

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### **Rebuilding hopes and homes**

The KwaZulu-Natal floods are a tragic reminder of the effects of climate change. There have to be new ways of tackling urban development, we can no longer repeat what has been done in the past. Adaptive ways of building infrastructure, settlement development, urban management and housing provision have to be put in place to create a necessary safety valve.

This is a strong message to the Council for the Built Environment (CBE) and its councils to take an innovative, transformative and urgent approach to its role of leading the built environment sector in tackling poverty, inequality and social injustices.

The sector is already reeling under the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as a tough economic environment.

Over the past two years we have seen job losses across the sector, projects shutting down, and companies cutting back or even closing their doors.

Coupled with this is an ever-growing number of young graduates battling to find employment or even just internships or work placements required to complete their qualifications. Currently, the CBE has a shocking 10 000 plus unemployed graduates registered on its database.

However, the construction and built environment sector is ideally placed to drive the economy and create jobs and development opportunities, with the CBE given the critical task of being a catalyst for change and developing a policy and framework for transforming the sector. And central to implementing creative and innovative ways to respond to intractable societal challenges, is to remember at all times we are dealing with more than just bricks and mortar.

The question is, how can we best do this? CBE's answer is simple in its answer, but complex in its outcomes: to create a transformed environment that not only survives but thrives. And at the core of this process are the people that work within the sector.

We must humanise the built environment. As the KwaZulu-Natal floods have shown all of us, the built environment impacts the daily lives of each and every South African; including the effects of physical and socio-economic injustices of past imbalances caused by the colonial and apartheid policies. CBE is cognisant that we must continue to build on the foundations laid almost 30 years ago with our first democratic elections.

While transformation may have many different descriptions, for the purposes of this discussion, it is defined as looking to build a strong profession based on partnerships and collaborations that adds value, and emphasises inclusivity and diversity, particularly encompassing the previously disadvantaged, women and young graduates.

The CBE has identified a number of transformative pillars for the built environment sector:

We must re-focus on the critical tasks at hand, tackling the consequences of climate change and the impact of Covid-19 and act to protect jobs. Through the Economic Recovery and Reconstruction Plan, there are various measures aimed at creating a conducive environment for the built environment sector to recover from the devastating effects of the Covid-19 pandemic.

We need to re-engineer the sector and find ways to turn the economy around by expanding output and increasing employment. It is important to open up the sector by identifying projects that will help drive the economy and create jobs – and unblock any barriers to access.

The CBE believes that opening up opportunities for historically disadvantaged groups will have a knock-on effect, allowing for a broad buy-in of the various projects and supporting South Africa's different communities in a multitude of ways. Supporting and including small, medium and micro-enterprises, particularly those driven by women or the youth, in project developments will spread any economic gains geographically, and strengthen levels of social cohesion across the country.

The CBE will collaborate with the construction sector and industry bodies to enhance the participation of women, youth and people with disabilities and has set a target of including 254 women-owned companies into the sector.

In addition, CBE will link unemployed graduates to Strategic Infrastructure Projects across the country. The CBE is looking at 44 districts, prioritising those areas where there is the greatest number of unemployed graduates or registered professionals.

We are in consultation with the Councils, planning to massify the mentorship of built environment candidates in all nine provinces, ensuring professionals are registered as well as provided with

employment opportunities. We will also be providing support to the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure on identifying graduate candidates for placement in infrastructure programmes.

Practically, the CBE, along with the Councils for the Built Environment Professions, is running candidacy programmes in 148 districts which are critical for the human development of our country. They prepare students for the world of work and entrepreneurship, give students valuable experience which contributes to future employment prospects, and lead to the acquisition of professional status. The candidacy programmes also produce scarce skills and the qualifications urgently needed by the economy and government's infrastructure plan.

The CBE must re-build the construction sector to drive demand and increase productivity. The Council works closely with our built environment councils, all three spheres of government, sectoral partners, and tertiary institutions exploring trends across the sector and identifying scarce skills as well as any new skills required. It is important, with the rapidly emerging digital changes taking place globally, to be agile, adaptive and innovative. With this in mind, the CBE also collaborates with tertiary institutions on curricula development to ensure that skills keep up with an ever-evolving landscape.

It is vital we strengthen the pathway to proper training and employment, particularly for young South Africans, prioritise continuous learning and upskilling and modify how we work to embrace new technologies. Afterall, as academic Patrick Gunnigle has noted, people are the lifeblood of an organisation.

The built environment sector must consolidate its transformation achievements and support the skills pipeline. We must find ways to stabilise the industry and ensure job retention. An important aspect of this is providing opportunities for reskilling and upskilling.

The KwaZulu-Natal floods have made the work of the built environment sector critical. It is a call to all who work in the sector to reconnect with their communities and contribute directly to the government's agenda of restoring normalcy. The built environment sector now has the opportunity to reimagine settlements of the future, to innovate, to use new technologies in the rebuilding process, and, importantly, to create opportunities for young professionals to work with communities in resolving their challenges.

The crisis must be used to bring about significant change in how we work. We can build a more collaborative, cohesive way of working across sectors to address the societal challenges

highlighted. The built environment sector cannot afford to miss this opportunity of being relevant to communities.

People want nothing more – and nothing less – than to be able to live in safety. They want to live in a country that is economically sound and environmentally sustainable with inclusive settlements that offers a range of opportunities.

This is a call for the built environment professionals to come forward to assist communities to rebuild their lives and restore normalcy. It is time to act.

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*Msizi Myeza is the Chief Executive Officer for the Council for the Built Environment*

**About the Council for the Built Environment:**

The Council for the Built Environment (CBE) is a Schedule 3A Public Entity that reports to the National Department of Public Works and Infrastructure. It is a regulatory body established under the Council for the Built Environment Act 43 of 2000 (the CBE Act) that coordinates the following six Councils for the Built Environment Professions - Architecture, Landscape Architecture, Engineering, Property Valuation, Project and Construction Management, and Quantity Surveying – and through memoranda of understanding these include Town and Regional Planning, Land Surveying, and Environmental Assessment Practitioners.

The CBE was established for the purpose of instilling good conduct within the Built Environment Professions, mobilising transformation in the Built Environment Professions, protecting the interest of the public and advising the South African Government on Built Environment related issues.

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