

Women4Africa international recognition award bestowed on Dr Snowy Khoza, CEO of Bigen Africa

The world we live in today has come to be regarded as a dynamic entity confronting us with unprecedented natural, social and economic challenges at every front, taxing our individual and collective ingenuity like never before. Africa, a powerful giant of a continent now coming into its own, is responding by producing its own heroic men and women to take the lead in its exciting transformation. One of these heroic women is Dr Snowy Khoza, Chief Executive of Bigen Africa, a thought-leading infrastructure development group active in Africa.

A virtuous woman

From her earliest years, Dr Khoza has proven her strength of character and determination to achieve her utmost despite the hurdles of a poverty-stricken childhood in apartheid South Africa, ultimately becoming the first female CEO of a leading infrastructure development group. In the process, she has been widely recognised for her contributions to industry, social upliftment and gender empowerment. With boundless energy and passion, she has shown herself to be a catalyst for change in all of these areas, thereby earning a number of accolades, the latest being international recognition at the fifth annual Women4Africa awards to be held in London on 21 May 2016.

“Dr Khoza, with her focus and passion for the causes that she champions, through which she inspires and makes a difference to the lives of others, epitomises the kind of person that Women4Africa celebrates,” says Dr Iraj Abedian, Chairman of the Bigen Africa Board.

Previously, Dr Khoza was also named the National Business Leader of the Year at the 13th National Business Awards, also dubbed the “Oscars of South African Business”, and as the winner in the Business category of the recognition awards presented annually by Unashamedly Ethical in 2015. She was also awarded Continental Lifetime Achiever at the Most Influential Women in Business and Government and Titans – Building Nations awards event in 2014.

To Dr Khoza, it is deeply meaningful to be allowed to stand amongst the strong and unique women of Africa. She sees such accolades as a gift from her heritage and upbringing, with all

its challenges, and an opportunity to take her place amongst those who have made a difference to their fellow Africans.

“My faith as a Christian and passion for my people, their growth and well-being are what have brought me to this point, and the satisfaction of knowing that I have helped to change individual futures is my reward, she says.”

From ashes to beauty

Like many similar stories of growing up in apartheid South Africa, Dr Khoza knew abject poverty. Memories of her early childhood, such as studying under a street light in the midst of winter, hungry and cold, had imprinted in her a deep sense of determination to transform the lives of impoverished Africans, as she had done with her own life.

“In her capacity as CEO, Dr Khoza has wrought far-reaching changes at Bigen Africa,” says Dr Abedian. “She has inspired its transformation from an engineering firm into a highly successful infrastructure development Group with the vision to improve the quality of life of all through the development of sustainable infrastructure solutions.”

With core capabilities in engineering, management consulting and development finance, Bigen Africa has secured many mega projects in Africa and is in the process of expanding its firm footprint even deeper into Africa. Some of these projects are:

- The 360km North-South Carrier (NSC-2) regional water transfer system in Botswana, for which Bigen Africa received the Best International Project award from *Consulting Engineers South Africa* in 2015.
- Electricity provision for 100 000 rural villagers in Ethiopia.
- Wallacedene taxi rank, South Africa’s first “green” taxi rank, which received a four-star rating from Green Star South Africa.
- Second Creek integrated development project in the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality, Eastern Cape and the Klarinet housing project in Mpumalanga, both of which won Govan Mbeki Housing Awards.
- Site supervision and contract management during the Clanwilliam Dam extension project in South Africa.

“Focused on both business and people, Dr Khoza has been responsible for establishing the highest standards of business ethics at Bigen Africa, and has strengthened the focus on employee development and female empowerment,” details Dr Abedian. “She has helped to foster a social conscience across the Group, introducing a creed of “doing good while doing business” which is not only practised in terms of corporate social investment, but is also incorporated into business practice to enhance the benefits for communities where infrastructure development projects are completed.”

In her private capacity, Dr Khoza is committed to social upliftment and has initiated a number of projects such as the Snowy Khoza Trust which aids children and child prisoners in obtaining an education. Because of her own background, and as a mother herself, she cannot ignore the needs of those whose futures may depend on simply being given the right opportunities. She sees this applying in the workplace, where great professional potential can be unlocked, and in the social context, where previous disadvantages can be overcome with relatively small outside intervention. It is her express wish that South Africa, and other African countries, would see this being done on a greater scale.

“Possessing a strong ‘future focus’, perhaps as a result of her background, Dr Khoza has proven her skill as a business strategist, taking Bigen Africa to greater heights every year through its flexible and insightful S-Vision five-year plans,” says Dr Abedian. “Despite the economic challenges businesses across the globe are experiencing at present, Bigen Africa has shown a consistent trend of business growth and profitability.”

Dr Khoza’s personal experiences have also instilled a deep compassion for and pride in the women of Africa in her, and she declares that it is time they come into their own right. “I applaud the mission of Women4Africa to honour women in their different capacities, both private and professional, where they are faced with many challenges but nevertheless succeed in making meaningful contributions to the improvement of our world. To God be the glory!”

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