

# **SOUTH AFRICA'S BUILT ENVIRONMENT ON AN UPSWING**

An outline of 2008 priority areas for the Council for Built Environment (CBE)

"It is true that in the built environment sector a number of challenges remain to be addressed. Meaningful effort has and is being made in turning around these hurdles and the signs are generally encouraging" said Chief Executive of the Council for Built Environment (CBE) Bheki Zulu as he introduced journalists to his organization. "As the coordinating body representing professionals we have dissected the nature of challenges facing us and have resolved on those that will enjoy our attention over the coming year or so"

Built environment means refers to the man-made surroundings that provide the setting for human activity, ranging from the large-scale civic surroundings to the personal places. It therefore is a sector that includes architects, urban planners, construction, traffic engineers, zoning authorities, interior designers, industrial designers and others.

The Council for the Build Environment (CBE) is a coordinating body of six professional councils which are the Council for the Architectural Profession, Engineering Council, Council for the Landscape Architectural Profession, Council for the Project and Construction Management Profession, Council for the Property Valuers Profession and Council for the Quantity Surveying Profession.

On 14 and 15 May 2008 the inaugural annual Built Environment symposium will be held at Gallagher Estates, Midrand. This event is expected to encourage dialogue that must produce world class solutions for South Africa's built environment sector. For the CBE it is a premier platform though which priority setting and improved partnerships should emerge.

Bheki Zulu set out the CBE's priorities for the coming year with a frank reflection on challenges facing his sector. These are:-

- Skills profile
- Capacity and relations amongst professional councils
- Public awareness and education
- Accessibility
- Greening efforts

## **Skills Profile**

"At the end of this month we intend to publish the first ever comprehensive skills audit report. Whilst there have been other efforts in this direction, none has been as comprehensive as what we are now finalizing" said Zulu.

The report looks at the supply side of skills needs and addresses the entire development pipe cycle. This means attention is being put to what is currently occurring at school level, going up to tertiary institutions until post-tertiary at

continued development. “We are very excited about what this process promises to deliver” further added Zulu

Reference was also made to the importance of improved motivation for the industry to play their part in skills development, “Construction industry, when busy like now, do not have the time to train people. When not busy they have no basis to invest in training. We are looking at instruments to entice these sectors”.

### **Capacity and Relations Amongst Professional Bodies**

There are a number of different policies affecting the built environment sector, CBE and its six professional’s councils. This has at times tended to limit coordinated effort which, if done could result in greater impact that would respond to the country’s needs. A further challenge is that the six professional councils are at different levels of development and this can naturally flow over to the quality of what they produce.

“We are in this game as world players and leaders from which others in our continent and other parts of the globe could learn. This means the need for consistency in delivery across the professional councils’ areas of work is pertinent” said Zulu.

He recognises that there are a number of issues that needs deliberation to see how delivery can be made even more efficient, effective and relevant across the councils. “I have questioned the logic of a regulatory body being dependent on subscriptions. The impact on the six professionals’ councils is that the quality of their work gets easily dictated to by the members they can attract at a given time. Is it not best that government takes responsibility for the financial needs of regulations and by so doing safe guard its quality and credibility?”

### **Public Awareness and Education**

“We are aware of the need for a public awareness and education campaign that targets the public, professionals and potential professionals. Lack of clarity about what the councils do and what opportunities the built environment offers makes this essential” said Zulu.

Already some effort has been made in this area. CBE has been engaged in a schools rollout programme to sensitise young people about the built environment and how they could partake in it.

A Communications Forum has been established where the CBE and its professional councils are now crafting joint marketing and communications strategies and pulling their resources together for better outreach and public relations.

“For example the public is not always aware that the CBE is an appeals body to its six professional councils. Another matter relates to understanding the actual choice you make when purchasing property and the professionals you engage in such”

It was also found that a number of professionals were also not aware of the for registration with the professional councils. “This reality has made it necessary to look at registration processes to see if there are blockages. Whatever solution is arrived at should though not compromise the quality of what we produce”.

## **Accessibility**

An effort is also underway to assess the extent the built environment's professional bodies are accessible to practitioners.

Some suggestions have been made that professional fees can be limiting. Another matter is the years it is required before one gets full accreditation as a fully operational professional. In some instances it can take up to ten years.

A concern was also raised about salary scales of built environment professionals in Government. "The impact has been that some professionals than elect to engage in different areas of work. We than, as a result, have lost out on years of training and capacity as these individuals normally do not want to return to what they have studied and trained for". CBE is in discussions with the Department of Public Service and Administration to try find solutions on how to turn this difficulty around.

Another area of concern was accreditation of courses offered by tertiary institutions. The professional councils are suppose to accredit courses at tertiary institutions, but this is not always what occurs. The result is that after study a student finds that their qualifications lack requirements to further pursue their career. "Students have no real recourse post-facto and it's quite sad and unfair actually" said Zulu.

## **Greening Efforts**

Expressing his excitement about prospects of greening for the built environment, Zulu said "On the upside, the Eskom incident has woken us up. Africa has so much sun, but we have not exploited it enough".

CBE is looking at innovation and recognition of best practices in so far as green buildings are concerned. Partnerships will be sought to look at how to further enhance the sectors participation in efforts aimed at greening and responsibly managing the environment.

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