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Elevating **business**.
Elevating **society**.



#SheLeads Storybook

Intro...

Investing in future female leaders is about more than development, it's about creating opportunities for women to lead and thrive.

BDO's #SheLeads programme continues to make a meaningful impact by supporting female audit trainees through mentorship, coaching and connection. Beyond building confidence and leadership capabilities, the programme helps participants grow their professional networks, learn from experienced leaders and collaborate on real-world challenges shaping the future of the profession.

What stands out most is the sense of community that develops among the participants, creating relationships and support systems that extend well beyond the programme itself.

I'm inspired by BDO's commitment to building a strong pipeline of future female leaders, not only for our firm, but for the profession and our country.

Karlien Groenewald

Founding Partner of #SheLeads



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Introducing our #SheLeads 2026 Candidates



Bonolo Morabe
Trainee Accountant
Audit



Farah Isaacs
Trainee Accountant
Audit



Jerusha Ramdeo
Trainee Accountant
Audit



Kayley De Barros
Trainee Accountant
Audit



Kelley Moodley
Trainee Accountant
Audit



Lerato Gatebe
Trainee Accountant
Audit



Lindokuhle Malaza
Trainee Accountant
Financial Services



Lulama Khoza
Trainee Accountant
Audit



Promise Twagirishema
Trainee Accountant
Financial Services



Rebecca Emond
Trainee Accountant
Financial Services



Shakia Uddin
Trainee Accountant
Financial Services



Victoria Barnes-Webb
Trainee Accountant
Audit

Every leadership journey is unique. In this storybook, six participants from the 2026 #SheLeads programme share their experiences, lessons, and reflections on growth, mentorship, and stepping into their potential. Their stories offer a glimpse into the impact of the programme and the power of investing in future women leaders.

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Shakia Uddin
Trainee Accountant
Financial Services

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What motivated you to join the #SheLeads programme?

#SheLeads' focus on empowering women aligns with everything I have fought to become and everything I still hope to be.

I was born in Bangladesh, where for many girls, life follows a path that is chosen for them long before they are ready. Growing up, I saw how easily dreams could be set aside and how quietly potential could be limited.

Moving to South Africa on the brink of adolescence was both a blessing and a struggle. I had to learn to speak and find my voice in a language that wasn't my own, learn to belong in spaces that felt unfamiliar, and carry the weight of starting over.

Today, I carry a quiet pride in knowing that I am the first woman in my entire maternal lineage to finish high school and go on to earn two degrees. For me, that is more than an achievement. It is breaking a cycle and rewriting a story that was never meant to include women like me.

I joined the #SheLeads programme because the core of the programme resonates deeply with my own journey, one that has been shaped by breaking barriers. Having heard about the impact of the #SheLeads programme and how it has helped women develop their skills, and realise their potential, I knew it was something I wanted to be part of.

How has the programme challenged you to grow outside of your comfort zone?

Surprisingly, I would not say the programme pushed me outside of my comfort zone. I am naturally quite a comfortable and outgoing person.

If anything, it became my playground. It created a space where I could be curious, ask questions, build meaningful relationships, and learn from people with diverse experiences.

Rather than challenging me through discomfort, #SheLeads challenged me to embrace opportunities, and make the most of the resources and people around me.

If you could thank one person from the programme, who would it be and why?

Definitely Imtiaaz Hashim, my mentor, who gets mentorship just right. I don't think I have ever gone to Imtiaaz with a question, challenge, or uncertainty and left without an answer. He creates a space where I can be unapologetically myself without holding back, and he listens to every word I have to say. I always leave our mentor-mentee conversations with greater clarity, direction, and confidence. What makes his approach so impactful is that he doesn't just share his own perspective.

He goes out of his way to connect me with others who can offer different viewpoints and experiences, expand my way of thinking and help me grow in ways I never expected. His guidance has been one of the most valuable parts of my #SheLeads journey, and for that, I am incredibly grateful.

Why do you believe programmes like #SheLeads are important at BDO?

