



Engineering the Future We Want: **Mobilising for Sustainable Development**

18-19
MARCH 2025
Indaba Hotel,
Fourways,
Johannesburg

The current status of transformation in the legal profession, honing into racial, youth and gender disparities in the legal profession and to identify the key challenges that legal practitioners face and possible solutions thereof

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INTRODUCTION

- Transformation means different things to different people. Eg: Racial dynamics, lucrative work
- Transformation much more than just numbers—though, as we know, numbers matter. We are speaking about altering the very culture, mindset, and structure of an industry that, historically, has been resistant to change. In the legal profession, this means achieving greater inclusivity, dismantling systemic barriers, and ensuring that the profession better reflects the diversity of the South African society we serve.

CURRENT STATE OF TRANSFORMATION IN THE LEGAL PROFESSION

- BLA 2017 protest
- Despite our best efforts, transformation in the legal profession has been a slow and challenging journey. The numbers of Black, female, and disabled legal practitioners remain disproportionately low compared to the overall demographics of South Africa. The overwhelming majority of senior roles in law firms are still held by individuals from historically advantaged groups, with access to opportunities, mentorship, and networks remaining far too limited for those from historically marginalized backgrounds. This is not just a problem within the law profession—it is a reflection of a broader issue in South African society. The legal profession, by its very nature, plays a pivotal role in the societal structures that both reflect and reinforce inequality. As such, transformation is not simply a question of equity or fairness; it is a matter of justice, legitimacy, and ensuring that the profession can fully meet the needs of all South Africans.



CHALLENGES

- Resistance to current legislative frameworks, including LSC)
- Access to Education and Training:

A significant barrier remains the access to quality legal education and training for individuals from historically disadvantaged backgrounds. Law schools and legal training programs, while increasingly diverse, still struggle with the challenge of preparing students who lack the resources or support systems that others may take for granted.

- Retention and Advancement:

While we are seeing more diverse entrants into the profession, the challenge of retention and advancement within law firms and corporate legal departments remains. Black and female lawyers often face subtle forms of bias, whether in the form of limited client opportunities, less access to high-profile work, or more overt discrimination. These barriers prevent meaningful advancement and the true diversification of leadership.



- Saturation of Graduates

Mention my radical approach

- Structural Resistance:

The legal profession is a highly traditional industry. In many ways, its structures and systems are resistant to change—whether it's the partnership model, billing practices, or firm hierarchies. While many firms recognize the need for transformation, there remains significant inertia. This resistance to change, coupled with entrenched practices, has resulted in a very slow pace of meaningful transformation.

PATH FORWARD/SOLUTIONS



- Policy and Regulation:

At the level of policy, we need to be clear about our expectations and ensure that regulations are crafted to support transformation goals. For instance, the South African government has taken steps to introduce broad-based black economic empowerment (B-BBEE) principles into the legal sector, and the Law Society of South Africa has adopted initiatives to encourage the transformation of the profession. However, there is a need for more enforcement and accountability within these frameworks to ensure that transformation goes beyond a mere box-ticking exercise.

- Mentorship and Sponsorship:

- Inclusive Leadership and Representation:

If transformation is to take hold, there must be an intentional effort to increase the representation of historically disadvantaged groups in leadership roles within law firms and legal institutions. Without diverse leadership, the changes we hope for will not materialize in a way that benefits all. The consulting engineering industry can provide valuable insights here, as it, too, has faced similar challenges.



- Creating a Culture of Equity:

Beyond numbers, transformation must also be a cultural shift. We need to create a legal profession where inclusion, equity, and diversity are not just goals but are woven into the fabric of everyday practice. This requires a mindset shift from traditional practices and a focus on developing a truly open, inclusive, and collaborative environment for all.

- Collaboration with Other Sectors:

Transformation is not an isolated challenge for any single profession. The legal profession must work more closely with other sectors, including consulting engineers, to learn from each other's challenges and successes. There is power in collaboration—by sharing strategies, experiences, and insights, we can work together to build a more just and inclusive society.

CONCLUSION



The transformation of the legal profession is a work in progress, but we cannot afford to rest on our laurels. The pace of change has been slow, but it is not insurmountable. We must continue to push forward with courage, determination, and resolve. I urge all of us here today—whether in engineering, law, or any other profession—to reflect on the shared responsibility we have in advancing transformation. Let us embrace it as a journey that will not only enhance the legitimacy of our industries but also ensure that we truly serve the needs of the people of South Africa.



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THANK YOU !