

Helping black women to feature in the industry audit

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ALTHOUGH African women accountants are still under-represented in South Africa, there's a concerted effort to drive gender parity, according to the African Women Chartered Accountants (AWCA).

Speaking on the eve of the organisation's Woman of Substance Awards, AWCA president Lesego Sennelo said over the past 15 years the number of black women accountants had risen from 407 to more than 4 700. Of these 2 500 were African.

Sennelo said, through collaborative efforts with private and big business, bottlenecks faced by women at the entry level were still being dealt with.

"We have committed ourselves to

raising awareness of the work we do which includes identifying young talent, facilitating learnerships, raising bursaries for aspirant chartered accountants, and since 2006 we have afforded 80 students with an opportunity to study," she said.

The association has also established student chapters at several institutions, including the universities of Cape Town, Rhodes, Wits, Monash and Johannesburg, as a pipeline to feed into the pool of chartered accountants.

Sennelo said the commercial business was designed with males in mind and because it was at the centre stage of the country's economic growth, it was imperative that women chartered accountants took their place with pride.

One of the highlights of celebrating

strides made by women was hosting the annual Woman of Substance Awards, which recognised exceptional leaders who also displayed a commitment to governance and community development.

This year's winner was announced on Thursday. The award went to Dr Thandi Ndlovu, chief executive of the Motheo Construction Group.

Ndlovu, a former Umkhonto weSizwe cadre, ran a private medical practice in Orange Farm, south of Johannesburg, for three years and during that time delivered medical services covering a population of over 200 000 people.

"I was inspired by my own mother, who had managed to send her three children to university and also by the

work I did with young women at the MK camps, south of Angola.

"But when I started working at the informal settlement I had a desire to contribute towards lifting up people from the conditions and organised them into building their own homes," she said.

Ndlovu added that she was under no illusions of being successful immediately when she started her construction company because the sector continued to be male-dominated and predominantly white. "But my focus was on affording people with decent and affordable social housing, empowering them to participate in the process and taking ownership of their homes with pride. So I had to be strategic..."

She said while there was a need to

focus on technical skills development, it was important to create opportunities throughout the value chain.

Although her company has built multimillion-rand projects, she counts as one of the most gratifying moments seeing someone moving from a "mud house" into a good-quality brick-and-mortar home.

Past award recipients include the late minister Stella Sigcau, businesswomen Gloria Serobe and Wendy Luhabe, accountants Nonkululeko Gobodo and Futhi Mtoba, former Independent Electoral Commission chairperson Dr Brigalia Bam, former deputy minister Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, former public protector Thuli Madonsela and former AU chairperson Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma.