

## **4<sup>th</sup> Built Environment Conference brings all the sizzles in Zambia**

The Built Environment professionals and academic converged under the remarkable weather of Livingstone- Zambia. The conference started from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> of May and it was the 4<sup>th</sup> installment of its kind: intellectually addressing the concomitant built environment challenges faced in Southern Africa especially in Zambia, which in its importance was put under the microscope.

Mayor of Livingstone Jorum Winda acknowledged the initiative by the Association of Schools of Construction of Southern Africa (ASOCSA) and emphasized that Zambia should seek sustainable infrastructure. He further hoped that the discussions will move towards focusing on sustainable infrastructure. Taking a cue from the Mayor, Chairperson of the Board of National Council for Construction Dr. Francis Ndilila established that the problems faced with Zambia are real problems that need real solutions. Compared to developing and first world countries, Zambia is at the bottom of growth and to achieve development it will require the country to reinvest in itself first.

This assertion found support as Zambian Construction industry only contributes about 9% to the GDP. The country is lacking in key infrastructural development such as roads, energy, housing and education. Reacting to this climatic challenge, the Board of National Council for Construction runs a school of construction to improve development in these identified key areas. Matthew Ngulube (Chairman of the Quantity Surveyors Institute of Zambia) didn't hold back in his presentation by qualitatively reaffirming the apex need for Zambia's quantity surveying industry to be independent by "allowing competition among us quantity surveyors by encouraging deserving candidates to register and open firms."

These challenges faced by Zambia are not foreign to South Africa and the rest of the continent. As it stands, it is a well known fact that what actually hamper infrastructure development are project costs. The conference speakers were very critical of the slow snail pace in which infrastructure development was undertaken in Southern Africa. This is compounded by the shortage of skills in the sector, the escalation of construction costs and materials, the global economical uncertainty in the financial markets and the introduction of technological innovation. Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB) CEO Ronnie Khoza said the solution to the current quagmire is the concept of instilling regional collaboration. An example of such collaboration is projects like Maguga Dam between South Africa and Swaziland where the central focus is on the provision of water for both countries.

Education was also a deliberative issue that was discussed in length and strides. Zambia's Copperbelt University it is found, produces the appropriate number of graduates but still faces major challenges such as the inability by the University to attract and retain academics, the increase in demand for Built Environment courses plus the limited capital injection for capital projects said Chewe Kambole Acting Dean, School of the Built Environment, Copperbelt University. In his address, CBE chairperson Mr. Madonsela elaborated on the need for the built environment industry to locate itself in the development agenda and further urged that delegates must "find practical expression of our knowledge towards advancing humanity."

