WHERE IS AFRICA IN TERMS INTERCONNECTIVITY INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

(Engineers duty is to think of solutions: Turn an opinion into reality)

African continental free zone area (ACFTA)?

This marks the beginning of a turn round Africa as a continent; such that its people will live together with temporally boundaries surrounding them; the people will move freely in their mother continent. Historically Africa continent was subdivided into units called countries that were being ruled by the colonialist they created boundaries that have existed up to date. These have hindered free movement of African people; hence trade and this has contributed greatly to the un and under development of the continent. With the decolonization having been achieved, the African leaders are coming to terms of how the continent can be turned around to the direction of development. We say thank you to them for this focused leadership; especially putting in place the idea of African continental free zone area.

Having made this focused decision in the history of Africa; what awaits this tremendous decision to realise in terms of economic progress; is a big and heavy load ahead of us. Policies will be made to ease movement across the continent; but where is the means; are the infrastructure available?

If the Africa continent is to be interconnected, it needs infrastructure that does the magic work.

Look at the need of railway lines from Cape Town to CAIRO; from the horn of Africa to Dakar; from Casablanca to Cairo. These would be the main lines, and other lines would be connecting directly to them. The overall planning for rail transport for the entire continent would base itself on these very lines. Take an example of Cairo to Cape Town countries along this would be line are mostly politically peaceful less two countries South Sudan and Sudan. These two countries have civil wars that can be overcome and therefore will not hinder actual implementation of such project.

This means therefore that there is nothing that can hinder progress of a project within Africa aimed at its connectivity other than countries prioritization criteria. The prioritization criteria of the country normally depend on the needs urgently required by the citizens and the political landscape.

An example that may help us understand the standoff that may arise most of the time is the SGR connecting Kenya-Mombasa to Uganda-Malaba via Naivasha. The SGR for Kenya from Mombasa to Naivasha was worked on however Kenya did not give priority on working on a section from Naivasha to Malaba; this means that Uganda SGR project would not proceed because of this lack of connection since the SGR would be hanging. It is only recent that Kenya Government intends to extend the SGR to the Uganda border Malaba. With this development Uganda now is ready to implement the SGR.

Is this kind of scenario easily avoidable? This is possible; but it will take a long time; so that specific projects that are identified as the key ones to do the connectivity of the continent are directly under an identified body. The body therefore must be credit worthy and must be politically respected in the current state of Africa continent such body is not easy to be identified or formed.

Therefore, this needs long term planning where Africa takes kin study of what happened in Europe; Europe as a continent is interconnected with infrastructure; how was this done?

Currently there is Africa Union that has helped in putting in place this ACFTA this is a fundamental step taken; therefore, through this Union the body that is allowed to take on these such projects can be formed.

Funding bodies like African Development Bank (ADB) is available, this kind of bank can be strengthened further financially through mobilization of funds by the African countries themselves. In almost all African countries there is scheme that helps citizens to save when still in the age of employment. In Uganda we have National Social Security Fund (NSSF); this is where employees save 5% of the earnings and the employer contributes 10% of the employee's earnings to the savings. Example is that if an employee earns an equivalent $100 @month the employee is compelled to save 5% equivalent to $5 and the employer is compelled to contribute 10% as already explained and this adds up to $10 added together it totals to $15 per month.

Currently Africa has a population of approximately 1.49Bn people but I will consider 1.2Bn for the sake of under estimation; if the employed in this category of people who contribute towards this saving scheme is say 30% of the population the total is about 360M, With a saving of $15 per month; this is the minimum contribution; the total collection per month would be 360M x 15 that totals to $5.4Bn monthly. Of this amount if only 50% is lent to ADB at a minimum interest then ADB would collect $2.7Bn monthly if this is done for a period of five years the total amount of capital that would be collected to develop kinds of infrastructure would total to 2.7x12x5 that totals to $162Bn; not so small money to start with.

If you have such funds being invested in infrastructure; you do not look at the infrastructure being developed alone, you look more at what these developments are going to promote. The promotions will include smoothening running businesses across the continent at fair prices as time in doing businesses is lessened. They will create a lot of jobs across the continent hence much more jobs being created. The more the jobs the more money will be saved hence the savings and more funds available for the bank to access and invest. What a breakthrough would this lead to.

With funds available the question that would arise is about to select and priotize the infrastructure to be worked upon; this is where Africa Union would work with professional associations like FIDIC AFRICA; working on impediments of procurement process FIDIC AFRICA would come in to work hand in hand with Africa Union.

Most Africa countries currently are facing challenges of financing projects, delayed procurement process, delayed payments to service providers, insufficient experienced professional staff and delayed completion projects on time. With the delayed completion of projects comes with extra costs hence making African projects very expensive to implement.

This fund would be generated by African people themselves; the pride that would come with self-financing of projects identified to push the continent forward would raise the hope of African people through their leaders. The result of this would mean total respect of African people by the financiers; the foreign investors would flock the continent because of its interconnectivity hence ease of accessing markets.

The kind of infrastructure projects that would bring about the interconnectivity would give prioritization to Rail transport, Bridges, water transport, internet services to name.

Most challenges we face as Africa continent in infrastructure development is majorly lack of and delayed financing projects at times the conditions given to access the financing abnormally unreasonable especially to a would be proud of itself country.

To some may look at this as un impossibility, it may look so but at one time I'm sure in early 20th century the colonialists looked at Africans as hopeless non educated human beings but today Africans are educated, lack of human resource is not too much of an issue now, the professionals are very available other than limited exposure to certain specific projects that are being implemented for the first time in certain countries in Africa to mention Standard gauge Railway, Road expressways.

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