

# Esha Mansingh of DP World is empowering women and transforming business

 By [Robin Fredericks](#)

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Esha Mansingh, at the age of 37, serves on the executive committee of Imperial Logistics, a DP World company. As the executive head of corporate affairs and sustainability for sub-Saharan Africa at DP World, she is the driving force behind crucial aspects such as investor relations, sustainability, and stakeholder communications.



Esha Mansingh, executive head of corporate affairs and sustainability for sub-Saharan Africa at DP World

Her influence extends beyond Imperial to DP World, where she spearheads sustainability, communications, government relations, and partnerships for sub-Saharan Africa. But Esha's impact transcends the corporate world. She initiated Imperial's first global women's forum and leads the charge in various corporate social investment initiatives across Africa and Europe, focusing on community development, women's empowerment, and healthcare.

Her numerous accolades, including being named a Young Global Leader by the World Economic Forum, underscore her dedication to driving positive change in the world.

This Women's Month, we interview Mansingh talks about her work in women's empowerment and sustainability, and her advice for young women who are aspiring to be leaders, she also shares her thoughts on the importance of Women's Month and how we can all work together to create a more equal world.

## **Tell us a bit about yourself and your background?**

I grew up in Chatsworth, Durban and matriculated at Pinetown Girls High School.

I have been fortunate to have spent my corporate career to date serving in core industries in South Africa including mining and now logistics. I have over 14 years of experience in investor relations, corporate affairs, sustainability and communications.

I currently serve as the executive head of corporate affairs and sustainability in sub-Saharan Africa at DP World and previously served on the Executive Committee of JSE-listed Imperial Logistics. In addition to my corporate role, I have pursued numerous projects and initiatives focussing on social impact and women empowerment on the African continent.

I am also honoured to have been recognised and participate in the following:

World Economic Forum Young Global Leader 2022; member of Harvard Kennedy School's Women Leadership Board; member of NBI, Unjani Clinics and World Economic Forum's New Champions South Africa Boards; 'Most Influential Women in Africa 2022 by European Business Magazine readers; Mail & Guardian Top 50 Power of Women 2021; Top 100 Most Successful Women in the World 2021 by the Global Trade Chamber; non-executive director and trustee of Imperial/Motus Community Trust.

However, my greatest joy and pride is being a wife and a mum to two beautiful children and a daughter.

From an education perspective, I have a BA degree in Communication Science. I was also awarded a certificate of completion for the Global Leadership and Public Policy for the 21st Century Program, 3/2023, John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, Executive Education; and a certificate of completion from Princeton University's Andlinger Centre for Energy and Environment in Climate Transition in June 2022.

**■ *What is your role at DP World, and what responsibilities do you oversee as a group executive?***

I was recently appointed to the DP World executive leadership team for sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) as Head of Corporate Affairs and Sustainability for the region. Part of this role means that I am responsible for Sustainability, Corporate Affairs, Communications, Government Relations, and Partnerships for the SSA region.

Further, I steer corporate social investment initiatives for DP World across SSA, many aimed at developing communities, and women and promoting road safety, primary healthcare and education.

Additionally, I am also the chairman of, and initiated, Imperial's first global women's forum (now DP World's sub-Saharan Africa women's forum) which is a network of women across our SSA markets of operation – and I am proud of the fact that we became a signatory to the global Women Empowerment Principles (WEP) community, endorsed by the United Nations (UN).

**■ *What do you love most about working in the logistics sector?***

This is an exciting and ever-changing sector – and the opportunity to be involved in a variety of areas is very rewarding. For me, at DP World, what I love is that as a global supply chain provider, we not only provide access to quality products and services but we take our clients' products to some of the fastest-growing and most challenging markets on the continent.

We make a meaningful difference in the lives of people in our countries and communities of operation every day.

**▄ How can the public and private sectors help facilitate the participation of more women in the logistics sector?**

I believe that this requires a multifaceted approach and needs to start with developing and supporting educational programmes that promote STEM subjects amongst young girls – to create a pipeline for female talent interested in logistics and related fields.

This of course needs to then be underpinned by collaborative efforts with educational institutions to offer scholarships, grants and mentorship opportunities specifically aimed at women pursuing logistics-related degrees.

However, as we know, we also need conducive work environments, where companies actively implement diversity and inclusion initiatives that focus on hiring, promoting and retaining women within our sector, and provide ongoing training and upskilling initiatives aimed at empowering women to thrive and grow in the corporate world.