Programmes like #SheLeads are important at BDO because, while significant progress has been made, many women are still navigating the effects of historical barriers that limited opportunities for those who came before them. Initiatives like #SheLeads help accelerate that progress by creating opportunities for women to learn, grow, build confidence, and develop as leaders. They provide access to mentors, networks, and experiences that might otherwise take years to build independently.

Lastly, how has the programme prepared you for future opportunities at BDO and externally

Through the programme, I had the opportunity to meet several leaders across the firm, including partners whom I may not have otherwise interacted with. I was also fortunate to attend a networking event with my mentor, which further exposed me to different professionals and perspectives.

Beyond the professional connections, the programme has reinforced the importance of building relationships and learning from others.

The programme also has given me access to conversations, and perspectives that will support my growth at BDO and equip me to navigate future opportunities wherever my career takes me.



Rebecca Emond
Trainee Accountant
Financial Services

What motivated you to join the #SheLeads programme?

I am not a particularly confident person and wanted to improve my confidence, especially in a work setting as going into third year next year I felt that it would assist me in being a better Auditor in Charge and leading my fellow trainees.

How has the programme challenged you to grow outside of your comfort zone?

Through the On the Couch sessions and Book Club meetups, I have made a conscious effort to apply the lessons and insights gained to my everyday life. Rather than simply learning the concepts, I have challenged myself to step outside my comfort zone and put them into practice. By “throwing myself in the deep end,” I have been able to build confidence, develop new skills, and gain a deeper understanding of how these principles can positively influence both my personal and professional growth.

If you could thank one person from the programme, who would it be and why?

Karlien Groenewald has led most of the sessions and her advice and wisdom has been eye-opening and shifted my perspective positively in how I view alot of things

How has the mentor pairing enhanced your experience and how has that relationship contributed to your development?

The mentor pairing programme has been incredibly beneficial, as it has not only strengthened my relationships within the department but has also provided me with valuable guidance and support. Through conversations with my mentor, I was able to relate to many of the experiences they shared and gain meaningful insights from their career journey. Their advice has offered a different perspective on challenges I may encounter and has helped me approach my own professional development with greater confidence and clarity.

Why do you believe programmes like #SheLeads are important at BDO

SheLeads programmes play a crucial role in empowering women to thrive in traditionally male-dominated environments. Throughout my career, I have often been the only woman, or one of only a few women, on an engagement team. The programme equips women with the confidence, assertiveness, and leadership skills needed to contribute meaningfully, advocate for themselves, and succeed in environments where they may otherwise feel outnumbered or overlooked.

Lastly, how has the programme prepared you for future opportunities at BDO and externally

A programme like SheLeads prepares me for the future by equipping me with the confidence, leadership skills, and professional presence needed to thrive in senior roles. As I progress in my career, I will increasingly find myself in situations where I need to influence decisions, lead teams, and advocate for my ideas. The programme helps me develop the confidence to speak up, be assertive, and contribute meaningfully, even in environments where women may be underrepresented. It also provides valuable insights from other female professionals and leaders, helping me build a strong network and learn from their experiences. These skills will not only support my professional growth but also enable me to become a role model and mentor for future generations of women in the workplace.



Victoria Barnes-Webb
Trainee Accountant
Financial Services

What motivated you to join the #SheLeads programme?

I was looking for opportunities to further develop my leadership skills, and I had heard from candidates in the previous year that this experience had been particularly beneficial in that regard.

How has the programme challenged you to grow outside of your comfort zone?

As someone who is naturally more comfortable focusing on technical tasks and supporting roles, stepping into leadership opportunities required me to become more confident in sharing my ideas, making decisions, and taking responsibility for outcomes. I believe that this programme has encouraged me to do this.

If you could thank one person from the programme, who would it be and why?

