

# Women Entrepreneurs and Executives in Tech Summit

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**Hosted by:** Salt Essentials

**Organized in cooperation with:** Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Microsoft, Complete Enterprise Solutions, Capricorn Foundation, CRAN, Acumatica, MACH, First Distribution

**Number of Participants:** 60

**Venue:** Hilton, Windhoek, Namibia

## Introduction

'Women in Tech' is an event organized for women with motivating and inspiring speeches from mostly women out of different positions. This third Woman in Tech Summit was made especially for empowering and encouraging woman who work in technical professions and leadership roles, to keep going and find your space in a man-dominated system. The event had many opportunities for exchange and networking.

Speech 1: **Tonata Nghifitikeko**, Chief Technology & Information Officer, Development Bank of Namibia

In her speech, Tonata Nghifitikeko focused particularly on women in entrepreneurship. She emphasized that women's entrepreneurship is important and indispensable, especially for the country's technological future. However, when it comes to digitalization, she noted that it is essential to ensure that technology is developed not as an end in itself, but for and with people. How exactly this should be implemented is, for her, the central question, and she emphasized that women's perspectives are also crucial. Women are well-suited for (leadership) positions in the technical field, are competent, and "do not need permission to lead."

Speech 2: **Aina Heita**, Program officer on behalf of **Eunice Smith**, Head Windhoek office, Unesco

In her speech, Aina Heita noted that significant progress has been made toward gender equality on the African continent; however, women make up only 30% of those in technical professions, and only 35% of students in technical degree programs are female. Technical professions are, on average, better paid than typically female-dominated professions, which is why a higher proportion of women in technical professions would help reduce the gender pay gap and contribute to financial independence from partners or parents. Furthermore, it would be a major step forward for the economy and society if women were included in decision-making and their perspectives were considered. "The question is not: Why women in tech, but: Why not sooner?"

Speech 3: **Emilia Nghikembua**, Chief Executive Officer, Cran

Emilia Nghikembua's speech focused on finding one's place as a woman in male-dominated industries. Both the tech industry and leadership levels are male-dominated, a fact of which women in particular must be aware. Due to this dominance and the low proportion of women, there are also fewer perspectives and potential solutions when it comes to a wide variety of issues and problems. According to Emilia, these structures that exclude women have developed historically and are therefore not permanent and can be overcome.

The focus of the second half of the speech was on finding one's place. For many women, their culture and family stand in the way; the hurdles of the system are too high, or they lack self-confidence. However, to achieve professional success, she said, in addition to the necessary qualifications, one needs self-confidence to project a strong presence—one that is convincing through preparation and self-presentation. With the statement "The system does not change to include you," she highlighted the exclusionary structures while also pointing out the personal responsibility required to forge one's own path. At the same time, she noted that it takes a great deal of resilience not to be deterred from one's own path. With President Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah and other female government officials, there are already many female role models in Namibia; however, every successful woman continues to serve as a role model.

Speech 3: **Hermien Elango**, Hermien Speaks

Hermien Elango started her speech with a personal story about her mental health struggles and continued under the theme "Holding the Tension." Everyone has burdens to bear, which are often invisible to others. Through care work, women typically carry a heavier burden. Nevertheless, it is important to always give your best, as any changes will not take your personal circumstances into account. In this case, "Holding the Tension" means showing up and giving your best anyway, since your work positively influences many people, even unconsciously. Nevertheless, it is important not to forget oneself, to maintain a balance between work and personal life, to set personal boundaries, and to uphold them. Open and honest communication is particularly important in this regard. The talk concluded with the message that it is important to pursue one's goals and give one's best in the process. Even if one fails, at least one has tried.

Speech 4: **Linda McLeod**, NIPDB / Manager: Startup and Scale, Department: MSME Development and Export Promotion

Linda McLeod also started her speech by noting that women, along with their perspectives and expertise, are absolutely essential to the system. She pointed out that while there are

already many women in leadership positions in Namibia, the system is still designed around men, a situation that must change.

According to Ms. McLeod, technology should be used to connect people. So far, very few women work in technical fields, especially in leadership positions. She believes Namibia has all the potential for a successful, equitable future; this potential just needs to be fully realized.

### **Panel Discussion:**

#### **Speaker:**

- **Ester Nghipandula**, Legal Advisor & Company Secretary, Agro-Marketing and Trade Agency
- **Lelanie Basson**, Managing Partner, Twafiika Consultants, Self-employed
- **Debbie Rowles**, Thinker / Solutionist / Business & Brand Purpose & Impact Strategist, Think Human Being, Self-employed

#### **Moderator:**

- **Elario Muller**, Commercial Expansion Development Executive: TKS & Services, Salt Essential Information Technology (Pty) Ltd

Speech 5: **Vanessa Maresch**, Commercial Expansion Empowerment Specialist, Salt Essential Information Technology (Pty) Ltd

In her talk, "Innovation & AI," Vanessa Maresch strongly advocated that technology and AI should be designed to relieve people of their workload and to enable more time for hobbies, interests, and so on. According to her, it is our responsibility to create and shape AI in such a way that it fulfills precisely those tasks. At this point, it is particularly important that women are also able to contribute their perspectives, as they ask the questions that the government and society do not ask.

