

Africa's \$360bn Infrastructure Moment Faces a Defining Test: Can Delivery Keep Pace with Ambition?

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Sub-Saharan Africa's construction sector is entering a defining decade; one that will shape not only skylines, but the economic trajectory of the continent itself.

At the centre of this transformation sits the [Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa \(PIDA\)](#), an ambitious, continent-wide initiative targeting more than 400 priority projects across energy, transport, ICT, and water systems by 2040. Backed by over \$360 billion in commitments, PIDA is not simply a collection of projects. It is a strategic framework designed to unlock regional integration, accelerate industrialisation, and drive long-term, inclusive growth.

Yet scale alone does not guarantee success. If anything, it raises the stakes. Delivering infrastructure at this level demands more than capital; it requires capability, coordination, and consistency. And this is where the region faces its most pressing challenge.

New research from the Project Management Institute (PMI) highlights a widening gap between ambition and execution. By 2035, Sub-Saharan Africa is expected to face a 57% shortfall in construction project professionals, one of the highest rates globally. Demand is projected to grow from around 260,000 professionals in 2025 to over 410,000 by 2035. That leaves a deficit of nearly 150,000 skilled practitioners in a sector that cannot afford inefficiency.

This is not an isolated issue. Globally, PMI estimates that nearly 2.5 million additional construction project professionals will be required by 2035 to meet infrastructure demand. However, in Sub-Saharan Africa, the

implications are more acute. Infrastructure is not just a growth lever; it is a necessity. Roads, power, water, and connectivity underpin everything from trade to healthcare access. When delivery falters, the consequences ripple across entire economies.

The paradox is stark. Construction is one of the most powerful contributors to GDP growth and job creation, yet it remains one of the least efficient sectors. PMI data shows that around 10% of global project investment is lost each year due to poor performance. In the context of hundreds of billions of dollars flowing into African infrastructure, that inefficiency equates to a significant loss of potential value.

“Construction sits at the heart of the region’s development ambitions,” says George Asamani, Managing Director, PMI Sub-Saharan Africa – speaking to multiple publications in the last week. “From transport corridors and energy infrastructure to housing, healthcare, and digital connectivity, projects are the vehicles through which we build our future. But without the right project management capabilities, we risk delays, cost overruns, rework, and, ultimately, lost value.”

That risk is not theoretical. Across the region, infrastructure activity is accelerating, driven by rapid population growth, urbanisation, and a push towards greater regional trade integration. Countries such as Ethiopia are leading the charge, with projected annual demand growth for construction project professionals reaching 7.8%, among the highest globally. The pipeline is real, and it is expanding quickly.

However, construction projects are inherently complex. They involve a diverse and often competing mix of stakeholders, including governments, regulators, contractors, investors, local communities, and international partners. Aligning these interests is not straightforward. Miscommunication or misalignment can lead to duplication of effort, delays, and costly rework; outcomes that erode both financial and social value.

This complexity is further amplified by the dynamic nature of construction itself. Design changes, shifting requirements, and on-the-ground challenges are common. Without strong coordination between teams, particularly between on-site and off-site functions, these variables can quickly escalate into significant overruns.

“Construction is highly visible and deeply scrutinised,” Asamani adds. “Every bridge, hospital, or power plant carries public expectations. When projects go wrong, the impact is felt not just financially, but socially and politically. That is why professional project management is not a luxury, it is what safeguards value, protects public funds and ensures infrastructure delivers its intended impact.”

The visibility of these projects means failure is rarely contained. Delays to a transport corridor can stall trade. Cost overruns on energy infrastructure can strain public finances. In many cases, the reputational impact can be just as damaging as the financial one.

Despite its central role in economic development, construction has historically lagged behind other sectors in productivity and technology adoption. This is beginning to change. PMI’s research points to digitalisation as a critical lever for improvement. Technologies such as Building Information Modelling (BIM), digital twins, and artificial intelligence offer the potential to enhance planning, improve transparency, and reduce rework.

However, technology alone is not a solution. It must be paired with the skills to use it effectively. Employers across the region are already reporting shortages in core project management competencies, including scheduling, planning, and resource optimisation. At the same time, so-called power skills, communication, collaborative leadership, and stakeholder engagement, are increasingly in demand.

The nature of infrastructure delivery is also evolving. Financing is becoming more closely tied to environmental, social, and governance (ESG) standards. Carbon management, sustainable procurement, and long-term environmental impact are no longer secondary considerations; they are integral to project viability. This shift requires project leaders who can integrate sustainability into delivery from the outset, balancing commercial objectives with broader societal outcomes.

Addressing the talent gap, therefore, is not simply a matter of increasing headcount. It requires a more deliberate and sustained approach. Recruitment must be matched with retention. Skills development must be continuous rather than episodic. Career pathways need to be clearly defined to attract and retain both emerging and mid-career professionals.

PMI's research highlights the importance of improving working conditions and investing consistently in professional development. Structured training programmes and recognised certifications, such as the Construction Professional (PMI-CP), are playing a key role in equipping practitioners with the capabilities required to manage increasingly complex projects. Beyond formal training, access to professional networks and thought leadership is equally important, enabling individuals to stay current and adapt to evolving industry demands.

There is also a broader cultural shift required. Project management must be seen not as an administrative function, but as a strategic discipline. It is the mechanism through which infrastructure ambitions are translated into tangible outcomes. Without it, even the most well-funded projects risk underdelivering.

"If we want infrastructure to be a true engine of GDP growth, we must professionalise the way we deliver it. We cannot afford to treat training as a cost. It is an investment in national competitiveness," Asamani concludes.

This is ultimately the crux of the issue. Sub-Saharan Africa has the ambition, the investment, and the opportunity. What it needs now is the capability to match. The success of PIDA, and indeed the broader infrastructure agenda, will depend not just on what is built, but on how it is delivered.

The coming decade will test the region's ability to close that gap. If it succeeds, the rewards are substantial; stronger economies, improved quality of life, and a more integrated continent. If it falls short, the cost will be measured not just in financial terms, but in missed opportunity.

In construction, as in all complex systems, execution is everything.