

# 'Purposeful leadership needed in the built environment' - Khanyi Mlambo

By  Sindy Peters

8 Nov 2022

[Khanyi Mlambo](#), founding president of South African Women in Construction, gave a rousing talk at this year's Green Building Convention in Cape Town, reminding those in the built environment of the industry's importance and its potential to change people's lives.



Khanyi Mlambo, founding president of South African Women in Construction. Source: [www.khanyimlambo.co.za](http://www.khanyimlambo.co.za)

She highlighted the dawn of a new leadership paradigm in business that's more in tune with the spirit of the times - a leadership that, in creating shared value, has to balance attaining profitability whilst ensuring positive societal impact.

Sustainability should no longer be tacked on to the periphery of the corporate agenda, and with stakeholders across the value chain applying greater pressure, businesses need to do better.

She said that the wicked problems the world faces "are simply not going to go away, no matter how much we try and ignore them", and that they should rather be viewed as opportunities for business to advance solutions and drive shared value creation.

"There is no better time for the built environment to be at the centre of... rethinking, restoring, and recreating an improved world," Mlambo said.

## Coordinated, collaborative approach needed

While the UN Sustainable Development Goals, with their 169 targets, may seem daunting, she said a coordinated approach among the private, public, and social sectors can help in achieving them.

For business, this means considering how the supply chain is managed, how it deals with human capital, how to progress society, and safeguarding the well-being of clients and customers, Mlambo explained.

"This is shared value. It's about equity, sustainability, and inclusiveness," she said.

Mlambo challenged those in the room to go beyond designing for aesthetic reasons and to reflect on the real needs and opportunities linked to sustainability.



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## Sustainability-conscious leadership

She noted that today's leadership needs to be purposeful and inclusive, considering how profitability contributes to positive societal outcomes. Leaders need to advance the agenda of sustainability and shared value creation, and solve for long-term

problems with long-term impact.

"We can no longer afford to just be self-serving, looking at ourselves, our own businesses, our own families without looking at broader society," she said.

Concluding her talk, Mlambo echoed the words of former President Barack Obama: "No one is coming. Nobody's going to come and sort out our problems, particularly government. We are the people that we are waiting for."

## ABOUT SINDY PETERS

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