

Integrating technical solutions with ESG to advance modern African economies

Good technical solutions lie at the heart of mining and industrial projects that are advancing modern African economies.



Good technical solutions lie at the heart of mining and industrial projects that are advancing modern African economies says Andrew van Zyl, managing director of SRK Consulting (South Africa) (Image supplied)

This is according to Andrew van Zyl, managing director of SRK Consulting (South Africa), who emphasise the alignment with global standards as key to helping clients reach and maintain the highest level of

performance and best practice in their operations.

Africa Day (Sunday, 25 May) highlights the importance of building resilient economies for social transformation, and the nurturing of consulting engineering expertise across various disciplines will be vital paving a path to inclusive growth.

Evolving regulations

“Technical excellence and high standards rely on experienced and multidisciplinary teams of professionals who can deliver integrity, independence and rigour in their work.”

“When delivering good technical solutions, it is also crucial to consider the regulatory and community context, as these increasingly impact the final result,” he says.

He notes, for instance, that a common theme in the industry is the rapidly evolving regulations relating to water, environment, sustainability and governance factors - including the rapid evolution of voluntary and compulsory reporting and requirements and the need for compliance and alignment.

Companies like SRK are frequently involved in helping clients to update themselves on these requirements and to apply them to planned projects to ensure alignment and compliance.

Avoiding fatal flaws

“This invariably means the early involvement of environmental, social and governance (ESG) specialists who can work in close collaboration with various technical disciplines,” he explains.

“This lays the foundations for smooth and predictable permitting, so that projects can stay on schedule and avoid fatal flaws.”

He points out that most of Africa’s leading companies have ambitious sustainability targets, further reinforcing the need for multidisciplinary teams to include ESG professionals to ensure that technical solutions integrate with a range of sustainability concerns.



MINING

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Climate change

“Clients must also be able to monitor and measure their operations and interventions,” he says.

“With the application of digital and other technologies, consulting engineers are playing an important role in helping clients to gather relevant data and to use it to drive their sustainability agendas.”

Climate change considerations are being factored into projects right from the design stage, so that future environmental conditions can be modelled and designs adjusted appropriately.

There have been growing numbers of high rainfall events in South Africa, for example, which place additio

strain on infrastructure.

Professional platforms

To foster the necessary expertise for high quality projects, professionals in various engineering and scientific disciplines are not only passing on their experience to younger entrants but are building their institutions for the good of broader society.

Being a company of professional natural scientists and engineers, SRK Consulting (SA) belongs to various industry and professional bodies and contributes to the overall practice of the different professions.

“We are involved on the council of the Southern African Institute of Mining and Metallurgy, for instance, as well as on the committees that manage the SAMREC and SAMVAL reporting codes and bodies such as the Geological Society of South Africa (GSSA),” he says.

“We encourage our staff to get involved in professional organisations and events, especially knowledge sharing through talks and conferences.

“Through being active members of these bodies, we can help keep them relevant to industry needs through ongoing innovation and raising professional standards.”



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Helping standards evolve

By promoting standards through its ongoing project work, SRK Consulting (SA) has been part of the process of guiding the practical application and evolution of standards.

In terms of aspects such as reporting standards, its close collaboration with the relevant bodies means that it has a good understanding of how to apply these standards.

This allows the company’s professionals to provide important feedback from the market on how to keep requirements manageable and realistic.

“An interesting aspect of our work is that it often has not only a local component but a regional or even multinational component,” he says.

“A mining project in the DRC will be driven by our Lubumbashi office but may draw in specialists from South Africa or Ghana.

“Where the owner of the project is based in China, our work may also involve experts from one of our offices in China.”

Quality design

Van Zyl acknowledges that there is considerable change and uncertainty in the market currently, but he highlighted that good engineering design underpins every successful project.

Such design quality ensures cost-effective solutions that reduce waste and minimise risk to communities and staff.

“These factors remain a priority for clients throughout Africa, irrespective of the prevailing economic, social and political climate,” he says.

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