

CESA, GIBB collaborate on sustainability reporting framework

Consulting Engineers South Africa's (CESA) recently released its compulsory Sustainability Reporting Framework for its members, which was developed in collaboration with black-owned consulting engineering firm GIBB.



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GIBB general manager Dr Urishanie Govender advised on the sustainability reporting approach and best practice guidelines to be applied in developing the reporting framework. Louwrens van der Merwe, sustainability consultant at GIBB, indicated that the importance of sustainability reporting is growing as it aids in directing industry to identify the crucial changes required of the way we do business to achieve a better triple bottom line.

Global Reporting Initiative guidelines

“Globally, sustainability reporting, particularly within the consulting engineering field, is becoming a requirement and CESA realised the need to be on par with this trend. Based on this, GIBB supported CESA to develop a sustainability reporting guideline and process for its members,” said van der Merwe.

GIBB developed the guideline on the backdrop of the internationally-recognised and widely-used sustainability reporting guideline, the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI). This informed the format of the CESA sustainability reporting standard and its adaptation to the local engineering industry.

Current trends

“It was imperative for us to look at current sustainability trends in engineering, through considering what FIDIC reports and guidelines indicate, as well as other current issues which highlight the impact of, and the need for sustainability in the built environment. These gave us some insight on key issues considered pertinent to the industry and how best to report on them,” he added.

The next step in developing a reporting standard that would best meet the needs of local engineering firms involved the identification of key sustainability issues affecting CESA and its members. The result of this was identification of ten key issues member firms have to report on; five of which were values already entrenched within CESA as a response to sustainability matters. The ten issues now form part of the compulsory sustainability report prepared by all member firms as part of annual declarations to CESA.

The CESA sustainability indicators are summarised as follows:

- Sustainability policy
- Material issues
- Stakeholder engagement
- Sustainability objectives and targets
- Awareness
- Education
- Economic and political certainty
- Job creation
- Eradication of corruption
- Responsible development

In addition to contributing to the development of the framework, GIBB also supported with developing the CESA Members' Sustainability Reporting training material and checklist aligned to the framework and used at CESA training courses offered nationally.

Pummy Mzolo, manager of Education & Training at CESA said, "This course is offered under the auspices of CESA's School of Consulting Engineering and we are very proud to be facilitating the course which will greatly benefit member firms." The training is purely based on CESA's reporting requirements and the current social, economic and environmental elements impacting the engineering industry.

91 GRI indicators

Van der Merwe commented that there are a host of indicators available to report on organisational sustainability, such as the 91 GRI indicators, which can be daunting to most professionals especially without some prior exposure or guidance to sustainability reporting.

CEO of CESA, Chris Campbell, remarked, "CESA has opted to take a phased approach when requesting members to submit sustainability reports, allowing members to get acquainted with the requirements thereof over a three-year period."

Van der Merwe concluded, "Although the professional sustainability circle in the country is relatively small, it is growing at an impressive rate. We are seeing more companies from various industries taking interest and getting involved in the sustainability conversation."

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