

BUILDING HOLISTIC ENVIRONMENTS TO DRIVE QUALITY, HEALTH, AND SAFETY



With a mandate to achieve world-class Quality, Health, Safety, and Environmental standards at some of Africa's most remote industrial and mining sites, ATS's Head of QHSE, Gift Mutohere talks about how he and his teams overcome numerous logistical and practical challenges to realise their mantra: **Safety is Our Culture.**

As a specialist in facilities management for many of Africa's most far flung and hard to reach industrial and mining sites, ATS has developed a sustainable approach to realising Quality Health, Safety and Environment (QHSE) as more than just a compliance requirement, but a lived reality that ensures the safety of ATS staff, its clients, their employees as well as the communities in which they work.

This approach is what allowed ATS to reach a significant group milestone in 2021 of over 500 continuous working days, and at least 30 million man hours (about 1.8 million hours a month) without a serious injury across more than 80 high-risk sites in Africa.

"This is a substantial way of rating safety performance and we are extremely proud of this record. It just goes to show our employees' dedication to a highly developed safety culture," says Gift Mutohere, Head of QHSE, ATS.

Gift, however, is quick to point out that health and safety is a more than a procedural exercise when it comes to operating in hazardous environments. This is particularly so in areas where the nearest town or medical facility can be hundreds of kilometres away, which not only has major implications for precious human lives, but a QHSE incident can have devastating financial and downtime implications for a client.

"Having a good safety record for more than 20 years shows that ATS has the edge when it comes to tailoring our health and safety plans for catering and facilities management in the mining and oil and gas sectors," he says.

By partnering with clients, ATS looks at the overall project objectives and targets to understand how a site specific strategy can be developed to realise these goals. This could be anything from achieving ISO certification through to increasing their Lost Time Injury (LTI) free hours. ATS takes a broad-ranging preventative approach to potential risks before developing a site-specific QHSE system that considers ATS's own targets while cutting across all facets of the operation. The idea is to work in tandem with the client so that QHSE becomes a lived reality for all members on the operation.

"It's about more than compliance. The truth is that in some of the countries in which we work, legislation and follow through around QHSE is weak. So it's important that we hold ourselves accountable by implementing best practices according to the highest international standards."



GIFT MUTONHERE
ATS, Head of QHSE

For ATS the crown jewel and ultimate goal at group and individual site level is to achieve certification on applicable ISO standards such as ISO 22000:2018 (Food Safety Management Systems), ISO 9001:2015 (Quality Management Systems), ISO 45001:2018 (Occupational Health and Safety Management Systems) and ISO 14001:2015 (Environmental Management Systems).

Achieving this level of quality assurance is not without significant challenges and for Gift and his teams it means adopting an agile approach, can-do attitude, and long-term view of QHSE. As a dynamic business, with activities ranging from catering to soft and hard maintenance work as well as construction and facility development, overcoming resourcing issues for quality raw materials, produce, products, parts not to mention employing and training a professional team in skills-scarce areas, are all part of the job.

For starters, it's essential to develop a strong skills base by finding individuals to train and develop into excellent QHSE resources in remote areas. Then, it becomes a logistical challenge of getting items like specialised kitchen equipment or chlorine and sanitation chemicals to site, often in countries where these items are simply unavailable.

"Even things like acquiring high-quality produce and protein can be a challenge," says Mutonhere. "We have to consider the environment in which produce is farmed, processed, packaged and transported, so that we don't risk people getting food borne illnesses such as Typhoid, Hepatitis A and Cholera, which are prevalent throughout Africa. We have to audit local suppliers and work with internal community liaison personnel to develop safe local supply chains.

"Our clients have a high level of trust in ATS to bring global standards to very remote areas. The expectation is to deliver the world-class standards one would expect from a hotel in say Sydney, Australia to a mine site in rural Burkino Faso," says Gift.

ATS has invested a lot into making sure this happens and follows a philosophy of "leaving a legacy" in the communities it works in. On an environmental level this means minimising waste, recycling and, where possible, using cleaning chemicals and products that aren't detrimental to the environment.

It also means educating the local communities on best practices for the planet as well as on health and safety at home.

"We run a lot of community programmes to educate people on things like the importance of water saving to hand washing and health and safety campaigns around prevalent diseases such as Malaria, TB and Cholera. We also run beach and community clean ups and tree planting initiatives. Planting fruit trees in communities has been a focus for ATS in 2022. So far we've planted hundreds of trees in Tanzania, Zambia, Ghana, the DRC, Cote d'Ivoire and Senegal .

"To be in this business you have to be passionate about people," says Gift. "QHSE is about so much more than checking off a compliance checklist, it's about building environments where people can thrive."