

# Construction KENYA SHOWCASE



JULY SEPTEMBER 2021



## How Symbion Conquered The Coastal Landscape

### ALSO INSIDE:

- Verified Real Estate Takes Market by Storm
- How Industry is Adjusting to COVID-19
- Engineering for Human-induced Vibrations

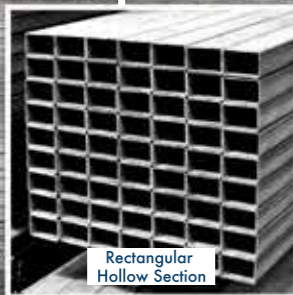


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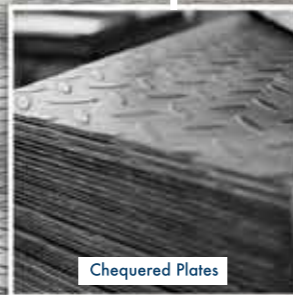
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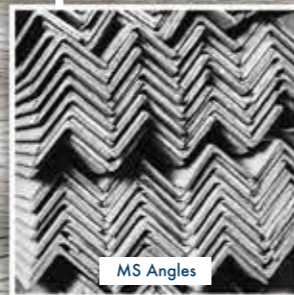
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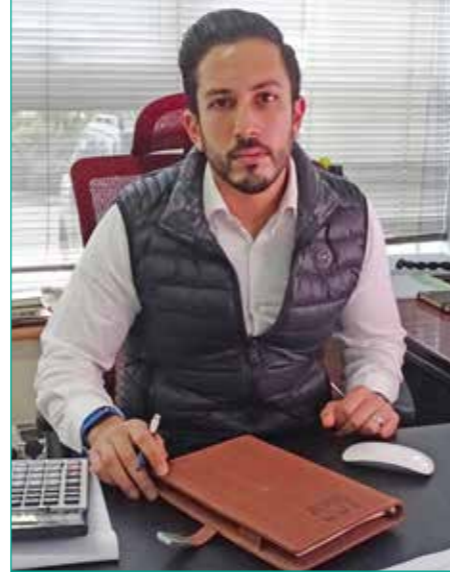
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**COVID-19** ravaged economies around the world and continues to do so. This has prompted businesses to rethink their strategies in order to survive the pandemic. In this issue, we look at how construction companies in Kenya have responded to the crisis and talk to a director at **Accurate Steel Mills**, Mr Avraj Bhachu, about his company's experience.



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When **Symbion** arrived in Mombasa in 2005, the architectural firm was determined to bring professionalism and collaborative approach to project execution. Today, many landmark projects along the coast bear its signature. We speak with **Titus Kipsang**, Symbion Consulting Group Chairman, who established the Group's office in Mombasa.

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Gated communities have gained preference among middle and high income market segments. They not only provide security and safety to the residents but also tend to have much higher standards of living with maintained roads, good lighting, and organized common services such as solid waste management. In this issue, we focus on **Edenville**, just outside Nairobi.



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Amid a confidence crisis in the residential property, one new property developer has decided to adopt a different approach with surprisingly good results. We visit **Verified Real Estate Ltd** to see their projects and speak to CEO **George Mwangi**.



**Titus Kipsang** was until recently Managing Director of Symbion Mombasa Limited. He is now Chairman of the Symbion Consulting Group, the umbrella group and one of the most established architectural and related services provider in Kenya and the East Africa region.

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**Human vibrations** can affect structures in multiple ways. It is essential that structural engineers consider this phenomenon when doing their designs.

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**Arch. Njendu: elected UIA Council Member**

## MUGURE NJENDU BAGS UIA COUNCIL SEAT

IMMEDIATE former president of the Architectural Association of Kenya (AAK), Mugure Njendu, has been elected as a council member of the International Union of Architects for three years, effective this year.

The International Union of Architects (Union internationale des architectes-UIA), is the only international non-governmental organisation that represents the world's architects, now estimated at about to 3.2 million.

The UIA was founded in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1948. The General Secretariat is located in Paris. It is recognised as the only global architecture organisation by most United Nations agencies among them United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat).

The UIA convenes the World Congress of Architects every three years, each

organised by a UIA member section that has competed for the honour.

Mugure's candidacy was put forward by the AAK which is a member of UIA.

The architect and urban planner is among five Africans elected to the council led by the current president, Jose Luis Cortes, with UIA representing architects from 131 countries and territories.

Mugure is an Edge expert, a green building standard developed by International Finance Corporation (IFC), a member of the World Bank Group.

She is a graduate of the Greentech Entrepreneur Business Programme for entrepreneurs focused on sustainable business solutions that will impact challenges from climate change.

She is a Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) advocate, and passionate about climate action.

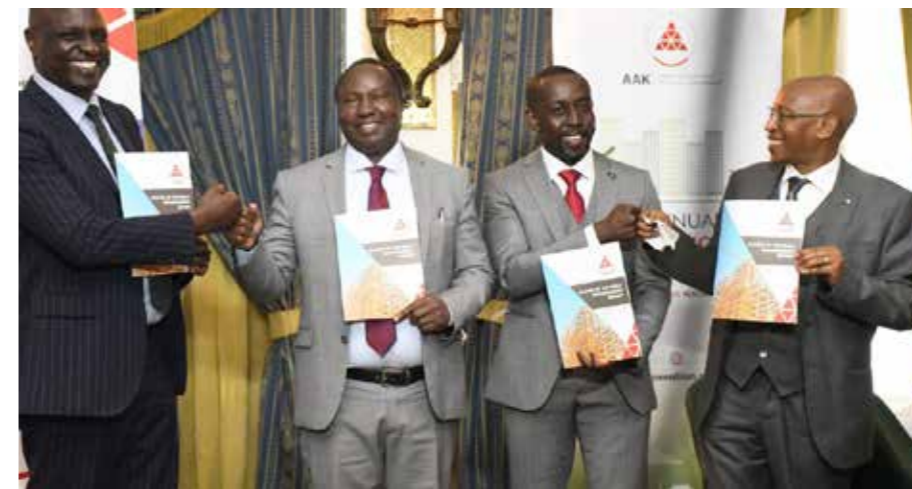


## NBV TO VENTURE INTO CEMENT MANUFACTURE

NAIROBI Business Ventures (NBV) says it intends to buy 11.33 hectares of land in Machakos, near Nairobi, from its subsidiary Shreeji Enterprises Kenya to build a new cement grinding plant. It plans to invest US\$140m in the project. A feasibility study for the construction of the plant has been concluded and the preliminary work to establish the plant is currently being conducted.

The shoe manufacturer announced plans in late 2020 to build a 1Mt/yr cement plant following its acquisition by UAE-based Delta International Holding.

The project will run as a grinding unit first before moving to clinker production at a later stage. The company also plans to diversify into vehicle and aircraft maintenance.



**From left: Joint Building & Construction Council (JBCC) Chairperson Muchiri Waititu, Deputy Director General NMS Kang'ethe Thuku, AAK President Wilson Mugambi and Director Housing NMS S.G Mwangi during the launch of Status of the Built Environment Report.**

The bi-annual report highlights developments in the real estate sector, tracks developments in land, financing, infrastructure, policy and legislation.

