



SAINT-GOBAIN IS FULLY COMMITTED TO LIMITING THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF THEIR MANUFACTURING PROCESSES.

GREAT LIVING PLACES

Sustainable Business Magazine speaks to Jolene Blundell, Head of Sustainability for Sub-Saharan Africa at Saint-Gobain, about regional challenges, buildings which improve people's wellbeing, and working with local partners.



JOLENE BLUNDELL, HEAD OF SUSTAINABILITY FOR SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA AT SAINT-GOBAIN.

Urbanization, the expanding labor force, and the rise of the middle-class African consumer. These trends are driving development and transformation in Africa, and will continue to do so. But which prospects does this entail for business and how do global companies materialize Africa's opportunities sustainably while preserving natural resources and ensuring inclusive growth across the continent?

Saint-Gobain is a global manufacturer and distributor of construction materials with 179,000 employees worldwide. The company has progressively increased its presence

across key Sub-Saharan African markets. Today, Saint-Gobain is present in 12 countries on the African continent, with more than 1500 employees across sub-Saharan Africa.

SAINT-GOBAIN IN AFRICA

In the next ten years, the total population in Africa is expected to exceed Europe, South America, and North America combined, and the young growing middle-class will create a bigger demand for consumer goods and services. In 2015, 621 million Africans – approximately two in every three people on the continent – had no access to electricity,

and 40% of the Sub-Saharan African population do not have access to clean drinking water. To support the expected increase in economic activity, the provision of adequate infrastructure will be crucial. A huge backlog in housing requirements is projected, but also the hotel and commercial sectors are expected to boom.

All Saint-Gobain's solutions aim to provide comfort, performance, and energy efficiency as well as healthy and aesthetically superior buildings, while preserving natural resources and developing new skills in the surrounding communities. Saint-Gobain's ambition is to take an active part in Africa's growth by contributing to affordable, locally-produced building solutions and influencing future, world-class African cities.

David Anderson, the General Delegate for Saint-Gobain Sub-Saharan Africa, believes, "In order to develop Saint-Gobain in Africa, Saint-Gobain has to help develop Africa". Saint-Gobain looks to provide a broad range of solutions in construction and renovation of various types of habitats, including schools, hospitals, hotels, commercial buildings, and homes. They also address surrounding water infrastructure through their pipeline solutions.

APPROPRIATE SOLUTIONS TO LOCAL CHALLENGES

Construction can be a powerful driver of development and transformation. On the one hand, construction creates economic and social advancement; on the other, it presents a multitude of skills and enterprise development opportunities. In a rapidly changing

