



INSIGHT

Ilda Lomba

Director

Corporate & Commercial and Oil & Gas Sector
CDH Namibia**Gender mainstreaming**

When people think about gender transformation in the workplace, they often imagine policies, quotas or corporate campaigns. But true gender mainstreaming is not simply a compliance exercise. It is the intentional integration of equality, inclusion and accountability into the way organisations think, lead, negotiate, recruit, govern and grow.

As a lawyer and director specialising in corporate and commercial law and the oil and gas sector, I have experienced firsthand both the progress made and the structural barriers that still exist for women in leadership and high-stakes industries. My career journey has shown me that gender mainstreaming is not only about creating opportunities for women; it is about building stronger, more sustainable, and higher-performing organisations for everyone.

The legal and energy sectors have historically been male-dominated spaces, particularly in areas involving complex transactions, negotiations, regulatory frameworks, and executive decision-making. Entering these environments as a young female professional required resilience, technical excellence, and the confidence to occupy rooms where women were often underrepresented. Early in my career, I learnt that competence alone is not always enough; visibility, credibility and strategic leadership also matter.

Working in corporate and commercial law taught me the importance of governance, risk management, and long-term strategic thinking. In oil and gas law, the stakes become even higher. Transactions involve multinational corporations, governments, regulators, environmental considerations, financing structures, and national economic interests. These are industries where decisions shape economies and communities for generations. Yet despite their significance, women continue to be underrepresented in leadership, negotiations, and technical advisory roles within the sector.

Over the years, I have advised on matters involving regulatory compliance, mergers and acquisitions, petroleum licensing, procurement, competition law, and complex commercial transactions. In many of these spaces, I found myself not only representing clients, but also quietly challenging assumptions about who belongs at the table. The experience reinforced an important truth: representation matters. When women participate meaningfully in decision-making, organisations benefit from broader perspectives, stronger governance, and more balanced leadership approaches.

However, gender mainstreaming cannot succeed through representation alone. It requires institutional commitment. Organisations must move beyond symbolic inclusion and focus on measurable impact. This includes transparent recruitment and

promotion processes, equal access to leadership opportunities, mentorship programmes, equitable remuneration structures, and workplace cultures that support both accountability and professional growth.

One of the most important lessons from my journey has been the value of collaboration across genders. Sustainable transformation does not happen in opposition to men, but in partnership with them. Some of the strongest advocates for women's advancement are male leaders who understand that diversity strengthens decision-making and innovation. Inclusive leadership is ultimately about creating environments where talent, expertise and integrity are recognised irrespective of gender.

The corporate world is increasingly recognising that diversity and inclusion are directly linked to performance. Investors, regulators and stakeholders are placing greater emphasis on governance standards, ethical leadership, and environmental, social and governance (ESG) considerations. Gender equality is, therefore, no longer a peripheral issue – it is a strategic and business imperative. Organisations that fail to embrace inclusion risk losing talent, credibility and competitiveness in an evolving global economy.

For women entering corporate law, commercial practice or the energy sector, my advice is simple: own your expertise, continue building technical excellence, and do not minimise your ambition. There will be moments where you are underestimated, challenged, or expected to prove yourself repeatedly. Do not allow those moments to define your confidence. Instead, allow them to sharpen your discipline, resilience and leadership.

At the same time, organisations must recognise that individual resilience should not substitute systemic change. True gender mainstreaming requires structures that enable women not only to enter industries, but to thrive and lead within them. It requires intentional succession planning, investment in female leadership pipelines, and a culture where inclusion is embedded into strategy and operations, rather than treated as a standalone initiative.

Looking back on my career journey, I recognise that every boardroom discussion, negotiation, transaction and leadership opportunity contributed to a broader purpose beyond legal practice. It became part of a larger conversation about visibility, transformation, and the evolving role of women in shaping industries traditionally dominated by men.

Gender mainstreaming is ultimately about creating workplaces and industries where leadership is defined not by gender, but by capability, vision, integrity and impact. As more women continue to rise in corporate leadership and sectors such as oil and gas, we move closer to building organisations that are not only more inclusive, but also more innovative, accountable, and sustainable for the future. 

