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We need more honest conversations about improving diversity, equity and inclusion in mining

16 February 2023



Chairman and President of the Minerals Council South Africa and Anglo American South Africa Chair Nolitha Fakude.

What will it take to make the mining industry truly [diverse, equitable and inclusive](#)?

This is the question I posed to leaders from three ICMM member companies at the Mining Indaba in Cape Town last week.

Their answers were brutally simple: we need to stare reality in the face, acknowledge the role that we as current leaders have played in not prioritising change fast enough, and take bold steps to change that reality for the better.

It is an uncomfortable reality - women make up only 14% of our global workforce, and the representation of Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC) is not anywhere close to where it should be.

The lack of diversity and inclusiveness means that these under-represented groups are commonly victims of bullying and harassment, including the most egregious forms of sexual violence.

Deliberate intervention is clearly key to remedying the issues that plague our industry with regards diversity and inclusion, as shown by the actions Nolitha, Sinead and Tom shared.

At Anglo American, a collaboration between mining companies and the National Prosecuting Authority is creating safe spaces and shelters for victims of gender-based violence (GBV) in and around mines where they can feel supported and report crimes. This forms part of the company's broader Living with Dignity programme, which has the aim of ending GBV at work, at schools and within communities.

I was struck by the people-centric approach that Nolitha Fakude, chair of Anglo American's management board in South Africa, emphasised was at the core of the design of the company's centres.



It was heartening to hear that Rio Tinto is implementing each of the 26 recommendations made by the report. Some of the interventions include intensive leadership training sessions that has contributed to Rio’s changing culture.

The sessions powered what Sinead Kaufman, chief executive of minerals at Rio, said were life-changing moments for the employees who had undergone training.

It left me with a feeling that Rio was in the throes of a genuine culture evolution.

Last but not least, Newmont’s chief executive Tom Palmer — who is one of the most engaged leaders on this issue that I have had the privilege to speak to — shared how it was personally important for him to help improve diversity in our space.

The most striking moment of the conversation when Tom said: “I am part of that [lack of diversity] problem.”

He indulged me by repeating this phrase three times so that the audience could really hear it.

He backed it up by saying: “The people whose behaviour needs to change are those people with power and privilege and they look a lot like me in our industry: middle-aged white men.”

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- Tom Palmer, CEO, Newmont

Newmont’s Ahafo North gold project in Ghana has set a target of gender parity by the time it starts mining. In addition, the project’s workforce is undergoing training to build a more accommodative culture that will support that ambitious target.



improving diversity, equity and inclusion in our industry.

In addition, investors are paying attention urging companies to be do more to create more diverse cultures. I was proud to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with [Abrdn](#) in endorsing their statement of the importance of diversity, equity and inclusion in the industry and for the steps we took in 2022 to update our Mining Principles.

At ICMM, which represents a third of the global industry, we updated those Mining Principles, which govern everyday practice for members and are a condition of membership, to raise psychological wellbeing to the level of physical wellbeing.

Although this was the first time diversity, equity and inclusion was on the mainstage at Indaba. I am confident it won't be the last. With the commitment I saw from Nolitha, Sinead and Tom, I'm filled with renewed hope that the next time we discuss it, the reality will be at least slightly easier to face.

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