

Construction is everyone's world - Thobile Bhembe

 By [Sindy Peters](#)

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Thobile Bhembe is the first and currently the only female site agent at Inyatsi Construction Group's subsidiaries across the sub-Saharan market. She was also recently awarded in the Excellence in Career Development category at the [2016 Women in Construction Awards](#).

We interviewed Bhembe to find out what it's like for a woman working in the African construction sector, and what advice she has for other women pursuing a career in this field.



Thobile Bhembe

■ ***What led you to a career in the built environment?***

My grandpa was a foreman in a construction company, so I envied what he was doing and the projects he worked on. I told him I wanted to be in construction when I grow up and he politely opposed and said it is a man's world not meant for women - he said I could be a nurse or a teacher. That statement alone made me eager to one day prove to the community that construction is everyone's world.

■ ***What is it like being the first and currently only female site agent at Inyatsi?***

I am honoured and proud, and I feel like it is my dream come true with the support from all divisions of Inyatsi Group Holdings.

■ ***What has been your experience, as a woman, working in Africa?***

It was a challenge at first because most of the men on site did not understand why a woman was explaining the work to them and giving them advice on how to do operations in "their world". But I also had to humbly ask for the advice of the men on site and also make sure that they were involved in every decision made. In that way you gain their trust and operations go smoothly.

■ ***In your opinion, what accounts for the low proportion of women working in the built environment globally?***

I think choosing a profession because your parents have told you so plays a big factor. Parents sometimes discourage young women from choosing what they want, they then choose a profession to please their parents as they are the ones paying for the institution fees. There are less women who say "I want this no matter what and how difficult it is". Perseverance and love for what you want to do keep you going and helps you conquer the challenges.

■ ***What barriers did you face, as a woman, becoming successful in your field, and how did you overcome them?***

Working directly with unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled men on site - having to give them instructions on how to do a job that they claim to know; some of them have been in the construction industry before I was born. I always kept humble and allowed them to be involved and had open discussions with them with respect for the success of the projects. The support from my supervisors also helped.

It was very hard to work in such an environment. My motivation was that I'm opening the gates for the next female generation in the construction industry and it won't be as hard as it was before - men will get used to having women in the construction field.

■ ***Based on your experience, what advice would you give to women pursuing a career in your field?***

Please be prepared to face challenges, such as not getting all the support you need from some of the men on site who still believe women are not meant to be in construction - don't lose your focus. Be strong and stay focused on the thing that you love. Construction is everyone's world. Always stay humble, involve them, let them feel that you are part of them and working together will benefit the company, not just individuals.

ABOUT SINDY PETERS

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