

Aim to increase African female chartered accountants

BULELWA PAYI

ALTHOUGH African women accountants are still under represented in South Africa, there's an effort to drive gender parity, said the African Women Chartered Accountants.

The association's president, Lesego Sennelo, said over the last 15 years the number of black women accountants rose from 407 to over 4 000 and of them, 2 500 were African.

"We have committed ourselves to raising awareness of the work that we do which includes among other things, identifying young talent, facilitating learnerships, raising bursaries for aspirant chartered accountants, and since 2006 we have afforded 80 students with an opportunity to study," Sennelo said.

The association has established chapters at several tertiary institutions as a pipeline to increase the pool of chartered accountants.

"What is also significant about this is that we mentor them and debate issues that they grapple with, so that by the time they qualify their



Lesego Sennelo, the president of African Women Chartered Accountants .

leadership skills are developed and enhanced," Sennelo said.

She said the commercial business industry was designed for men and it was imperative that women chartered accountants established themselves in the sector.

The annual Woman of Substance Awards recognises leaders who are committed to governance and community development.

This year's winner was Dr Thandi Ndlovu, the chief executive of Motheo Construction Group.

Ndlovu, a former *Umkhonto we Sizwe* cadre, ran a private practice in Orange Farm, an informal settlement south of Johannesburg.

"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," she said.

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

Ndlovu knew that when she started her construction company, the sector was 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," she said.

"So I had to be strategic about the approach."

It was important to create opportunities throughout the value chain, and to enable those who started as sub-contractors to advance to higher levels, she added.

Ndlovu said her company are able to up-skill young engineers to match experienced counterparts.

Her company has multi-million rand projects, but she said one of the most gratifying moments was when someone moves from a "mud house" with rickety ceilings and doors into a quality brick and mortar home.

Previous Woman of Substance Award recipients include: the late Stella Sigcau, a former Public Works minister, businesswomen Gloria Serobe, Wendy Luhabe, chartered accountants Nonkululeko Gobodo and Futhi Mtoba, former Independent Electoral chair Brigalia Bam, former deputy minister Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, former public protector Thuli Madonsela and former AU chair Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma.