

Building Bridges in Africa

U.S. companies help empower the continent with infrastructure and training



BY BARBARA BILLITZER

In September, Acrow Bridge, a leading international bridge engineering and supply company, was invited by United States Trade Representative Michael Froman to join a high-powered group of U.S. companies doing business in Africa. The business roundtable met during the 12th Annual African Growth and Opportunity Act Forum in Ethiopia to focus on how the U.S. government can further facilitate successful business relations between the U.S. and Africa.

At the Forum, Ambassador Froman singled out Acrow as a successful example of America's trade and investment relationship with Africa. Through its Comprehensive Bridge Development Program, Acrow has worked on a number of large infrastructure development projects in Africa, including the recent supply of more than 150 bridges to the Government of Angola and 100 bridges to the Department of Feeder Roads in Ghana. Under the program, Acrow also provides specialized training for local engineers, technicians and contractors in bridge infrastructure.

"We are honored to have been a part of this important event," said Paul Sullivan, Acrow's Director of International Business

Development. "At Acrow, doing business in Africa is much more than supplying bridges to countries that need them. It's about helping create a strong infrastructure essential to sustaining long-term growth. And it's about helping people and their communities gain vital access to educational, health and economic resources that allow them to thrive and prosper."

DEMAND FOR RIGHT OF WAY PROFESSIONALS

Muzi Shange, IRWA's Chapter 83 President in South Africa, took note of Acrow's participation, commenting that, "Right of way professionals need to rise up and respond to the call for their expertise. There is a realization from all parts of the world, especially in big powerhouse companies like Acrow, that Africa presents exceptional growth opportunities on the one hand, and some stubborn challenges on the other."

One of Africa's top developmental challenges continues to be the shortage of physical infrastructure. Muzi notes that the world is eager to do business with Africa, but finds it difficult to access African markets, due to poor infrastructure. In most African countries, particularly the

lower-income ones, infrastructure has served as a major constraint on doing business.

The cost of addressing Africa's infrastructure needs is estimated at around \$93 billion a year, according to the World Bank. While governments and multinational companies continue to cement the future of Africa through trade and infrastructure investments, Muzi believes that the role of IRWA and the right of way companies and individuals involved in the projects can never be exaggerated. IRWA members can make a significant contribution in creating Africa's infrastructure, especially in the areas of education and training, which will empower local communities. Experienced, knowledgeable and ethical rights of way professionals are urgently required.

"It is validating for us as IRWA members to see that we are on the right path, geared up and aligned with global thinking and Africa's development agenda," said Muzi. "These international development initiatives must be applauded and fully supported in order to ensure that the trade and investment efforts are not just a myth, but are a reality that empowers the Africa continent." 🌍