

Meet Professor Nishani Harinarain, a trailblazer in construction

With a career spanning over 17 years in academia, Professor Nishani Harinarain has made significant contributions to the construction industry and has garnered several accolades for her work.

The first PhD graduate in construction management at UKZN, she is an associate professor in construction studies and a member of the Association of South African Quantity Surveyors (ASAQs).

"I was drawn to the construction industry because of my fascination with buildings and infrastructure," she recalls. "I enjoy seeing projects come to life and being involved in the process."

Women add unique skills to the industry

As a woman entering the construction field, Harinarain faced numerous challenges, particularly those related to gender bias and stereotypes.

"I was often the only woman on site or in the boardroom," she explains. "I faced scepticism about my abilities, and although I did not encounter it, I know that the industry can be harsh and unwelcoming and, in the past, insensitive towards women."

To overcome these challenges, Harinarain emphasises the importance of persistence and hard work.

"I ensured that I was never excluded and that I was given the opportunities to grow. I think it is important for firms to create a more inclusive and supportive environment to address the unique challenges faced by women. Maybe this can even help attract and retain more women in the construction industry," she says.

When asked about the unique perspectives and skills that women bring to the field of quantity surveying, she highlights their collaborative nature and communication skills.

"Our ability to foster strong relationships, facilitate teamwork, and effectively communicate with stakeholders can enhance project coordination and client satisfaction. Women also tend to be adept at building and nurturing relationships, which is crucial in quantity surveying. Developing trust and rapport with clients, contractors, and suppliers can lead to long-term partnerships and repeat business, contributing to the success of projects and the reputation of the quantity surveyor. We play an important role in the industry."



In 2018, UKZN academic Prof Nishani Harinarain was awarded the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Engineering and Technology in Academia: Teaching and Learning, from Women in Engineering and the Built Environment (WIEBE) in partnership with the Department of Public Works, the University of Johannesburg and construction company Group Five. Source: [UKZN](#)



Sanna Sebone shares tips on building a sustainable woman-owned construction enterprise

Sindy Peters 17 Mar 2023



Roleplayers should work together to encourage STEM careers

Offering advice to young women considering a career in construction or quantity surveying, Harinarain encourages them to explore their interests and connect with professionals in the field.

"Their experiences and guidance can provide valuable insights and support as you navigate your own career path. Take the time to understand why you are interested in the construction industry or quantity surveying. Explore different aspects of the field to identify what truly resonates with you."

To encourage more young girls to consider STEM careers in construction-related fields, Harinarain suggests early exposure to STEM concepts and construction-related activities.

"Girls need to be encouraged to pursue their interests and passions without societal limitations. There needs to be a collaboration between construction companies, industry associations, and professional organisations to promote diversity and inclusivity that specifically targets girls and promotes their entry into STEM fields within the construction industry."

She believes that a career in quantity surveying is not only rewarding and fulfilling, but also contributes to the industry's growth and helps shape a more diverse and inclusive future.

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