

African engineers sign protocol of understanding

Engineers from various African states gathered in Harare, Zimbabwe, recently to sign an historic protocol of understanding.

At the same time their formation of what is known as the Africa Engineers Forum has established regional co-operation among African countries and, significantly, makes a statement to the world - that engineering in Africa is an African agenda.

The historic gathering of representatives of leading African engineering institutions, and others, highlighted an important milestone in co-operation in the region. It was also an event where African engineers - black and white - looked ahead to the Earth Summit on Infrastructure Development, to be held in South Africa in September next year. For the first time ever, African civil engineers - responsible for infrastructure development on the continent - will stand together to make their mark in the world engineering fraternity.

Delegations

After nearly two days of deliberations in Harare, at which keynote addresses were delivered highlighting some of the challenges being faced in Africa, delegates carefully worded their protocol of understanding for their signatures. Countries represented at the talks were Zimbabwe, Botswana, Uganda, South Africa and Tanzania. Representatives from Nigeria arrived after the signing.

The South African delegation was led by Dr Kevin Wall, president of the SAICE, and Dawie Botha, the Institution's executive director.

"We have agreed to sign a protocol of agreement to govern the operations of the Africa Engineers Forum (AEF)," said the outgoing president of the Zimbabwe Institution of Engineers (ZIE), Elias Ndlovu, addressing engineers and guests



Photographed at the signing of the protocol of understanding in Harare recently are (left to right): seated, Mohamed Meghji, president of the Institute of Engineers, Tanzania; Clement Ollphant, president of the Botswana Institute of Engineers; Dr Kevin Wall, president of the SAICE; Elias Ndlovu, president of the Zimbabwe Institute of Engineers, and Alex Gisagara, president of the Ugandan Institution of Engineers. Standing: Faried Alle, vice-president (organizational transformation) of the SAICE; Eric Gumbie, past-president of the Zimbabwe Institute of Engineers; Ron Watermeyer, vice-president (technical leadership) of the SAICE; Dawie Botha, executive director of SAICE; Johnnie Johnston, chief executive officer of the Zimbabwe Institution of Engineers; Sam Kundlshora, vice-president elect of the Zimbabwe Institution of Engineers, and chairman co-ordinating the Africa Engineers Forum; Allyson Lawless, Immediate past-president of the SAICE; and Albert Rugumayo, past-president of the Uganda Institute of Professional Engineers.

present at the signing.

"The concept of sustainable development demands appropriate and affordable engineering services and infrastructure within the local as well as the global environment," he said.

"Although engineering knows no human-made or geographical boundaries, Africa and its people have to share many issues and challenges of common interest.

"In 1995 the South African Institution of Civil Engineering (SAICE) established the Africa Forum which served the purpose of encouraging networking and liaison within Africa by means of co-operation agreements, which to date have been signed between institutions located in Ghana, Kenya, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. At a meeting in Harare in 2000 it was decided that the time was right to extend the existing network to involve a wider spectrum of countries than initially envisaged. It was agreed that the Africa Engineers Forum (AEF) would be established which would build upon the earlier initiative to facilitate more inclusive and broader co-operation of African engineers in order to promote and foster sustainable development within an African context," he said.

Aspirations

In order to achieve their aims and aspirations, the signatories of the protocol agreed to establish an African Engineers Forum to promote a number of issues that include the following:

- the African engineers' concept for

sustainable development;

- communication at a technical level amongst engineers, both resident within and outside Africa;
- internationally accepted norms in terms of conduct, integrity, ethics, engineering standards and care for our people and our environment;
- an African electronic database for technical information linked to the web site of Institution of Civil Engineers and American Society of Civil Engineers (earthshaper.com) and others;
- exchange of information and sharing of experiences regarding engineering practice;
- professional and technical networking opportunities and events;
- an events database concerning annual programmes of events, including those relating to continuous professional development, for the purpose of forward planning and co-ordination;
- best practices in terms of desirable and appropriate engineering standards, processes, procedures, methods or systems in relation to the delivery processes and the life cycle of products and assets;
- harmonization of standards, documentation, methods and procedures as appropriate;
- the use of procurement as an instrument for development and capacity building;
- gender participation and equality in

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engineering practice;

- networking of knowledgeable African engineers who can influence policy through the development of best practices;
- networking amongst African tertiary educational institutions involved in engineering related education;
- appropriate education and training for engineers dealing with the challenges of rural development;
- public awareness programmes in order to enhance the visibility and recognition of the role of the engineering profession in African civil society;
- pertinent science and technology policies including research and development initiatives by governments in Africa;
- capacity building in order to develop knowledgeable decision-makers, clients and users of engineering infrastructure and services;
- government participation in engineering practice and related matters;
- best practices relating to foreign investment and donor involvement and influence in Africa; and
- liaison with decision-makers, industry stakeholders, clients and other built environment professionals.

Africa

Discussing the African situation, delegates agreed unanimously that engineering in Africa was for African engineers, who are best able to apply appropriate technology. Examples of inappropriate technology being applied at the insistence of foreign donors were discussed, as was "donor corruption." An example of this was given as a donor insisting that a particular item of machinery should be sourced from the country of the donor.

Another item, which arose during deliberations on the preparation of the protocol of understanding, was Africa's poor image with regard to corruption. Delegates expressed their abhorrence to corruption. It was agreed that the AEF would promote internationally accepted norms in terms of conduct, integrity, ethics, and engineering standards.

Future

Sam Kundishora, chairman of the membership committee of the Zimbabwe Institution of Engineers (ZIE), and chairman co-ordinating the Africa Engineers Forum, introduced the protocol at the inaugural annual conference of the Zimbabwe Institution of Engineers, held the day after the signing of the protocol

document.

"We want to shape our future; we do not want our future to be shaped by others," he told ZIE delegates. "There are forces from the west and the east who are trying to influence development on our continent. As engineers we are saying that we want to be the shapers and shakers of our continent, and we need to speak as Africans - irrespective of our colour.

"We recognize that we are part of the global village, but in this village we are in the African house.

"Our true potential lies within ourselves. In this context, the true potential of Africa lies within the African engineer," he said.

Kundishora added that African engineers would develop best practice for sustainable development and would present this to donor institutions and governments. The AEF would prepare to present its views on sustainable development in Africa at the Earth Summit to be held next year.

"We need to make a difference. It is up to us to see that we can make a change and the AEF is taking the first step," he said.

Changing

Jeremy Ascough, a member of the ZIE, who said that engineers in Zimbabwe have started operating in an exciting new market, highlighted the changing situation in Africa.

"In the past, most engineers have worked in the sophisticated, highly commercialized field of modern engineering, with a culture similar to that to be found in the highly developed western-type economies. This may have had a significant impact on only an estimated 2 million of the population of some 14 million men, women and children in Zimbabwe," he said.

"The 12 million or so people of the other culture also have expectations for a better life style but their culture is highly socialized, with an as yet poorly developed technical background and different business norms. In order to market engineering products and services into this other culture will require considerable economic and cultural adjustments for the establishment of effective communications and engineer client relations. There is a move towards increasing the level of science and technology at all levels across Zimbabwe, but there is a need for engineers with the right training and experience to make things happen," he added.

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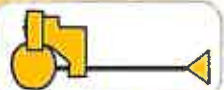
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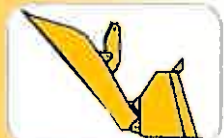
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