

**ADDRESS BY MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS AND INFRASTRUCTURE SIHLE ZIKALALA
DURING THE COUNCIL FOR THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT CLIMATE CHANGE INDABA, OLIVE
CONVENTION CENTRE, DURBAN, 31 AUGUST 2023**

Deputy Minister of Public Works and Infrastructure, Ms Bernice Swarts;

EThekweni Mayor, His Worship Cllr Mxolisi Kaunda;

MECs, MPLs, Mayors, and Councillors;

SALGA President, Mr. Bheki Stofile;

Secretary-General of the Africa Continental Free Trade Area, His Excellency Wamkele Mene;

Our Host, CBE Chairperson, Ms Amelia Mtshali;

CEO of the Council for the Built Environment, Dr Msizi Myeza;

CEO for the Construction Industry Development Board, Mr Bongani Dladla;

Senior Government Officials;

Members of the Press;

Esteemed Delegates;

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen;

It is an honour to address you at the inauguration of this Climate Change Conference in the enchanting landscapes of KwaZulu-Natal.

We gather here not merely as representatives of our respective provinces and sectors, but as architects of change, as advocates for a sustainable future, and as stewards of our planet.

We applaud the Council for the Built Environment (CBE) for bringing together minds and voices from various sectors to address the defining challenge of our time: climate change.

The climate crisis is not a distant threat but a stark, present reality. We are witnessing its devastation at home and worldwide - with extreme weather events, sea-level rise, and disruptions to ecosystems.

The urgency of this crisis compels us to take bold and concerted action, starting today.

This is a call to arms for all of us to come together, as individuals, communities, organisations, and governments, to tackle this global challenge.

As we conclude Women's Month, we also remember with pride and gratitude the late champion of environmental protection, Minister Edna Molewa, who passed away five years ago.

It was Minister Molewa who galvanised our nation to appreciate that a healthy environment is the basis for a healthy economy.

This Climate Indaba takes place under the broad theme, “**Restoring Access, Rebuilding Social Cohesion, Healing Communities through Social Infrastructure**”.

It is a theme that resonates deeply within our hearts. It requires that we close the gap between climate change policy and practice, specifically within the context of the South African built environment.

We are called upon to move from climate policy to pragmatic action.

As we reflect upon the harrowing floods of 2022 that swept through our nation, we are reminded of the stark reality that policy papers and rhetoric alone cannot shield our communities from the unforgiving forces of nature.

The time for mere lip service is over; the moment has arrived for bold and pragmatic action that aligns our policies with the ground realities.

The floods were not just a natural disaster - they were a poignant reminder that our climate policies must seamlessly translate into tangible transformations in the built environment.

To bridge this gap between climate policy and practice, we have to follow a comprehensive approach that encompasses at least three pivotal aspects:

1. Integrated Climate-Responsive Urban Planning

We must infuse our urban planning strategies with climate resilience at their core. It is imperative that we weave together the threads of climate science, architecture, and urban design to create cities that can withstand the challenges of a changing climate.

Our urban landscapes must be reimagined as dynamic ecosystems that conserve water, mitigate heat, and facilitate sustainable mobility.

The interplay of green infrastructure, compact urban layouts, and energy-efficient buildings must become the hallmark of our urban planning efforts.

2. Inclusive Stakeholder Engagement

Closing the gap between policy and practice requires the active involvement of all stakeholders.

We are called upon to foster a culture of collaboration that transcends boundaries – be it geographic, sectoral, or ideological.

Governments, private enterprises, local communities, and academia must forge robust partnerships that facilitate knowledge exchange, technology transfer, and resource sharing.

3. Empowering Regulatory Frameworks

Our climate policies must be underpinned by regulatory frameworks that empower transformative change.

Incentives for green buildings, renewable energy integration, and climate-resilient infrastructure must be woven into our legal fabric.

If we succeed in creating an enabling environment, we can drive innovation, catalyse investment, and empower our industries to adopt practices that align with our climate objectives.

Collectively, we should pioneer solutions that not only reduce our carbon footprint but also improve the quality of our Built Environment by funding research into new technologies, materials, and construction practices.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the floods of 2022 were a stark wake-up call – a testament to the urgent need for synergy between policy formulation and pragmatic implementation.

The rise in natural disasters such as floods, caused by climate change has implications for those tasked with building infrastructure in South Africa, including our entity, the Independent Development Trust (IDT).

The building of quality, reliable, and sustainable infrastructure to support the well-being of people and economic development has become ever more critical. This is in line with the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 9, which puts inclusive, resilient infrastructure as the centrepiece of development.

We therefore need to invest in strengthening the capabilities of the state and its organs in managing climate-resilient assets by integrating climate change considerations in our planning tools including Infrastructure Delivery Management Systems.

Environmental Assessment and Climate Change

Climate change should not be viewed in isolation, but rather as a cross-cutting issue influencing all aspects of development.

In this sense, environmental assessment is a critical tool in our arsenal to combat and manage climate change impacts.

The Environmental Assessment Practitioners Association of South Africa (EAPASA) is mandated to provide quality assurance regarding EAPs.

Assessments should not be done as a tick box exercise but should be used to inform the correct location and design of our infrastructure.

The Role of the Engineering Council of South Africa in Combating Climate Change

As a regulator, the Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA) regards engineering professionals to be vital in responding to climate change through various strategies and solutions.

