

# 2021 Presidential Address

**A**s IMESA President, one of my key mandates is to motivate that ethics be made a compulsory part of the CPD cycle for registration with the Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA), by requiring registered practitioners to attend an ethics presentation annually during their five-year registration cycle. My husband and two children are qualified medical doctors, and their professional lives are governed by their Hippocratic Oath. In my view, civil engineers should take a similar oath that determines the moral principles for ethical practice, since their actions have a direct bearing on civilised society.

With the economy looking grim and infrastructure development being disrupted in an unprecedented manner, the unbearable truth is that Covid-19 has changed – and will forever change – the world as we know it. It's impossible to quantify the extent of the impact it will have on the South African economy and the development of future infrastructure. However, what remains clear is that we, as engineers, need to support recovery and development in South Africa in whatever way we can.

In everything we do, our actions define who we are and our underlying value systems. As municipal engineers, we have an extra responsibility because our outcomes in terms of infrastructure service delivery are so integral to the socio-economic success or failure of the towns and cities in which we operate.

Both civil and municipal engineers must stand together in ensuring that we live up to the Code of Conduct for Registered Persons in terms of the Engineering Professions Act (No. 46 of 2000).

Being a member of IMESA makes you a willing and welcome participant in the endeavour of maintaining and growing professional engineering excellence at local government level. We can create a real difference in terms of micro- and macro-development. Our pool of IMESA specialists provides an excellent sounding board for public and private sector stakeholders, and invaluable input on past and current infrastructure projects. This is so important for South Africa's infrastructure-led economic recovery.

## IMESA Projects

The IMESA technical courses that were scheduled for 2020 had to be postponed due to Covid-19 lockdown restrictions and are on hold until 2022.

It was with great sadness we received the news that Professor Carel Schoeman passed away in June this year. He developed the **Capacity Building in Urban and Regional Planning** course, which IMESA rolled out around the country in 2019. The course materials have been made available and ways for IMESA to continue to disseminate the content are being investigated.

The **Small Coastal Stormwater Outlets** guidelines from the project initiated by Stellenbosch University and sponsored by IMESA can be downloaded from the knowledge base library on the IMESA website.

IMESA also sponsored the development of a pre-feasibility tool for **Water Conservation and Water Demand Management**, which was identified as a critical activity after droughts in the Western Cape and significant problems experienced by many municipalities with the impact of non-revenue water on the ability to fund and execute

water and sanitation infrastructure projects. The tool was developed by Emanti Management and was demonstrated to members in training workshops held at IMESA branches at the end of 2019.

Guidance regarding the **Reuse and Reclamation of Water** for local authorities was identified as a priority in 2019 and IMESA was called on to support the development of guidelines for local municipalities in a project sponsored equally by the WRC and IMESA. After some delays due to administration requirements, this is now progressing well.

A new project initiated by IMESA and co-funded by the WRC is the development of a best practice guideline for **Design Flood Estimation in Municipal Areas in South Africa**. This project addresses another critical aspect for municipalities, and we look forward to sharing the guidelines when completed.

## Strategic Liaisons

Although engagements with external bodies have been limited this past year, IMESA has continued to interact with ECSA, SALGA, CESA, SAICE, the WRC, CoGTA and National Treasury, among others.



### Civil Engineers South Africa (CESA)

– CESA and IMESA jointly present the Excellence Awards every second year

and have been liaising to evaluate this year's submissions for the awards to be announced in November 2021 and showcased at the IMESA Conference.



### Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA)

– IMESA has met the new requirements to be registered with ECSA both as a CPD Licensed Body and CPD Service Provider, and continues to keep up to date on relevant legislation and regulations.

### South African Forum for Engineering (SAFE)

– The focus in 2019 was mainly on construction issues and SETAs, with meetings continuing into 2020. No meetings have been held this year, but IMESA has confirmed commitment to take part when the forum is active again.





**South African Local Government Association (SALGA)** – Although there have been fewer opportunities for interaction this year, IMESA has maintained contact with SALGA at a national level for support on communication with municipalities.



**Water Research Commission (WRC)** – IMESA has sponsored two projects in joint ventures with the WRC, as described above. Work on both projects is in progress and the completed guidelines will address critical issues in municipal engineering.



**National Treasury** – In August 2020, IMESA invited high-level representatives of National Treasury, CoGTA, CIDB, SALGA, MISA and SAICE to an online workshop to raise urgent issues related to supply chain management and the interpretation of various policies. The representatives from National Treasury and CIDB took note of the issues raised and have addressed some of them. A National Treasury City Support Programme (CPS) water team is now in the process of facilitating the clearing of procurement impediments and is collaborating with professional bodies like IMESA to resolve the issues.

**International Federation of Municipal Engineers (IFME)** – The importance of international knowledge sharing was underscored during the IFME meeting held in May 2021, which I attended virtually as South Africa's representative.