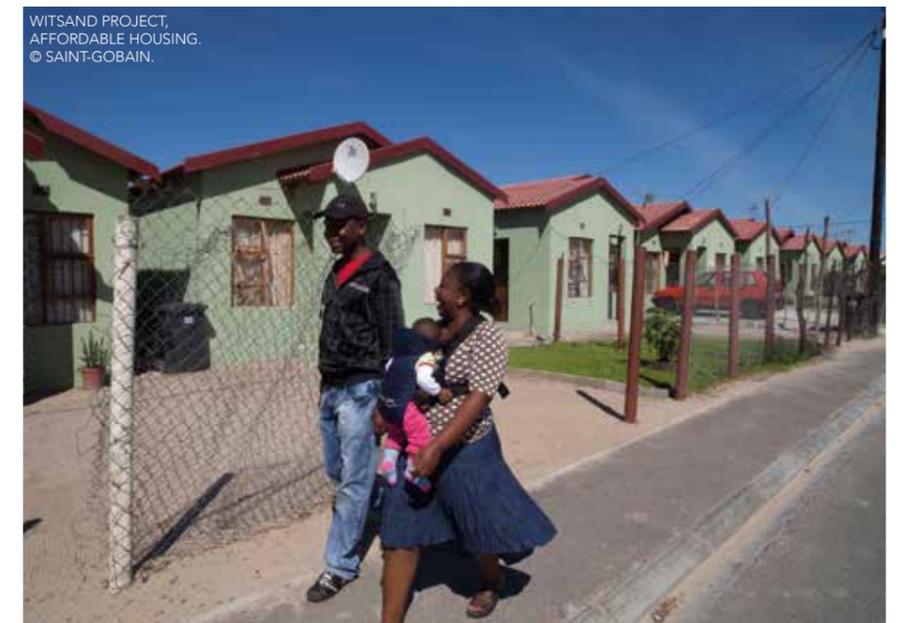


environment, Saint-Gobain supports its stakeholders in responding to local challenges. "By establishing local teams in each of our markets, we can develop knowledge of those markets, and better understand the cultural requirements and local construction methods," says Jolene Blundell, Head of Sustainability for Sub-Saharan Africa at Saint-Gobain. "This enables us to adapt our offerings to the market specifics."

About 10% of the population of Africa can afford to live in formal housing. Saint-Gobain looks to create affordable solutions for low income households to reduce the housing shortage. Their affordable housing team has developed a solution called a Combi-Pack, which is an insulation and ceiling kit which is moderately priced for South African homes. It will appeal to some of the challenges government contractors face, and it is tailored to the needs of the local communities.

MULTI-COMFORT HOLISTIC APPROACH

Saint-Gobain also aims to provide high-performing solutions for comfortable, healthy and aesthetically superior buildings, while at the same time preserving natural resources. "We seek to adapt our solutions to make buildings more efficient in terms of energy





consumption,” explains Ms. Blundell. “We also have developed a Multi-Comfort Holistic Approach. By carefully considering all the different areas of comfort that a building can provide, we are able to improve people’s wellbeing within buildings, regardless of the types of buildings and the specific activities taking place inside them. The solutions we offer – including complete pipe systems, glass wool, plasterboard, plaster, glazing, mortars, and more – can help improve the energy efficiency of buildings, air quality, and acoustics while maximizing aesthetic and natural light as well as health and safety of the installers of the products and the occupant.”

Due to these reasons, as well as other contributing factors, Saint-Gobain products were selected to contribute to the new headquarters for the Department of Environmental Affairs in Pretoria, which was the first government building in South Africa to achieve a 6 Green Star SA rating. “We utilize lifecycle assessment tools which have been developed by Saint-Gobain and third-parties to look at the environmental footprint of our products and solutions,” says Ms. Blundell. “On the manufacturing side, we track and measure performance across our sites using a central environmental management system, and this data is documented annually and reviewed at group level. This allows us to put mitigation measures in place to reduce our energy and resource consumption, improve our environmental footprint, and reduce waste.”

TRAINING ACADEMY

Facing key regional challenges such as shortage of skilled labor and a high unemployment rate, a high level of expertise sharing and skills training is required. “This is an area in which we’ve really been able to support local communities,” says Ms. Blundell. “As identified in South Africa’s National Development Plan, there really is a scarcity of artisan

trade skills in the country. Instead of waiting for others to solve that, we’ve developed our training academy with partners like the USA-based Youth Build International.”

This training academy focuses on unemployed youth from disadvantaged communities. “In addition to the one-month installations short course, the academy offers the national certificate in Ceiling and Partition (C&P) Installation,” says Ms. Blundell. “It was the first – and still is the only – training institution in South Africa to have been accredited by the Construction Education and Training Authority (CETA) to present this qualification. We then place the students with contractors on-site to ensure the product is being installed efficiently. Afterwards, some of them go on to work with the contractors, others get employed here at Saint-Gobain, and some go on to start their own businesses. Students who want to become business owners enter a three-year incubator program. We have a six-month

post-support system in place, to check up on the students and see if we can assist with placing them on specific projects or with our partners in the built environment.” To date, Saint-Gobain has trained 859 installers at the training academy in South Africa.

