Forum: General Assembly 2 (GA 2)

Issue: Facilitating the development of basic infrastructure in African nations

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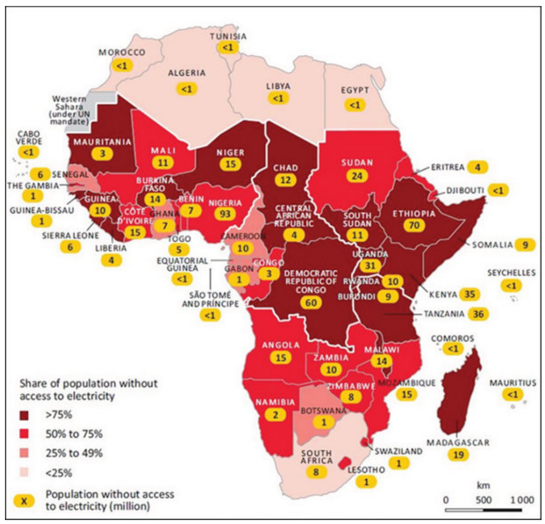
Introduction



Many African states still have large gap between individuals about the accessibility on electricity. According to the World Bank/International Finance Corporation (IFC) working paper, Sub-Saharan Africa would need to invest about **7.1 % of GDP per year** in infrastructure to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, but current investment is only about 3.5 % of GDP which is only the half of the goal (IFC).

Also, transportation infrastructure has not been constructed in African region, excluding capital cities still remain undeveloped. Roads, rails, ports, and air transport infrastructure is one of the biggest challenges for African states to develop by their own. Also because of weak cross-border relationship between African regions it is even harder to develop infrastructures. Especially, water supply and trade corridors is considered as categories that is desperate for the interconnection and cooperation between nations.

Lastly, the most significantly, water accessibility will be another features to concentrate their investment on. Production of sanitated water and disposition of waste are being done very well. Not enough water makes more pressure on government to import clean water from other region, and this often leads to neglect the importance of clearing waste in the nation. This means again because of insecurely thrown wastes, the water is again polluted and this bad cycle will be repeating overtime.

Definition of Key Terms

Infrastructure

This term refers to the basic and physical structures, such as roads, bridges, and hospitals that are essential for human living in each state.

Public-Private Partnership (PPP)

PPP is a collaborative agreement and arrangement of risk distribution on project financing, construction, and operation between public and private investors. This relationship between public and private stakeholders puts better efficiency to citizens benefited projects.

Urbanization

Urbanization refers to the development of no modernized states or cities into better suburbs where citizens would prefer to live in. Urbanization can be done through establishing concrete infrastructure in cities.

Capacity building

This expression refers to construction of better individual or company level investment in infrastructure. For example, concocting two small countries in LEDC to make the combined company much stronger than before, Which helps faster development and less pressure on each of small companies.

Renewable energy

Energy from resources that have naturally been produced and stored which cause no other cost to produce it. However, the method of extracting these resources and restoring these resources cost money and need development of technology; such as solar, wind, and hydroelectric power, important infrastructure.

Water sanitation

This straight-forwardly refers to the process of cleaning the polluted or nonconsumable water into drinkable water and the methods to implement disposal of wasted water.

Sustainable Development

One category of various development methods that achieve the demand of human races on resources and infrastructure and able to supply those without too much pressure on earth environment.

Transport Corridors

A linear area that connects two or more major regions through developed infrastructure such as highways, railways, and public transit routes, which enable easier the movement of people and goods, fostering economic development.

Background

The “Scramble for Africa”

Prior to 1885, European settlements in Africa were primarily confined to coastal regions. But in the 1880s, because of Belgium’s desire for wealth fueled by technological and economic advancements, the European powers conferred in 1884 in Berlin, Germany to discuss the apportioning of the continent, called the “Scramble for Africa.” The main goal of this was for countries to extract as much revenue as possible from Africa from its natural resources.

Initially, colonial control facilitated the development of infrastructure, for example new railways and ports, causing large amounts of European investment to flow in and creating prominent changes in the operation of labor and land markets. Rural populations subsequently increased along the railways, creating villages. In Ghana, where railroads decreased transportation costs, cocoa production for export markets became more profitable, allowing it to become the world's largest exporter of cocoa by 1911.

