**NEWS ARTICLE**

AECOM to showcase its ESG legacy on World Environment Day

**31 May 2023:** The Middle East has a strong drive for renewable energy, smart cities and sustainability, while South Africa is looking at how best to bring about its Just Energy Transition (JET) and find effective solutions to move away from coal as a power source.

The fact that globally trusted infrastructure firm [AECOM](http://www.aecom.com) is active in both the African and Middle Eastern markets places it in a unique position to highlight its environmental, social and governance (ESG) legacy on [World Environment Day](https://www.worldenvironmentday.global/) on 5 June. “It is a great opportunity for transfer of knowledge and experience between the two regions, although the focus is slightly different,” **Elisabeth Nortje**, Associate Director – Environment, Africa.

AECOM is collaborating on largescale projects in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia from its South African office. Apart from World Environment Day, it will also leverage the [COP 28](https://unfccc.int/cop28?gclid=CjwKCAjw3POhBhBQEiwAqTCuBqJljjsZFdEk27JTq3uDkrqsngsQ4b7ZrWEZ1aE_JJ0YK7wefIR3KBoCrYcQAvD_BwE) climate change conference to take place in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) from 30 November to 12 December as an important platform for its Sustainable Legacies strategy as part for its ESG goals. This follows on from COP 27, which took place for the first time in Africa, at Sharm El Sheikh in Egypt from 6 to 20 November 2022.

Nortje adds that implementing ESG in South Africa represents a major growth market for AECOM, particularly in the mining industry. She notes an increased demand for ESG advisory services and audits. “I foresee a major push for the social and governance component of ESG in terms of the social aspects such as addressing vulnerable groups.”

AECOM Africa MD **Darrin Green** says that the considerable investment flowing into South Africa at present to propel the JET is likely to be affected by factors such as the country’s recent grey listing by the global financial crime watchdog the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), combined with its complex relationship with China and Russia. “The question mark is around the implementation,” says Green.

While the government struggles with implementation of the JET, Nortje points to green shoots in Mpumalanga where electricity utility Eskom has issued tenders to decommission some coal-fired power stations and replace these with renewables. She notes that there have already been requests for Environmental Impact Assessments in this regard, funded by the World Bank. “Obviously there is a massive social component related to retraining people who have been reliant on the coal value chain to date,” she highlights.

In this regard, JUST SA is a collaboration by the German government and its agencies GIZ, the International Climate Initiative and the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment. Other local organisations involved include the Mpumalanga Green Cluster Agency, GreenCape, Trade & Industrial Policy Strategies (TIPS), the National Business Initiative, Yes4Youth and the World Wide Fund for Nature.

The five-year project will see Germany inject R300 million into Mpumalanga for technical assistance to develop ‘green’ skills among the youth. “I certainly think we are going to see more of these kinds of partnerships or clusters being formed to collaborate on the proper implementation of the JET,” says Nortje.

She adds that her expectations for COP 28 in Dubai are high, especially following on from some of the breakthroughs at COP 27. These include establishing a Loss and Damage Fund to provide financial assistance to nations most vulnerable and impacted by the effects of climate change. Another intervention is the Early Warnings for All Initiative (EW4All), which is anticipated to be rolled out globally by end 2027.

COP 28 in Dubai is likely to place the spotlight firmly on AECOM’s pre-eminence in the ESG field. “Particularly for experts in the environmental space, it is such a good opportunity for us to display AECOM as a global organisation. We pull in voices from the local communities we are involved with and all stakeholders in our projects, whether in Africa or the Middle East. We have good relationships with all the specialists we co-opt when needed and we place a major emphasis on inclusivity and diversity and all other social aspects wherever we may be working,” says Nortje.

Green cautions about staging “talks for talks” and urges all countries involved in COP 28 to honour their commitments “so we can see it happening on the ground. AECOM has the skillset to provide support in this regard. Working globally as we do, from designing and authorising to permitting major infrastructure, we can make a difference.”

He continues: “It is embedded in what we do, and it is certainly very much a global focus for AECOM. The problem is sometimes convincing our clients, especially when these kinds of engineering measures add costs. It is all about lifecycle costs and sustainability, and not all of them necessarily think that way. Our clients need to be educated and made aware, but that is a broader issue.”

AECOM will use COP 28 to highlight the work it is undertaking on some of the leading smart cities in the Middle East, which need to address concerns around sustainability, infrastructure and enhanced service delivery, all within an ESG framework. Smart cities are climate resilient ESG cities where the city ecosystem serves as a framework that brings sustainability, liveability and equitable clean energy into one conversation.

Here AECOM’s Regenerative Development Strategies (RDS) set a framework to contribute to and achieve an overall vision and sustainability rating system requirements for all its scope of works. The main RDS objectives include reversing climate change, extracting resources wisely, preventing environmental pollution, reversing biodiversity loss, improving nature services, supporting social cohesion, enlivening a sense of place, building for sustainability and demonstrating the circular economy.

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**Notes to the editor**

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