



## DEBBIE COUSINS

**Head of environment and sustainability department operations, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD)**

Many women work in sectors hard hit by COVID-19 and many are suffering the economic impact of lockdowns, Debbie explains. Like other international financial institutions, the EBRD has 'deepened its efforts to support access to equal opportunities to women and vulnerable groups by engaging with clients and countries on understanding broader issues of inequality that result from the crisis'.

EBRD standard tender documents have enhanced provisions to require more coverage of labour-related issues, including grievance mechanisms and occupational health. It has also provided new guidance and training on gender-based violence and harassment issues (GBVH).

'These GBVH tools need to enable people to speak out,' says Debbie. 'What is most important is that a survivor-centred approach is adopted so that individuals, particularly in cases of GBVH, feel reports will be handled respectfully, in a safe and non-judgemental manner.'

'Ideally everyone needs to feel supported to challenge gender inequality and also think outside the box – maybe we could do more to highlight that most OSH risks apply equally, whether the employee is male or female? Maybe undertaking women-focused safety audits could highlight that there are few differences if any in most work environments.'

Debbie concludes: 'I am hopeful that as more women are supported into work and given a voice they will be at the forefront in supporting OSH, and consider this an integral part of their job and a potential career choice.'

## ROBYN BENNETT

**Health and safety specialist, Avid Plus, and president, New Zealand Institute of Safety Management (NZISM)**

'Successful interventions are those that include the voices of the affected in the decision-making process,' Robyn says. 'It is as simple as encouraging those who organise and drive change to include women in the process.'

OSH professionals should be asking the reasons women are being excluded and looking at ways we can support them to become involved. Robyn has always seen her role in OSH as one of providing encouragement and support. 'This is particularly important for women in the industry who may not always have been exposed to opportunities for growth and development,' she says.

'We need to inform, educate and support. Many struggle to understand

the benefits of diversity, including accessing knowledge and perspectives, and understanding the skills of those that are not mainstream to their organisation. It brings a richness and depth that can be used to develop and grow organisations.'

New Zealand has seen significant changes in OSH over the last 15 years: more professionalism, encouragement and support of women in the profession, and greater numbers of women having a health and safety role.

'It is the combined and balanced approach of all genders in a profession that gives it its strength,' Robyn says. 'Strength of thought, strength of skills and strength of abilities that collectively develop and support industry.'

## DIVERSITY BRINGS A RICHNESS AND DEPTH THAT CAN BE USED TO DEVELOP AND GROW



## CINTHIA GUADALUPE ROWE

**HSSE country lead (Peru) at Maersk**

'Until a few years ago in Peru, it was impossible for a woman to enter a production mine because the workers fervently believed that this would mean an accident or drop in production,' says Cinthia. 'While we have come a long way since then, there is still a lot to do.'

The profession needs to consider how it trains professionals – not just in creating courses that recognise these problems, but in providing practical tools for people to deal with these issues when they arise.

Cinthia has come across people who pretend abuses of power and violence against women do not exist, and those who are outraged, issue drastic sentences that work in the short-term but complicate the situation in the long-term. 'It is important that we admit that it exists and happens in most contexts: from small companies, entrepreneurs,

to multinational companies with gender equality policies,' she says.

'You can't fix something you don't recognise. Opening channels of communication and honest spaces to debate the issue is necessary. This is a complex problem, which requires multiple agents to solve it (from the government to the family nucleus itself) but, in my opinion, this business initiative would be a good starting point.'

Collaboration is critical, she adds. 'We cannot create procedures without consulting the people who directly carry out the task.'

Things are improving, though. 'In this last year I have seen greater business initiatives and programmes that recognise the specific leadership of women in supply chains.'

'And through a company mentoring programme, I have met more women leaders in the field.'

## STEPHANIE BENAY

**Director, safety system and assurance, BC Hydro, and chair of the Canadian group of Women in Occupational Health & Safety Society (WOHSS)**

Watching her father pass away following a 40-year painful battle with an occupational-related illness left an 'extraordinary impression' on Stephanie. 'I ensure that every day I assist organisations in understanding and managing effectively workplace health and safety risk.'

Whether writing articles, speaking at conferences, mentoring professionals or starting a national association, everything she does is to honour her father and ensure others and their families never have to 'endure that kind of pain'.

Stephanie was part of a group of women who created WOHSS in 2017 to support women in OSH with mentorship, sponsorship, career growth and networking. 'I know and see the impact we are having, but we need more women in our industry,' she says.

How women are treated is a greater societal problem and continues to be an issue in OSH. 'Gender bias and harassment training for our male colleagues is essential,' she says. 'And understanding accountability and responsibility in these situations, and what to do as a bystander witnessing this, is invaluable in many organisations.'

She adds: 'I believe organisations need policies that transcend words and are actionable, making disclosure as easy and safe as possible for the victim.' This requires employers to ensure employees understand not only what this is, but how to respond, action, investigate and learn. And organisations need transparency around this. 'We know in safety that when we hear people's stories, it's more impactful,' she adds.

