

# Standard Bank hosts Brave Conversations for Top Women 2020

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As South Africa's preeminent initiative to advocate for the advancement of gender empowerment, Standard Bank Top Women has once again embarked on its annual conference aimed at addressing issues of gender inequality, in all its various forms. The theme for the 2020 instalment of this prestigious event is aptly titled "Brave Conversations", which looks at administering social change through brave conversations and challenging the role we play as society in empowering women to accelerate growth in Africa.



*Caster Semenya & Hon. Minister Maite Nkoana-Mashabane at the 2019 Standard Bank Top Women Conference*

"As a trusted partner and a brand of influence, Standard Bank wants to lend its voice in supporting the call for collective social change within South Africa and Africa as a whole. As a nation, if we truly want to participant in real change, we cannot stop at acceptance, we must have conversations that push and pull at the issue of gender inequality," says Lindy-Lou Alexander, Head of Marketing for Personal and Business Banking at Standard Bank.

This compelling narrative will be explored at various lengths by some of South Africa's leading women in celebration of women across the African continent. The conference will be in the form of a webinar, in respect to the adherence of lockdown and social distancing. This gathering will take place over two days and will be attended by some of the nation's most accomplished businesswomen and thought leaders on 1 and 2 October 2020.

Amongst the various speakers and women of influence the conference will be attended by:

- Funeka Montjane, Chief Executive, Personal and Business Banking at Standard Bank South Africa
- Dr Saundarya Rajesh, social entrepreneur and Founder-President of Avatar, India (voted a top speaker in 2019)
- Hajer Sharief, Human rights advocate & Co-Founder of "Together we build it", Hajer promotes the participation of women and youth in peacebuilding efforts Libya
- Yvonne Chaka Chaka, Entertainer & Founder the Princess of Africa Foundation South Africa

“This year’s Top Women conference through the lens of Brave Conversations really allows us to empathetically highlights issues affecting women and how we go about solving them as a collective,” says Alexander.

### The realities Of women in business in South Africa

More than half of South Africa’s population is female, yet only 34% of SMEs are women-led, according to survey conducted by Facebook in partnership with the World Bank and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Female entrepreneurs face challenges that are unique to them. Common barriers for women entrepreneurs include a lack of capital and assets, fewer business-orientated networks in their communities, lower status in society, higher levels of domestic responsibility and culturally induced lack of assertiveness and confidence in their ability to succeed in business.

To help women progress Standard Bank has implemented various initiatives focused on growth and development from both an internal and external perspective. Supported by United Nations Women and the Commission for Gender Equality, the Top Women Conference joins hands with women from all walks of life in an ambitious campaign and a refreshed narrative in Brave Conversations, that focuses on the advancement of women and girls.

“We are excited that, through our Brave Conversation theme we offer a quality bolstered innovative programme that will allow women entrepreneurs a unique opportunity to learn and be fast tracked to high-level networking with trade executives, to grow their business acumen and skills development through panel discussions, and to gain valuable exposure among captains of industry,” concludes Alexander.

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