**NEWS ARTICLE**

Zutari has Africa’s only representative on the International Federation of Consulting Engineers Quality Task Group

**31 January 202****4:** Joining seven members from Europe, Asia, Australia, and the Americas, **Sonja de Klerk** from leading consulting engineering and infrastructure advisory firm [Zutari](http://www.zutari.com) is the only representative from Africa on the Quality Task Group of the International Federation of Consulting Engineers (FIDIC). The global representative body for national consulting engineering associations, FIDIC represents over a million engineering professionals and 40 000 firms in 100 countries.

When the updated version of the ISO 9001 standard on quality management systems was developed prior to 2015, de Klerk represented South Africa on the relevant ISO technical committee. Following that, she co-authored the FIDIC Guide to the Interpretation and Application of ISO 9001:2015 for the Consulting Engineering Discipline.

This remains the ‘go-to’ guide for any global consulting engineering firm aiming to implement or improve their quality system. “However, work has started at ISO level to develop a new version of ISO 9001. When we see those updates coming through, we obviously have to be responsive, so watch this space,” reveals de Klerk.

FIDIC’s core values of quality, integrity, and sustainability foster important discussions. “These values are interconnected,” notes de Klerk. “Quality engineering in this day and age should be innovative, particularly to drive progress in terms of sustainability.”

For Zutari, this aligns strongly with its purpose to co-create an enduring impact through infrastructure to enable communities, economies, and environments to thrive. The FIDIC values also align with de Klerk’s work portfolio in Zutari as Lead of Quality, Environment, and Sustainability. “These are topics I am very passionate about and hope to inspire others.”

FIDIC is perhaps best known for publishing standard contracts for engineering clients, consultants, sub-consultants, joint ventures, and representatives that are used worldwide. “It helps engineering projects run more smoothly, from contract negotiations to contractual risk management,” says de Klerk.

Other tools and resources available include business practice documents, policy statements, position papers, guidelines, training manuals, and training resource kits. FIDIC also supports national associations for engineering firms in the areas of management systems, including management, risk, business integrity management, environment management, sustainability, and quality management, which is where de Klerk’s specific contribution fits in.

Commenting on the importance of Zutari, and indeed Africa having FIDIC representation, de Klerk says it is a critical link for national consulting engineering bodies such as Consulting Engineers South Africa (CESA) and equivalent associations from Botswana to Cote d’Ivoire, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

FIDIC provides important advocacy and stakeholder engagement for the industry, hosting forums and conferences to develop solutions for industry issues in a collaborative manner. For example, the FIDIC stakeholder network includes transnational organisations such as multinational development banks, the World Bank, and institutions from the United Nations to the International Monetary Fund and the World Economic Forum.

Interaction among member associations and industry colleagues from all over the world allows the sharing of best practices between nations, but also between different sizes of consultancies. Regional groups like the FIDIC Group of African Member Associations arrange regional conferences. Meanwhile, the FIDIC Africa conference is an important event on the annual calendar, allowing the consulting engineering sector in Africa to network and foster capacity building.

A trend is the rapid digitisation of workflows. When she started out in the industry, de Klerk reflects it was still the norm to create two-dimensional drawings, sign them physically, and then take them to site with transmittal notes.

“It has changed dramatically, and from my observation is drastically accelerating,” comments de Klerk. Many global consultancies now create multidimensional models of the assets they create. Not just three-dimensionally, but adding time and construction sequencing, cost, and future maintenance.

“If an engineer talks about seven dimensions, they are not talking about science fiction. A digital model of an infrastructure asset does not just ‘look nice for clients’. It helps identify issues early,” points out de Klerk. For example, making designs safer for construction crews and end users, avoiding clashes, and therefore any further disruptions and delays on a project.

“All of that also makes project delivery more cost-effective, faster, and more predictable. An increasing number of firms also use technologies like drones for reality capture or virtual reality to train end users on how to operate assets. There is really huge potential in digitisation,” highlights de Klerk.

Some countries like the UK remain ahead of South Africa due to the government, for example, making it compulsory for large-scale infrastructure projects to be carried out using BIM. “But there is amazing digital work being done across Africa, from Egypt to South Africa,” stresses de Klerk. “Obviously, digitisation also brings totally new risks with it. As a management system professional, I feel strongly that conventional quality management systems must ‘up their game’ to include systems and processes for BIM and information security (IS).”

Relevant standards like ISO 19650 for BIM and ISO 27001/2 for IS cater for this new reality. Having led the heritage organisation to its successful ISO 19650 certification, de Klerk is now collaborating with colleagues from diverse functions and regions across Zutari to progress BIM, IS, and drone management systems. “That is an area of expertise I am confident will be of great value to the FIDIC Quality Task Group,” adds de Klerk.

FIDIC champions for sustainability to be incorporated right from project inception. The later a project starts considering its environmental, social, and economic performance, the more difficult and costlier it will be to implement. However, de Klerk says it does not mean nothing can be done on a project already in progress. “It is never too late.”

However, the sooner sustainability is factored in, the better. FIDIC offers useful material in the form of the Project Sustainability Framework (or PSM2 for short). Locally, CESA has a sustainability framework and guide, and supports member firms in this regard. “What can be done is very discipline specific,” says de Klerk.

“Most are familiar with ‘green’ buildings, but really every engineering discipline can do exciting work to mature sustainability and resilience,” says de Klerk. She points to the exciting and encouraging work happening across the industry, be it methane harvesting from wastewater treatment works to provide energy for its operation, to innovative, more carbon-conscious material mix designs. “Methane is normally a waste product that contributes to climate change. Now we are realising it is a resource, and if we apply circular economy thinking, we have much to gain,” says de Klerk.

In terms of climate resilience and the growing need to futureproof essential infrastructure, de Klerk says the challenge is that design standards tend to be based on what happened before – that is, on collective experience. “Now we are seeing more extreme weather events, higher wind speeds, and more rainfall in shorter periods, which we now have to think about when setting out on new projects,” says de Klerk.

In addition, there is increased pressure from regulators, stock exchanges, institutional investors, and banks to find sustainable solutions. “For me, it is more about doing the right thing and recognising the value-add which consulting engineers can contribute, rather than just reacting to pressure ‘because we must’,” concludes de Klerk.

***Ends***

**Notes to the Editor**To download hi-res images for this news article, please visit <http://media.ngage.co.za> and click the Zutari link to view the company’s press office.

**About Zutari**

As an infrastructure engineering and advisory practice, we believe infrastructure has unparalleled potential to create enduring impact.  Never more relevant, this potential can be realized only if we plan, design, deliver and manage infrastructure in ways that maximise its value.  Our work in water, transport, energy, resources, and built-environment infrastructure does just this – helping to nurture thriving communities, growing economies, and healthy environments.  At Zutari we understand that radical impact doesn’t just happen; it requires more of us to connect differently, work smarter, and stay rooted.

**We connect differently**. Our broad collective of in-house experts connects across traditional disciplines to provide integrated results. We collaborate with clients, partners, and end-users, leaning into diverse perspectives to create superior solutions - together.

**We work smarter**. Our people lead the industry. We draw from deep technical skills, accrued over decades, and embrace the transformative power of digital technology to find simpler, better, and more innovative ways to deliver value.

**We stay rooted**. Few can rival our local capacity and understanding. Building on solid foundations, now 90 years in the making, we are trusted to shape locally relevant solutions through our extensive footprint in Africa and the Middle East.

At Zutari our people connect differently, work smarter, and stay rooted. Working in this way, we reliably deliver impact through infrastructure, making the world a better place – one project at a time.

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