

# Development of built environment sector in Africa is crucial

Opportunities and challenges in the real estate sector and broader built environment in sub-Saharan Africa was the key theme of the recent Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors' (RICS) 2016 Africa Summit in Sandton, Johannesburg.



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RICS chief executive Sean Tompkins said the growth and development of the built environment sector in Africa was crucial to the sustainable growth of continent, especially with Africa's rapid urbanisation.

"The built environment sector needs to be taken more seriously and we need to get the message across. Africa is one of the fastest urbanising regions in the world and will have to house a billion people, so getting its built and urban environments right is critical," Tompkins added.

"Africa is not alone. Most governments around the world don't recognise the importance of the built environment sector and the profession. They understand medical, accounting and law professions better, but need to get the message about the role and importance of built environment professionals. They need to understand the importance of increasing skills in the sector and having more built and urban environment professionals."

## Increased presence

RICS has a key role to play in promoting the broader built environment sector and is increasing its presence in Africa. Tompkins said RICS was taking a collaborative approach in working with other professional bodies, governments and institutions in Africa to promote standards, skills and the built environment sector on the whole.

“There is a role for professional bodies such as RICS to set the competencies to ensure that we’re creating the workforce for the future. It is important to create an environment where government, regulators and professional bodies hold one another to account,” he said.

During one of the interactive discussions at the RICS Summit, the lack of sufficient data in the real estate sector and broader build environment in sub-Saharan Africa, outside South Africa, was highlighted as one of the main challenges for property developers and investors.

Another issue that emerged was that developers investing in Africa often found it hard to access information regarding land ownership. Land rights and tenure were major challenges and there was no one-size-fits-all solution.

## **RICS has expertise**

With such challenges, RICS is an organisation with the expertise to assist not only in terms of promoting standards and transparency, but also skills and capacity building in the built environment.

Wafula Nabutola, RICS’s director for sub-Saharan Africa, said RICS has had a presence in Africa for over ten years, with its first office in South Africa. It has since opened regional offices in Kenya for East Africa and Ghana for West Africa.

“Despite its challenges, Africa is still a continent of opportunity. But, Africa needs real capacity building across the built environment. RICS can play a role in this as a globally recognised organisation in the built environment,” said Nabutola. “We are increasing our presence in Africa and want to build relationships and collaborative partnerships with governments and national bodies to help unleash the property and broader built environment sector in Africa.”

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