

On Project Management Needs a Higher Purpose¹

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

20 January 2021

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Dear David,

Happy 2021! Last year was extremely challenging for us at the University of Nairobi due to Covid-19. However, we managed to embed most our courses on the online platform. The process took a lot of our time and energies. As a result, it was difficult to actively participate in PM World Journal and Library activities. However, I have continued to enjoy reading and sharing the published articles with my students and colleagues. Before I forget, kindly please allow me to thank PM World Library for supporting our two graduate students: Daisy Ogutu and Grace Chebet. Both graduated in December 2020 with Master in Project Planning and Management and we expect them to register for the PhD program in Project Planning and Management. Thanks so much!

This letter is a response to your article ‘*Project Management Needs a Higher Purpose*’, published in the January 2021 PM World Journal issue. I have read the article and I confirm that the issues that you have raised in the paper resonate with our experiences with projects and project management in Africa. The title of your article raises deeper questions with regard to the relevance of the way projects are conceptualized and managed in Africa. The analogy of the roaming black elephants resonates not only with Africa’s development challenges but more so with projects and project management in Africa in addressing the black elephants.

The monumental challenges posed by climate change, poverty, dispossession and inequality in Africa are being worsened by Covid-19. The pandemic is reversing all the development gains that the continent of Africa has made over the last two decades, and the situation is likely to get worse if governments, research institutions, societies in Africa and the international development partners do not urgently develop strategies and interventions to cushion the millions in the continent who have suffered from systemic and prolonged marginalization, dehumanization and oppression. Covid may not just wipe the development gains made by the continent but will make life more unbearably burdensome and miserable for communities and populations in Africa.

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I strongly believe that projects and project management have a more pressing and urgent role to address these intractable wicked problems. Beyond the critical role of financing of projects in the Africa, the choice of projects, including their design and their management, will play a critical role in the way populations and communities in Africa will live with these roaming black elephants. This will be the higher calling and role of project management.

In a draft paper, **Toward Re-Humanizing Projects and Project Management in Africa**, which I am submitting to PM World Journal for publication, I have articulated a more nuanced perspective on the importance of re-humanizing projects and project management in Africa. I have posited that (development) projects can only be relevant and responsive in addressing the ‘roaming black elephants’ and the ‘wicked problems’ in Africa, namely dehumanization, marginalization and destitution, when the needs and the conditions of the historically marginalized populations and communities in the continent are placed at the center of development programming.

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