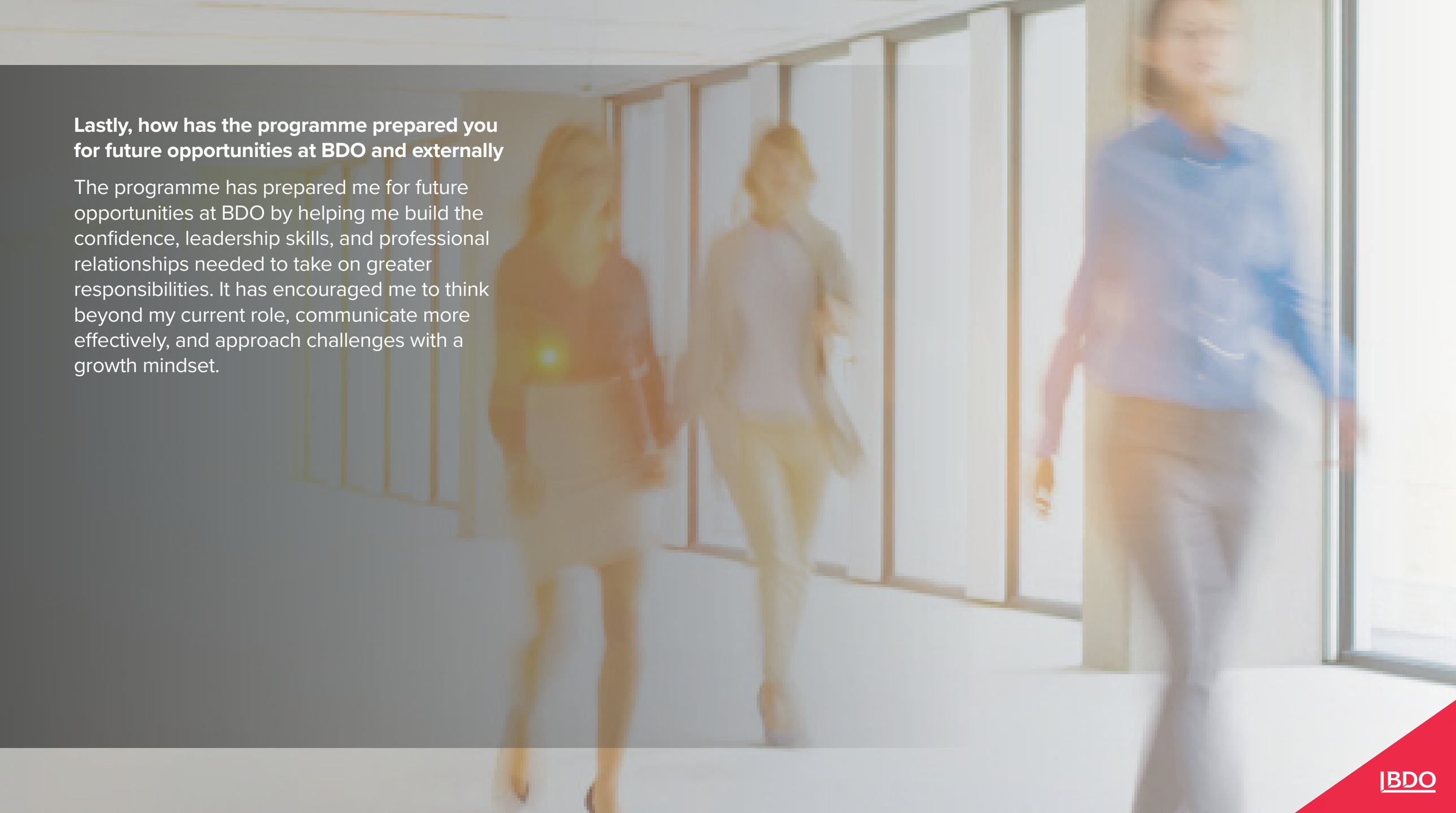
Karlien Groenewald

How has the mentor pairing enhanced your experience and how has that relationship contributed to your development?

The relationship contributed to my development by helping me build confidence, strengthen my leadership and interpersonal skills, and reflect more intentionally on my personal and professional growth.

Why do you believe programmes like #SheLeads are important at BDO

Programmes like #SheLeads are important at BDO because they provide a platform for developing future leaders, building confidence, and fostering meaningful professional networks. They create opportunities for individuals to learn from experienced professionals, share perspectives, and gain skills that may not always be developed through day-to-day work alone.



Lastly, how has the programme prepared you for future opportunities at BDO and externally

The programme has prepared me for future opportunities at BDO by helping me build the confidence, leadership skills, and professional relationships needed to take on greater responsibilities. It has encouraged me to think beyond my current role, communicate more effectively, and approach challenges with a growth mindset.



