

Engineers See a Great Opportunity to Transform Kenya

By Eng. Shammah Kiteme

President William Ruto addressed Kenyans on 4th January 2023 on a wide range of issues. This address clarified the inner thinking of the government and the plans the government has on issues affecting Kenyans. It is commendable and hope it can be sustained so that Kenyans are constantly aware of the government programs on matters affecting them.

Engineers keenly followed the address particularly to pick the matters Engineering and the actions the government is taking.

On energy cost, the President indicated that the government will interrogate the issue with a view to retiring expensive sources of energy. More focus will be put in building three transmission lines and investment in green energy.

It is important to point out that Kenya has a huge geothermal potential that remains unexploited. This is one way of tapping the energy reserves to ensure that cheap power is availed for commercial, residential and industrial use.

Energy is a key ingredient in manufacturing. Lowering the cost of energy will eventually lower the cost of production and will encourage more foreign direct investments as investors notice that production costs will be lower if they set up in Kenya. This is also an important step to lower the cost of living.

Engineers will play their role in more investment in green energy.

Industrialization is key to economic development. As a country we should aim and exporting finished products and not raw products. While noting the percentage share of industrialization on our GDP went down from 9% to 7%, the President promised to grow it to 20% by 2030. This is achievable. Engineers are key players in this and it is our belief that manufacturing, value addition through agro-processing should be a key focus for our country as this has potential to create job opportunities.

On Agriculture, the President came out clear on the aspect of increasing food production through investment in agriculture. This includes providing farm inputs like seeds and fertilizer to be available to farmers. While this is true it is also important to embrace large scale farming as opposed to subsistence farming. It is possible to invest in mechanization and produce more. This way food will be available for domestic use and for export. Kenya can produce enough food to feed herself and the Horn of Africa that still imports food from as far as Russia and Ukraine.

Engineers will play their role to participate in this government initiative through the construction of dams and water pans for water storage that can be used for irrigation. It is now clear that rain fed agriculture will not meet our food demand.

The President committed to digitize all government business in six months. This is laudable. With mobile penetration at 61%, Kenya stands to gain with more digitization of government services. There is a whole lot of difference when I took my passport in 2010 and when I renewed it last year. The same is

experienced when applying for the renewal of the Driving License. There is no reason why citizens should queue in long lines for services that can be accessed online.

I request to bring it to the attention of the President that some counties have deliberately collapsed the online building approval. This greatly frustrates Engineers as well as developers. It is a way of ensuring that corruption is maintained as money exchanges hands during the manual submission of development plans for approval. We urge all the counties to embrace online approval process for buildings.

Education also featured in the President's address. The investment in TIVETA is welcome. More training of technicians who can be deployed to address our vast infrastructure needs is critical. Funding is required to achieve this. We need to train more Engineers and technicians. It is important that sufficient internship opportunities are created for Engineers and Technicians in training. There should be budget allocation to allow all the Engineering entities both in private and public sector to attach a number of graduates for a hands-on training. This will grow a much-needed human capital. The government should also amend the Engineers Act 2011 so that there is only one body regulating Engineering in Kenya. The current situation where Engineers and Technicians are regulated by different bodies is not tenable. It is a good move that Executive Order No. 1 of 2023 assigned the regulation of Technicians from the Ministry of Education to the Ministry of Infrastructure.

Lastly, there are many Engineers who are unemployed. Engineering takes 5 years to train at the university and when Engineers are not employed this is a great resource going to waste. It is important that the government absorbs all Engineers in National and County Governments. It is sad that counties continue to approve buildings without requisite Licensed Professional Engineers in their employment who can ascertain that the designs being approved are sound. Collapse of buildings is a menace that can be stopped by all counties employing Licensed Engineers to ensure safety of the building they are approving.

Government should also create opportunities for Engineers willing to work in foreign countries. Some countries especially in the west have skills shortfall while in Kenya many Engineers are jobless. Through engaging these countries, Kenyan engineers should be able to relocate to work in these countries who have opportunities but no workers.

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