

From the Editors

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This special issue of the *Project Management Journal (PMJ)* presents a collection of six of the best papers presented at the International Academy of African Business and Development (IAABD) conference held on May 17–20, 2011, in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

Africa is definitely one of the most promising areas in the field of project and program management with regard to long-term development (GDP growth) and research and education dynamism (International Monetary Fund, 2012).

And as mentioned in *African & Global Economic Trends* (African Development Bank Group, 2012):

Growth in Africa moderated in 2011, as a result of weakening external demand and compounded by the political turmoil and social unrest afflicting North Africa. However, these negative impacts were partly offset by the robust performance of other subregions in Africa, which benefited from high commodity prices and the relatively steady pace of world trade. Aggregate GDP growth for the continent in 2011 resulted from the higher growth in Sub-Saharan Africa (5.1%), particularly the West Africa and East Africa subregions, which recorded growth of 6.2% and 6.0% respectively. (p. 5)

Christophe N. Bredillet

This special edition of *PMJ* focuses on managing projects in Africa. We are very pleased to be able to provide a window into the important project activity taking place in this part of the world. As editors we come to this endeavor from very different backgrounds. One of us grew up in Canada, has never been to Africa, and until last year had no idea that there are a total of 54 countries on the continent (Janice). One of us grew up in Africa, is a professor of economics, and now stays connected to his roots through the IAABD activity (Jacob). One of us grew up in France and, at the time of this special edition, was living and working on project management educational activities in Africa (Christophe).

This special edition was born out of a conference dedicated not to project management but to conducting and teaching business in Africa. The project track was added to the conference program after a chance discussion between Jacob and Janice at a graduation ceremony, and it drew a full slate of interesting papers and a very dynamic discussion. In consultation with Christophe, we recognized the opportunity to build these papers into a special edition for *PMJ*. We requested submissions from the best conference presenters and advertised to academic readership of both *PMJ* and the *Journal of African Business*. Three reviewers examined each paper—two of whom focused on the project management content, while the third reviewer focused on the African context. The goals of the review process were to help the authors transition their papers from conference papers (where necessary) to full *PMJ* submissions, to ensure that the project management papers provided enough contextual background so that we could see how the African context becomes an actor in the project endeavor, and that the non-project management papers connected their research to ongoing discussions in the project management literature.

We selected six papers that extend both the empirical and theoretical understanding of the African project context and contribute to improving practice. The authors of these papers include some that may be known in project management ranks (Ika, Haavaldsen, Klakegg, and Rwelamila); others that have, to this date, never set out to write a project management paper (Zhang and Wei); and a couple of new scholars just beginning to contribute in this specialized area of project management research (Louw and Shiferaw). Each paper that was selected makes a unique contribution to either our understanding of the African project context or project management in general, and sometimes to both. Before we review the papers and topics, we will provide a short introduction to the African project context.

Africa's Project Context at the Start of the 21st Century

Africa is far larger than most people imagine—because most of us do not study the continent, and the maps we use are not proportional. The continent of Africa is home to 54 countries and contains much of the remaining natural resources in the world. To put the size of Africa in perspective, Africa is three times the size of the United States and 120 times the size of the United Kingdom, and it could contain more than 11 billion football fields. In these 54 countries, there are 2,000 languages in 4 language families in use. To put it bluntly, Africa does not easily lend itself to generalizations.

In the early part of the millennium, Africa made significant progress in real economic growth. Huge natural resource reserves combined with needs in infrastructure, urban development, health, communications, technologies, agriculture, transportation, and education have transformed the continent into one of the world's strongest engines of economic activity. Underlying Africa's impressive growth is, among other things, the development and implementation of hundreds of various types of projects (in this paragraph, "projects" refers to "projects, portfolios, and programs") ranging from complex multilateral aid projects to business-led projects. China, India, and a few Middle Eastern Gulf nations are financing a record number of projects across sub-Saharan Africa. Investment commitments by these emerging financiers jumped from less than US\$1 billion per year before 2004 to US\$8 billion in 2006 and US\$5 billion in 2007, according to the World Bank.