On the other hand, these measures, characterized by the lack of regard and prudence for long-term maintenance, created infrastructures primarily serving resource extraction and exploitation rather than the gradual promotion of internal development naturally. Therefore, infrastructure was often concentrated in specific areas and lacked coordination and disregarded local needs, sometimes leading to negative consequences like the disruption of food or poor sanitation for Africans while focusing on the needs of colonizers. For example, some colonial railroads were developed to exercise more effective control over the native population.

The Decline of Infrastructure

Since these colonial systems were designed for exploitation rather than the sustainable development of nations, newly independent countries inherited infrastructure not conducive for internal integration or economic diversification. As a result of mismanagement, lack of maintenance, and the emigration of Europeans after independence, railroads and other infrastructure declined in productivity. Additionally, the arbitrary border designs meant that African communities could not move freely in accordance with their nomadic practices, inflicting economic hardship while instigating conflicts among local people. Nowadays, post-independent African governments use this for political means: for example, the Lou-Nuer of South Sudan and the Jikany-Nuer of Ethiopia which are the same ethnic group living among the Ethiopia-South Sudan border, yet are considered two distinct ethnic groups, developing hostility through resource competition.

All these factors considered, it is hard for African nations to organize themselves after the European powers left. Conflict ran rife after Europeans left, with many ethnic groups vying for control, beginning an era of incessant conflict. Europeans occupied the continent long enough to replace existing political structures but did little to ensure a smooth transition as newly formed countries were left on their own. Many newly independent states also lacked access to sufficient domestic revenue, forcing reliance on foreign aid and loans, which often came with conditions that limited long-term infrastructure investment. In total, African nations owe more than 1.8 trillion dollars in debt, the high debts reducing the capacity to import and investment in other aspects of the country. Debt servicing used up 16.7% of African government revenues in 2023, drastically reducing the amount to be used for infrastructure.

Why Infrastructure Hasn't Improved Yet

Transportation

This lack of organized infrastructure development has had major ramifications for economic growth and the quality of life in African countries; at least 20% of the population in Cameroon, Ghana, Mauritania, Niger, and Tanzania must travel more than two kilometers to obtain water.

Without well-maintained roads, reliable energy, or efficient transport systems, African countries, especially landlocked ones, are subject to higher costs of transport, limited access to markets, and reduced investment incentives from elsewhere. Farmers and small-scale producers, for instance, could not get their goods to urban markets, thereby severely limiting incomes and reinforcing poverty cycles, which are made worse by the high cost of basic goods and services because of poor transportation infrastructure. The African Development Bank estimates that poor road and rail connectivity increases African trade costs by as much as 40%, making it even cheaper for some African countries to import goods from Europe than from neighboring states. The real implication of bad transportation and insufficient energy is that other forms of needed infrastructure cannot work either: local hospitals lack energy or resources, schools have inadequate facilities, and communities have challenges even in effectively functioning. A simple ripple effect because of missing basic infrastructure.

The government

The government, meanwhile, has its own problems and is often not strong enough to contribute. Public investment in social services like infrastructure, healthcare, and education declines as a result of widespread corruption and embezzlement, shoddy institutions, and a lack of accountability. Furthermore, governments often favor the elite minority over the majority by establishing unequal access to opportunities and resources. To put it in perspective, African economies lose an average of $10 billion a year due to corruption. Furthermore, one of the main causes of civil unrest and, as a result, greater economic hardships is corruption and governments' inaction. For instance, countries experiencing conflict for more than half of the post-Cold War period have, on average, a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita that is nearly 30% lower than countries that have not faced conflict; the World Bank states that countries experiencing conflicts face an average of twenty years of economic growth loss.

Energy

Access to energy is crucial for economic development, yet 600 million Africans still lack access to electricity today. Simultaneously, power shortages affect 30% of African nations, hindering industrial growth. In South Africa, frequent blackouts, known as load shedding, costed the country about 51 million dollars daily in 2023 over the course of nearly 2000 hours of outages in merely the first half of that year, disrupting start-ups, digital services, and other industries.

Major Parties Involved

African Union

The African Union (AU) plays a major role in enabling the development of infrastructure in Africa, especially through its initiatives such as Program for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA). Over 69 PIDA projects are now in place adopted by the AU in 2021, covering things that will bolster regional economies from transportation to digital connectivity to water, with an estimated cost of 160.8 billion US dollars in total.