Mugambi said the growth of the real estate and construction sectors would be hinged on the overall performance of the economy.

He said the contraction in the country's economy due to Covid-19 was equally felt in the built environment.

Deputy Director General, Nairobi Metropolitan Services (NMS) Kang'ethe Thuku, who was the Chief Guest, said the report would provide the required insights in revamping the city and enable Nairobi compete with other cities of the world.

"As NMS we are committed to formulate policies that shall guide and control developments in Nairobi City for the next 10-15 years," he said.

## CONSTRUCTION SECTOR ON TRACK TO RECOVERY

THE CONSTRUCTION industry is expected to grow by 3.9% this year. According to a report released by The Architectural Association of Kenya (AAK), the projected growth is pegged on a sharp recovery in construction activity after pandemic restrictions last year.

"We project that the growth will particularly be propelled by huge infrastructural investments by the Government of Kenya," the association's President Wilson Mugambi said at the launch of the Status of the Built Environment for the first half of 2021.

## TRIAD/HFG DESIGN ULTRAMODERN HOSPITAL AT TENWEK, BOMET

TENWEK Hospital in Bomet will soon have a new Cardiothoracic and Emergency Centre. The ultramodern hospital building will provide a 176 bed-self-contained surgical centre all within 4-storey levels above ground and two basements, located 300m west of the main Tenwek Hospital campus. Triad Architects in collaboration with US-based Health Facilities Group (HFG) are the design consultants. The building is composed of two interlinked blocks connected through a central core with three hospital lifts and a W-shaped ramp. Each block has adequate provision of staircases



for fire escape within a 30 meters running distance. For details, visit <https://constructionkenyashowcase.com/category/projects/>.

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# COVID-19: HOW THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY IN KENYA RESPONDED

BY JOHN NJIRAINI

Across the globe, the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has severely disrupted economies, with devastating effects on global trade and simultaneously affecting households, businesses, financial institutions, industrial establishments and companies in general.

The building and construction industry has not been spared, with the Kenyan sector feeling the full impact of the pandemic. Due to the pandemic, the sector has been hit by challenges ranging from supply chain disruptions, transportation problems, labour shortage, financial constraints, project delays to loss of jobs.

In Kenya, the construction industry contributes about 5.6 per cent to the gross domestic product (GDP) and provides employment to almost half a million people. Government statistics indicate that last year, the industry growth shrank to 0.6 per cent from an upward of 5.6 per cent projection at the beginning of the year before the pandemic hit the country in March. During its peak a decade ago, the industry was growing at an annual average of 13 per cent but this year it is projected to expand at 3.9 per cent, a sign of recovery from Covid-19 pandemic according to a report by the Architectural Association of Kenya (AAK).

“We forecast Kenya’s construction industry growth to accelerate to 3.9 per cent year-on-year in 2021 as the sector recovers from the negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic,” said the Status of the Built Environment report. It added that while this puts Kenya in line with the 2021 Sub-Saharan Africa average of 4.4 per cent for construction industry growth, the country will not be able to recover its pre-Covid-19 growth rate.

Growth will mainly be propelled by huge infrastructural investments by the government. These include the ongoing construction of the Nairobi Expressway as well as the Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) Corridor project. Other factors that will drive the sector’s growth and recovery include the dualling of the Nairobi-Mombasa Highway as well as the implementation of the affordable housing agenda.

“2021 brings with it new hope of recovery in the sector as the Kenyan government continues to remain committed in implementing investor-friendly reforms and driving large-scale infrastructure projects aimed at boosting regional integration and economic diversification,” states a report by Deloitte. The construction industry has witnessed the turmoil of Covid-19 including rising cost of steel. The increase has also been attributed to the high demand for

Despite the unprecedented Covid-19 related disruptions and challenges, the construction industry in Kenya has deployed resilience as its response mechanism.

steel amid low global supply, thereby resulting in prices of construction metals shooting up by up to 25 per cent in Kenya.

Data from the London Metal Exchange, the centre for industrial metals trading, shows that the price of a tonne of steel bars has risen from Sh40,000 in April 2020 to Sh81,000 in July this year. Steel is a vital component in the building and construction industry and is used to make roofing sheets, reinforcement bars, steel beams and columns, windows and doors, among other products. Thus, any upward change in its price means higher cost of projects. It is important to note that the iron and steel industry in Kenya forms about 13 per cent of the manufacturing sector, which in turn contributes significantly to the GDP. However, the local steel industry is heavily dependent on imported raw materials, as no local sources have been developed to date. It is estimated that the country spends about KSh60 billion annually on importation of steel, mainly from China.

Despite the unprecedented Covid-19 related disruptions and challenges, the construction industry in Kenya has deployed resilience as its response mechanism. Construction companies like Accurate Steel Mills and Devki Group have stepped up to help the country tackle the pandemic and ease the suffering witnessed due to a shortage of oxygen and cylinders in both public and private hospitals.

Accurate and Devki have been involved in initiatives to provide free medical oxygen to help deal with these

shortages amid a surge in demand as a result of rising hospitalization driven by increased infections. Several other companies have also decided to help the country tackle the pandemic despite being forced to scale down operations by as much as 50 per cent since Covid-19 struck. However, others have been forced to reduce staff levels and cut down production, affecting their stability.

The pandemic has also presented an opportunity for businesses to reengineer their production lines and manufacture new products for the market, especially those that are essential in curbing the spread of the virus. The new products include alcohol-based hand sanitizers, personal protective equipment (PPE) and ventilators.

As human capital is a key factor in the construction industry, companies have undertaken different measures to curb the spread of Covid-19 in line with protocols laid out by the government. These include placing decontamination points in their workplaces and sites, social distancing, enhanced awareness of protective measures and provision of PPE among workers. Other measures taken by companies to curb transmission include provision of internet data and equipment for remote working, fumigation of workspaces, payment for Covid-19 tests when necessary and arranging for vaccinations in conjunction with county health departments.

“The adverse effects of the pandemic coupled with investor uncertainty continued to drive down employment levels, with some companies facing difficulties in paying salaries and wages to their employees,” notes a report by the Kenya Association of Manufacturers (KAM). It adds that this comes amidst an increased cost of doing business due to Covid-19 employee related support and reduced productivity.

The sector is optimistic that the roll-out of the national vaccination campaign by the government will result in containment of the pandemic and facilitate resumption of normal economic activities. Kenya is targeting to vaccinate at least 10 per cent of the population by the end of September. By the time of going to press, over 1.2 million doses of vaccines had been administered across the country according to the Ministry of Health.

# STEEL MANUFACTURER'S RESILIENCE AMID PANDEMIC CHALLENGES

As Covid-19 continues to ravage the country, we asked ACCURATE STEEL MILLS Director AVRAJ BHACHU to share his reflections on the pandemic.

**Covid-19 hit Kenya in the first quarter of 2020. Please tell us the immediate effect on your operations following the initial restrictions.**

I think that pre-Covid, the Kenyan economy had grown quite well, and consistently so over the last decade. A larger demand has obviously meant an increase in competitors entering the market, but the last 12 months have been very challenging. We have seen a huge decline in demand during this challenging period, but we see this as temporary and expect the market to be resilient and bounce back.

