

Nurturing nature, Q&A with Catherine Constantinides

 By [Sindy Peters](#)

14 Aug 2015

Catherine Constantinides is a social entrepreneur, climate activist, business mogul and one of the most inspiring youth leaders in South Africa with a number of accolades to her name. She's the driving force behind Miss Earth SA, encouraging women to actively participate in protecting the natural environment. Her hero is her mom.



Catherine Constantinides

■ *What inspired you to start Miss Earth SA - where does your passion for environmental responsibility stem from?*

Catherine Constantinides: I was Miss Earth South Africa in 2003, thereafter I was offered the licence by the international office and, without giving it a thought, I grabbed the opportunity with both hands. It was an opportunity for which I had very big dreams. I wanted to use the platform to create a leadership programme focused on engaging young South African women to become more actively involved in issues around safe guarding our environment, climate change, sustainable development, food security and conservation.

I grew up in a home that inspired a foundation of nurturing the natural heritage we are blessed with. Many childhood memories are filled with time spent in our garden at home with my parents and looking after plants, pets and injured animals we found; I believe the love for the environment stems from that.

■ *Since its inception in 2004, what impact has Miss Earth South Africa had on the lives of the young women who have participated in the programme?*

Constantinides: Twelve years later we are privileged to see the amazing impact that this programme has had and continues to inspire in each and every young lady that has been a part of the programme. These are not just as simple as the everyday impacts we see when we engage and educate communities or when we inspire children during an assembly, activation or project. They are much deeper in their rooting and include former ambassadors who moved into environmental law after being part of the Miss Earth. Not only did Martie Bradley go into this law space but she is also a lecturer on environmental law at the University of Pretoria, an opportunity that allows her to constantly engage young minds and influence the environmental and climate agenda. This is only one such example; another is a former Miss Earth who went on to head up the sustainability portfolio at MTN after her year of reign. Again, a portfolio that allows her to put into practice the passion ignited during her year of reign. We have also been contacted by many former participants of the programme over the years that share life stories, experiences and journeys they have taken post Miss Earth that have been inspired by what they learnt, projects they engaged and people that they met as part of their Miss Earth journeys. These include their role as moms and house-makers; each experience is vital to how they continue to impact the environment and how they consciously try to lower their carbon footprint in their daily lives.

■ ***What is the role of women in driving sustainable development?***

Constantinides: Women are key in driving sustainability. As the nurturer of our family units and the backbone of our communities, women are integral in understanding the impacts of **NOT** moving forward with a conscious understanding that our current rate of consumption is having horrific implications on the way we live, work and play. These climatic impacts and changes can already be seen across our continent and, as a result, we have seen the United Nations term refugees in different parts of the world as 'climate refugees'. Additionally, women are already a driving force to combat the effects of climate change and many powerful women locally and internationally are championing this important space. Our very own Minister of Environmental Affairs Edna Molewa is a great example of a female champion in the sustainable development space alongside Ella Bella, a climate activist and founder of the international youth movement Generation Earth.

■ ***You're also an executive for Lead SA, what does partaking in active citizenship mean for women specifically?***

Constantinides: Active citizenship is a term that applies to us as citizens of our very communities and country. It is a term that embraces what it means for us to be an active part of a whole. In my personal opinion, as women we have a greater responsibility to be the active citizens of our societies as we are the mothers and care-givers that build and move our country forward. What we don't often realise is that it is the small impacts we have on a day-to-day basis that build, nourish, inspire and motivate those around us to do better, be better and build. The only way we will see change is by inspiring people to take ownership of the challenges we are faced with.

■ ***You've received a number of accolades for your work as an environmentalist and an entrepreneur, what advice would you give to young women looking to walk a similar path?***

Constantinides: Believe in yourself and live your dreams, those dreams and plans that inspire and ignite your very core. Be true to yourself and know that you are able to influence your family, your work circle, your community, these influences bring about change. The ability to be anything we dream of lies within each of us, but we must get up and chase them each day with the enthusiasm and passion that we can be change-makers. No man will make a greater mistake than someone who does nothing, because they can only do a little. Be an active citizen. Be bold, be brave and aspire to inspire! There is no such thing as winning and losing, rather have the perspective of winning and lessons... It is up to you what you take from those lessons, failing is part of the journey, it also teaches you about how badly you want something, because it is that hunger and drive that allows you to pick up and try again.

■ ***Who has had the greatest positive influence on your life?***

Constantinides: Georgina Erato Constantinides, my mother - the strength I see in my unbelievable mom. She is a rock, a strength and positive force of the world. Despite the great deal of challenges, far too many for one person, in one lifetime, yet she gets up, ready to tackle the day with enthusiasm, passion and a zest for life she does not realise she even has. I am so grateful to have her in my life, nurturing my thoughts, ideas and being the air beneath my wings, and every dream. She has always believed in us and encouraged us to dream as big as we possibly can. She is the quiet force that has nurtured our spirit as human beings.

■ ***Do you think it's important having a month dedicated to women in South Africa?***

Constantinides: I think we need to strive for gender equality and to be in a place and time where we do not have to have a women's month. Having said that, I think it is important to understand and identify what we celebrate, acknowledge and reflect on during this month that has been dedicated to us. It is critical to understand why we celebrate 9 August, what the day represents and remembers. We must not get lost only in the challenges of today but we must celebrate the iconic women that allowed us the freedoms we enjoy today and the stand they took in order to secure us the rights we have now.

■ ***Is enough done to celebrate women during Women's Month?***

Constantinides: I think more could be done. We need to find a careful and important balance between celebrating women over the month of August as well as highlighting the challenges that women still face today. I think we can sometimes get

lost in only the challenges faced by women and we forget to acknowledge what women **HAVE** achieved and the difference they are making every day of the year. The challenges need to be tackled every day of the year and we need to include the male voice as an important part of the solution to move forward and bridge the divide.

■ **What is your message for Women's Month?**

Constantinides: My message to women during Women's Month and every day of the year is simple; "Women empower, girls compete!" Strive to empower and inspire other women and remember that by lighting somebody else's candle, it takes no light away from the one you are holding. Never be scared to give credit and praise where it is due.

For more info on Miss Earth SA, go to www.missearthsouthafrica.co.za.

ABOUT SINDY PETERS

Sindy Peters (@sindy_hullaba_lou) is a group editor at Bizcommunity.com on the Construction & Engineering, Energy & Mining, and Property portals. She can be reached at sindy@bizcommunity.com

■ 2022 Lesedi Award winner Faeza Marshman on what drives her giving spirit - 9 Dec 2022

■ #ESGAfricaConference: Why integrating the environmental and social components of ESG is key - 3 Nov 2022

■ #ESGAfricaConference: ESG an opportunity for purposeful shareholder engagement - 1 Nov 2022

■ #ESGAfricaConference: Success in ESG starts with leadership, partnerships and good governance - 31 Oct 2022

■ #ESGAfricaConference: What should ESG reporting look like in Africa? - 26 Oct 2022

[View my profile and articles...](#)

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>