**PRESS RELEASE**

AECOM to leverage ‘Think and Act Globally’ strategy to unlock growth in 2022

**13 December 2021:** As the world’s trusted infrastructure consulting firm, [AECOM](http://www.aecom.com) is justifiably proud of its involvement with the Tema Port expansion project in Ghana. One of the biggest infrastructure projects of its kind on the continent to date, AECOM recently received an ENR Global Best Projects Award 2021 for its work. Apart from the port itself, AECOM was also involved with the new liquefied natural gas (LNG) import terminal at the existing port, which will be finally commissioned in 2022.

“This project is testament to the resilience of our teams and our ability to work under the most challenging conditions due to Covid-19,” says AECOM Africa MD **Darrin Green**. From constraints in terms of site access and being unable to travel across borders due to shifting lockdowns, AECOM has still managed to carry out projects successfully in Ghana, Mozambique and Lesotho, among others.

Green says he is especially proud of the company’s involvement with Tema Port, as this is the sort of mega project that makes the rest of the world sit up and take notice of what Africa is capable of in terms of delivering infrastructure. “It is a combination of our resilience and adaptation under difficult circumstances that has been such a highlight of the year for me.”

As part of the Middle East and Africa region, AECOM’s local expertise and experience are also much in demand in other countries such as Saudi Arabia, where various smart city projects are underway. “We are increasingly picking up international work, which is a reflection of how solid our business model is,” adds Green.

AECOM in South Africa has even undertaken work in Australia, New Zealand and the US. “That is fantastic for smoothing out the troughs in our local market, as well as giving ourselves invaluable global exposure,” says Green. It is also what makes AECOM an increasingly attractive option for up-and-coming young engineers, allowing it to tap into the cream of the crop globally.

It is this strong international presence that has allowed Green to weather to what he terms as “the hardest year in my 30-odd years in the industry,” both for consultants and contractors. While 2020 saw an overlap of projects from the previous year, the pipeline finally dried up in 2021 due to the combined impact of the local lockdown and a troubled global economy.

Despite the discovery of a new Covid-19 variant and a fourth wave that is expected to crest in January 2022, Green says AECOM remains very well-positioned in South Africa, which continues to be its primary market in Africa. It had already begun transitioning to a more digital environment using digital tools for site inspections, for example, and a new way of working prior to 2019, which gave it a leading edge in the market when the pandemic began.

While AECOM did see some growth in 2021, this was off a very low base, with all eyes now turned to the South African government’s anticipated infrastructure fund rollout. “It is starting to filter through intermittently, but not nearly with the kind of volume that both the industry and the country requires. The situation is exacerbated by pricing pressure and fierce competition on all fronts. If the infrastructure rollout is really aimed at kickstarting the economy, then we need to see a lot more urgency and decisiveness from the public sector,” argues Green.

He points to South Africa’s infrastructure network, much of which is 40 to 50 years’ old and well past its design life. “The fact that it is not being maintained properly means that any repairs that need to be undertaken are commensurately more expensive as a result. What we need is a structured, broad-based asset-management approach to infrastructure development, where experts such as ourselves can contribute our expertise and experience, especially in terms of project and construction management,” says Green.

Looking to the future, Green is confident that the three- to five-year, R131 billion funding secured by South Africa at the recent COP26 global climate conference will be a major fillip for the renewable energy sector. However, a much more immediate issue than the local energy crisis is the looming water crisis, which has resulted in an increased demand for climate-resilience planning.

Earlier on this year AECOM launched its Sustainable Legacies strategy for achieving ambitious environmental, social and governance (ESG) objectives across the global business. The strategy integrates four key pillars to embed sustainable development and resilience across the company’s work, improve social outcomes for communities, achieve net-zero carbon emissions and enhance governance.

In terms of growth prospects going forward, Green foresees these clustering around very select opportunities in South Africa and in Africa generally. “We are seeing an uptick in the donor and lender funding space, but market conditions on the continent are likely to remain exceedingly challenging for the next 12 to 18 months. We will certainly be looking to leverage our strategy and budget accordingly, based on supporting the broader region in which we operate.”

In Africa, this means supporting key clients and projects. “I really do not expect to see huge growth in the African market, apart from activity associated with these key clients,” adds Green. Closer to home, Green reveals there is a major need in South Africa for planning and modelling to be undertaken in order to accurately gauge the country’s infrastructure deficit. “That work has not been around in any real volume for at least the last 20 years,” he says.

“The reality is that we really need to get the basics right first in terms of essential infrastructure such as water, wastewater, roads, power and telecoms before we begin to look at more advanced initiatives such as e-mobility or smart cities. If there is any good to have come out of Covid-19, it is the fact that it has accelerated the uptake of digitisation by at least ten to 15 years. This massive leap forward means there is definitely a silver lining in the way that we are now able to deliver projects.”

Green concludes: “Despite these advances, what happens next is critical. We need to see the public sector drive the infrastructure rollout to assist the ailing economy, especially in terms of getting the basics right first. Only once these pieces of the puzzle have fallen into place will we be able to proactively and effectively plan for a future that will benefit generations to come.”

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**Notes to the editor**

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