**Did you make any staffing adjustments like other firms?**

As a commitment to our staff, Accurate Steel Mills ensured that we retained the majority of our staff and ensured that there were no salary deductions that were implemented during this entire period in a show of continued commitment to the people of our great country.

**Globally, there were massive disruptions in supply and demand including huge delays and high prices. How did these affect Accurate Steel Mills?**

Raw materials are commonly sourced from China, Japan, Turkey, India, Korea, South Africa and Egypt for our products. As steel is a cyclical market, one often finds that cyclicality also shows itself within freight rates and availability. In periods of market lows, freight rates are very competitive and there are many more players in the market.

However, as is currently the case, with a market high (or in today's scenario, an "extreme" high), material variability is hugely scarce as suppliers choose to supply themselves domestically first, leaving a shortfall for international supply. With greater demand, freight rates also increase as



**Mr Avraj Bhachu**

competition for vessel allocation presents a real challenge.

**The pandemic situation has not stabilized here in Kenya and even globally. In fact the new Delta variant poses a new challenge. Do you foresee difficulties in your industry in the days ahead?**

Yes, the new variants pose a continued risk to the health of all Kenyans, and we encourage everyone to ensure they remain vigilant while we rise through this as a country. The industry continues to be faced with huge costs of materials, and we foresee this trend of high prices carrying on until the end of the year due to huge material shortages and fewer vessels travelling towards our borders. I think the

difficulty facing the steel industry in the months ahead is not only the temporary challenges, but the longer-term shift of the market towards reducing carbon emissions and sustainable production. This means that our traditional long term supply partners are imposing export taxes and purchase of carbon credits is becoming ever more difficult. We may see this trend carrying on well into the next few years and even as manufacturers, it is always difficult to forecast exactly how large this long-term effect would be.

**Many organizations appear to have adjusted to the turmoil caused by the virus. What kind of changes has your company made in order to sustain production and continue serving the market despite the uncertain environment?**

It has not been an easy challenge to sustain. We have had to arrange for additional credit facilities to cater for the higher cost of raw materials but are committed to be adequately stocked for the market, while at the same time ensuring that our quality is of the highest standard as we stay true to our brand strength and that of the entire Bhachu Group of Companies.

**Some private companies have been doing their part to help in the national effort to tame Covid-19. We understand you provide free medical grade oxygen. Please shed more light on this.**

CSR is a very important factor for us. One of our most recent projects is a collaboration with the Nairobi Metropolitan Services L3 Hospital, which has been commissioned to provide healthcare to the residents of Kwa Reuben slum. This project is a major step in the right direction, and we have teamed up closely with NMS to work on the surrounding structure, walls and car park area development. All construction that we are providing is free, but more importantly, a continued gesture of our determination to help this community.

As you rightly mention, we also availed all of our external Oxygen capacity and have sent a direct communication to NMS to avail free refilling of Oxygen cylinders to all hospitals in the vicinity. We are KEBS approved and have all the additional purification devices to ensure the medical grade of the oxygen required is well maintained.



**TOP: Accurate Steel Mills plant. MIDDLE: TMT reinforced steel bars manufactured by the firm. BOTTOM: Mild steel angles from the company.**

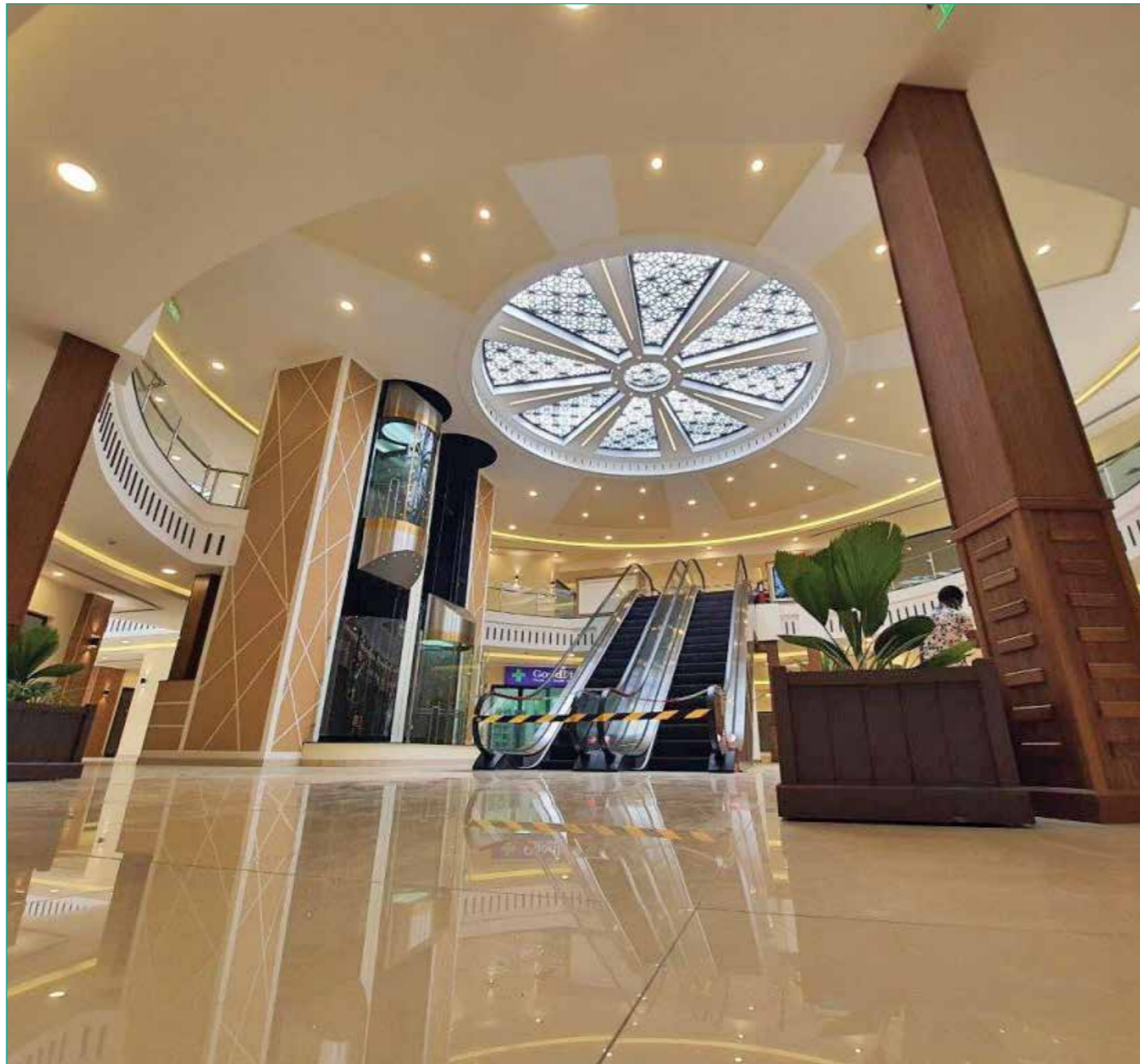
# HOW SYMBION MOMBASA CONQUERED THE COASTAL LANDSCAPE

Architectural Firm Readies for New Opportunities

Few architectural firms in Kenya have managed to build a strong brand like the Symbion Consulting Group (SCG). Boasting a rich history spanning four decades, Symbion's footprint is evident in some of the most iconic projects not only in Kenya but across eastern, central, and southern Africa.

