Building a better, greener future for the world

Manuel Couto Alves, President and CEO, MCA Group, reveals how the leading construction firm has evolved to support innovative sustainability

In just over two decades, you have transformed MCA Group from a small construction firm based in Guimarães, northern Portugal, into a global and highly diversified engineering, procurement, construction (EPC) and finance group. Could you describe the group’s evolution and the values you have instilled that have driven the group toward an innovative and sustainable future?

The group was founded in 1998 as a regional Portuguese company focused on public infrastructure and then grew throughout the nation. We started our sustained internationalization process in 2006 in Portuguese-speaking Africa. This introduced us to very different cultural working regimes, which gave us experience in overcoming difficulties and turning these into opportunities that strengthened us as a company. Another characteristic of MCA Group’s evolution is that it has always understood that new projects in emerging markets must have a local governance structure, with adequate technical resources.

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MCA Group is now a truly global business, very much in tune with today’s challenges and with a strong brand of projects. In recent years the world has developed a different sensitivity to the green economy, environmental sustainability and renewable energies. MCA Group wants to contribute to building a sustainable future; we want to be part of the solution by developing projects with private and public entities. We know this green future is where we are going and where we want to go, but never forget where we came from and don’t neglect the other sectors of our activity that we continue to develop. MCA Group has never stopped evolving. Currently, we are present in over 10 geographic markets and we operate in 11 sectors of activity, from construction to the environment and renewable energies, including maritime works and coastal protection, roads and integrated infrastructures. Summing up our history, present and future, what stands out is that we always work with ambition and innovation.

What does sustainability mean to you personally?

As the moment, we are involved and very committed to one of the largest solar projects in Africa, which is in Angola, a country that has taken the introduction of renewable energies as a determining factor for social and environmental development. The priority focus of our strategy is development, engineering, construction and project financing in markets where this paradigm fits. I see renewable energy as strategic for the future of MCA Group on the African continent. The cost of producing renewable energy is now more competitive than conventional sources of production worldwide and this is most evident in Africa, where many countries don’t yet have a very comprehensive electricity grid and use a lot of diesel generation in the regions furthest from main cities. The introduction of renewable energy in these markets will greatly reduce the need to import fossil fuel, replacing it with an indigenous and clean energy source.

We have studied the technological evolution that has happened in the sector and with the advances in lithium batteries, for example, we hope to be able to build independent off-grid energy systems that are free of fossil fuels in the very near future. In this way, we will be able to deliver clean electricity to populations that live furthest from power generation centers. There is a lot of appetite from financial institutions to accompany us in this strategy and to finance green deals, as they also have to meet their own ambitious sustainability goals. With this type of project, they are able to associate their financing with initiatives that have positive environmental, social and economic impacts. Our Angolan solar project will be one of many that we are going to build on the continent.

Your company has a remarkable track record in planning, designing, financing and building critical infrastructure across continents. MCA Group’s flagship projects include Puerta Mayor in Spain and the Douro Marina in Portugal. What made those particular projects such a success?

The two projects were very important for MCA Group’s learning curve and new business models. Only by bringing together an experienced team was it possible to successfully complete the Portuguese city of Oporto’s Douro Marina, which we carried out on a development, engineering, construction, project financing, operation and maintenance basis. Today, enabled by MCA Group, it has become one of the gateways of this fantastic city. It was a demanding maritime project involving a large internal team, which allowed us to train the group to develop its operations and achieve the correct environmental certifications. Our Puerta Mayor project on the outskirts of Madrid, which is operated by our company, has been a great success. This MCA development and EPC project extended to an area of about 200 hectares. It has become a major reference point in Southern Europe and we have gone on to complete similar operations in other areas of Spain.

What geographic regions do you see new growth coming from in the next decade?

The group’s strategy is to consolidate the markets where we have greater representation, such as Portugal, Spain and Angola—places where we have had a constant and diversified presence for years. We are currently in a transition phase with projects and are waiting for better socioeconomic conditions in order to mitigate the risks in Mozambique, São Tomé and Príncipe. The new countries in which we are betting on gradual growth, and which have passed to the “innovation” phase with technical and administrative structures in place, are Uganda, Kenya, Cameroon, Mexico and Germany, via Austria, where we have finished the first phase of acclimatization to the market.

We are focused on specific projects, be they in the construction of roads of national and regional scope, waste treatment centers or biomass industries. The projects we are involved with in 2020 that are most representative of MCA Group are a public railway initiative in Portugal, which we start this month, a biorefinery in Portugal that will be completed in September, field work for our Angolan solar projects, which began in October, and various ongoing projects in Spain.

“For 15 years, we have taken on projects in international territories, which we have carried out with dedication and quality that has earned the trust of our customers and partners.”

Manuel Couto Alves, President and CEO, MCA Group

Is there anything else you would like to highlight about MCA Group?

We are an experienced company used to overcoming complex challenges. For example, during the COVID-19 crisis, we had the vision and speed to adapt our activity, and never stopped working or even slowed down. We owe a lot to the professionalism of our directors and employees, and our executive committee started to meet weekly by teleconference, which allowed us to make ongoing decisions while closely monitoring the evolution of the pandemic context. We followed healthcare organizations’ guidelines, and adapted new rules for productivity and the development of remote projects with excellent results.

We have the highest management standards, respect societies and local communities, have an ethical and sustainable commitment to the environment, and are concerned about hiring local workers. For 15 years, we have taken on projects in international territories, which we have carried out with dedication and quality that has earned the trust of our customers and partners. We act as if we were a company listed on the stock exchange, without yet being so.

Manuel Couto Alves, President and CEO, MCA Group

MCA Group operates in over 10 countries on 3 continents

In the last decade, MCA Group has executed projects worth more than $1.4 billion

MCA Group’s current pipeline of projects is valued at nearly $3.2 billion

MCA Group is now operating in central Europe and will be expanding to other regions where the MCA Group already operates.

What geographic regions do you see new growth coming from in the next decade?

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A global partner for development that goes much further than others

MCA Group stands out for its competence, experience, responsiveness, innovation and commitment to sustainability

Impressive financial performance

Turnover

thousands of euros

Projects confirmed in 2019

thousands of euros

MCA Group has a growing global footprint

Currenty, MCA Group is active in over 10 countries on three continents

Consolidated international presence

MCA Group has the confidence of its worldwide clients

A rich pipeline of diverse projects focused on engineering, construction, integrated and specialized infrastructures

MCA Group is experiencing continuous and sustained growth

Environment sector

Green energy sector

Infrastructure sector

Construction sector

Total = €3,176,951,858

Environment sector

Waste treatment and biofuels

€227,084,396

Green energy sector

Solar

€890,000,000

Infrastructure sector

Roads, ports, airports, railway and other infrastructures

€1,061,132,611

Construction sector

Housing and civil construction, corporate real estate, sports and other projects

€998,734,851

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