Lerato Gatebe
Trainee Accountant
Audit

What motivated you to join the #SheLeads programme?

I joined this initiative because I believe it will help me grow into the best version of myself while inspiring young women to pursue careers in chartered accountancy and, ultimately, management positions. I also believe that, in order to bridge the gap created by past under-representation, women need to be encouraged even more to pursue these roles.

If you could thank one person from the programme, who would it be and why?

My fellow participants, I have witnessed a remarkable change in all of us as we grow in confidence and become inspired to lead. My mentor, Fayaz Mohammed, has played a significant role in inspiring and guiding me along the way.

Why do you believe programmes like #SheLeads are important at BDO

Because of the same reasons as to why I decided to join the programme

Lastly, how has the programme prepared you for future opportunities at BDO and externally

Through this initiative, I have developed the confidence and skills needed to step into a senior role. Taking the lead has shown me that such responsibilities are far less intimidating than they appear, and I now feel well prepared for the challenges of senior management.



Promise Twagirishema
Trainee Accountant
Financial Services

What motivated you to join the #SheLeads programme?

I am passionate about continuously learning, growing, and investing in my personal and professional development. As a young woman at the beginning of my corporate career, I recognise that there is still so much for me to learn, and I value opportunities that help me build both my skills and confidence.

The #SheLeads programme particularly appealed to me because it brings together like-minded women who are committed to growth and leadership. Being surrounded by inspiring individuals provides an opportunity to learn from their experiences, broaden my perspective, and develop meaningful connections.

I believe that programmes such as #SheLeads empower women to believe in their potential, step into leadership roles with confidence, and create positive change in their workplaces and communities. Joining the programme has helped me become a better version of myself than I was yesterday while equipping me with the tools to succeed in both my career and personal life.

How has the programme challenged you to grow outside of your comfort zone?

One of the ways the #SheLeads programme challenged me to grow outside of my comfort zone was through the #SheLeads book club. At the start of the programme, we were gifted a copy of Atomic Habits and were encouraged to read assigned chapters and participate in discussions.

Reading in my spare time has never been a strength of mine, so prioritising time to sit down and read consistently was a challenge. What was even more challenging was intentionally applying the tools and habits from the book in

my daily life. Building new habits and changing old ways of thinking was uncomfortable at first, as it required discipline and consistency.

However, the experience has been rewarding. It pushed me to be more intentional about my personal growth and showed me that meaningful change comes from small, consistent actions. As a result, I have become more mindful of my habits and more committed to continuous self-improvement.

If you could thank one person from the programme, who would it be and why?

I would like to thank my mentor, Shehnaaz Suleman, for the incredible support and encouragement she has given me throughout the programme. This year has been particularly challenging as I have been balancing my APC studies with the demands of work, and there were times when it felt overwhelming. Despite her busy schedule, Shehnaaz has always made time for me. She consistently motivates me, reminds me to believe in myself, and encourages me to keep striving to be better. Her positivity shines through everything she does, and her willingness to invest in the growth of others is something I truly admire. I am incredibly grateful for her guidance, support, and the confidence she has helped me build.

How has mentor pairing enhanced your experience and how has that relationship contributed to your development?

The mentor pairing has been one of the most valuable parts of my #SheLeads experience. Having someone I could openly talk to, ask questions, and learn from made the programme feel much more personal and impactful.

What I appreciated most was that our relationship went beyond formal check-ins. We intentionally made time to connect, whether it was going for a walk together or attending a gym session together. These moments allowed us to build a genuine relationship and created a comfortable space for honest conversations about work, studies, personal growth, and career aspirations.

Through these interactions, I gained valuable perspectives, learned the importance of being intentional about my development, and became more confident in my abilities. Having a mentor who is invested in my success has encouraged me to step outside my comfort zone, challenge myself, and approach both my career and personal goals with a more positive mindset.

Why do you believe programmes like #SheLeads are important at BDO?

