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With green buildings, Kenya can secure a cleaner, healthier future

On October 4, the world marked the annual United Nations World Habitat Day. The theme was 'Accelerating urban action for a carbon-free world'. This was in recognition that cities are responsible for 70 per cent of global carbon dioxide emissions, with transport, buildings, energy, and waste management accounting for the bulk of urban greenhouse gas emissions.

According to the World Bank, a global population of 4.2 billion people live in urban environments and this will increase by 2.5 billion people in the next three decades. This rapid growth in urban settlements is one of the key drivers of cement consumption.

With the rising levels of urbanisation, research firm IMARC's report for East Africa Cement Market predicts stable growth in the next five years along the global compound annual growth rate of around five per cent. Currently, the residential sector holds the largest market share owing to a rise in the demand for better housing facilities from the middle-class population.

This is a big opportunity for cement businesses that comes with an even bigger need to give consideration to our environment.

The first goal of the Paris agreement-2015 is to limit global warming to well below two degrees Celsius, and the second goal is to achieve a climate neutral world by mid-century. We therefore have a role alongside other key stakeholders in ensuring sustainable urbanisation.

Gas emissions

A sectoral breakdown by UN Habitat on the technically feasible and available mitigation measures to achieve a 90 per cent greenhouse gas emission reduction shows that the building sector can account for 58 per cent of the cut, followed by transport sector at 21 per cent, materials efficiency at 16 per cent and the waste sector at five per cent.

We have been taking an all-round approach with sustainability pillars on climate and energy, circular economy, water and biodiversity to avert the pressure placed on our environment, and more participation by other manufacturing industry players as well as the consumers can go a long way.

At the core of our cement business, we have to first look at the building materials supplied to the market and how they are contributing to the 'Race to Zero' carbon goal. As consumers become more aware of their role in sustainability, demand for green construction solutions is on the rise. This involves a more careful selection of materials and designs that leverage low carbon standards and incorporating low carbon cements in construction.

Sustainable building projects with futuristic features are taking shape in Kenya and we are seeing more consumers express the need to incorporate the 'green construction' theme in their buildings, especially in the applications of materials, water harvesting systems, water reticulation systems, solar panels to cater for lighting and water heating needs as



well as features like large windows for maximum natural light and fresh air, among others.

Green construction has long been a goal for the construction industry and we have the 'Houses of Tomorrow' initiative and a range of Green Cement products running in line with this ambition.

Carbon footprint

On the ground, there is still demand for expert technical support to orient customers on sustainable buildings needs to help them understand the 'green building' concept but also to help them have a better understanding of low carbon footprint and how it matters, thus enabling them to make better and sus-

tainable construction decisions.

By embracing a green construction mentality, cement producers and consumers will greatly contribute to sustainable urbanisation. These have to be complemented by other environmentally friendly ways of cement production such as reducing fossil fuels usage by bringing together waste producers to dispose of their waste in cement kilns and using solar as an alternative energy source.

The role of cement manufacturers can go beyond their production processes and construction solutions to ensuring they extend environment conservation initiatives to the market.

Such ways would include awareness of proper processes to dispose cement bags after they are used, with options ranging from reusing, recycling or fully embracing biodegradable bags since bags left behind after constructing can be a menace in waste management efforts.

The rapid urbanisation does not have to come at a cost to our environment. To ensure this, we have to answer the big questions that are: what are the sources of energy for this urban population?

What are the main transportation modes? How is waste being managed? And most importantly from where I sit, what building materials are being used? As urban populations grow, these aspects directly impact on greenhouse gas emissions. There is evidence to show that businesses embedding sustainability into their overall strategy and core operations are more successful.



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Big day

As we celebrate achievers, we should name and shame the looters



MOHAMED GULEID

Today, we are celebrating the 58th Mashujaa Day since we attained our independence. As we celebrate the heroes that brought freedom and honour to the people of Kenya, let us also learn to shame and name those who caused disrepute to our country.

Kenians are currently going through a difficult period. The Covid-19 pandemic has affected all sectors of the economy and many people are now under duress because they cannot make ends meet. The worst affected are those who earn their livelihoods daily through hawking or performing petty trade.

Kenya's economy is hinged on this group. The poverty gap in Kenya is wide. The gap between the richest and poorest has reached extreme levels in Kenya. Less than 0.1 per cent of the population (8,300 people) own more wealth than the bottom 99.9 per cent (more than 44 million people). The richest 10 per cent of people in Kenya earned on average 23 times more than the poorest 10 per cent. Unfortunately, the coronavirus pandemic has decided to double-punish those on who the economy of the country is hinged.

The upper strata of the richest only got wealthier. Covid billionaires and people who have amassed wealth during this pandemic have caused death to many Kenyans because people could not access the necessary equipment against the virus after the funds were stolen.

President Uhuru Kenyatta also recently mentioned casually that close to Sh2 billion of public funds was looted in Kenya daily. The office of the Auditor General sadly said approximately one third of the national budget was lost through pilferages. Therefore, the government is aware of these problems, but apparently, it is unable to contain them. I am not sure if this is by design or because of lack of capacity or maybe both. But the government can efficiently deal with people perceived to be a threat to security. I, therefore, do not know what is more dangerous to our security than the looting of money meant for purchasing medicines for the vulnerable or food for those desperate during this biting drought.

Mashujaa Day is for celebrating heroes. Those who fought for our independence need recognition. Many are honored during such an event for their contribution to nation building. However, it is also time for a separate list of people who looted public resources to be read out during Mashujaa Day. The day should be renamed Mashujaa and Mafisadi Day. This will become a deterrent softly. Those named by the president as being graft kingpins to be given different titles depending on the level of corruption. Those to be crowned as kings or queens should be those who crossed the billions shillings mark. Those at the bottom get away with certificates of recognition but with a warning. Unfortunately, those being crowned now for being heroes sometimes buy their way into such a medal. It is logical to assume that because of the level of graft in the system, the culprits are likely to bribe their way out of the list of shame.

The day will lose meaning if the good foundation by our founding fathers is undermined. The Constitution says the sovereign power is in the hands of the 'people'. The People should rise by demanding their rights but also ensuring the leadership is held to account for any misdeeds.

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