Women driving the future of underground mining

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This Women's Month, Redpath Africa Limited celebrates the women whose dedication, technical expertise and commitment to excellence are strengthening every aspect of its mining operations, from engineering and logistics to workplace wellbeing.

Mining is often associated with heavy machinery, engineering, and underground operations, but behind every successful project is a diverse team of professionals whose contributions keep operations running safely and efficiently.

This Women's Month, Redpath African Limited is recognising three women whose careers demonstrate that success in mining is built through commitment, continuous learning, and a willingness to embrace opportunity. Women's Month provides an opportunity not only to celebrate individual achievement, but also to recognise the many ways women contribute to South Africa's mining industry every day.

Working across engineering, drilling and blasting, stores management, and operational support, they represent the growing diversity of careers available within the mining industry, while highlighting the important role women continue to play across every level of the organisation.

A global culture of professionalism

Their stories also reflect many of the values that define Redpath's global culture of professionalism, dependability, innovation, determination, and an unwavering commitment to safety. These qualities are central to the company's brand identity and approach to every project.

For **Johanna Seema**, a Charmec operator on the Redpath Decline Project, mining represented an opportunity to begin an entirely new career. Having transitioned from another industry, she was encouraged by seeing women receive the same opportunities as their male colleagues and has embraced every opportunity to learn.

Over four years, she has progressed from general labourer to operating specialised underground equipment responsible for charging blast holes safely and efficiently. "I arrived knowing nothing about mining. Now I am one of the female operators on the project, and I still want to keep learning", says Johanna.

Significant industry change

She believes the industry has changed significantly during her career, with more women joining mining operations and taking on increasingly technical roles. Johanna's advice to young women is simple: "Do not be afraid of the mining industry, keep learning and believe that anything is possible if you set your mind to it."

Not every contribution to a successful mining operation happens underground. For **Marcia Hlungwane** and **Rose Pheto**, both changehouse attendants, creating a clean, organised, and welcoming environment plays an important role in supporting the wellbeing of every employee.

Marcia says maintaining high housekeeping standards while ensuring facilities remain safe and hygienic gives her a strong sense of purpose. "When employees thank me for keeping the facilities clean and comfortable, I know my work has made a positive difference."

Contributing to the wellbeing of others

Rose shares a similar perspective. "I wanted a career where I could contribute to the wellbeing of others", she explains. "Knowing my work helps create a clean and safe environment for employees motivates me every day." Both women emphasise that reliability, teamwork, respect, and dedication are fundamental to delivering consistent service and supporting the broader mining operation.

Johanna Seema, Charmec operator on the Redpath Decline Project at Redpath Africa Limited *Photograph: NGAGE Public Relations*

Marcia Hlungwane, changehouse attendant at Redpath Africa Limited
Photograph: NGAGE Public Relations

Rose Pheto, changehouse attendant at Redpath Africa Limited
Photograph: NGAGE Public Relations

They concur that opportunities for women in mining have improved significantly. Rose points to increasing recognition of women's capabilities and growing opportunities for career development. Similarly, Marcia and Rose believe continued investment in training, mentorship, career development, and safe working environments will help more women realise their full potential.

Inspiring the next generation

Asked what advice they would offer young women considering careers in mining, Marcia encourages young women to "work hard, believe in yourself, keep learning and never let challenges stop you from reaching your goals", while Rose believes confidence and perseverance will continue opening doors for future generations.

Together, these three women demonstrate that mining succeeds because of the collective efforts of people with diverse skills, backgrounds, and experiences. Whether supporting underground blasting operations, operating specialised mining equipment, maintaining critical engineering systems, managing operational resources, or ensuring employees have clean, safe, and welcoming facilities, every role contributes to operational excellence.

Their stories reflect Redpath Africa Limited's commitment to creating an inclusive workplace where talent, professionalism, determination, and continuous learning continue to shape the future of underground mining.

Contact: Redpath Africa Limited
Michelle Jonker
Marketing and Executive Support Manager
Tel: +27 (0) 11 570 4300
E-mail: Michelle.Jonker@redpathmining.com
Web: https://www.redpathmining.com/en/

Why supporting expecting mothers is mining's next inclusion frontier

Yvonne Rudolph: Branch Manager, PRISMA Training Solutions, Kathu

The South African mining sector has made great progress in opening doors for women in operational roles. However, keeping female talent in the industry for the long term means looking past basic recruitment to focus on how the industry can better support women through major life changes, such as pregnancy.

When an operational worker announces her pregnancy, health and safety rules correctly require her to step away from high-risk work, such as underground mining or driving heavy machinery. While these rules are essential to protect both mother and baby, the sudden shift can leave expecting mothers feeling sidelined. To build a truly inclusive industry, mining companies must see pregnancy support as a powerful tool for retaining skilled talent, rather than as a temporary administrative headache.

Keeping purpose on light duty

The label 'light duty' often carries an unfair stigma, reducing a capable employee to filing paperwork or doing busywork. When a pregnant employee moves off the floor, her contribution should remain meaningful.

Reassignment is actually a golden opportunity for structured upskilling. While an operator cannot physically run machinery or go underground, she can spend those months broadening her skill set. This is the ideal time to invest in her development, from foundational software and administrative skills to core interpersonal strengths like peer mentorship, team communication, and hazard awareness. By the time she goes on maternity leave, she has not just filled time; she has expanded her professional toolbelt.

Helping women leave and return with confidence

The impact of pregnancy on a woman's career goes beyond her months on the job; it includes the time she steps away and her eventual return from maternity leave. Leaving an operational shift for several months naturally creates worry about falling behind or losing one's standing.

Mining companies can ease these fears with simple, structured guidance.

Teams benefit from short training or catch-up sessions right before a woman goes on leave and again just before she returns, making sure everyone is aligned. Additionally, workforce planning must cover her role without making her feel like her job is under threat. When a temporary replacement is presented as a learning opportunity for another team member, it protects the mother's job security while helping the wider team grow.

Moving from compliance to real humanity

At its foundation, supporting expecting mothers is about basic humanity in the workplace. Operating heavy machinery or working shifts is physically demanding on its own; doing that while growing a new life adds an incredible amount of stress and fatigue. When companies respond with empathy, clear guidance, and flexible planning, they show that an employee's worth is not only about her daily shift output. Women who feel valued during pregnancy return with greater loyalty and commitment, which directly improves long-term female retention in technical mining roles.

Mining operations that get this right will always have the advantage when it comes to hiring and retaining top talent. The industry can make sure motherhood is never a roadblock to a lasting mining career, merely by moving past simple compliance and treating people with genuine support.

Editorial contacts
Jason Bome
Group Marketing Manager at Workforce Holdings Limited
e-mail: jason.bome@workforce.co.za