



International Women's Day 2022

A Gender-Equal and Inclusive Future in STEM Careers is Achievable

If you could reimagine a gender-equal world, what would it look like? An existence that is free of bias, stereotypes, discrimination and is diverse, equitable, and inclusive. It is widely proclaimed, that gender equality - a basic human right, is fundamental to realising a peaceful, prosperous world. But, many girls and women today continue to face inequality, a lack of visibility and opportunities as well as acknowledgement and underrepresentation in positions that impact our future.

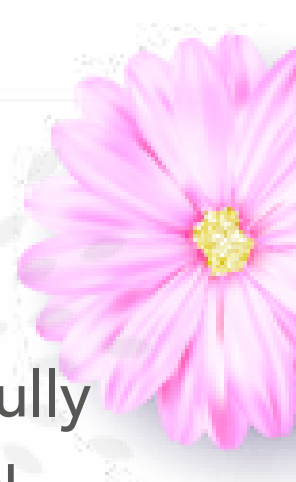
Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) are an integral part of the health, social development and veterinary fields. But the number of women in STEM fields continues to be relatively low compared to men. As much as the percentages are increasing, the increase is still at a snail's pace which is why continuous reinforcement and awareness is critical if we hope to usher in a new era of equality in said fields where the number of women matches the number of males in STEM.

In South Africa, secondary education enrollment for girls may be higher than for boys. However, many girls drop out before completing their matric or lack the required aptitude in mathematics, science and the digital skills required to enroll and excel in STEM-related programmes at the tertiary education

level. Statistically, 50.3% of girls compared to 58.6% boys achieved 30% or higher in Mathematics in the National Senior Certificate Examination.

The field is growing, and women deserve an equal opportunity to take their seat at the table within STEM. Increasing acceptance of female STEM professionals leads to more representation for women of all backgrounds. But today according to the Equality Report gender norms, stereotypes, biases and sexual harassment set by families, society, culture, and the media tend to perpetuate discriminatory practices and policies that discourage girls from pursuing STEM careers and lead to women leaving STEM careers.

It is now more important than ever to get girls and women excited about Mathematics and Science subjects as well as the endless opportunities a career in STEM-related fields can bring about. That is why we are proud to be partnering with organisations such as, TechnoGirl, a programme that is created to give girls a head start STEM through mentorship and skills development. Through the programme, high school girls from disadvantaged communities are selected to participate in mentorships, skills development workshops, and job shadowing in the STEM relevant sectors.



Many women have and are contributing meaningfully in STEM, but they often go unseen, underpaid and uncelebrated. If we hope to inspire future generations of women leaders in these fields, we need to create spaces where women can be celebrated, rewarded and seen for their contributions in these male-dominated spaces as we work towards forging the gender-equal future we want to see.

Let us strive to be more deliberate in teaching job skills, providing self-development tools, inspiring women and instilling innovation from early childhood to higher education. So that we can better prepare them to benefit from the ever-evolving and rapidly growing, and technologically driven global digital economy.



ELAINE BRASS | **HWSETA** CEO