Programmes like #SheLeads are incredibly important at BDO because they empower women to grow, develop their leadership potential, and build confidence in themselves

and their abilities. Historically, women have faced barriers to advancement in many workplaces, and initiatives like #SheLeads help create opportunities for women to learn, connect, and thrive. The programme creates space for women to share experiences, learn from one another, and build supportive networks. It also provides access to mentors and role models who inspire participants to aim higher and believe in what they can achieve. Most importantly, programmes like #SheLeads help pave the way for future generations of women. By investing in and empowering women today, we create a more inclusive workplace and inspire the next generation of female leaders to pursue their ambitions with confidence.

Lastly, how has the programme prepared you for future opportunities at BDO and externally

The #SheLeads programme has prepared me for future opportunities at BDO and beyond by exposing me to the experiences and journeys of successful female leaders. Through the programme, I had the opportunity to interact with female partners and managers and gain insight into the paths they took to get to where they are today, including the challenges they faced and how they overcame them.

Hearing their stories and learning from their experiences has been both inspiring and reassuring. Their advice has given me practical tools and perspectives that I can apply in my day-to-day work as I continue to navigate my career.

The programme has also helped me build confidence in my own abilities and encouraged me to be more intentional about my personal and professional development. It has shown me that growth is a continuous journey and that, with the right mindset, support, and determination, I can pursue opportunities that may have once seemed out of reach. These lessons will continue to benefit me throughout my career, both at BDO and wherever my professional journey takes me.



Lindokuhle Malaza
Trainee Accountant
Financial Services

What motivated you to join the #SheLeads programme?

As a second-year trainee in Financial Services, I joined the #SheLeads programme because I wanted to develop skills beyond technical competence. While my role has helped me build strong analytical and finance skills, I recognised the importance of leadership, confidence, and building a strong professional network. I was particularly drawn to the opportunity to learn from successful women in the industry, gain mentorship, and connect with other ambitious women who share similar aspirations and challenges.

How has the programme challenged you to grow outside of your comfort zone?

The programme has challenged me to become more intentional about both my personal and professional development. Through the book club discussions and group sessions, I have been encouraged to openly share my experiences, strengths, and areas for growth, which is something I would not naturally do. It has also pushed me to improve my time management by balancing work commitments with programme activities, mentoring sessions, and self-development. Most importantly, it has encouraged me to think more deliberately about my future career goals and the steps I need to take to achieve them.

If you could thank one person from the programme, who would it be and why?

I would thank Karlien for the incredible role she has played in facilitating the programme. She has created a supportive environment where everyone feels comfortable being vulnerable and sharing their experiences. One of the most valuable lessons she has reinforced is that we are not alone in our challenges and that many of the difficulties we face are shared experiences. Her encouragement and perspective have reminded us that growth

often comes through discomfort and that we are capable of overcoming obstacles.

How has the mentor pairing enhanced your experience and how has that relationship contributed to your development?

My mentor pairing has been one of the most valuable aspects of the programme. I have really appreciated seeing firsthand that successful women can build fulfilling careers while also prioritising their wellbeing, family, and personal interests. Learning about how my mentor balances her professional responsibilities with travel, personal health, and family life has shown me that career success does not have to come at the expense of other important aspects of life. It has given me a more holistic view of what success can look like and has motivated me to pursue my goals with confidence.

Why do you believe programmes like #SheLeads are important at BDO

Programmes like #SheLeads are important because they create opportunities for women to develop leadership skills, build meaningful networks, and learn from experienced professionals. They also foster a sense of belonging and empowerment by providing a platform where women can openly discuss challenges, share experiences, and support one another. By investing in the growth and development of women, BDO is helping to build a more inclusive and diverse leadership pipeline for the future.

Lastly, how has the programme prepared you for future opportunities at BDO and externally

The programme has helped me develop greater self-awareness, confidence, and leadership skills, all of which will support my future career growth. It has encouraged me to be more proactive about managing my development, building professional relationships, and seeking opportunities that align with my long-term goals. The lessons, mentorship, and network I have gained through #SheLeads will not only help me pursue future opportunities within BDO but will also equip me with skills and perspectives that will benefit me throughout my career.



Karlien Groenewald
Founding Partner of
#SheLeads

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