**▄ Where do you believe the value lies in a diverse, inclusive work environment, particularly in terms of gender representation?**

I have always worked in predominantly male-dominated industries, and this has meant I had to work a lot harder to prove myself and demonstrate value – beyond merely being given the opportunity. However, I overcame these challenges with persistence and focus. When opportunities came knocking, no matter how unrealistic,

I never said no – using them as learning experiences and ensuring I was solution-oriented at every turn. I have always been passionate about how I can ‘create a voice’ for myself and others, and I believe that with the right leadership focus, you can always create opportunities for gender representation and drive a culture of empowerment – a culture that is not only focused on rewarding individuals but the company itself.

Real gender transformation is more than merely positions on executive boards though, it is about digging deep into the fabric of the organisation and unravelling every aspect that does not align or hinders growth.

The key for me is also collaborating with my colleagues, both male and female, to create an inclusive and empowering culture.

**▄ Do you think there is enough female representation in the industry?**

I certainly think it’s getting better and certainly, the parameters of ESG are helping to drive this far more for companies – but, as always more can be done. At DP World, we are focused on consistently growing our empowerment model – creating tangible opportunities for growth and development.

**▄ Based on your experience, what advice would you give to women pursuing a career in logistics today?**

True female leadership and empowerment start with recognising the good in every woman and knowing how to unlock their potential through empathy, support and creating opportunities.

However, it takes more than that – it takes someone to truly drive this agenda with passion and to commit to it both inside the business and in their own personal capacity. It also takes someone with focus who can positively influence people within the business to not only see, but intentionally buy into, their vision and to join them in the journey of executing this vision. However, remember that corporate roles do not define you.

In fact, quite the opposite. I believe that there comes a time in life when moving up the ranks is not enough. Making a real difference in the position you are in is what defines success. Rather it is about empowering other young people, young women and those without a voice – to help them find one. That’s where we can each make a real difference in the workplace and in our communities.

**▄ What future trends do you predict for the sector?**

There are quite a few trends that will not only impact the logistics sector – but every aspect of business in SSA. We know that the logistics industry is undergoing a digital transformation and examining all aspects of what this means – even how artificial intelligence (AI) is being looked at in terms of how it could enhance supply chain visibility, optimise routes and streamline operations.

Sustainability and green logistics are gaining prominence – examining how this sector adapts to cleaner energy sources and more sustainable practices. Our focus on infrastructure investment and skills development and training will also continue in logistics - to not only enhance our connectivity but upskill to bridge skills gaps that need to be addressed.

■ ***Can you highlight some of the women-led empowerment projects you've driven through DP World's Women's Forum?***

Through our regional Women's Forum, we have created a platform that drives the support and empowerment of women across SSA – which aims to extend support and drive all female initiatives across the region.

This forum has extended the mindset of the business and witnessed a lot of progress within the group by addressing women's issues, some of which include implementing self-defence programmes to protect potentially vulnerable women in the workplace, female driver programmes focused on empowering women to get their driver's licenses and become more employable – as truckers, drivers, etc.

The aim of the forum is to hear our women, to act on their needs and to demonstrate that together we can make things happen - the more people see that it is possible, the more it is not impossible!

The success of this forum is premised on the support of both our male and female colleagues. This forum also extends its support to empowering and uplifting women outside of our business, through impactful community investments. These initiatives include Unjani Clinics NPC, which delivers quality, affordable primary healthcare services by enabling entrepreneurship for women nurses. We also partnered with Barefoot College International to develop so-called 'Solar Mamas' in Senegal, where rural women are trained as solar energy and maintenance technicians.

We also play a leading role in promoting women in sports, including sponsorship of the DP World Lions women's cricket team, and investing in certified training for women to find employment as sports coaches. Lastly, we have invested in a programme delivering anti-gender based violence training in schools in South Africa.

■ ***What message do you have for women this Women's Month?***

For me, there are three key leadership attributes that need to be demonstrated to drive real empowerment

a) **EQ and empathy** – You can't empower, inspire, and innovate if no one buys into your approach. It is this emotional empathy that leaders need to demonstrate – right from the bottom of the organisation, all the way to the top.

b) **Create opportunities to push boundaries** – leading by example and giving people the freedom to be who they are but pushing them to be who they can be.

c) **Respect and recognition** – publicly recognising people, highlighting those who have contributed to the business's success.

The advice I would give is don't become complacent and don't take anything for granted. Work ethic is critical for continued success. Surround yourself with people who are similar-minded as well as people who back you and support you. Surround yourself in both your personal and your professional life with people that are like-minded, share the same vision and back you, you know you're not doing it alone.

ABOUT ROBIN FREDERICKS

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