

How the construction sector can embrace tech for competitive advantage

Delivering the welcoming address at the recent 14th Built Environment Conference, Professor Kahilu Kajimo-Shakantu, head of the Department of Quantity Surveying and Construction Management at the University of the Free State (UFS), noted that increased and smart adoption of technology can transform the construction sector to make it more sustainable. This as the industry faces the negative impacts associated with costs, implementation timelines, profits, etc.



Professor Kahilu Kajimo-Shakantu, head of the Department of Quantity Surveying and Construction Management at the University of the Free State (UFS), and sixth president of the Association of Schools of Construction of Southern Africa (ASOCSA).

Kajimo-Shakantu is also the sixth president of the Association of Schools of Construction of Southern Africa (ASOCSA). The theme of this year's conference, presented for the very first time in a virtual format, was 'Technology, transformation and sustainable construction'.

Identify and harness opportunities

"It is clear that while Covid-19 remains a challenge, opportunities can be identified and harnessed even by our own construction industry through the exploitation of technological, transformative, and sustainable practices. The technology and transformation taking place now – in South Africa and beyond this Covid-19 situation – should be embraced for competitive advantage, even after the pandemic disappears," said Kajimo-Shakantu.

She also provided some practical suggestions: "Technologies, such as remote monitoring of construction sites and selected construction site operations through high-definition cameras and robust software, should be encouraged as a way of minimising health and safety risks and mobility costs during the project duration, and at the same time ensuring an all-time virtual presence on site for various purposes."

"Virtual contract progress meetings, site meetings, and supervision of specialised work are some of the benefits that the construction industry could gain if they adopt technology that can lead to sustainable construction beyond the Covid-19 era," she added.



Encourage meaningful partnerships

It is no longer a case of business as usual. Kajimo-Shakantu believes stronger collaboration and meaningful partnerships must be encouraged among all stakeholders if the conference theme is to be fully actualised for the benefit of the construction industry as it races towards attaining sustainable construction.

She said: “Clients, consultants, contractors, and suppliers of materials and services can wholly embrace technology and transformation for sustainable, cost-effective, less wasteful, and cleaner construction processes.”

A guest of honour at the event was the vice-rector: academic at the University of the Free State, Dr Engela van Staden. In her welcome address, she challenged delegates to establish a consistent channel for disseminating some of the research outcomes to industry stakeholders, including the respective government departments. “It is time to go beyond building rich databases and prestigious publications for our universities,” she said.

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