

# In the driver's seat



*The engineering sector may be eons away from meeting transformation targets for empowering women but Savannah Maziya is already miles ahead of the bid.*

Multinational, strategic consulting, engineering, and programme/construction management organisation, Parsons Brinckerhoff, recently confirmed the appointment of Savannah Maziya for their African affiliate of Parsons Brinckerhoff Africa (Pty) Ltd. Maziya has extensive industry experience, including serving as Group Chief Executive Officer of Bunengi Holdings, and National Sales and Investment Manager (USA) at Cacharel. She also served as President of Serengeti Portfolio of Prestige and was Chief Executive Officer of the African Broadcast Network.

She currently, also serves as a Director at WBHO Construction (Pty) Ltd. This is among a

string of other directorships for big companies internationally, including having been a member of the King of Swaziland's Economic Advisory Board and that of the Construction Industry Development Board of Public Works.

When Transform SA met with her we asked:

**TSA: Congratulations on your appointment as as Chairman of Parsons Brinckerhoff Africa. What does this mean, for you and the organisation?**

**SM:** I view my appointment as an extension of all the work I have been doing within the sector. First, it is an extension into a global organisation with

a strong operational presence, and second, an extension of the great work the organisation has been doing in Southern Africa.

**TSA: What long-term plans do you have to take the company forward?**

**SM:** There are immediate goals, which I view as important to deliver in this role for the organisation. First, I believe I need to add to the organisational value chain by ensuring that Parsons Brinckerhoff Africa achieves high standards in the following areas:

- Corporate Governance
- Expanding the rail and strategic consulting business divisions
- Building strong stakeholder relations

**TSA: How has the adjustment been like?**

**SM:** the adjustment has been on both sides. Parsons Brinckerhoff is a global organisation with a structured code and it has been a white male dominated space. I will have to assume that they need to adjust to a strong opinionated woman like me, whose main focus is that we deliver world class projects and transfer skills whilst doing so, as i had to adjust to the code to maintain consistency within the organisation..

**TSA: Do you consider your leadership style to be any different from that of your predecessor and others who came before you?**

**SM:** The role in the African affiliate is new, and there are no predecessors to benchmark against. However globally, the set structures are solid and there are peers managing other regions. There are virtues and vices, with leading this new region. The greatest of the virtues being an opportunity to blaze a new trail by creating localisation of resources among Africans and most importantly, creating localisation for women in the industry.

**TSA: Given your background, you must be one of few women in this industry, globally, who have achieved accolades as impressive as yours. How does this make you feel as a Black woman in this very senior position and an African for that matter?**

**SM:** While it is true that I am one of few women that have made through the ranks up to this point, it is also important to acknowledge that I am not the first. There has been a generation of women who have survived the pressures of building a career in the field, who stand out as examples to be emulated by this generation.

Society in general should appreciate the challenges faced by women in carving similar careers. I used to believe that if you are smart enough and knowledgeable about a subject matter, people will listen. However, experience has taught me, that it takes a set of different skills to achieve a voice, and it is in building this corporate wisdom, that women can shape an alternative future for other women in this space. Women should also enter the sector and be allowed to fail with the same scrutiny afforded men, and not be subjected to double standards.

**TSA: What is Parsons Brinckerhoff Africa doing to address the issue of imported skills, in particular here in South Africa? Are we likely to see that forming part of your priorities and how do you plan to implement them? What programmes does Parsons Brinckerhoff Africa have in place to assist with transformation of the engineering sector?**

**SM:** Parsons Brinckerhoff has been a strong localisation drive which is structured to attract and retain local, as well as previously disadvantaged individuals. Part of the journey is ensuring that we attract the right people and have effective succession planning and training.

**TSA: The engineering industry has in the past been criticised for its lack of transformation with only a minimal number of Black engineers registered with the Engineering Council of South Africa. According to the National Society of Black Engineers, South Africa has an engineer to population ratio that lags far behind when compared to other developed and developing countries. For instance, China has one engineer to 130 citizens, Japan 1:314, Brazil 1:277 and South Africa 1:166. Are there any plans by Parsons Brinckerhoff that seek to transform this reality?**

**SM:** The task needs to be addressed through a four pronged strategy with the parents, government, business and the individual delivering on their roles. The individual should firstly choose to study Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics subjects, and achieve a competitive grade that would allow them to attain bursaries and gain access into the universities. Our aim at Parsons Brinckerhoff is to support, monitor, absorb and export South African competence throughout all regions where we operate. **TSA**