It is engineers who are at the forefront of designing energy-efficient buildings, Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) technologies, Smart Grids, Sustainable Water Management, Waste Recycling, and Climate Modelling.

The Role of the Geomatics Council in Responding to Climate Change

We also recognise the crucial role of the Geomatics profession which is normally the first one on the scene of disaster.

Within the Geomatics Field, the technology has advanced so much that within a few hours, we are able to obtain a detailed 3D mapping of the site of disaster.

This is possible through the use of both Aerial Photography, Lidar Technology, Drones, 3D Mobile and terrestrial Scanners.

Disaster Managers can use the 3D Imagery to plan Early Warning Systems, identify areas that can cave in and destroy properties and harm people.

Today, Engineers are able to use this 3D Imagery to design bridges and roads that are more resilient to disasters.

The Role of Architecture and the Architectural Professionals in Addressing Climate Change

Compatriots, our response to climate change begins at project inception, determining the suitability of site, planning alternative energy sources, and thinking about water harvesting.

The South African Council for the Architectural Profession (**SACAP**) is therefore an important statutory regulatory body which plays a vital role in sustainable designs, regulating and ensuring the highest standards within the architectural profession.

Commitment to Sustainable Design

It is encouraging to see architectural professionals embracing sustainable principles and making them integral to their work.

The use of natural material within project areas make buildings sustainable, organic, and in sync with local cultures and building practices.

This must be encouraged to minimise the use of foreign material which exacerbate the impact of climate change.

We must fully harness Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) to achieve sustainable design as our practical response to climate change and building climate-resilient communities.

Collaboration and Partnership

To effectively combat climate change, **collaboration** is paramount.

We call upon architectural professionals, engineers, planners, policymakers, and all stakeholders to work hand in hand to leverage knowledge and resources to respond to the climate crisis effectively.

The application of the District Development Model (DDM) must put the protection of the environment at the centre of all plans of the three spheres of government.

No one must be left behind. We must mobilise the whole of society, men and women, rural and urban, traditional leaders and faith based communities and galvanise the youth in particular to be ambassadors that will lead from the front in the protection of their only home, this earth.

Partnerships with all stakeholders can result in public awareness and education that will enable meaningful decision making at community and government level.

Innovation & Advocating for Climate-Resilient Regulations

Honoured Guests, the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure is committed to the development and implementation of climate-resilient regulations and standards.

We must work closely with multidisciplinary stakeholders to create a regulatory framework that incentivises and mandates sustainable design practices across the built environment disciplines.

Building Liveable, Smart Cities and Post-Apartheid Spatial Planning

To achieve a sustainable and equitable future, we must also address the challenges of post-apartheid spatial planning.

We recognise that the release of state-owned land for denser mixed-use development are key enablers in this endeavour.

We pledge to play a leading role in transformation by promoting frameworks which allow households, communities and business to set up decentralised utilities to ease the burden on municipalities and improve access to basic essential goods and services.

These approaches will not only create liveable and smart cities but also promote inclusive growth. Rural and township economy is now more essential to ease the burden of rapid urbanisation and competition for scarce resources in our urban areas.

The Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB) and Addressing Climate Change

Compatriots, research tells us that building and construction are responsible for almost 40% of the world's energy-related carbon emissions.

Our Department is determined to lead in:

- Implementing policies that ensure that all government buildings utilise resources efficiently.
- Diversify the energy generation mix, reduce reliance on fossil fuels, attract private investment and secure energy generation capacity through the implementation of the Renewable Energy Independent Power Producer Procurement Program (REIPPPP).
- Benchmarking Carbon Emissions.
- Attracting Investments in green hydrogen projects.

There are no less than 19 green hydrogen projects that have been identified for development in South Africa over the medium to long-term, nine of which have been registered in terms of the Infrastructure Development Act as Strategic Integrated Projects (SIPs).

We take pride in the work of Agrément South Africa (ASA) which has developed the EcoASA program which promotes eco-labelling by standardising the specification of eco-friendly products.

The recycling of construction and demolition waste to create engineered aggregate reflects a desire within both the industry and the wider society to make more sustainable choices.

It is our collective responsibility to ensure that the benefits of green technology and cutting-edge research do not only accrue to the large and established players in the construction sector.

Emerging contractors and enterprises owned by women, the youth, and People With Disabilities should also become participants in a futuristic construction environment and the benefits of new research and technology should be spread across the entire sector.

The Department of Public Works and Infrastructure has made a commitment for all its contracts to have a standard, built-in maintenance plan requirement, and to be coupled with energy efficiency requirements.

The construction industry needs to rapidly digitalise which will make the delivery and maintenance infrastructure more effective.

Digitalisation speeds up infrastructure planning, reduces rework, and saves our precious resources. 3D-modelling software is revolutionising the industry.

Conclusion

In closing, let us remember that the Built Environment is not just about structures.

It is about inventing and shaping our future.

Together, we have the power to build a world where the construction and property sector becomes a driving force for healing our planet.

We are confident that by working together, we can usher in a brighter, more sustainable future.

Let this climate conference be a testament to our commitment to a world where the Built Environment stands as a symbol of our dedication to the well-being of our planet and future generations.

We wish you success in your deliberations.

I thank you!