EXPERTISE SHARING

Based on the success of the initial training academy, Saint-Gobain is setting up other centers in sub-Saharan Africa. “We’ve started a center in Zambia, in conjunction with Lusaka Business and Technical College and in partnership with the International Labour Organization,” says Ms. Blundell. “We are also looking to start a similar program in Malawi.”

The training of Saint-Gobain staff has also been a major focus over the last year. “We have created a team of Sustainability Ambassadors who aim at raising the level of understanding of sustainability within each one of our brands,” says Ms. Blundell. “We also offered a training program to help our staff understand sustainability benefits more tangibly. For the first time in the Group, this sustainability program was presented simultaneously to 62 staff members from 12 different Southern African countries from the various brands that operate on the African continent. This has initiated a lot of momentum in the various participating countries, and it’s very exciting to see this level of commitment and enthusiasm from our employees.”

The Green Building Council’s Green Star Tools, Accredited Practitioner program also aligns with Saint-Gobain’s CSR policy



SAINT-GOBAIN ALSO PARTNERS WITH THE NGO THE ADOPT-A-SCHOOL FOUNDATION.

around encouraging employees’ professional growth. Saint-Gobain tries to encourage staff to register for this program so their customers can benefit from having an expert on their project team.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

Saint-Gobain aims to support its growth by establishing strategic partnerships with organisations who share its vision. As a founding member of the Green Building Council of South Africa (GBCSA), Saint-Gobain actively promotes sustainable building in the Southern African region. “The GBCSA has such a large network of members who are encouraged to really push the boundaries,” says Ms. Blundell. “By ensuring buildings are constructed to be environmentally sustainable, healthy, and comfortable, the actions of the GBCSA are very much in line with our goals as a company. It’s great to see the Green Building Council becoming active in other regions as well, like Zambia, Kenya, Ghana, Namibia, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Mauritius, and to see similar discussions arise in those areas as well.”

Saint-Gobain also partners with tertiary institutes, societies, and associations in Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Kenya. “It allows us to keep the local market informed of our latest construction techniques, while staying

familiar with traditional building techniques,” says Ms. Blundell. “We also do a lot of joint research with the University of Pretoria and the University of Johannesburg.”

SUPPORTING LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Through their training academy, Saint-Gobain donate products to be placed in community buildings that need repairs, like schools and crèches, and the students get to practice using their skills onsite. Saint-Gobain also partners with the NGO The Adopt-a-School Foundation. “Their vision is to support the creation and enhancement of a conducive teaching and learning environment in disadvantaged schools,” explains Ms. Blundell. “We believe our view of a comfortable, higher-performing classroom really complements their focus. The Adopt-a-School Foundation will identify schools that are desperately in need of additional facilities, and then we will come in with our partners. We’ve constructed extra classrooms, kitchen facilities, toilets and workstations at schools. These kinds of projects often involve temporary workers from the local community.”

Saint-Gobain also has a group foundation, the Saint-Gobain Initiatives Foundation. “These are company funds sponsored by our employees and retirees which can

support projects that are being implemented,” says Ms. Blundell. “Current or retired employees can put eligible projects forward that will benefit disadvantaged populations. The Foundation provides financial support to the projects it selects. Through this initiative, we’ve recently worked on schools in Ghana and Kenya”.

THE NEXT STEP

Looking to the future, Saint-Gobain is fully committed to limiting the environmental impact of their manufacturing processes, protecting their employees’ health and safety, and uplifting local communities. “From here, we’re going to continue partnering closely with the GBCSA, government entities, and NGOs who share our vision,” says Ms. Blundell. “We aim to take part in advocating for legislation and standards in various African countries to support higher performance for buildings. We also want to continue developing a better understanding of local construction methods, while deepening the understanding of the application of our products and solutions. All this is in support of our group mission which is to create great living places, improve daily life, and enhance well-being for everyone.”

Learn more about Saint-Gobain in Africa: www.saint-gobain-africa.com