United Nations

Although less direct, the United Nations (UN) also supports the development of infrastructure in Africa through peacekeeping missions, humanitarian aid, and many of its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which help lessen the impacts of ongoing poverty, conflict, and sustainability in the continent, all of which are significant bottlenecks to faster development. The Economic and Social Council also helps develop initiatives.

World Bank

The World Bank mostly provides the funding and support required in the development of infrastructure across Africa, such as projects like the Chad-Cameroon Pipeline and the Lesotho Highlands Water Project. However, despite its contributions to technical expertise and funding, corruption in various countries has caused major setbacks and greatly reduced its efforts.

China

With over 21.7 billion US dollars received in Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) deals, China remains a major contributor to African infrastructure. Notable initiatives include projects such as

Kenya's Mombasa-Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway and the Djibouti-Ethiopia Railway, improving transportation links and trade, built by Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs). At the same time, however, many of these projects are financed through Chinese loans, garnering high debt burdens often backed by natural resources. Countries like Zambia and Djibouti have faced financial difficulties, while the reliance of Chinese labor rather than local labor limits domestic job creation.

Additionally, China has been Africa's largest trading partner since 2009, with trade reaching 282 billion US dollars in 2022. However, African nations mostly export commodities such as oil and copper, while importing high-value manufactured goods from China, limiting Africa’s role as a resource supplier and its potential industrial diversification.

Nigeria

Nigeria is Africa’s most populous country and has one of the largest economies, with industries including oil, gas, agriculture, manufacturing and more. The further development of its economy faces many obstacles, including an unreliable energy sector, poor transportation networks, and ports to efficiently handle higher-volume trade. Improving Nigeria’s infrastructure, or that of other African countries, can significantly strengthen their economy and attract more foreign investment.

Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

Large-scale inter-regional and rail link projects: Trans-Sahara Highway

The Trans-Sahara Highway, also known as Route 2 of the Trans-African Highway network, is a 4,500 km road corridor connecting Algiers (Algeria) on the Mediterranean coast to Lagos (Nigeria) on the Atlantic. As it considers as one of the most ambitious infrastructure plan in African region under the supervision of United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and the African Development Bank (AfDB). It was indeed one of the majestic construction plan for Africa and especially targeting 6 countries where the highway go across: Algeria, Niger, Nigeria, Mali, Chad, Tunisia, it ended up with not quite successful plan where still unpaved roads in rural areas, armed conflicts and terrorisms, reliance of limited national limited fundings, weak diplomatic frameworks, and immature maintained work and polices delayed the whole process down where thanks to the revitalization work of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA) Nigerian and Algerian have been upgraded to modern highway standard while the Niger segments still left in weakest leak along the highway. But because Niger interconnects between Algeria and Nigeria, it alleged the disconnection of trade routes between these countries and other adjacent countries indirectly.

In addition expanding private sector participation through governance and institutional reform and infrastructure funding mechanisms through financial infrastructure and development banks has also been done as well.

Possible Solutions

Infrastructure Projects Through the AU and PIDA

Regional infrastructure projects such as transnational railways, trade corridors, and power grids can connect nations, especially landlocked ones, and provide a much higher efficiency of trade. The PIDA already provides a framework for such collaboration, but it could be strengthened due to different political priorities and uneven resource distribution across countries.

Public-Private Partnerships

Governments can collaborate with private companies to finance, construct, or maintain infrastructure such as railways, roads, or energy systems. This approach reduces the burden on financially constrained states, while introducing more efficiency and innovation. However, PPPs require strong regulations to prevent corruption and similar issues, which is a serious issue that Africa currently faces.

Strengthening governance and anti-corruption measures

Improving transparency, accountability, and oversight in infrastructure projects ensures that funds are used effectively and efficiently. Establishing organizations such as independent audit bodies or other measures can reduce embezzlement or delays. However, considering many African states are dictatorships, direct audits may not be the most feasible because there is nothing to enforce these measures.

Improving Domestic Skills and Expertise

With PPPs and foreign investment, many Africans face job losses due to foreign skilled workers, in addition to the emigration of skilled workers to abroad. Developing local technical expertise through education and vocational training can ensure that the infrastructure projects are sustainable and do not have any greater negative impacts on the local scale.

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