For Titus Kipsang, who recently took over as Symbion Group Chairman, the success of the firm is largely enshrined in the principles of its founders. To the founders, among them renowned architect Jon Cavanagh, the practice was always bigger than individuals. In fact, when many firms rotate around a few





The interior of Likoni Mall, one of key projects by Symbion Mombasa (Image: Bulkon Builders Ltd)



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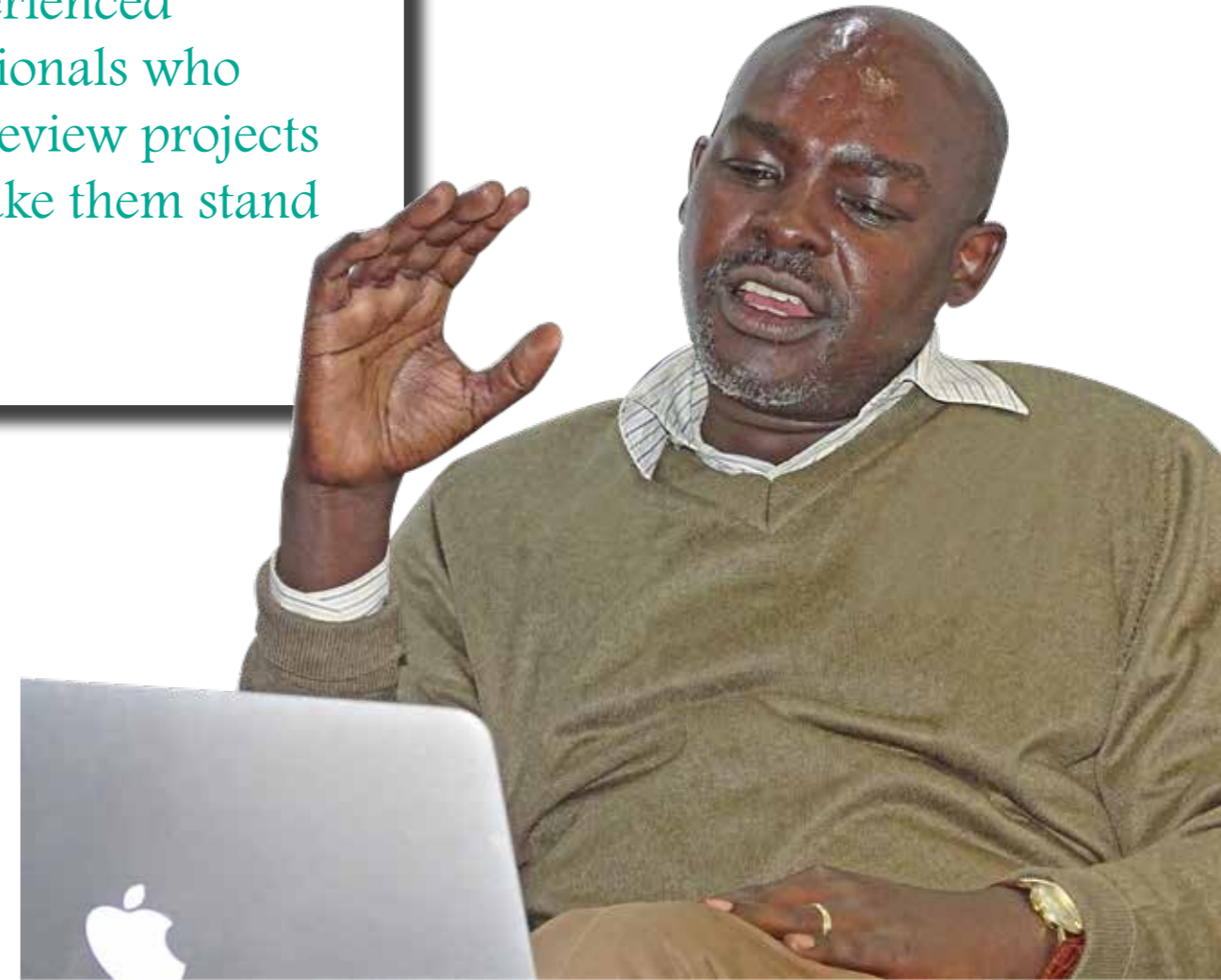


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“Symbion brought to the Coast a team of experienced professionals who could review projects and make them stand out.”

*Symbion Consulting Group Chairman Titus Kipsang, who established the group's Mombasa office, speaks to Construction Kenya Showcase at Symbion House in Nairobi.*



partners, Symbion shuns the personality-driven models and espouses the ability to deliver outstanding projects and services. “For us, the practice is bigger than any of us,” says Kipsang, adding that a clear philosophy to grow talent and award hard work has catapulted Symbion to among the top architectural firms in Kenya.

Operating under the SCG, the practice has different units that operate autonomously from a management perspective but consolidated under SCG board. Each of the units has its own management although overall leadership is provided by the Directors. “We have a group board where I am the chairman. We congregate as a group of directors and shareholders under SCG to do the overall

review of the business.” explains Kipsang.

Until this year, Kipsang was the founding managing director of Symbion Mombasa, the unit that he was responsible for establishing in 2005 before it grew to be an independent company in 2010. For Symbion, the desire to have a presence in Mombasa had always been overwhelming owing to the nature of the coastal clients and the fact that addressing the needs of the Mombasa market from Nairobi was somehow difficult. For this reason, the firm wanted to replicate its success in offering services cutting across architecture, project management, interior design and master planning and urban planning in the coastal region.





**Baobab Plaza in Kilifi (left) and Mira Heights in Mombasa: For Symbion Mombasa, the underlying factor in a majority of the projects has been the need to blend traditional with modern architecture.**

“Before we set up in 2005, coastal clients perceived Symbion as remotely removed as a partner,” explains Kipsang. He adds that in Mombasa the market is structured in a manner that close relations, like being friends, largely dictate the aspect of trust which in effect translates to getting jobs. “This emanates from the Arab way of doing business that is largely driven by personal relations,” he notes.

Symbion’s entry in Mombasa, which was through the acquisition of an existing practice, was a game changer. At the time, the firm’s turnover was nothing to write home about and the ambition was to grow the practice and conquer the entire coastal strip comprising Mombasa, Malindi, Lamu and even parts of Tanzania. For this to happen, the practice needed to reflect the coastal ambience even internally, with the current Managing Director Abdunnassir Mohamed, hailing from the Coast.

