

Sustainability to drive trends in construction

 By John Schooling

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The myth that cost outweighs yield for companies that invest in greener, more sustainable and stakeholder-driven policies has been debunked. In fact, the cost of not being sustainable is starting to exert serious strain on business, a trend confirmed by an article in *The Harvard Business Review* titled ["The Comprehensive Business Case for Sustainability"](#).



As an industry dependent on environmental factors, construction will be greatly affected by diminishing resources and stricter sustainability legislation. Moving towards green building is also one of the greatest climate change mitigation strategies we have. In light of this, I predict a range of trends for the South African sector in 2017 – from greater valuing of resources to wider continental cooperation, and more investment in innovative technology.

Water scarcity will drive change

High water usage is already costly, as companies dependent on it are starting to realise. Coca-Cola has just invested \$2bn in reducing water use and improving water quality within areas in which it is produced. Construction companies will too feel the pressure of relying on what is becoming one of the scarcest raw materials on the planet. Building technologies that require less, or zero, water will become one of the best investments for developers, as will techniques of harvesting rain and wastewater on site.

Construction will move indoors

This is unlikely to be seen on a wide scale in South Africa in 2017, but it has certainly begun. The unpredictability of the outdoors – of reliance on water, climate and transport can be largely avoided by moving production and construction sites into warehouses. Compilation on-site of pre-fabricated parts is the future of speedy, cost-effective and quality construction and we will see more and more of this in Africa as it develops and urbanises.

Product innovation and those that drive it will reap rewards

Product innovation drives success, and there are few things better than a crisis to force a business to adapt and push the envelope with their product. Profit margins can be expanded with innovation, labour costs reduced, environmental impact minimised and time spent on construction cut down. The young graduates and scientists that develop these innovations will become increasingly valuable and investment in their development will prove hugely beneficial.



We will avoid waste

Society now holds a deep regard for the clever use of space - the re-generation of old buildings, the use of rooftops to harness solar energy, and the design of small but highly functional living and working spaces. This attitude will follow through in the construction sector – with every element of the production process increasingly measured and streamlined. Construction that uses less water and less energy is less expensive, as is the harvesting of offsets and bi-products.

Ideas and relationships will cross borders

A more globalised world has meant greater sharing of insight, information and techniques. Climate change is a universal problem and businesses will start looking for similarities across regions to leverage off the innovations each produces. Bar major disruption, there is likely to be major expansion of business into the African continent – as STAG African has committed to doing.

ABOUT JOHN SCHOOLING

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