

African Construction and Totally Concrete Expo addresses industry challenges, opportunities

The core message during the first two days of the recently held seventh African Construction and Totally Concrete Expo was that 'with adversity comes opportunity'. The event, which is now part of the Big 5 Construction Expo circuit and which includes Kenya, Nigeria and the Middle East, sounded an optimistic message on its first day.

"The current challenges facing the construction sector are well documented, but the general feeling was that these challenges have created a new set of opportunities, especially for small- and medium-sized companies," says Tracy-Lee Behr, portfolio director of the African Construction Expo at dmg events.

The focus on new opportunities for SMMEs and innovators in the construction sector was at the core of the opening presentation by Councillor Herman Mashaba, executive mayor of Johannesburg, on 11 June. Mashaba hosted a mayoral networking breakfast on the opening day where he highlighted the city's plan to use property development and construction as the core drivers of its goal of growing the city's economy by 5% per annum by 2021.



Herman Mashaba opened the 7th Annual African Construction Expo

"We have a massive demand for thousands of low-cost houses, rental units and student accommodation that could get your sector back on its feet.

Johannesburg Inner-City Rejuvenation Programme

"That is why the City of Joburg has embarked on an ambitious Inner-City Rejuvenation Programme, which seeks to turn Johannesburg into a construction site," said Mashaba.

As part of the city's Rejuvenation Programme, it announced the awarding of 24 tenders for the revitalisation of inner-city buildings which are valued at approximately R20bn. Apart from being one of the largest construction projects to be announced by an African city, Mashaba and the city believe that it will be a core driver for new broad-based black economic empowerment to enter the construction sector and grow their businesses, while developing the city and providing an estimated 11,000 new job opportunities.

Speaking on the second day at the Stakeholder Engagement Forum, Jacob Mamabolo, member of the executive council (MEC) for infrastructure development in Gauteng, reiterated the province's focus on using infrastructure development for economic growth and job creation. He said that the planned future expansion of the Gautrain network to more areas, including townships, will drive construction sector growth and related employment.

African Smart Cities Summit

The positive news by the City of Johannesburg was echoed in the co-hosted African Smart Cities Summit. At the summit, representatives from many different disciplines and even more countries discussed the opportunity that a challenging economic environment creates for innovation.

"The summit found that in our current economy, the need for innovation in construction, architecture and technology becomes essential to a company's survival. This has seen the introduction and adoption of many new ideas and technologies and has made South Africa a hotbed for innovation in this sector," says Daniel Claassen, director of the Smart Cities Summit.

With visitors from more than 15 African countries at the expo and various workshops, attendees also discussed the opportunities that the continent provides. Many of Africa's largest economies are experiencing strong growth, and South African construction firms and suppliers are well positioned to serve this market.

This was emphasised by Rob Jefferey, economist at Economic Risk, who highlighted the challenges in infrastructure and policy in Africa and the subsequent opportunities that this creates for businesses.

Jefferey was one of the speakers at the Stakeholder Engagement Forum, which also featured speakers such as John Matthews, president of the Master Builders Association; Njombo Lekula, managing director PPC RSA Cement and Materials; and Nobenguni Bagopa, president of the South African Institute of Black Property Practitioners.

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