

Making Mining Welcoming for All

Mining engineer Theresa Nyabeze is helping drive meaningful change in one of Canada's most critical industries.

By Sharon Aschaiek

For Theresa Nyabeze, P.Eng., diversifying mining isn't just a goal. It's a commitment to helping shift mindsets and open doors for the next generation of professionals.

As technical leader of diversity, equity, inclusion and culture at Vale Base Metals, Nyabeze advises on and executes programming that fosters mutual understanding and productive collaboration among employees. "Mining is an ecosystem that's impossible without a strong focus on people and enabling those people to come together to make it all work," Nyabeze says. "When we have empathy for others and what they do, it helps us make better decisions."

THE DIVERSITY GAP

The 2024 *Equity Deserving Groups in Canada's Mining Industry* report of the Mining Industry Human Resources Council (MiHR) found that women make up just 15 per cent of the industry's 400,000 workers and 15 per cent of engineers. Meanwhile, the MiHR's 2023 *Canadian Mining Labour Market 10-Year Outlook 2020* report indicates visible minorities account for just 9 per cent of mining workers overall; data on racialized mining engineers are scarce.

Mining's pervasive diversity gaps have not impeded Nyabeze's career trajectory, thanks to her mix of engineering talents, networking abilities and optimistic attitude. Emigrating from Zimbabwe with her family at 12, she built on her aptitude for math and science by studying mining engineering at Laurentian University. While completing her undergraduate degree, she joined the not-for-profit group Women in Science and Engineering (WISE) Sudbury.

"In WISE, I saw how women already in the industry were managing their lives and careers. That was important to my professional growth," says Nyabeze, who later volunteered for WISE, including as its president from 2017 to 2020.

Hired by Vale in 2000 as a research engineer, Nyabeze has had diverse roles with responsibilities that have included strategic planning for mines, supervising miners underground and conducting orebody financial analysis. In her penultimate position of senior specialist mining engineer, she travelled across Canada and to Brazil and Indonesia contributing to the governance of company mineral reserves and resources.

INSPIRING THE NEXT GENERATION

In 2017, Nyabeze wrote a children's book to debunk common myths about underground mines being dark and scary places with intimidating people. The book is geared toward enticing more youths, including her then two young kids, to consider the profession. *Underground! My Mining Adventure* is about a young girl's journey underground with her mother where she discovers mining's complexity and innovation. Nyabeze says the book has been distributed to several Ontario schools and translated into French, Brazilian Portuguese, Spanish and some African languages.



Theresa Nyabeze, P.Eng., is working to promote diversity and inclusion in Canada's mining sector. Photo: Meoraa Media

Nyabeze's commitment to diversifying mining spans grassroots and institutional efforts. She co-runs a mentorship network supporting new immigrants in the sector and serves as a board advisor for Women in Mining Sudbury. For five years, she led the Diversity & Inclusion Advisory Committee at the Canadian Institute of Mining, Metallurgy and Petroleum (CIM), advancing conversations on ethnic diversity, neurodiversity and allyship.

She continues to stay true to her technical roots through the CIM's MRMR Society while shaping the mining industry's equity, diversity and inclusion strategy through the Environmental and Social Responsibility Society of CIM's Diversity and Inclusion Working Group. A proud alumna of the Governor General's Leadership Program, she now chairs its northern Ontario tour, curating experiences for future leaders.

In her role at Vale, Nyabeze champions the company's global inclusion strategy, embedding it into core business practices through education and change management, with the aim of fostering a workplace where everyone belongs.

With mining's aging workforce and the lack of available skilled workers forecasted to cause labour shortages, Nyabeze says improving diversity is key to sustaining the sector's growth and innovation. "With mining, you want people who are technically minded, but you also want different kinds of thinkers, which can be shaped by how they've experienced the world," she says. "How do we all come together with our different values and ways of knowing and execute projects together?" **e**