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**Murray & Roberts Construction Takes The Lead
In Sustainable Construction In Africa**

Major South African contractors such as Murray & Roberts Construction can play an important role in promoting sustainable construction in Africa. “Obviously the further north into Africa you go, the less energy efficiency comes into play. However, it is still incumbent upon those countries to buy into the green agenda and they have the opportunity to do so a lot earlier in the development cycle than the industrialised countries have done. It is really up to them to change legislation in such a way that it accommodates sustainability. Until that happens sustainable construction will have very little traction in Africa,” Gavin Taylor, Chief Operating Officer, Murray & Roberts Buildings & Construction Africa, says.

“Many foreign investors are effectively looking for resources to take out and this to date has been done in a largely unsustainable manner, and that needs to change.” Taylor adds that the oil and gas industries are taking the lead in introducing international best practice into Africa. “These sectors are already measured by their home governments in terms of their own sustainability systems and procedures, which requires them to drive sustainability into the host country they are operating in. To require the host country to take that step is a tall order due to their different political and economic drivers which can in the short term override the need for long term sustainable solutions.

“There is a lot of work to be done in Africa. Most of Murray & Roberts’ African experience is driven on the back of mature clients. In Africa there are a lot of resource hungry nations that are sometimes less than scrupulous in obtaining the resources they need to fuel growth in their home countries. They do not leave much behind in terms of the social upliftment and much less so in terms of training and infrastructure. The infrastructure that remains is generally just what enabled them to extract those resources in the first place,” Taylor says.

Murray & Roberts Construction has access to the latest skills and experience through its global operations, which is a major advantage in Africa. Taylor adds that a lot of South African expertise has migrated into Europe, the Middle East and Australia over the years, and that not enough has been done to attract these expatriates back to help develop the continent. “Generally in times of economic downturn we export a lot of expertise. Those people pick up skills that are answering to

developed world standards and the like, and I do not think we do enough to attract those people back.

“In order to be able respond to all the pressures being exerted on the construction industry, you need all the tools at your disposal. I think we can start re-importing skilled African people in order to engage them in what could guardedly be termed a real socio-economic revolution in Africa, never mind South Africa, given the vast oil and gas reserves that have been discovered on both the East and West Coast in addition to the mineral resource treasure trove of the continent. What we have to ensure is that such natural wealth is harvested with the sustainability of Africa being at the forefront of the development agenda.”

While the South African construction industry is at the bottom of its economic cycle at the moment, Taylor predicts a slow upturn. “That is partly due to our socio-political exposure in the international press, which has detracted from foreign investment. However, if you look at the existing infrastructure we have in the country, we need to invest in long term maintenance programmes to insure that we negate going backwards and invest in new infrastructure to ensure prosperity in the future. South Africa still remains a destination of choice for companies that want to springboard into Africa.”

With a lot of attention focused on the new regional growth hubs of Ghana and Nigeria in West Africa, Taylor points out that these economies are mushrooming from a low base. “We need to be far more aware of cultural differences in Africa and respond to them in such a way that is sensitive to geopolitics rather than just exporting wholesale what has worked in a South African context. People are responding more positively to Africa.” This means that Africa itself is in a much stronger position to drive its own sustainability agenda, for example.

“There are opportunities, but whether or not the political masters in Africa allow these to be acted upon is the big issue. A question mark hanging over most developing countries in Africa is that they are perceived as weak in tackling corruption; the attendant cost of doing business is therefore seen as unsustainable. However there are many countries that are maturing and positioning themselves at the forefront of the African Renaissance.”

The key to successful business in Africa is through local partnerships. “I definitely think we have an opportunity to change the perception of locals about foreigners coming into their countries, but only

if this includes a sustainable legacy. To be successful in Africa generally what you have to do in my view is create local partnerships that are always based on a win-win scenario whereby knowledge can be transferred into those local businesses. Simultaneously there is a two way transfer, which helps de-risk a project from our perspective. We have commenced with a number of transfer programmes whereby our selected partners in Africa receive training on the Murray & Roberts way of conducting business. That is not to tell them this is the only way we are going to conduct business, of course. They need to guide us in terms of what systems they lack and what would work for them in their own countries and what would not work. You do not just want to impose systems on them; we want to ensure that whatever we add in terms of efficiencies does not place a burden on those companies that in itself becomes unsustainable.”

SUSTAINABLE AFRICA PIC 01 : Gavin Taylor, Chief Operating Officer, Murray & Roberts Buildings & Construction Africa.

SUSTAINABLE AFRICA PIC 02 : Murray & Roberts Western Cape was the main contractor on the R1.6 billion Portside project in Cape Town, a leading green building landmark in Africa.

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