



Kamentha Pillay, founder of online community The STEM Moms Club and owner of The STEM Mom blog

### Having it all

Kamentha Pillay is the founder of the online community The STEM Moms Club and owner of The STEM Mom blog. She is a qualified electrical engineer with an MBA from the University of Roehampton in the UK.

The STEM Moms Club was started based on the outcomes of Pillay’s MBA thesis. Pillay points out that the female candidates in the study identified how difficult it had been to navigate their careers. While all the candidates were established in their respective fields, many indicated the lack of progress over the years and identified it as a lonely and unsupportive space for those who had chosen to start a family while also wanting to progress in their careers. “I wanted to create a space for these women to form a community, to be a source of encouragement for each other and to realise that they aren’t alone in their experiences.

“So we place a huge amount of focus on encouraging young girls and women into the field and, of course, this is essential. In my opinion, growing women in the sector is a huge challenge for organisations that are content to continue as they always have,” she says.

“Those women who have managed to reach the rather elusive positions of power have to create room for other women as well. Power needs to be shared for any sort of progress to happen. Only we can resolve the challenges within this sector, together.”

*In 2017, a commitment was made at the United Nations to empower one million girls through STEM education.*



Naadiya Moosajee, co-founder of WomEng

### It starts at school

Naadiya Moosajee is the co-founder of WomEng, a social enterprise developing women and girls in the engineering and technology industries. She holds a master’s degree in civil engineering and has worked in the engineering and technology ecosystem for 13 years.

WomEng works along the value chain, from attracting more women into the field to running capacity building, leadership, entrepreneurship and innovation programmes around the world. In 2017, a commitment was made at the United Nations to empower one million girls through STEM education. This is done through WomEng’s outreach programmes, Launchpad and GirlEng.

“In South Africa particularly, the challenge is around maths and science skills at school level. Unfortunately, due to our education system’s move to maths literacy, many students with no career guidance opt for maths literacy, or their schools don’t offer mathematics. This means they have no option at tertiary level to choose engineering, which limits the number of students entering the field,” says Mosajee.

She explains her working theory called the 20 per cent tipping point, where one starts to see shifts in a sector after there is a critical mass of women in the sector. “The engineering sector in South Africa is currently at around 10 per cent, therefore, we have a long way to go to both attract and retain women.”



Katrin Tenim, architect at Paragon Architects

### Confidence is key

Katrin Tenim is an architect at Paragon Architects. She holds an NDip, Ttech and MTech in architecture from the University of Johannesburg.

*“I am a firm believer that you can do anything you set your mind to by believing nothing is impossible and working hard towards your goals.”*

— Katrin Tenim

Tenim strongly believes that we need to enhance the confidence in women and their ability to work in the industry. Enabling women and realising the need the industry has for them, will bring forth a whole new dynamic that is needed to cultivate the growth of the built environment.

“The industry is still male-driven and we women often need to work harder to prove ourselves from the onset — but breaking through that barrier and gaining the trust and respect of the industry is extremely rewarding and makes it worthwhile.

“I am a firm believer that you can do anything you set your mind to by believing nothing is impossible and working hard towards your goals,” says Tenim.

“Confidence is a key factor. Just like any other individual in the industry, you too have been enabled by the exact same training that has equipped you to be in the industry. Trust in yourself, remain open-minded and don’t ever doubt your ability to do the job,” she says. ■