

The Green Building Forum

On the 24th of July 2008, the CBE convened a forum to “gain perspectives on Green Building strategies, principles and practices.” Nana Mhlongo opened the forum hoping that such a session will tease out issues relating to the Built Environment and how green building thereof can have a substantial impact on the creation of sustainable built environment. Bruce Kerswill (Chairperson) of the Green Building Council of South Africa (GBCSA) gave meaning to the forum when he briefly defined green building as a “building that significantly reduces or eliminates its negative impact on the environment and its occupants.” He further outlined a number of initiatives which the Council is undertaking to promote Green Building practices in South Africa.

The forum’s sole purpose was to engage in solutions and find alternatives to this residual status quo faced by the built environment. Also, the forum identified the construction sector as being obstinate towards accepting green building initiatives. Jeremy Gibbert purported that professionals are unwilling to change because it was “easier to keep doing the same thing.” This culminates into a situation where contractors become niggardly and avoid safety regulations, environmental concerns and health considerations. Llewellyn van Wyk from the CSIR signaled a warning that there has been evidence of a social and ecological collapse and that the construction industry was a major contributor to that collapse as it is the highest resource consumption sector in the world.

To effectively determine whether companies and organisations are adhering to the green building initiatives, the GBCSA recently introduced a Green Star SA rating system. The purpose would be to “identify different categories in which a building environmental performance can be improved.” With South Africa faced with energy shortages such initiative can help reduce consumption by 30%-70%.

However van Wyk proposed that to effectively address such challenges, South Africa will need to take stock of the following:

1. Support for the development of performance standards through scientific research.
2. Support for an overarching, legislative and regulatory Code of SBC in South Africa.
3. Encouraging the adoption of Metro-wide, Broad based Sustainable Infrastructure Policy Frameworks.
4. Facilitate the growth and participation of voluntary initiatives.

Low income housing development was another issue that centred the discussion. The housing backlog, the quality of RDP houses and their impact to the environment were issues addressed at the forum and how such variables contribute towards green building initiative. Namso Baliso of the Department of Housing acknowledged that there are flaws however the department is putting all hands on deck to ensure that housing settlements are sustainable. Towards meeting the green building initiatives she responded by stating that the Department is “shifting from just providing housing to developing sustainable human settlements” by systematically ensuring

1. Energy efficient design consideration
2. Energy efficient materials and technology
3. Water efficient design considerations
4. Secondary water use(grey water and rain)
5. Water saving devices

Agreement South Africa (ASA) representative Masivuye Ntantala concurred with Namso Baliso that currently, every building should be typically investigated for structural strength and stability, thermal and energy performance by the ASA. Douglas Guy from PEER AFRICA in his presentation focused on the past and present initiatives on whether they meet the bigger picture of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDG)/Globally Harmonised System (GHS) and

South African Demand Side Energy Management (SADSEM). The forum produced satisfactory results as fundamental issues were addressed and discussed. It is in this hope that the forums recommendations will be forwarded to various stakeholders in the Built Environment and there would be further engagements of this nature.

Stephen Majara Monamodi