

LEADING THE FIELD

Gavin Dyer, regional MD of Weir Minerals Africa and Middle East, says the firm uses its strategic partnerships and innovative products and services to tackle Africa's challenging mining industry.

BY KERRY DIMMER

'WITH the decline in resources pricing over the past 12 to 15 months, it would be naive not to adapt business operations and models to meet the fast-changing and challenging mining environment in Africa. And the pace is only going to quicken,' says Gavin Dyer, regional MD of Weir Minerals Africa and Middle East.

'Fortunately Weir Minerals accounted for this and we've proven that even in the most adverse of circumstances, our business model remains robust and we continue to add economic value wherever possible in all the economies in which we operate.'

Weir Minerals' business thrust is to design and manufacture engineered products for customer-critical processes in the transportation of slurry in particular.

The company has a solid reputation within the mining, power, oil and gas, and general industrial sectors.

While operating in Africa over the past 35 years, the Weir Group has overcome the enormous challenges the continent presents for business operators, resulting in a zero-tolerance approach to corruption and unethical behaviour.

'Factors that impact enormously on trading in Africa include corruption, political advancement, poverty, transparency, complex and unpredictable legislative environments, as well as the availability of power and services. These exist in varying degrees in each of the areas in which we have operations. There are always going to be obstacles. You need to deal with those individually and unemotionally.

'In good times, there may be room to absorb or better cope with changes. However, markets are cyclical by nature, especially mining, and in tough times there are not enough mechanisms to provide the equivalent relief.

'The sad outcome is a far more cautious approach by investors, or unnecessary delays in foreign investment and job creation. This places a further burden on the African mining nations and ancillary industries. Currently, minerals across the board are experiencing a five- to 10-year low, so cost-cutting and retrenchments have become an unfortunate reality.'

It's not all bad news, however. At least, not for Weir Minerals. Dyer says survival

depends on the answer to the question: where do you add the most value and what is that value proposition?

'Our focus is to ensure we help our customers reduce costs and we've had great success with the introduction of new technologies, such as improvements to our slurry pump offering – in particular the Warman SLR.'

The pump was developed specifically for slurry handling duties in the mining and chemical industries. Innovative changes to the pump release significantly help the customer solve the gap that occurs between a working impeller and casing when a slurry pump begins to experience stress. Being able to adjust the throat bush and inner liner increases wear life and maintains efficiency.

'Warman pumps are realising global success across a wide range of commodities. The MCR pump range is particularly outstanding for performance and reliability. The rubber-lined centrifugal Warman MCR pump has superior safety and low ownership costs that, along with the combination of ruggedness, durability, hydraulics and material, make it the one of the most ideal slurry pumps for African conditions,' says Dyer.

'Our focus is to ensure we help our customers reduce costs and we've had great success with the introduction of new technologies'

PHOTOGRAPHY ANDREAS EISELEN/HSEMImages



'We view it as our duty to contribute to the economies in which we operate and have adapted our business model to ensure that upliftment is tangible'

Technology is without doubt one of the most crucial elements of Weir Minerals' value-add proposition and Dyer reiterates that it is a differentiator in what has become a highly commoditised market.

'In order to compete effectively, our local manufacturing facilities have been upgraded to state-of-the-art and best-in-class. Continuous improvement is at the heart of everything we do and produce. The advantage to our customers is that our production systems and lean manufacturing processes aid in driving out unnecessary costs.'

Maximising productivity at Weir Minerals is measurable, given that it buys into the adage 'if you cannot measure it, you cannot manage it'.

Besides ongoing product training and knowledge sharing, the organisation offers an artisan training programme, inclusive of millwrights, electricians and machinists, to support critical areas of business, especially where the market is unable to provide such resources.

'Skills are essential in a highly technical environment and our approach secures future skills for the growth and sustainability of our business,' says Dyer. 'Within our lean structures and within the Weir production system we have also created an environment that promotes, where possible, self-management. In this way we manifest a conducive platform for ownership, which in turn supports productivity.'

Ensuring that the future lies in qualified hands means ensuring a solid foundation for individual growth and so it is that Weir Minerals, as an engineering-focused organisation, has also implemented projects designed to uplift maths and science skills within the communities in which it operates. Other contributions come via the organisation's CSI programme.

Health, safety and environment drive the thinking behind all Weir Minerals activities. Initiatives are directed beyond the obvious manufacturing environment and extend to home, road and personal safety outside of the workplace, as well as in the environment where employees reside.

'We view it as our duty to contribute to the economies in which we operate and have accordingly adapted our business model to ensure that upliftment is tangible,' says Dyer.

Weir Minerals' growth plan also extends beyond partnership with which there is a good fit.

According to Dyer, the company seeks 'those businesses that are also complementary to the market and have excellent manufacturing capabilities'.

One such acquisition that ticked all boxes was that of the Trio Engineered Products, which designs and manufactures a wide range of crushers (including vertical shaft impact crushers), mobile plants and conveyors. This complements the already

high-quality range offered by the Weir Group which, aside from slurry pumps, also includes dewatering pumps, hydrocyclones, screens, mill liners, rubber lining, centrifuges, hoses and high pressure grinding rolls, as well as spares, service and maintenance thereof.

However, Weir Minerals is driven by far more than the supply of products, says Dyer.

'Apart from the delivery of innovative products and services, our mission statement confirms that we will be wherever and whenever global energy and resources need us, and to become a trusted partner.'

This statement is not lip service. Last year Weir Minerals was honoured with the Procurement Leaders Global Award for External Collaboration, an accolade granted to the division for its collaboration with Anglo American when the two signed a global framework agreement.

This award is especially notable because it underlines the strides that Weir Minerals has made in developing and fostering excellent supplier-customer relationships. In procurement circles worldwide, the award is also considered the most celebrated and sought-after acknowledgement.

By constantly ensuring that its considerable geographical footprint matches the needs of its customers in more than 70 countries, Weir Minerals is not only a giant standard-setter, innovator and engineering excellence provider, but also the preferred partner of choice. **AD**