

Q&A

Narisa Balgobind

Head of Africa Debt (excluding SA),
Absa Corporate and Investment Banking.



Q *Where did your financial markets journey begin, and how did you end up where you are today?*

A I moved into my current position when an opportunity arose to advance my career by stepping into a managerial position to head up Absa's Africa Debt Financing business. Prior to that, I spent 16 years in Resources and Project Finance, leading transactions across the African continent. I started my banking career in credit, where I learnt the fundamentals. Prior to banking, I was a junior equity analyst at Merrill Lynch, and I started my career as a trainee analyst at Sanlam Investments..

Q *Did you have a mentor at any point in your career? If so, who were they and what did you learn from them?*

A I have had various mentors at different points in my career, but the lesson I learnt from all of them is to be true to yourself. Every interaction, including the negative ones, provides you with a valuable lesson. My mentors have assisted in broadening my horizon by sharing their wealth of experience. They have

challenged me to think differently, offered different perspectives and insights, and – most importantly – assisted in building my confidence as a dealmaker.

Q *What, if any, hurdles have you had to overcome in an industry that has traditionally been male-dominated?*

A When I started my banking career, in most cases, I was the only woman at meetings. It was rather intimidating until I discovered my voice and expressed my views. That is core to any investment banker: be confident and assertive in a professional manner.

While the industry has become more inclusive and is now actively recruiting more women, the fundamentals have not changed. You need to learn to never sell yourself short, but to believe in yourself and your value-add.

Q *What are some of the most memorable deals you have worked on?*

A My most memorable deals are the ones that stretched me the most. My first deal was the financing for a junior Oil & Gas player to

develop an oilfield offshore Ghana. It was a new industry for me personally, and the first upstream Oil & Gas deal for the bank, and it took a lot of out-of-the-box thinking to shape the deal into a bankable format.

Another particularly memorable deal was the advisory and arranging work I did to refurbish an abandoned coal mine, develop the surrounding infrastructure and establish a coal fire plant in Zambia. The deal was challenging as it has many moving parts, and included an export credit finance solution together with DFI funding and commercial bank funding. The deal took some time to solution, but we closed it eventually – and the project now contributes approximately 20% of Zambia's overall power consumption.

Q *What advice would you give to young women who are looking to enter to financial markets?*

A Be authentic and true to yourself. Get to know yourself. Understand who you are, what your triggers are, and where your development points lie. By working on yourself, you will be more self-aware and more equipped to handle a job in a highly challenging industry. 🇿🇼