion will carry you to success, and it is something to hold onto when nothing else makes sense. "My boss's has always believed in me, and that pushed me to believe in myself as well," she adds.

Upon Faith's completion of her address, Marlene concluded the day's events by reiterating some of the fundamental topics of discussion, "Be brave; be courageous;"she said. "Do excellent work and let your work speak for itself. Grab hold of opportunities, or create your own," she enthused.

Everyone was encouraged to embrace this opportunity to network with each other, which incited very positive feedback. SAWIEN will hold several events encouraging further networking and promotion of women, while carrying with them the knowledge that their contribution as women play a crucial role in the advancement of the energy sector.

Please also see member benefits, vision statement and further background on accompanying press release.

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Captions:

Caption 1: LTR: Marlene van Rooyen, Founder of SAWIEN, Faith Mkhacwa, Project Manager, NCPC, SA, Danae Dholakia, Political Counsellor from The British High Commission in Pretoria and Lisa Reynolds, Sustainability Director at Saint-Gobain and Chair of the SABS Technical Committee.

Caption 2: Marlene van Rooyen, Founder of SAWIEN.