

SARENS thriving in a changing industry

SARENS, a family-owned business founded in 1955 and headquartered in Belgium, has undergone a significant transformation in recent years that has allowed it to decentralise its way of working, expand geographically, and provide heavy lifting and engineered transport services to a variety of industries, including offshore and onshore wind, civil, oil and gas, power generation, and infrastructure.

In late 2020, in response to challenges amid the Covid-19 pandemic, SARENS in Southern Africa implemented a new business model called the “depot model”.

Regional director for Southern Africa, **Tim Biesemans**, explains that this saw the company establish depots in South Africa’s Sasolburg, Witbank, Brits and Steelpoort areas, where it services the oil and gas, mining, and power industries. He also acknowledges that a change was needed as the company had been a top-heavy organisation, which is “not a sustainable business model in today’s competitive market”.

“We have been operating in a challenging market environment for some time now, and it became clear that we needed to take decisive action to ensure the long-term viability of our business,” Biesemans notes, adding that the reorganisation plan is designed to strengthen its core business, enhance its operational efficiency, and position SARENS for sustained growth in the years ahead.

The 2020 pandemic played a significant role in changing how businesses operate and SARENS quickly adapted to the working-from-home model, while finding additional ways to reduce overheads and mobilisation costs. The project-driven company also focused on fostering faster response times and improving communication with clients, resulting in more efficient operations.

In phase two of its strategy, SARENS branched out to other African countries, namely Mozambique, Zambia, Tanzania and Angola, deploying the same depot model.

The expansion allowed the company to strategically align with peers and other companies, specifically already-established companies that complement SARENS’ scope of work.

As part of this endeavor, SARENS was able

to sign a memorandum of understanding with logistics, lifting and transport company Raphael Logistics, in Tanzania, to meet local and international clients’ needs for projects and rentals.

“The partnership is the next step in supplying a one-stop-shop solution to our clients in Eastern and Southern Africa,” Biesemans notes.

In mid-2022, SARENS expanded its presence within South Africa by opening a branch in Cape Town, which specialises in renewables, transport and special projects. Initially started as a transport department, the Cape Town depot quickly evolved into a technical solutions depot, selling to clients in South Africa and beyond. In just eight months since opening, the depot has already secured three major projects, namely in Angola, Tanzania and South Africa, expanding its reach and cementing SARENS’ position as a leader in the region.

However, SARENS struggled to find the right local people when expanding north of the border.

“By finding the right local people, in the right place, and adding South African expatriate personnel to hand over knowledge, procedures and experience, it allowed us to diversify our markets and revenue streams, and reach out farther and wider geographically,” Biesemans explains.

In this regard, SARENS regional human resources manager **Deon van der Pas** notes that the company places a strong emphasis on employee development and advancement.

“We provide training and development opportunities to employees, and we focus on promoting from within. Employees are the backbone of a company’s success, and we invest in their development to ensure continued success for all parties in the future,” he says.

Because of this, the company has more control over uncertain factors such as potential jobs not being realised or being canceled at the last minute.

“We use our equipment and people towards different sectors and clients daily, which allows for a backup plan, if plan A doesn’t work out,” Biesemans notes.

Fleet and Project Solutions

One of the company’s most significant

strengths is its extensive fleet of cranes and transport equipment. SARENS has over 1 600 cranes and over 3 000 transport units, making it one of the largest crane rental companies in the world. Its equipment is also constantly updated and maintained to ensure the highest level of safety and reliability.

A significant effort to replace its fleet with greener machines is currently made by the company to adhere to clients’ demands for cleaner solutions, Biesemans notes.

“Engineered transport involves the transportation of large and heavy objects, often requiring specialised equipment and planning. SARENS’ transport services include the transportation of wind turbines, prefabricated modules, and other large structures,” says Operations Manager **Hans De Langhe**.

However, SARENS has also faced challenges in its various departments. The company’s logistics and operations department, for example, struggled to manage the complex logistics involved in transporting heavy and oversized equipment.

One of the biggest challenges the company experienced in 2022, was transport delays when transporting equipment from South Africa to international destinations.

De Langhe says the company’s investment in innovative solutions and new technologies and equipment allowed it to “streamline its processes and improve efficiencies, ultimately benefiting clients” and mitigating or outright avoiding delays.

