

Challenges of executing projects in select African countries

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Abstract:

Many economists and management thinkers have pointed out that international business destination in the coming decades will be Africa. This aspect has drawn attention of the management professionals to project execution in African countries. As in any fast developing country, it is expected that there will be considerable 'project oriented activity' in the African continent in the next few decades. This article attempts to understand some of the 'significant common challenges' for setting up new projects, especially start up projects, in African countries. 'Projects' are a vehicle of growth in any of the emerging economies and it is important that projects in the developing economy are successful. However one must note that the projects environments in 'African' countries have numerous peculiarities and one must pay attention to these for the success of future projects in this region.

The article aims at identifying some factors that may be useful for international professionals who are expected to execute projects in these countries in the future. Several African countries are struggling through various phases of economic and social development and are grappling with challenges of accelerated rate of industrial and economic growth. While such a situation opens up opportunities, it also throws up several challenges in execution. Hence a good understanding of such challenges may be crucial to ensure the success of projects in such countries.

We distinguish between the factors that help improve the outcome of the project (referred to as 'Project Criteria') and the factors that help improve project management processes (referred to as 'Critical Success Factors (CSFs)'). This paper considers CSFs that are especially relevant to successful completion of projects in African countries. The factors so identified are classified into the following groups that are generally seen in African projects environments: Strategic Issues, Stakeholder engagement, Operational aspects, HR and people issues, Availability of support from 'reliable vendor networks' and social and cultural issues. The paper is based on the findings of the case study results analyzed by the authors and attempts to throw light on critical factors that may help improve probability of success for the projects undertaken in these countries.

Keywords: Critical Success Factors (CSFs), Startup Projects, Project Success Criteria, Project management process parameters, Project Success, Developing economies.