

Continued support needed from government, corporates, ordinary citizens

 By Sindya Peters

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As part of our #LockdownLessons series, Bizcommunity is reaching out to South Africa's top industry players to share their experience of the current Covid-19 crisis, how their organisations are navigating these unusual times, where the challenges and opportunities lie, and their industry outlook for the near future.

We chatted to Njombo Lekula, MD at PPC, to get his take.

■ **What was your initial response to the crisis/lockdown and has your experience of it been different to what you expected?**

Njombo Lekula: PPC worked quickly to engage regional leaders in technical, sales and marketing to ensure we were in a position to transition into work from home and/or standby for essential service support while observing all necessary lockdown rules and procedure. Our PPC Ltd teams ensured that the governments' national lockdowns in South Africa, Botswana, DRC, Ethiopia, Rwanda and Zimbabwe were adhered to, thus managing the spread of Covid-19 in our Southern African operations.

While driving business continuity in an uncertain environment remains challenging, we are humbled to have a team and partners who are willing to navigate these uncharted waters with us.

■ **Comment on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on your company or economy as a whole.**

Lekula: The construction sector in South Africa has been adversely affected by the pandemic. In line with government efforts to curb and manage the spread of Covid-19, industry came to a close on the 26th of March. Industry Insight estimates that up to 140,000 formal jobs could be lost.

While we maintain an optimistic demand scenario to secure the sector and protect local businesses like us, we need the continued support of government, corporates and ordinary citizens so we can secure jobs and sustainably provide the country with a 100% local product.



Njombo Lekula, MD at PPC



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■ **How is your company responding to the crisis?**

Lekula: Our contributions and continued efforts to empower the community to experience a better quality of life have been focused on providing sustainable support. In line with local needs, the mobile clinics form part of our ongoing contribution towards our Covid-19 efforts in South Africa. Working closely with local authorities, the four mobile clinics, with a pick-up trailer that is used for medication across Gauteng, continue to be available for testing and general healthcare.

Our impact-based approach to contributions across the business has enabled us to ensure the total investment is R6.5m (R3.5m in Tshwane and R3m in Johannesburg) which was made in our FY20. This allows us to continue to look for additional ways we can live our brand promise, 'Strength Beyond', as the mobile clinics are made available into our FY21.

We are humbled to have the partnership with the Tshwane Department of Health. Working closely with them, the nurses and support staff required to improve access to healthcare in the province, we are encouraged to know these clinics will continue to provide a lasting impact during this pandemic and beyond.



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How has the lockdown affected your staff? / What temporary HR policies have you put in place regarding remote working, health & safety, etc.?

Lekula: Our strongest asset is our employees who have helped us to provide 100% local, 100% quality cement products and materials that customers are used to. Their service excellence over the past 128 years has driven the business to engage them in the work from home process while being attentive to their individual circumstances.

As we operate under the guidance of the Minerals Charter, we have welcomed the opportunity to work with our SHEQ teams in restabilising a new definition for our sanitary baseline. While we engage our local partners in the provision of Covid-19 cloth masks, we continue to provide the relevant PPE required in cement and materials production.

How are you navigating 'physical distancing' while keeping your team close-knit and aligned and your clients happy?

Lekula: PPC is a family. It is a new reality for us to no longer be greeted by the warmth, hugs and high-5's of our colleagues at our doors and working sessions. The passion for what we do has given us all the strength we need to navigate the changing environment. The team's willingness to engage and consult with the aim of finding innovative solutions continues to inspire us all. Our clients have engaged the teams on the delivery and provision of our services either as essential service workers or as businesses go back to work in Level 4.



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Has this global crisis changed your view of the future of the industry in any way?

Lekula: The global pandemic has worked to strengthen our resolve to provide 100% local products developed by us while supporting local companies and partners. As we exist to empower the community to experience a better quality of life, we believe in the collective development of our sector.

Covid-19 lockdown has added pressure to local cement manufacturers who are engaging in the long-term impact of imports and sub-standard cement. While we remain optimistic of our contribution to the local market, we can only do so with the support of all in South Africa who ask for PPC by name due to its 100% local and 100% quality consistently found in every bag of PPC cement.

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