

My Brilliant Career

The voice of cities aims to build better governance

Sithole Mbanga is the CEO of the South African Cities Network

By MARGARET HARRIS

Tell me about the South African Cities Network (SACN) and what it does.

The SACN was born out of a need among the founding mothers and fathers of democratic local government to learn from each other and share best practice on how to govern and manage cities better.

They focused on creating inclusive cities, building sustainability and resilience, good governance, economic development and long-term city development.

The SACN nurtures and facilitates peer-to-peer learning based on these issues, informed by empirical research and produ-

cing evidence-based policy.

What does your role as CEO at SACN involve?

There are two main issues: ensuring the organisation remains true to its founding principles of sustainability, and focusing on the city development agenda while remaining relevant to the times in which it exists; and building expertise and capacity to deliver on the organisational mandate, both within and outside the SACN.

What would you like South Africans to know about SACN?

SACN is the voice of cities for the public good. It advocates for city governments and exists to enable responsible and mutual exploitation of goodwill between local government, civil society, creative and innovative industries, the public sector and the business community.

What are some challenges SACN faces?

Balancing the divergent and shifting re-

search priorities of its member cities, on the one hand, with the research information requirements of a support system that must be fed with the policy ingredients that make cities stronger and more competitive and boost our economy, on the other hand.

How has the pandemic affected you and the way you work? What lessons did it teach you?

In many ways, the Covid-19 pandemic has showcased how much is ahead of us if we are to achieve the objectives of the South African constitution, specifically the notion of equity.

It's been tough to learn that we are still miles apart from each other, and yet we have all the tools at our disposal to resolve and close the societal gap.

The opportunity, however, is that we have now leapt into different (and hopefully more efficient) ways of working, innovative ways of doing less harm to the climate, and new economic forms that will enable us to create equitable jobs.



Even as a child Sithole Mbanga thought about community unity and equality.

Picture: Garry Sarre

What did you want to be when you were a child?

As a child, I thought about community, unity and equality.

I've always wanted to be an activist with a community heart and, hopefully, through my work at SACN I have managed to achieve this.

Everything out there happens because of society, and never in spite of communities.

What is your go-to career advice?

A career is built, not found, and everything is possible by working together – and especially if we have each other's mutual interests at heart.

What do you look for when recruiting new people for SACN?

Professionalism combined with youthfulness and the will to achieve.