Effectively, the Mombasa practice became an autonomous limited company in 2010 with the mandate to service

the region. Though Symbion ventured into a region with established practices, some of which were owned by people from the region, it went there with a penetrative strategy. This was anchored on bringing a new, nay international, mindset to the architectural space away from what the region was not getting. The second component of the strategy was offering an international service at local pricing to make it affordable. The third component, which was critical, was the opportunity to enrich the architecture. Clients in Mombasa were not getting real value because most of the firms were a one-man practice and lacked a team of professionals to input ideas into a project in order to make it world class.

“Symbion established a studio design approach to project designs. A team of experienced professionals were always available to thoroughly review projects in order to make them stand out,” says Kipsang. He adds that the resource base, with experience spanning 50 years of practice, offers clients the advantage of technical interrogation of projects thus ensuring that each product developed at Symbion

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**We are proud to be associated with Symbion Mombasa Limited on The Baobab Plaza Project, Kilifi**





**Sarova Whitesands auditorium which was a Symbion Mombasa project.**

Mombasa has been thoroughly reviewed, interrogated and developed.

By all accounts, the decision to establish an independent practice in Mombasa was a masterstroke. Here was a region with vast opportunities in sectors like hospitality, port-related business and trade, which was also closely linked to the port. “We saw the opportunities and our intentions were to service the market at a very close angle,” avers Kipsang.

The hospitality industry, in particular, presented vast opportunities. Congregating under the auspices of ‘sun and sand’, the industry was witnessing significant growth owing to the fact that Kenya was grappling with a substantial deficit of bed nights, a challenge that had ripple effects on the tourism sector. Current estimates show Kenya has a deficit of 2,000 bed nights which translates to about 20 hotels. With the coastal region being the heartbeat of tourism, it thus meant that investors would want to put up the majority of the hotels in the region.

With a presence in Mombasa, coupled with years of experience and having built the necessary connections, it meant that Symbion was strategically placed to service clients in the region. Indeed, the firm boasts many projects with some of the recently completed including Sarova Whitesands refurbishments, Pride Inn Hotel refurbishments, Likoni Mall project that was completed in

December 2020 during the thick of the Covid-19 pandemic, New Gen Plaza in Voi and Baobab Plaza in Kilifi completed in June 2021.

Notably, Symbion Mombasa’s footprints are not only in the hospitality industry. The firm has also undertaken several office blocks projects, residential apartments, was involved in the expansion of Bandari College that is owned by the Kenya Ports Authority and has also undertaken many other port-related projects.

Although Kipsang reckons that the projects that Symbion Mombasa has been involved in are all remarkable in their own rights, the refurbishing of Whitesands and Pride Inn hotels were quite outstanding for the firm. “We are proud of all these projects. Each of them celebrates different strengths that we have within the Symbion brand,” he notes. He adds the firm has undertaken modest jobs to huge projects worth as much as KSh4 billion.

For Symbion Mombasa, the underlying factor in a majority of the projects has been the need to blend modern and tradition exquisitely. This emanated from the fact that the East African coast has always had distinct architecture. “It is true that the East African coast has a very rich architectural heritage. This is because of the great mix of cultures and the unique climate,” avers Kipsang. He adds that Symbion has been very keen in the preservation of the coastal heritage. This it does by consistently and intentionally

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**Naurus Beach Apartments**

utilizing all the elements on projects. “We borrow heavily from this rich heritage to create architecture that is environmentally sound,” he explains, adding that even where modern architecture is desirable, the firm ensures that it borrows from motifs and design elements that help set these modern buildings in context with the locality.

Apart from preserving the rich coastal heritage, Symbion has also been deliberate in conserving the ecosystem. While environmentalists and conservationists have raised concerns that new projects are destroying the region’s ecosystem, Symbion has taken the middle ground in ensuring that while environmental conservation is critical, solutions can be found to ensure that projects are not stopped.

The fact that Symbion is well established in the coastal region means the firm is always the first call for clients. In effect, Symbion is well placed to take advantage of upcoming opportunities in the region. Some of these opportunities include the opening up of Lamu as a second port city, something that allows for acceleration of growth and demand of building infrastructure in the

entire strip between Lamu and Mombasa. The firm also sees opportunities in Kilifi and specifically Vipingo which is an industrial and tourism destination. Moreover, the blue economy promises the greatest and most untapped opportunities for growth of both the country’s economy and the building sector.

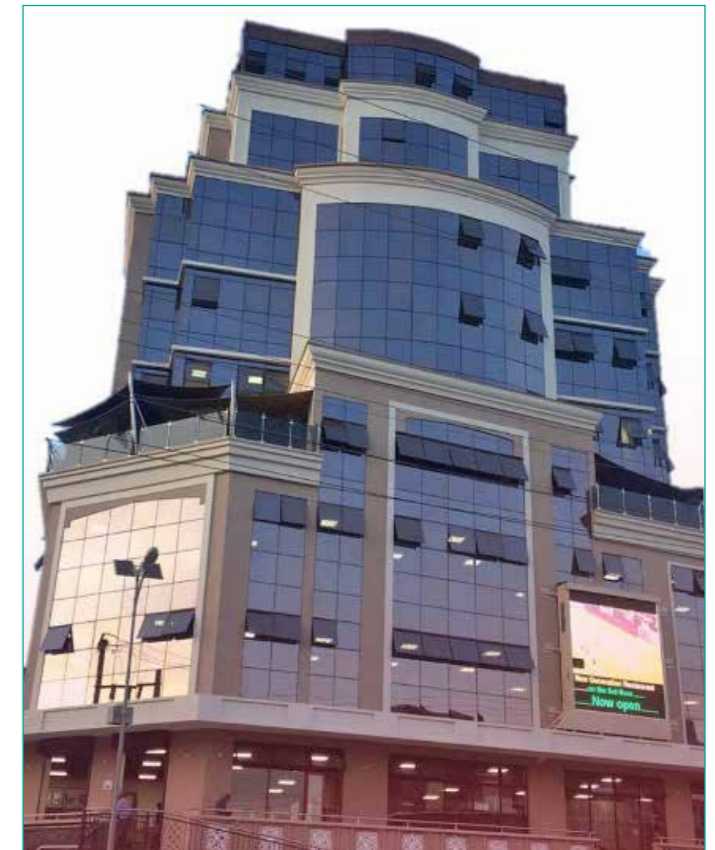
“The standard gauge railway, which some are currently viewing as a reason for the deterioration of the economy of Mombasa, sits with a great opportunity if the country can manage to generate return cargo that will replenish the clearing and forwarding as well as port related industry”, reckons Titus. He adds that the special economic zones of Dongo Kundu and the others already earmarked in the 2030 economic blueprint have the potential to uplift the coastal economy.

Despite achieving phenomenal success, Symbion’s operations in Mombasa have not been without challenges. Top on this has been sourcing and obtaining adequate skill sets to operate successfully and on a long-term basis. “Most of the talented, skilled staff are from up-country and who may not have a long-term intention of being at

the coast,” says Kipsang. The other challenges are related to the economy which continues to remain vulnerable to external factors like security, Covid-19 related instabilities and tourism related vagaries.

Challenges notwithstanding, Symbion is determined to continue cementing its leadership in the architectural sector at the coast. According to Titus, the firm is determined to become an unquestionable authority in design innovations and creative thinking making significant contributions to the economy of the region.

