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The underrepresentation of technical women in executive and board of directors' roles in the ten largest listed mining companies in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

As with many technical industries, mining is dominated by men. It is well established that the industry has struggled with the attraction and retention of female talent. While women have made significant inroads in the industry, technical women (defined here as women who come from a geology, engineering, metallurgical, etc background) are underrepresented in the most senior decision-making roles of major mining companies. The purpose of the study was to explore this phenomenon, examining the executive committee and board composition of the 10 largest mining companies listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange and interviewing 30 technical women who have worked for, or currently work for, these organisations.

The results demonstrate that technical women seldom advance from operations to the boardroom and, typically, play a support function while men make core mining and technical decisions. The study also finds that many technical women move into non-technical roles for a number of reasons. Further, while attraction of women to the industry continues to rise, the studied companies are struggling to retain technical female talent.

The study further highlights the significance of government intervention concerning the inclusion and advancement of women in mining. It also emphasises the need for continued policy development and concludes with recommendations on how mining companies can drive both the inclusion of women in mining as well as their corporate advancement.