

Turning trends into sustainable opportunities

Ethel Nyembe, head of Small Enterprise at Standard Bank, says entrepreneurs who can identify trends, assess their duration and viability, and swiftly turn them into sustainable opportunities, are entrepreneurs who are geared for success.



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This business truth applies as much to leadership of major multi-national corporations as it does to start-up businesses. The ability to see the road ahead and adapt to meet an emerging trend can be the difference between success and failure, says Nyembe, commenting on a recent episode of *The Growth Engines*, the Standard Bank supported series airing on Business Day TV.

"The 21st century's 'Scramble for Africa' is on with South African and international companies competing to take advantage of the continent's booming economies. Companies with interests ranging from manufacturing and energy through to banking are all vying for a key position. However, they have their work cut out for them, especially when they have to compete with the early adopters who had faith in the future of the continent, identified trends and moved into Africa years ago," she says.

Two such companies are construction giant, Group Five, and Enzani Technologies, a unique, women-dominated electrical engineering contracting firm.

Africa's promise recognised

Executive director of Human Resources at Group Five, Jesse Doorasamy, confirms that the company recognised Africa's promise several years before many others, and moved to take advantage of the opportunities offered by huge development contracts. Now, arguably the strongest construction business in Africa, this company is reaping the benefits of taking a long-term view on the future of the continent.

"Our clients and the composition of our markets have changed markedly over the last 15 years, particularly because of our early march into Africa. Trends in the nature of projects present wonderful opportunities. On the negative side, however, is the slow pace with which projects move from conception to start-up of construction. Also a challenge is the construction

sector's ability to attract and retain engineering and project management skills," says Doorasamy.

With the pressure on skills in South Africa and in the rest of Africa, Group Five has increasingly been looking to skilled sub-contractors to close the gap.

"Sub-contractors are a key driver of our success. Our achievements depend on the excellence of our supply chain. We need stakeholders in the chain to partner with us to provide the quality outputs and safety standards expected by our clients. This need creates major opportunities for small companies in the construction sector. The sub-contracting field, because of the skills required by Group Five, means that the vibrant sub-sector allows the cream of the talent to come to the fore."

Capitalising on two trends

It is within the specialised world of electrical engineering that a unique company of female electrical engineering contractors has stepped forward. Today, Enzani Technologies is reaping the rewards of two trends that they capitalised on - the first towards sub-contracting; and the second towards ensuring that BEE companies get their slice of the construction industry.

Tlaleng Moabi, MD of Enzani Technologies, says that the company identified the trend of major companies looking for skilled black professionals for partnerships.

Making the transition from small electrical engineering contracting company to major player has meant building relationships that transcend geographical borders.

"We work hard at creating and maintaining relationships for several reasons. On site, it is when the going gets tough that relationships help resolve problems. On the pure business side, you can't build a sustainable construction business on small projects. You need big projects to grow, and a sound skills base to offer to big players.

"When relationships are strong, it becomes easy for a major company to look to your company when projects are on offer. This means that our growth is assured as we can then literally 'piggy-back' our way into major projects locally and over South Africa's border," says Moabi.

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