

The Launch of the Skills Task Team

South Africa's population is estimated to be around 44 million citizens of which according to research, 440 000 can make the country go forward. Officially opening the business of the day which was held on the 19 of September at Birchwood Executive Hotel, Prof Gwen Theron attributed that the Built Environment was marginally represented in this fold.

It is no secret that South Africa faces a colossal of skill shortages especially in the built environment sector. It was against this background that the Skills Task Team was launched. According to the CBE, the key objectives of the establishment of the Skills Task Team are to:

- identify bottlenecks with regard to the supply of Built Environment Professionals by the tertiary institutions;
- to revisit and identify ways through which students can best be educated, while enhancing their skills to meet the needs of the industry i.e. improving quality of graduates;
- to recommend possible interventions both by public and private sector to address challenges with regard to the supply of built environment graduates; to promote adoption and implementation of such interventions by tertiary institution(s); and monitor implementation and progress of initiated programmes.

Addressing the forum, the Minister of Public Works Thoko Didiza raised a valid concern about the exodus of professionals leaving our shores but the more pertinent question was "why South Africa is not producing more professionals?" The Minister embraced the Skills Task Team but however emphasized the critical areas such as academia; environment and experiential learning would need to be addressed efficaciously by the team. Mr. Bheki Zulu from the Council for the Built Environment (CBE) further unpacked the whole structure and announced that a Professional Development Pipeline has been incorporated in the skills task team. The key focus of this program is divided into four components namely schools, tertiary, candidacy and CPD. All these components in the set program will feed each other interchangeably. It is hoped that such a project will encourage the "B.E institutions to address the skills shortages in South Africa" said the Minister. It was also announced that Prof. Perulman will be the chairperson of the Skills Task Team.

The forum also pondered on the key drivers of moving forward however the delegates were hiatus to justly adopt the project. Certain loopholes had to be deliberated for such a task team to work. The CEO of the Construction Industry

Development Board (CIDB) Mr. Ronnie Khoza asserted that such a project can not in certain terms be left to academics only; professional bodies if included can add great value.

Another thorny contestation was the capacity issue. Mr. Llewellyn van Wyk from the CSIR postulated that it won't be enough for the academics to assume ownership of such a magnitude because the project will have a "problem with the assumption that one person from the university can cover the whole aspect including the challenges in the B.E sector." He further elaborated on the issue when he categorically stated that if the Skills Task Team maintains the status quo those members would have to commit themselves to the mandate. Mrs. C Stuart-Williams from the Kwa-Zulu Department of Public Works advised the Task Team established to also consider reporting mechanisms

Mr. Mandla Zondi the project facilitator assured that matters raised at the launch will be equivocally addressed at the scheduled meeting and an eloquent feedback on such matters will be communicated intensely.