Major projects in Africa generally involve multiple stakeholders, including governments, international organizations, local and international financial institutions, private companies, nongovernmental organizations, and local communities, to name just a few. These multiple stakeholders are known to have different and often divergent interests as well as different power standings. The decision to undertake some of these projects and their implementations are heavily influenced by historical and geopolitical factors that link African countries to some of their traditional European and North American allies. The growing presence of China and India in several African countries is also shaping the design and management of projects in Africa. Managing projects in Africa can be particularly complex given the involvements of these multiple stakeholders and their historical, geopolitical, and economic relationships and the cultural differences between Africa and some of its major trading partners.

While Africa is a huge laboratory of different project activities in a very specific context, there are surprisingly few published works that investigate the management of projects in Africa. The purpose of this special issue is

threefold: (1) to highlight what we know about projects and project management in Africa; (2) to explore what research from this particular setting and these types of projects has to tell us about project management practice in general; and (3) to identify the research needed to improve our understanding and practice of project management in Africa.

Summary of Articles

The articles in this issue can in no way cover the complexity and diversity of projects in Africa. However, we do believe that these articles should be enough to open our eyes to some of the challenges and opportunities to learn from projects in this new context. We hope that these articles will both contribute to and trigger a rich agenda that explores the impact that this particular context exerts on projects and project management. The articles included in this special edition explore:

- three different countries as well as multinational projects;
- for-profit, public sector, and development aid projects;
- infrastructure and information and communication technology;
- project governance as well as project management; and
- partnering challenges.

The first paper, by Rwelamila and Purushottam and titled "Project Management Trilogy Challenges in Africa—Where to From Here?" provides an overview of project challenges from the perspective of scholars and educators working there. Drawing from five separate research projects to explore the origins of the specific challenges facing African project managers (8 out of 10 are accidental project managers; organizations are fragmented and archaic; and the project management curriculum is outdated), the authors make recommendations on how to address these challenges.

The second paper, by Shiferaw and Klakegg, and titled "Linking Policies to Projects: The Key to Identifying the Right Public Investment Projects," reviews the merits of project governance in linking policies to projects by examining public sector projects in developing African countries. The challenges of governance are here complicated by the targeted funding of aid groups that are sometimes at odds with the needs and policies of the receiving government. The authors explore the role of good project governance techniques to potentially address these conflicts.

The third article, by Ika and titled "Project Management for Development in Africa: Why Projects Are Failing and What Can Be Done About It," examines the nature and challenges of international development projects and, in particular, four traps to which these types of projects are prone (one size fits all, accountability for results, lack of project management capacity, and cultural). This article

concludes by proposing an agenda for action including both practical and research steps to address these challenges and support the design and implementation of these very special projects.

The fourth article, by Zhang and Wei and titled “Managing Political Risks of Chinese Contracted Projects in Libya,” discusses the political risks of Chinese contracted projects in a country experiencing the beginning stages of a political crisis. Exploring the impact of these unpredicted, rapidly emerging risks, and the tangible and intangible losses that these activities have caused, provides us with a window into a specific challenge prevalent in parts of Africa today and into the growing number of Sino-African projects being undertaken on the continent, where China is becoming a major player in many projects.

The fifth article, by Shiferaw, Blakegg, and Haavaldsen and titled “Governance of Public Investment Projects in Ethiopia,” maps the review processes for public investment projects in order to identify the most important challenges for this type of project. Identifying the key priorities of and gaining commitment from key stakeholders are recognized as the most important front-end challenges facing this type of project. While these may sound like familiar challenges, the authors show how these familiar challenges play out in very different cultural and funding models for projects.

Finally, Louw and Rwelamila address the question “Is the balanced demand of the profession sufficiently accommodated?” by examining the project management training offered at three universities in South Africa. Their review of these programs suggests that this training, which they consider to be representative of the programs available throughout Africa, tends to reflect the traditional view of project management as a control technology rather than recognizing the social organization activity of project management. They assert that projects in the African context require this social skill as much or more

than any others and they conclude by mapping a way for the curriculum to be revised to incorporate recent research-driven calls for rethinking project management development.

Contributions

The articles in this special edition provide insight to a unique and important project context, highlighting both what is unique about projects in the African environment and what is more common to project work in general. We recognize that this set of articles simply provides an introduction to the challenges and can in no way reflect the magnitude of what we have yet to learn. We hope that this special edition has made you think and opened your eyes to the challenges and opportunities. We look forward to seeing more articles about both the unique aspects of African projects and the generalizable knowledge from attempts to address common project challenges in future editions of this and other journals.

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