

African innovation to be showcased at annual Green Building Convention

Issued by [Green Building Council of SA](#)

16 Jul 2014

The Green Building Council of South Africa's annual convention is set to showcase Africa's potential to develop sustainable buildings as an answer to its infrastructure challenges as well as in response to Africa's growing and complex cities.



The convention, to be held in Cape Town from 10 to 12 September 2014 has cast its central theme as "It's time for Africa - bringing it home". It will feature a variety of local and international leaders who will speak to the opportunities unique to the African context.

"Green building inspires innovation," says Brian Wilkinson, CEO of the GBCSA. "Building resource-efficient structures that are environmentally sustainable and cost-effective challenges project teams and developers to push the boundaries. In doing so they are setting new benchmarks for their peers and taking the green building movement to new levels."

In addition to inspiring delegates on the broader subject of sustainability, the convention also aims to provide greater momentum to transform the built environment towards environmental sustainability on the African continent.

Green building offers a distinct opportunity to mobilise communities around buildings that take little from a centralised grid and deliver a lot locally, making this year's theme a fitting one. Locally, the GBCSA has long advocated building high performance buildings as a necessity in African cities, where power shortages and infrastructure breaks threaten to destabilise areas.

Nedbank has long been an advocate of the green building movement locally and continues to drive the sustainability agenda. As a leader in this space - from both a financier and occupier of green buildings - Nedbank Corporate Property Finance continues to build sustainable partnerships in the South African property industry. This demonstrates a shared outlook with the GBCSA, to combat the effects of climate change" says Frank Berkeley, Nedbank Corporate Property Finance, sponsors of the Green Building Convention.

"Africa has the opportunity to leapfrog," says Jo Anderson, Programme Manager of GBCSA. "That is, to learn from the lessons of the developed world, while avoiding the mistakes that have been made previously."

She adds there is also a need to focus on African knowledge and grow existing sustainable systems. "It's important that new innovations have respect and insight into local socio-economic structures and traditional ways."

It is within this context that the Green Building Convention will also showcase the latest green building technologies and trends.

Leading the discussions around green building at the conference will be Mick Pearce, Anton Musgrave and Siyabulela Xuza, all acclaimed for their contributions towards sustainability.

Pearce believes architectural expression must construct a balance between the natural, social and economic environments in which a project is sited. "I have become increasingly interested in the development of a new relationship between the city and nature," says Pearce.

This belief and practice speak to the energy requirements for Africa and the opportunities of maintaining the African environment while still addressing the need for development.

It is an outlook shared by Siyabulela Xuza, Mthatha-born scientist, who, at only 25, has developed an alternative rocket fuel and is now turning his attention to Africa's energy problems. In 2011 he became a fellow of the Kairos Society, a global network of top student and global leaders using entrepreneurship and innovation to solve the world's greatest challenges. Xuza was invited to the United Nations and the New York Stock Exchange in recognition for being one of the world's emerging business leaders to offer strategies for solving the world's energy crisis.

The 2014 UN Habitat Report on The State of African Cities: Re-imagining Sustainable Urban Transitions argues for "a radical re-imagination of African approaches to urbanism". This re-imagining hopes to strengthen the positive aspects of complex African cities while at the same time encouraging improved living conditions. It is what people like Xuza are already doing, and delegates at the Green Building Convention will be encouraged to take this approach even further.

Anton Musgrave will focus attention on driving sustainable growth and long-term relevance in a changing world. Musgrave is a futurist, business strategist and entrepreneur. With his background in property, he will discuss the strategic thinking and future innovative growth imperatives needed to endure as the world around us evolves.

Facilitated by media man Chris Gibbons, the convention's compelling line-up also includes Peter Willis, Director of the SA office to the Cambridge institute for Sustainable Leadership; trend analyst Dion Chang; and Jo da Silva who heads up Arup International Develop and has been named an Officer of the British Empire (OBE) for services to engineering and humanitarian relief.

The Green Building Convention will illustrate the unique role the building industry can play in furthering sustainability through innovative development, especially in Africa.

Green building in Africa is increasingly taking a leading role in the sustainable development of infrastructure. Anderson notes: "In addition to GBCSA's pioneering role in promoting green building in Africa, we have seen the development of fully established Green Building Councils in Ghana, Namibia, Kenya, Nigeria and Mauritius. There are also early signs of councils in Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Zambia, Malawi and Botswana."

While green building has already come a long way in Africa, it still has a long way to go, and this year's Green Building Convention is set to help give it a big boost to gain even more impetus in the future.

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