Van der Pas adds that cultural and language differences also play a key role when expanding internationally, and that these “initial steps are often some of the most difficult”.

Other challenges, Biesemans and Van der Pas highlight, include understanding the legal and tax conditions in every country, as well as setting up a local entity to assist with the importation of equipment.

“Each country has different rules, taxation, permits, clearing and the like. Trying to work with a transporter or broker who has extensive knowledge of this has helped us avoid delays and standing time at the border,” De Langhe notes.

Another challenge, Biesemans adds, was realising that patience was key to success.

“In all markets, there are already active service providers. For us to convince the client and effectively give ‘the new kid on the block’ a chance is not an easy matter, and can take us days, weeks, months, or even years in some cases. It is a lot of hard work, and dedication is key to staying on top of your game and achieving the results you want.”

SARENS provides preliminary engineering solutions for heavy lifting, transport, and



Left to right:

Liande Pienaar – SHEQ Manager

Jacques Giezen – Fleet Manager

Tim Biesemans – Regional Director

Philip van Niekerk – Regional Finance Manager

Hans De Langhe – Regional Fleet and Operations Manager

Deon Van Der Pas – Regional HR Manager

abnormal lifting projects, with in-house engineers conducting front-end engineering design studies to ensure the most feasible and economical solution.

Whenever needed, the global projects division in Belgium provides additional support.

According to Biesemans, the company’s rental operations in Africa helped establish a local footprint and mindset, strengthening the company’s approach to expanding on the continent.

SARENS established a local footprint in Africa by hiring local people, which Biesemans sees as a crucial step in the right direction, as it helps the company transition from a South African operating business unit to an Africa-focused mindset, enhancing the way it approaches business on the continent.

It was critical to “expand regionally, but think locally”, Van der Pas comments.

Renewable Energy & Safety

SARENS has been increasingly involved in large-scale wind energy projects in recent years, providing specialised heavy lifting and transport services for the installation of wind turbines and their components.

This includes successful projects in Round 4 of South Africa’s Renewable Energy Independent Power Producer Procurement Programme (REIPPPP), such as the Karusa and Soetwater wind farms.

The Karusa and Soetwater projects consist of 94 turbines with a hub height of 91.5 m and a rotor diameter of 117 m. The rated power per turbine is 3 MW and the rated total

power is 282 MW.

SARENS has also committed to transport and port works for upcoming projects in Round 5 of the REIPPPP, which is expected to actualise in 2024/25.

Safety and sustainability are top priorities for SARENS. The company focuses on creating a safe work environment for its employees and clients, while also minimising its environmental impact through the use of sustainable practices and equipment.

SARENS was recently awarded a bronze medal, by the prestigious global environment, social and corporate governance rating group EcoVadis, an organisation that has rated over 75 000 trading partners worldwide to date, for its commitment to sustainability.

SARENS achieved its EcoVadis rating while building a commercial relationship with industrial gases company Air Liquide, which had requested that SARENS Belgium undergo a Sustainability Management Audit with the organisation.

The initial request only applied to SARENS Belgium, but the company’s leadership team chose to take it to the entire SARENS Group, meaning that all SARENS business units globally could use the EcoVadis assessment ranking as a positive step in their environmental, social and governance journey.

Following the assessment, SARENS NV received an overall score of 50%. Its current rating shows the company making good progress in both labour and human rights, as well as environment categories.

The company, with a global presence

comprising operations in over 60 countries and a fleet of more than 1 600 cranes, is also now 100%-owned by the Sarens family after Begoos (Group Luc Track) sold its participation in the capital and relinquished its mandate to the SARENS board of directors.

The event was of historic significance for SARENS, which is proud to demonstrate its robust standing in the global heavy lifting arena – especially as said change occurs at a time when key contributors in the sector are experiencing difficulties.

Regional financial manager **Philip van Niekerk** says being family-owned provides SARENS with the competitive advantage of not only having a faster response time but helps it to adapt and remain an agile business.

Following the announcement in April, the company said that it was confident that this step would “solidify and secure the long-term ownership of the company, which will equally allow the organisation to refine its long-term strategy and strengthen clients’ and employees’ trust”.



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