Speech 6: **Beatrice Schulz**, Chief Executive Officer and Founder, LeadHership Foundation

Drawing on her personal experience, Beatrice Schulz emphasized how important it is not to lose sight of oneself and to become the person one wants to be. She also noted that in leadership positions, it is important to understand the purpose and impact of one's role. She stressed that it is particularly important to set clear boundaries, seek support when needed, and, above all, to carry out one's duties with enthusiasm and joy.

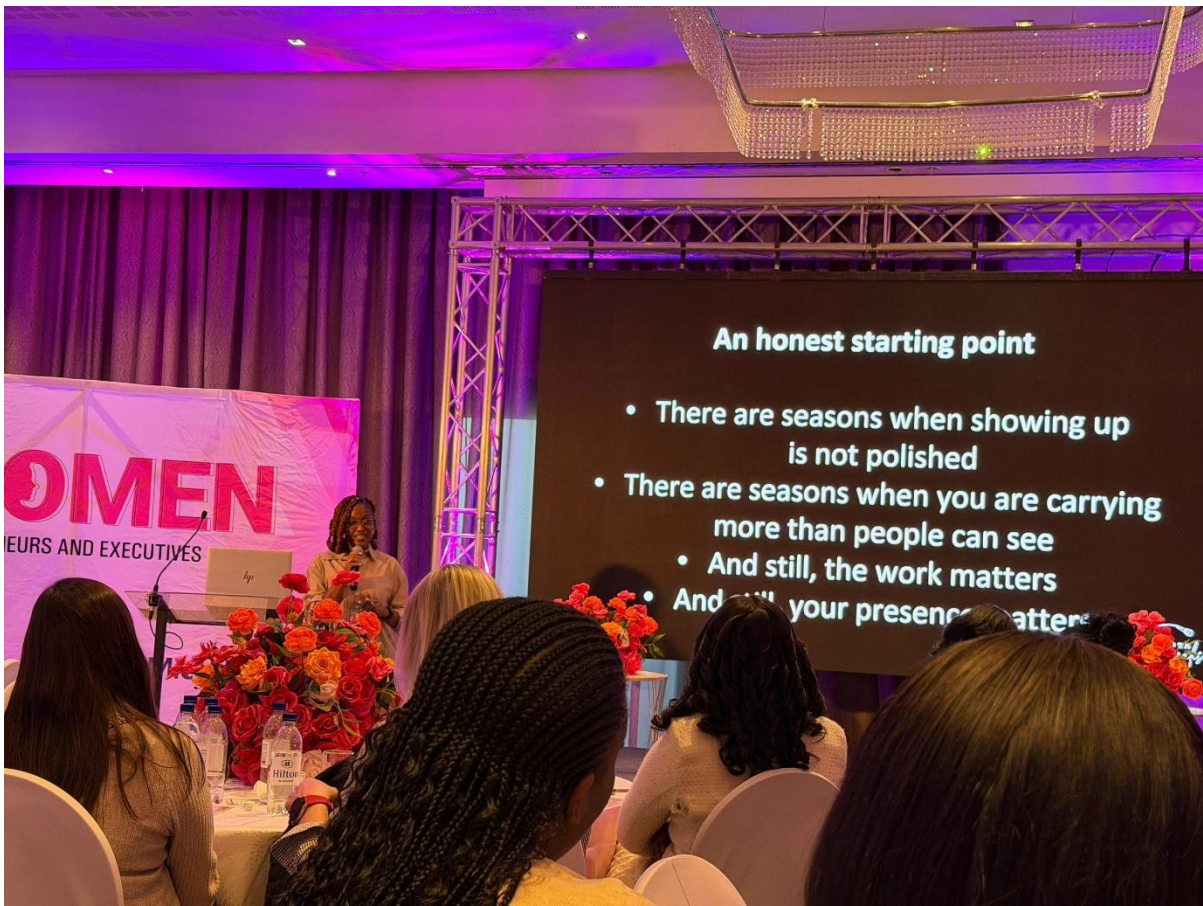
### **Key Takeaways:**

Women are an essential part of society. To benefit from their ideas, worldview, etc. they must be included into a system, that is that it is largely tailored to men. To change this system, women have to actively enter this world and take their space.

**Photos:**



Picture 1: Emilia Nghikembua



Picture 2: Hermien Elago



Picture 3: Beatrice Schultz