

The Anglophone Africa buildings industry - a continued evolution

 By [Devan Pillay](#)

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The Anglophone Africa building sector is going through several important and enduring changes dictated by various trends that will undoubtedly set the tone for future development and growth.

Trends today



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The first is urbanisation; megacities, and even smaller cities and towns, are experiencing rapid growth. Urban centres play a critical role in fighting poverty and sustaining economic growth and are often considered the future of prosperity in the developing world.

That said, the continent's urbanisation also faces energy constraints which supports investments in microgrids supplied by renewable energy sources. That, together with creating awareness on using the energy resources in a frugal and responsible manner, can support and sustain countries' urbanisation efforts.

The second trend, and this is as a direct result of the pandemic, is the repurposing of buildings. Traditional office buildings which are suitably located in the hub of a city, are being adapted for mixed use, for example residential, commercial and offices.

In South Africa, for example, there is no longer a pureplay scenario where commercial developments are only built and used for retail and hospitality purposes. We are now finding a mix of commercial and residential buildings, with proximity being the main driver for these new and repurposed buildings.

Additionally, and part of this second trend, is the replacement of long-term leases with shorter, customisable options. Market dynamism catalysed by the pandemic has necessitated agility and innovation from property owners who need to reconstitute their business models predicated on the past. Those unwilling to adapt will certainly fade into irrelevance. Customised leasing options catering to a changing, transient workforce, replacing long term corporate leasing, is one such example.



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The globe at our doorsteps

A global macrotrend that is certainly impacting Anglophone Africa countries is the provision and management of energy, which is germane to our ongoing existence.

Smart usage of energy is becoming a top priority and has a direct impact on the way buildings are being developed and built today. Additionally, existing buildings need to be adapted to ensure energy usage information is readily available and

managed.

As mentioned, buildings often don't have a nine-to-five occupancy anymore, which means energy needs can be adapted. This is where building management, driven by the smart connected universe comes into play. Calendars, for example, can be integrated into building management systems catering for these variable peak times in the workspace, adapting energy usage for utilities and managing other services like janitorial and catering on demand.

Africa is characterised by its egalitarian approach, accommodating the need for multi-class proximity to urban centres. Whilst the urbanisation trend has accelerated to such an extent, with demand outstripping supply, leading to the explosion of informal settlements, the silver lining is that large-scale residential developments are integrating a broad mix of accommodation to suit multi-classes and budgets. This presents opportunities for a broad spectrum of our population to live within the urban perimeter, while enjoying proximity and the benefits of amenities.



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Data and the future

Data and demographics continue to be important contributors to the buildings industry, giving us insight into market share and market potential. A sobering note, and just one of the many devastating impacts of the pandemic, was a 42% decline in approved building plans between 2020 and 2019. The recovery has yet to happen, although we do see a slight uptick in construction activity, which are more brownfield as opposed to greenfield.

These brownfield activities, which extends to renovations in the residential segment, has been spurred on by hybrid work models and people investing in their living and working spaces, considering the increase in utility.

Electrical connections are another important data metric that correlates with the previously mentioned urbanisation drive. More electric connections undoubtedly allude to urban gravitation.

The last, and certainly one of the most exciting trends for the Anglophone Africa building industry, is the exponential growth of data centres driven by increased cloud adoption and the ever-growing demand for cloud computing and digital services. The proliferation of data centres, whether edge colocation or hyperscale, is providing a welcome boon to the construction sector.

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