

New SAICE president calls for return to ethical leadership

The South African Institution of Civil Engineering (SAICE) recently inaugurated Mopilwane Fana Marutla as its 117th president.



Mopilwane Fana Marutla, president of SAICE

Marutla is a civil engineer with 22 years' experience, specialising in railway engineering, infrastructure design and maintenance, project management and business case development. He is head of business development, transportation at GIBB Engineering & Architecture, and previously worked for 17 years at Transnet Freight Rail.

Marutla was chairperson of SAICE's Railway & Harbour Division from 2016-17. He is an advisory board member in the Department of Civil Engineering (Technology) at the University of Johannesburg, an advisory board member in the Department of Civil Engineering at the University of Pretoria, a board member of the South African Heavy Haul Association, and a committee member of rural-development initiative the Thabampshe Development Forum.

Role of ethical leadership

In his inauguration speech, Marutla emphasised the role of ethical leadership in improving South African education, youth entrepreneurship and procurement. Marutla proposed addressing unemployment, poor education and underrepresentation of women in STEM fields by investing heavily in youth entrepreneurship initiatives. He also spoke of the need to boost the numbers of maths and science teachers and lecturers at academic institutions.

Marutla also called for renewed commitment to the goals and vision of the National Development Plan (NDP). "A working economy is built upon quality education, infrastructure investment, production of exportable goods and the good health of the working class," said Marutla.

He echoed finance minister Tito Mboweni's pronouncements in a recent discussion document that network industries such as energy, transport, water and telecommunications underpin economic growth, productivity, and competitiveness.

"These network industries face challenges of poor maintenance and delayed capital investment to support economic development," he said. "But many professionals in the STEM environment have already raised their hands and are simply waiting for government to provide policy certainty to drive this developmental agenda. Our country's huge potential is heavily under-utilised."

Corruption a well-known impediment

Marutla said corruption was a well-known impediment to infrastructure development. "Corruption and unethical procurement rob the country of the economic and social infrastructure we need for our people," he said.

He also lamented the lack of compliance to procurement norms and regulations in South Africa's business culture. "Proximity to political leaders has become a new criterion for where contracts are awarded. This unfortunately not only compromises project quality, but also return on investments, which then become significantly reduced," he said.

Marutla called for a return to ethical leadership. "As we align our institutions with modern technological developments, we

should do so based on ethical models of leadership. We need a nation that abides by its laws,” he said.

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