Evolving urban patterns were a common viewpoint shared by the IFME country members in attendance. Prime examples include how the growing work-from-home culture is influencing city planning. If remote working becomes a more permanent feature – as many believe it will – this will influence key areas. These include reverse migration from cities, and transportation planning.

In countries worst affected by the virus, like South Africa, the focus is on economic recovery plans with public infrastructure investment a key driver to improved service delivery within the local government arena.

Sadly, IMESA was not able to host the IFME Board Meeting scheduled for Cape Town in October 2020 but we look forward to future opportunities to contribute our input for global solutions to municipal issues.

**EXCO and Council**

The election of a new IMESA President as well as the Executive Committee and Council for the 2020-2022 period was completed and implemented with effect from 30 October 2020; however, with Covid-19 restrictions preventing an IMESA Conference last year, the ceremonial traditions were not possible. I take the opportunity now to thank Randeer Kasserchun as Immediate Past President for his valuable contribution to IMESA activities from 2018 to 2020.

IMESA has reduced the number of EXCO Technical Directors to four, with broad portfolios that will be broken down to establish work groups of Council members in specific portfolios. One Technical Director



portfolio, for example, is Infrastructure, which will have the support of Council workgroups for projects in Transportation, Roads, Stormwater, Water & Sanitation, and Building Structures & Town Planning.

**Membership and Branches**

Our head office staff continue to keep IMESA's administration and finances in good order despite the challenges faced through various lockdowns and the impact of Covid-19 on membership and conference income. It is encouraging that our membership base has remained stable and that we are receiving new applications on a regular basis.



Our branches have faced similar challenges, and most had to convert their branch activities to online events and communication. We encourage members to get involved and are always open to ideas on how we can provide more technical development opportunities and assist members to conquer common engineering challenges.

IMESA has branches covering the following regions:

- Northern Provinces (Gauteng)
- Free State/Northern Cape (Bloemfontein/Kimberley)
- KwaZulu-Natal (Durban)
- Border (East London)
- Eastern Cape (Port Elizabeth)
- Southern Cape/Karoo (George/Mossel Bay)
- Western Cape (Cape Town)
- SADC Countries.





### Finances and Investments

The loss of income from not being able to hold the 2020 IMESA Conference has had to be carefully managed, but the Institute's financial status continues to be stable thanks to the efforts of Eddie Delpont, Operations Director: Finance, with the support of EXCO and Council. Our investments provide long-term security, and the Institute continues to be fully compliant with the requirements of SARS and other regulatory bodies.

Covid-19 has highlighted the collection of membership subscription fees as a priority for continuity of the Institute when other activities are not possible. We are looking at various training initiatives and other ways to thank our members for their ongoing support.

### Obituary

With Covid-19 taking an additional toll, we have had to say sad farewells to several IMESA stalwarts in this last year.

The sudden loss of Pieter Myburgh in January 2021 has been keenly felt. After joining IMESA in 1992, he became an active member of the Southern Cape/Karoo Branch and served as Branch Chair. He was elected to Council and then to the Executive Committee in 2010, which culminated in serving as Vice President: Technical from 2018. He held the position of Senior Manager: Streets and Stormwater at Mossel Bay Local Municipality and was highly regarded for his contribution to municipal engineering in the Southern Cape.

Professor Schoeman, mentioned earlier, joined in 1985 and his involvement over many years in various IMESA projects related to town planning has been invaluable.

Mathys Vermeulen was a member from 1981 onwards and sadly passed away in June this year. He was IMESA President from 1993 to 1994 and an Honorary Fellow.

The IMESA Annual Report has a full list of deceased members who will all be remembered for their individual contributions to IMESA.

### In Summary

The unprecedented rate of change in every aspect of life over this last 20 months has truly tested us all in unthinkable ways. I am sure every one of you, or someone close to you, has experienced loss of some sort in this last year and many have lost everything that was their 'normal'.

The post-Covid-19 recovery of our nation will depend on how we empathise and address the emotional issues at all levels of interaction to build the resilience needed to carry us forward. In local government especially, I can see that it will be crucial for employees to be provided with the resources and skills to manage stress and conflict, as well as a good support network to help them deal with the pressures of a rapidly changing work environment.

As engineers, we have already had to become more resilient, forward-thinking and innovative in finding ways to get essential work done. I personally have found that the change to online meetings and teleconferencing has enabled me to multitask and to allocate more time to projects and people at less cost because of reduced travel.

It might be a good thing that we cannot go back to the old 'normal'. Let's embrace the changes we can influence as engineers and find visionary ways to solve the challenges that lie ahead. I close with advice from the former US president Theodore Roosevelt:

*“Whenever you are asked if you can do a job, tell ‘em ‘Certainly I can!’ Then get busy and find out how to do it.”*