“Each of our projects celebrates different strengths that we have within the Symbion brand”



**New Generation Plaza, Voi**

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**COMMERCIAL BUILDING - VOI**



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## EDENVILLE: A GATED COMMUNITY DESIGNED FOR THE DISCERNING

The homes at Edenville have witnessed significant capital appreciation both during construction and post completion.



Gated communities have gained preference among middle and high income market segments. They not only provide security and safety to the residents but also tend to have much higher standards of living with maintained roads, good lighting, and organized common services such as solid waste management. They also have minimal traffic as the vehicles using estate roads are mainly those of residents and their visitors. There is also a sense of community.

Edenville is a plush, gated community development, situated in the midst of coffee plantations off Kiambu Road. It is a short drive from Windsor Golf and Country Club and two of Nairobi's biggest malls- Two Rivers and Village Market. It is also close to the popular Karura Forest. New developments, road infrastructure, retail and commercial developments have all served to make this location an ideal residence within the Nairobi metropolitan zone. Edenville is a fifteen minute drive from Muthaiga roundabout with easy access to the Runda and Gigiri suburbs as well as Thika Road and the Northern bypass.

Developed by Paramount Chief Estate Limited, the development offers a beautiful, leafy outlook for its residents. The semi-detached maisonettes come with a garden and two parking spaces. Carefully thought-out landscaping for each home not only adds to the picturesque backdrop, but also creates a strong sense of privacy.

The homes at Edenville have witnessed significant capital appreciation both during construction and post completion.

The second phase of Edenville comprising of 404 maisonettes came after the highly successful Phase I that consisted of 345 villas. Set on a total of 42 acres, Edenville Phase Two is designed to appeal to both investors and home buyers with highly competitive pricing in an area

## PROJECTS

with strong growth potential. Edenville homes offer 3, 4 and 5 bedroom accommodation for on individual plots, with sizeable gardens that are perfect for both young executives and families.

### External and Common Area Finishes

<i>Main Boundary:</i>	2.1m high stone walling with electric fencing
<i>Court boundary:</i>	1.8m high chain link fence with planting
<i>House boundary:</i>	1.2m high chain link fence with planting:
<i>Entrance:</i>	Gates Double entry and single exit steel gates with double height viewing point
<i>Driveways:</i>	Interlocking concrete paving blocks with intermittent landscape points
<i>Maisonette finishes:</i>	Roof Zinc-Aluminium sheeting on timber structure
<i>Walls:</i>	Stone-effect cladding alternated with plaster & paint
<i>Windows:</i>	Small pane steel casement
<i>Floor:</i>	Ceramic tiles in living and wet areas
<i>Doors:</i>	Solid hardwood main door and mahogany flush internal doors
<i>Staircase:</i>	Hardwood timber treads and risers with steel balustrades
<i>Wardrobes:</i>	Veneered MDF Cabinetry
<i>Kitchens:</i>	Veneered MDF Cabinets with granite worktops
<i>Bathrooms:</i>	Full height wall tiling and white quality sanitary ware
<i>Curtain rods:</i>	Wrought iron with decorative ends
<i>Utilities:</i>	Solar hot water heating

Effective planning and the use of space are key components that have been factored into the design of these homes. The development has a secure water and power supply, including onsite solar power heating and boreholes. Solar power and reverse osmosis machine in the kitchen to provide drinking water from the tap are key attractions.

The developer has partnered with leading banks KCB, NCBA,

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ABSA, STANBIC and STANDARD CHARTERED for mortgage financing. Three bedroom houses start at Kes 20.295m, 4 bedroom start at Kes 21.945m while 5 bedroom units start at Kes 27. 445m.

Construction began in October 2015. Edenville Phase II is now complete and ready for occupation with some residents already moving in.

### Challenges

According to the developer, several challenges came in the way of executing the project. The first was depreciation of local currency during the project life. However, the construction contract was prepared to cushion the company from various financial shocks such as the price of imported material.

The construction contract did not cover all project costs as a few items could not be quantified at project commencement. To address this, a provision was made for unforeseen costs through the setting aside of contingency funds.

Another challenge was the economic slowdown due to factors such as a general election which has previously caused fear in the past due to political unrest. But the development location was sold as a safe region that was open to everyone.

Lastly, the economic slowdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic threatened the uptake of units. To counter this, the sales team is focusing on the rise in demand for detached/semi-detached housing which has peaked because of the pandemic.

### Lessons Learnt

- The value of a good brand name cannot be underestimated; it produces repeat sales through word of mouth.
- Most purchasers are reasonable, therefore excellent customer service is of importance. When service is great it moves the sale transaction further and more swiftly at every stage.
- Building strong relationships whether with service providers, employees, purchasers, financial institutions, sales agents, etc. is critical as it strongly contributes to the overall cohesion of the project.



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# VERIFIED REAL ESTATE LIMITED

## NEW DEVELOPER TAKING THE MARKET BY STORM

Four-year old developer has chosen to do things differently - with surprising success, writes JOHN NJIRAINI.

**T**he Kenyan real estate sector is grappling with a major confidence crisis. The sector, which had hitherto witnessed unprecedented growth as Kenyans pursued dreams of owning homes, is now struggling, largely because the level of trust for developers is at its lowest. In fact, a significant number of Kenyans who trusted off plan developers with their hard earned money in the hope of owning a home one day are today a troubled lot. Worse still are many others who opted to invest their savings with real estate companies that promised impressive interests of up to 18 per cent.

But in the midst of the disappointments, depression and heartbreaks that many Kenyans are enduring in the hands of developers, one firm is flourishing. Verified Real Estate Limited, a relatively young company, has emerged as the face of hope amidst despair. While a few firms



**Amalia Gardens was Verified Real Estate's first project.**

are killing trust, Verified Real Estate is building trust. While others are blaming Covid-19 pandemic for stalled projects, Verified Real Estate is busy implementing projects. And while others are contemplating folding up, the company is exploring new opportunities.

“Right now there’s a lot of negativity in real estate because people are losing money,” says George Mwangi, Verified Real Estate Founder and Chief Executive Officer. He adds that by being able to build trust, the firm has managed to implement four projects during one of the hardest periods characterized by Covid-19 ravages not only on the real estate sector but on the economy at large. “This has been due to sheer hard work, prayers and strategy,” he notes, adding that while Covid-19 hit people with underlying conditions extremely hard, the same was the case with real estate firms. “Those companies with underlying conditions are the ones blaming Covid-19 for failure to deliver on their promises.”

For Verified Real Estate, the winning card has been building trust. To achieve this, the firm has opted for

the less travelled path. In the Kenyan real estate sector, a majority of firms have chosen two routes. One is the off-plan development route in which developers acquire land, build a show house and entice dream home owners to buy into the project. The idea is to raise funds before implementing the project, a scenario that has resulted in stalled projects and disappointed customers. The second is building complete projects and going out to look for people to buy. This is a scenario that has resulted in developers holding projects that cannot attract buyers.

