

**Short biography:** Songo Didiza is a founder and managing partner at Green Building Design Group, a leading Tier 1 Energy Services Company (EsCO) based in South Africa. Songo is a sustainability and ESG expert.

As a thought leader she leads project teams focused on advancing sustainability transitions within infrastructure projects. Songo has over 14 years' experience working in the fields of clean energy, green buildings and ESG advisory.

She has been voted Sub-Saharan Africa's Energy Innovator of the Year by the Association of Energy Engineers (AEE) in 2019. In 2023 she was awarded Proptech winner by Growthpoint properties for her ESG technology innovation.

She currently serves as a SA Real Estate Investment Trust's Association Advisory Member developing an ESG Disclosure framework for the real estate environment in Africa. She chairs the ESG Track of the Institute of People Management (IPM). Key speaking invitations include EuroFM, Africa FM, SAFMA and Green Building convention in 2024.

### **Advancing ESG within the University FM environment**

The buildings and construction sector are by far the largest emitter of greenhouse gases, accounting for a staggering 37% of global emissions. The biggest contributor to a university's carbon footprint, across all campuses, is the burning of fossil fuels.

Without immediate decarbonisation efforts, this expansion will lead to a sharp rise in CO2 emissions.

In South Africa, a water-scarce country, decarbonisation efforts must go hand-in-hand with effective water stewardship. As universities seek to balance environmental sustainability with operational efficiency, there is a growing need to integrate water management into their broader ESG frameworks. This ensures that universities not only reduce their carbon footprint but also address critical water-related challenges—protecting and conserving a vital natural resource.

As sustainability becomes a priority, university facilities management teams are increasingly expected to address Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) concerns. In fact, 82% of facilities management stakeholders now consider ESG factors when making decisions about investments and operational strategies (PwC, 2022). These growing investors' concerns have led companies to explore technology solutions to implement and manage their ESG data, more certainly the "E" part of the ESG reporting process, collectively called Proptech technology ("Proptech").

To meet growing demands from institutional stakeholders, facilities teams are adopting PropTech solutions, which offer advanced tools for monitoring and managing ESG data—particularly the environmental (E) aspect of ESG reporting.

Within the academic real estate environment, smart technologies such as smart meters, IoT devices, and AI-driven tools are being deployed to monitor resource (energy, water and waste) consumption and resource management in real time. These technologies enable facilities managers to automate manual processes, enhance data analytics, and improve communication with university leadership and external stakeholders. In doing so, universities can achieve more sustainable building operations, lower costs, and provide transparency in ESG performance.

For instance, smart metering devices eliminate the need for manual energy readings, providing real-time data on energy usage and enabling more efficient decision-making. These systems allow university facilities teams to focus on day-to-day operational activities while optimizing resource consumption to align with broader sustainability goals. PropTech also plays a pivotal role in integrating ESG metrics into an organisation's reporting framework, ensuring that universities are equipped to demonstrate their commitment to sustainability and governance objectives.

By leveraging these technologies, universities can foster a more sustainable and resource-efficient campus, contributing to the global effort to reduce the environmental impact of real estate development and operations.