

Groundbreaking "Women Leading Change 2025" event lights up Women's Month

Duke Corporate Education hosted a highly impactful summit - "Women Leading Change 2025: Reimagining our World with Courage", in Johannesburg on 19 August

JOHANNESBURG, GAUTENG, SOUTH AFRICA, August 26, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Duke

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Dr. Sharmla Chetty, CEO of Duke Corporate Education

Corporate Education ([Duke CE](#)), the custom executive education arm of Duke University and a global leader in leadership development successfully concluded its flagship Women's Month event, Women Leading Change 2025: Reimagining our World with Courage, in Johannesburg.

The summit, held on Tuesday 19 August in partnership with the International Women's Forum South Africa ([IWFSA](#)), African Women Chartered Accountants ([AWCA](#)), and B20 South Africa 2025, brought together more than 1,000 visionary leaders, innovators, and changemakers from more than 350 companies across sectors and

continents to foster bold, inclusive leadership in an era of complexity and rapid change.

From humble beginnings eight years ago, the event has become an annual institution for South African corporate leaders looking to explore new frontiers of leadership thinking. This year's focus on courageous, human-centered leadership as a catalyst for innovation, sustainable growth, and national progress was designed for a world crying out for bold action.

Taking place during South Africa's Women's Month, the event featured a touching tribute to Dr. Zanele Mbeki, founder of the Women's Development Bank and celebrated women's rights activist. Dr. Mbeki was honored for her advocacy for women's rights and her contribution to elevating the status of women in South Africa.

A stellar cast of more than 50 local and international speakers shared their hard-won insights, covering themes ranging from women in leadership, to leading in a time when algorithms predominate and the recognition that longer lifespans require ongoing investment in learning.

Alongside Dr. Mbeki's tribute, the event included stirring presentations from Tsakani Maluleke,

South Africa's first woman Auditor General and Nolitha Fakude, President of IWFSA and Chair of Anglo American's Management Board, as well as an update from B20 Sherpa, Dr. Cas Coovadia.

International speakers included Lucrecia Borgonovo, Chief Talent and Organizational Effectiveness Officer at Mastercard and Michael Fraccaro, Mastercard Fellow and Former Chief People Officer at Mastercard. They shared in a thoughtful discussion around male allyship and advocacy with Bryan Habana, Mastercard Rugby Ambassador, Co-founder and CCO, Paymenow. Fran Katsoudas, Executive Vice President and Chief People, Policy & Purpose Officer at Cisco, shared her thoughts with Annika Larsen, eNCA news anchor, about the importance of embracing lifelong learning, making space for others and vulnerability.



Dr. Zanele Mbeki, founder of the Women's Development Bank and women's rights activist, is honored for her life-long contribution to uplifting women in South Africa. Pictured alongside Dr. Mbeki are Pumla Molope, AWCA President, and Dr. Sharmila Chetty, CEO of Duke CE

Opening proceedings, Dr. Sharmila Chetty, CEO of Duke Corporate Education and recent recipient of the "Women of Substance Award" from African Women Chartered Accountants (AWCA), paid tribute to the 20,000 women who marched to the Union Buildings in 1956, acknowledging their courage, but reminded delegates that courage is not women's work alone, saying that "when men and women rise together, society is stronger". She appealed for a return to ethical, inclusive and courageous leadership concluding by challenging delegates "to move from applause to action: to mentor one more person, open one more door and to raise one more voice".

The summit reinforced Duke CE's commitment to fostering inclusive, courageous, and human-centered leadership, moving beyond dialogue to purposeful strategy and bold commitments. Participants left with actionable insights to drive measurable progress in their organizations and communities.

In summing up the day, Dr. Chetty concluded "Through these conversations, and by leveraging deep partnership, bold ideas, and a shared belief in the power of human potential, we are not only putting people at the center of leadership, but helping leaders grow, so that communities thrive and the world moves forward."

She also thanked Mastercard and Cisco (Platinum), MTN, Absa Group and the FirstRand Foundation (Gold) for their generous sponsorships.

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