Verified Real Estate, which is barely five years old having been established in 2017, opted to be different. The firm has adopted an entirely new concept of mid-plan development. According to Mwangi, the whole idea of mid-plan development is giving customers the benefits of off-plan without losing trust. For this to happen, the firm comes up with projects and seeks to sell them with a payment plan that ensures it can easily implement the project and deliver on the basis of having backup financing. In essence, projects cannot stop because clients have not completed their payments. **CONT. PG 28**

## CEO PROFILE: GEORGE MWANGI

**G**eorge Mwangi has the gift of the gab. He’s also ambitious, aggressive and relentless. He believes in his business acumen. For the 33-year old Verified Real Estate Limited Founder and Chief Executive Officer, pursuing his passion has been more fulfilling than conforming to what is expected of him.

This is evident. Gee, as he’s popularly known by friends, studied for a Bachelor of Commerce degree specializing in finance at the University of Nairobi. Yet, he has no passion for finance and accounting. Even after landing his first accounting job, he did not last even for a month. This is because his love is sales and outdoors.

The decision to pursue his passion has seen George work for various companies including Multichoice selling decoders and major developers as a sales manager. Notably, in most of the companies that he worked at, George had a tendency of not lasting for even a year mostly because he felt his ambitions were not in line with the aspirations of the companies.

“I want to make money, be rich,” he says unapologetically. For him, sitting in an office taking orders will not make him rich. Indeed pursuit of his ambitions made him to be quite relentless until he met his partner with whom they are building a strong brand of real estate developments under the name Amalia.

When George got a call from someone he did not know in 2017, his world took a turn



in a direction that he had desired. The call came soon after he had established Verified Real Estate and it was from a renowned businessman and construction mogul who was struggling to sell housing units in a project he had developed in Ngong. Being a savvy salesman, George was able to sell the units.

The two did not go their separate ways. Instead, they formed a strong partnership and embarked on real estate developments riding on each other’s strengths. “Old money needs new talent,” observes George, adding that there is a lot of old money lacking good expertise to make it more money. “The only way for you to become a millionaire is by making the current millionaire a billionaire,” he avers.

With the complementary partnership, the two were able to deliver the first project, Amalia Gardens, which was hugely successful and set them on a road to more projects. Now on their fourth project, Amalia Paradise, George and his partner are determined to continue changing the narrative in the Kenyan real estate sector.



**Amalia Greens, Verified Real Estate's second project. The 18 units sold out in less than 12 months.**

#### FROM PG 26

"Our concept is mid-plan developing because we wanted to be trusted," he states. He adds that the mid-plan idea is designed to eliminate the challenges of off plan developing while retaining the benefits. With back up financing there are no challenges of delay in construction. Besides, the firm is also able to take a few mortgages unlike off plan developers.

Adopting a unique strategy has brought about phenomenal success for Verified Real Estate at a time when many developers are struggling. The firm, which works in partnership with a construction company, has for the short duration been implementing gated community projects in Ruiru sub-county, Kiambu County under the brand name of Amalia. Cheekily, Mwangi came up with the Amalia brand after searching for Spanish women's names on the internet.

Of importance to note, before starting to implement projects, Verified Real Estate undertook extensive research and feasibility studies on the wider Ruiru area because it wanted to undertake demand-driven developments. The

research proved that Ruiru had become one of the most sought areas having opened up because of the by-passes. In fact people were walking away from areas like Kileleshwa, Kilimani and Lavington where developers have concentrated on two-bedroom apartments, opting for stand-alone houses in Ruiru. "Instead of buying an apartment in Kileleshwa, people are seeing sense in a stand-alone house in Ruiru at the same price," avers Mwangi. He adds that apart from being a few kilometers from the Nairobi central business district, major developments in Ruiru like Tatu City have propelled the profile of the sub-county significantly.

Armed with a clear strategy and ideal vision, Verified Real Estate was certain Ruiru was the place to start its journey of conquering the real estate sector. Its first project, Amalia Gardens, involved 18 four bedroom master ensuite maisonettes with servant quarters. Being a new firm doing its first project, Verified Real Estate had to start with a show house. The houses, which were selling at KSh12.5 million, were all bought in less than 12 months and the firm went on to deliver the project as promised.



**Amalia Paradise is the developer's latest and largest project taking shape near Tatu City.**

The demand for Amalia Gardens was overwhelming and many clients missed out. To a large extent, this was a blessing in disguise because the moment Verified Real Estate launched its next project, Amalia Greens, the 16 houses were bought quickly like hot cake. "We did not have to do any advertising because the demand was

already there," notes Mwangi. Amalia Prestige, which involves 26 houses, was the third project by the developer. Interestingly, the firm embarked on the project around the same time Kenya was reporting its first case of Covid-19 in March 2020. Instead of getting into a panic mood, or blaming the pandemic in order to fail to keep its promise,

**Adopting a unique strategy has brought about phenomenal success for Verified Real Estate at a time when many developers are struggling.**



**George Mwangi speaks to our writer at Amalia Paradise site offices.**



the firm ensured that amidst the fears, implementation of Amalia Prestige went on. Luckily for the firm, customers who had bought the houses did not stop servicing their payments. For those that experienced difficulties, the firm was able to restructure and accommodate longer payment periods. This was possible because of having backup financing that ensured project implementation did not stall.

With Amalia Prestige nearly delivered, a few months ago the firm embarked on Amalia Paradise. This is an exquisite 63-house project that gives new meaning to the gated community concept. The key features of the project include contemporary flat roof design with well-designed functional spaces and detached ensuite servant quarters, clubhouse, fully fitted gym, dedicated kids play area and tennis court. Others are convenience store, private gardens, solar water heaters, spacious double volume lounge, family room and spacious American open plan kitchen with an island.

Verified Real Estate has already managed to sell most of the units and intends to keep its promise and trust by delivering the project on time. For the firm, getting buyers for the units not only at Amalia Paradise but even in the other projects has been the easy part owing to its intriguing architectural designs, elegant finishes, great workmanship, well-thought functional spaces and obvious value for money.

The desire to ensure customers get value for money is critical. In fact, Verified has made it a policy to directly import products particularly for finishes and interiors instead of buying expensively from local suppliers in order to pass on the benefits to customers. In Amalia Paradise, the units are selling at KSh16.5 million each. "We import our finishing products to cut down on building costs and pass the benefits to customers," explains Mwangi.

Despite achieving significant success in a relatively short period, Verified Real Estate is extremely careful when it comes to launching new projects and making decisions on the number of units for each project. Unlike other developers, the firm has a formula that informs the next project and whose common denominator is the financing factor. "For us we avoid biting more than we can swallow unlike most developers whose strategy is bite as much as you can, chew as fast as you can and hope you don't choke," says Mwangi.

Going forward, Verified Real Estate intends to maintain its clear focus on demand-driven development. For the firm, the end goal is always about serving customers as opposed to doing big projects. "We will continue to do projects based on demand. Unless there are people to serve, we won't do development," states Mwangi. He adds that focus for his company is not on the number of units but on the customers the firm is able to serve. "We want to serve more people in the right way by understanding their needs," he concludes.

