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SIDSSA 2025

INFRASTRUCTURE DIALOGUE CALLS FOR RESILIENCE, URGENCY, AND INCLUSIVE GROWTH

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In anticipation of the **2025 Sustainable Infrastructure Development Symposium of South Africa (SIDSSA)**, a robust dialogue was hosted by the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC), Infrastructure South Africa (ISA), and Arena Events via the Business Day Dialogues platform. Held under the theme **"Building Resilient Communities: Investing in Social Infrastructure,"** the gathering sparked urgent and visionary reflections on the future of infrastructure in South Africa.

Masterfully guided by veteran journalist Sakina Kamwendo, the dialogue opened with a compelling welcome by Lyndon Barends, MD of Strategic Partnerships and Events. Barends set the tone by emphasizing infrastructure as more than bricks and mortar—it is the anchor of sustainable development. "Infrastructure must serve people," he insisted, noting its power to uplift communities through education, connectivity, and local development.

The keynote address by Minister Dean Macpherson of Public Works and Infrastructure echoed this vision. With the GNU in place, Macpherson expressed optimism: "It's important to see a country that is connected, a country that finds dignity through infrastructure." He stressed that the time for talking is over: "South

Africa is now under construction." The department is prioritizing implementation with a targeted R1 trillion investment over the medium term, aiming to draw in an additional R100 billion in private sector funding. Local government's role, he stated, is "critical," and tools like the **"Local Government Inclusive Growth Index (LGIGI)"**—a joint initiative by ISA and the University of Johannesburg (UJ)—will help identify gaps, drive targeted investment, and track transformation.

A panel discussion followed, featuring Dr Hubert Joynt (ISA), Prof Dani Meyer (UJ), Mr Lucky Sele (Mayor of Mogale City), and Mr Tsakani Manyike (IDC). Manyike underscored that the IDC's infrastructure funding approach is not simply transactional: "It is not about lending money and getting a return, but also about socioeconomic benefits like job creation, transformation, and rebuilding industrial capacity." From digital infrastructure to water and energy access, Manyike described infrastructure as a vehicle for inclusive economic growth and entrepreneurship—especially in rural and underserved areas.

Prof Meyer shared insights from UJ's groundbreaking transformation and inclusive growth indexes. The LGIGI, using eight key variables, compares South African municipalities to BRICS nations and enables

real-time, practical insights into poverty, economic participation, and infrastructure access. "This is not just an academic tool," Meyer explained. "It's a spatial plan that municipalities are using to shape actionable development strategies."

Mayor Lucky Sele described the index as "a call to action" to respond to the lived experiences of residents. Reflecting on Mogale City's score, he described it as "a sobering moment," recommitting to projects that bring meaningful infrastructure to his community. Sele also critiqued the current skills gap, saying, "The infrastructure sector is open to too many unqualified players," and called for stricter professionalisation within engineering. Mogale City's bursary and incubation programmes are steps toward nurturing competent local talent.

As the dialogue closed, it was clear that South Africa's infrastructure agenda must be grounded in accountability, data-driven planning, and coordinated partnerships across government, business, and communities. Infrastructure is not an expense, the speakers echoed—it is an enabler of dignity, jobs, equity, and national pride. As Macpherson affirmed, "We are building to grow our economy and empower our people—not for the sake of building."



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