

SRK's wide expertise now serving all economic sectors

Beginning life in 1974 as geotechnical specialists, SRK Consulting focused largely on the mining sector in its early years; it was not long, however, before it expanded into civil engineering work – and established a sister company by 1981 to operate in this field. Since then, the expansion into other disciplines has continued apace, and SRK has become increasingly involved in focus areas such as water management, environmental and social impact, various aspects of infrastructure development, and energy.

According to SRK Consulting South Africa's managing director Vis Reddy, its non-mining business has in recent years increased to 50-60% of SRK's total workload, taking into account that mining has been in a slump for some time.

"Our growth in non-mining work is not just in percentage terms; it has grown in its revenue contribution to the business over the last ten years," said Reddy. "We are today servicing local governments, parastatals, petro-chemical and industrial sectors. We expect that our mining services will increase to between 50-60% of our business when commodity prices increase following on the recent downturn in the mining industry."

One of the earliest steps in the diversification of SRK's expertise was the merger with civil engineering firm Binnie & Partners (SA) in 1988, which extended the skills base into water and effluent technology, structural engineering and hydraulics. The company's innovative ownership model and its entrepreneurial approach soon led to SRK practices being opened in KwaZulu-Natal, the Western Cape and the Eastern Cape; these offices also expanded into non-mining fields like water and civil engineering.

"By the late 1980s and early 1990s, for example, the KZN office was offering civils-focused services to the industrial sector – from civil structural works to stormwater management," said Reddy. "SRK's services in groundwater and water supply also grew in the 1990s from these offices."

The 1990s also saw SRK expanding into services related to contaminated land and remediation, serving mainly the petro-chemical sector.

"With changes in environmental legislation, especially after 2000, there was increase in demand for environmental management services in the industrial sector," he said. "SRK applied its environmental experience in mining to non-mining clients like parastatals and government agencies – where SRK has a long history of undertaking policy work."

By the late 2000s, SRK's service offering was truly diversified, offering municipal engineering services to local government – such as stormwater management, civil infrastructure, wastewater treatment and disaster management. The wide range of projects – large and small – to which SRK has contributed in each of these segments is testimony to the breadth and depth of its skills base.

Water

Recent water-related projects include SRK's close collaboration with the Amajuba District Municipality (ADM) in northern KwaZulu-Natal, bringing water to remote rural communities. By formulating a dynamic plan based on detailed baseline studies, SRK has been able to propose and implement solutions that involved boreholes, windmills, hand-pumps, springs, storage units and gravity-fed reticulation.

In response to ongoing drought in the western parts of the Karoo, SRK was contracted to other water supply projects, such as siting boreholes and establishing borehole water supply for the Middelpos Primary School in the Hantam Local Municipality.

Environment

In terms of environmental projects, SRK has become a leading expert in environmental and social impact, working not just on technical studies but on higher level policy and also on management frameworks.

In April 2018, SRK was appointed to update the Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF) for the Southern African Power Pool (SAPP). The ESMF will be used as a guidance manual to screen, scope and assess all SAPP priority power projects for environmental and social risks and impacts, and to ensure their proactive mitigation and management. This project is a follow-on from earlier work to prepare an ESMF to guide planning and assessment of priority power projects in mainland SADC – thereby ensuring that they reach bankability. The project involved work in South Africa, Lesotho, Swaziland, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Angola, Mozambique, Zambia, Malawi, DRC and Tanzania – and is funded by the World Bank.

SRK is also called upon to assist with challenging interventions such as community resettlement plans. In Sierra Leone's Northern Province, the company has been appointed by Joule Africa Limited to prepare the Resettlement Action Plan (RAP) for the Bumbuna II Hydro Electric Power Project. The Yiben reservoir dam construction will result in the inundation of an area of about 115 square kilometres – affecting 35 settlements and about 1,000 households.

In Malawi, SRK is completing an Environmental and Social Impact and Resettlement Action Plan for the Roads Authority, related to the M1 road from Kacheche to Chiweta in Malawi's Rumphi District.

SRK is also undertaking a Scoping and Environmental Impact Reporting (S&EIR) process and an Atmospheric Emissions Licence (AEL) application process for a proposed new chlor-alkali plant to be located within the Richards Bay Industrial Development Zone (RBIDZ).

Energy

With the growth in renewable energy projects – mainly related to solar and wind energy – around the Western Cape, Northern Cape and Eastern Cape, SRK has provided geotechnical assessments and investigations. It also recently completed the EIA for the Roodeplaats windfarm close to PE, with the EIA project being approved by the Eastern Cape Department of Economic Development, and the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism.

In the traditional energy space, SRK is involved in the Medupi Power Station project – with design and construction supervision for the raw water dams, coal stockyard, roads, storm water, silt traps, pollution control dam and overland coal conveyor terrace. SRK has significant expertise in the design of liner systems, and has been involved with the project since initial geotechnical studies were undertaken in 2005.

Infrastructure

SRK's expertise relating to infrastructure has been employed in a range of applications from planning and housing to municipal infrastructure and facilities. SRK's Port Elizabeth office is working on a project on non-motorised transportation facilities in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan Municipality – focusing on the upgrading of pavements and sidewalks in the metro to make non-

motorised transportation accessible and convenient. SRK is responsible for the design, layout and project management on this project.

In Cape Town, the SRK office is providing input into the redevelopment of many old buildings in and around Cape Town. In most cases, many old buildings are heritage or historical buildings and need to be preserved; with the lack of space in the CBD, developers are looking at increasing the height of existing buildings. SRK is involved in assessing whether the carrying capacity of existing foundations can carry the additional load.

SRK in KwaZulu-Natal has been involved with housing projects in the province since 2010, with a total of 3400 houses completed to date. Projects range from rural to urban and from large projects with more than 1000 stands to small, rural, Operation Sakuma Sakhe (OSS) housing projects consisting of 20-70 houses. Contributions including town planning layer management, using a planning tool which provides geographic information systems (GIS) overlays of criteria such as road corridors, floodlines, wetlands, servitudes and endangered species. SRK certifies all construction and building work at various stages of development before payment tranches from the client to contractors can be finalised.

SRK has over 15 housing projects on its books, seven of which have either reached or completed construction stage. A further eight housing projects are at various stages of approval and have not yet reached the construction phase.

“The range of services that SRK offers means that the company is involved in almost every sector of the South African economy beyond mining,” said Reddy. “The wealth of experience that we have gained over the past 44 years – starting out in the mining industry and spreading into non-mining sectors – allows SRK to contribute significantly to the development of South Africa and Africa in general.”

He highlighted SRK’s commitment to continue attracting the best people into the company and seeking better solutions to current problems – including the growing use of technology.