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# TITUS KIPSANG: COMBINING MODESTY WITH GREAT ACCOMPLISHMENT

## Meet Symbion Consulting Group Chairman, Devout Christian and “Telephone Farmer”

The world over, a majority of the most successful companies have one thing in common — the ability to identify top talent and nurture it. In Kenya, the Symbion Consulting Group (SCG), is the epitome of talent identification and nurturing. Titus Kipsang, SCG Group Chairman, knows this too well. This is because he is a product of the firm’s ability to identify, bring on board, train and nurture rare talent. “I started working for Symbion while still in university,” he says.

For Titus, who grew up in the remote Bartabwa village in Baringo County and went to Bartabwa Primary School in the 1980s, his remarkable journey in the architectural field started when he joined Moi High School Kabarak for his secondary education. This was during the period when the school was going through an infrastructure transformation. Kipsang saw all manner of buildings being built from the entire school tuition and administration block to state-of-the-art laboratories and auditoriums.

“We were daily interacting with buildings coming up, including the beautiful Kabarak Chapel. It was perhaps this building that aroused the greatest interest in me to pursue architecture,” he reminisces. By the time he was completing form four, Titus was already certain he wanted to pursue architecture as a profession, a dream that came true when he joined the University of Nairobi College of Architecture and Engineering in 1991 to pursue a degree in Bachelor of Architecture. He graduated in 1998.

Notably, Kipsang was in university at a very turbulent time. The country was going through political upheavals

and the University of Nairobi was literally a battleground. Numerous strikes meant prolonged durations out of university. “It was a long stay at the university,” he states. Luckily for him, a visit by Symbion partner Jon Cavanagh to the College of Architecture to mentor students would mark the beginning of an exciting journey with one of the most successful architectural practices in Kenya. During the event, Cavanagh’s eye for top talent recognized

Kipsang and Pius Muli, another partner at Symbion and they were both given an opportunity to work at the firm while pursuing their education. It was thus natural that the two would join Symbion upon graduation.

“My first job was with Symbion which I got the week after completing my studies. I never got to tarmac like most of my college mates,” avers Kipsang, who is married to

Christine Kipsang, a lawyer practicing in Mombasa. The couple has two children aged 23 and 17.

Symbion gave Kipsang the platform to prove his abilities. But more importantly, it was a practice that was well grounded in rewarding hard work. It was therefore not surprising when Titus rose through the ranks to become partner and was tasked with setting up the Mombasa unit



before eventually rising to become the group chairman.

For over two decades, Kipsang who is a devoted Christian, has been privileged to handle many different projects of various varying magnitudes. While they range from master planning to huge developments, the Nyali Baptist Church development project remains the one with the most unique composition. From the project, Kipsang drew serious life lessons beyond architecture. This is based on the fact that he is a deacon at the church where he has been spending considerable time doing ministry work.

A man who loves to spend time with his family and is not disappointed that none of his children has any interest in architecture, Kipsang is proud to have witnessed the evolution of architecture from the drawing board to computers to full digitization. Besides, digital monitoring of projects on site has also grown with drone surveys being a common phenomenon. Moreover, digitally printed buildings are beginning to make their presence in the construction world.

Though these changes are a sign of growth of the profession, the level of university training seems to be deteriorating going by the caliber of graduates coming out of these institutions. It is for this reason that Symbion has an elaborate two-year training program for its crop of new architects. "We take them through robust training because we want them to meet our standards," explains Kipsang. This, in fact, is a passion that he has extended beyond the office. With several of his relatives studying architecture and at least six children of his close friends and neighbours in Nyali currently pursuing one degree or another in architecture, Kipsang is actively involved in mentoring the young generation.

Away from the office and the architecture world, Kipsang is a dairy and tea farmer. While architecture has given his professional satisfaction, farming is the 'soft' hobby that enables him to maintain connection with his traditional roots. "In our community we love cows and farming," he says, adding that despite his being 'telephone' farming, it is something that is very close to his heart and one that he will take fulltime the day he walks away from architectural practice.



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## HUMAN INDUCED VIBRATION AND WHAT IT MEANS FOR STRUCTURAL ENGINEERS

Every form of vibration can have a serious impact both on designs with thin slabs and wide columns, and designs with short spans

**W**hen we think about human-induced vibrations or vibrations caused by human footfall, our minds will probably jump to an image of Millennium Bridge-style swaying or even a building collapsing. However, the damage that is caused by such vibrations is often less visible than you might think, and more likely to result in disruption than cause a building to topple. Even if the consequences aren't too dramatic, it is still important that engineers consider human vibrations in the design process to ensure that structures are safe and comfortable to use.

### Impulse vs Resonance

Human vibrations can affect structures in multiple ways. These include resonant, and impulse or transient response. Put simply, resonance occurs when Object A vibrates at the same natural frequency as Object B.

Resonance is created when one object (object A) vibrates at the same frequency as another (object B). Object B resonates with this and begins to vibrate too. Think singing to break a wine glass! Although the person singing isn't touching the glass, the vibrations of their voice are resonating with the glass's natural frequency, causing this vibration to get stronger and stronger and eventually, break the glass. In the case of a structure, resonance occurs when the pedestrian's feet land in time with the vibration. In some cases, such as when a structure is light or stiff, natural frequencies can be too high for resonance to occur. Here the discomfort is caused by the initial "bounce" of the structure caused by the footstep and is a concern on

light or stiff structures. Because of this, it is important that engineers design structures in such a way that the vibration effects will be reduced.

### What can human-induced vibration do?

Vibrations induced by humans can impact structures and their users in several ways. These include:

- Interfering with sensitive equipment. Depending on the building's purpose, what it houses can be affected by the vibrations of people using the building. Universities and laboratories, for example, may have sensitive equipment whose accuracy and performance could be damaged by vibrations. Even in ordinary offices, the footfall vibration can wobble computer screens, upsetting the workers.
- Swaying bridges. One of the most famous examples of human-induced resonance impacting a structure occurred with the Millennium Bridge. As people walked across the bridge, the footsteps caused the bridge to sway, and everybody had to walk in time with the sway because it was difficult not to. Thankfully, this feedback can only occur with horizontal vibrations so building floors are safe from it, but footbridges need careful checking to prevent it.
- Human discomfort. According to research, vibrations in buildings and structures can cause depression and even motion sickness in inhabitants. Tall buildings sway in the wind and footsteps can be felt, even



**Engineers at a construction site: it is important that engineers design structures in such a way that the vibration effects will be reduced.**

subconsciously by the occupants. It has been argued that modern efficient designs featuring thinner floor slabs and wider spacing in column design mean that these new builds are not as effective at dampening vibrations as older buildings are.

jumping in time to music or in response to a goal in a stadium are also dynamic loads that might damage an under-designed structure.

- Jeopardising structural integrity. The build-up of constant vibrations on a structure can, eventually, lead to structural integrity being compromised. A worst-case scenario would be the complete collapse of the structure and is the reason some bridges insist that marching troops break step before crossing. Crowds

**What can be done?**

Every form of vibration can have a serious impact both on designs with thin slabs and wide columns, and designs with short spans (due to their low mass). Using sophisticated structural analysis software is an effective method for engineers to test for and mitigate footfall and other vibrations at the design stage.

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