Attracting and Retaining Investments in the Counties

By Auscar Wambiya

As devolved governments settle down to deliver on the manifestoes of the political leaders and the various Annual Plans, Program Based Budgets, County Integrated Development Plans, the Medium-Term Plans and Vision 2030, it is critical that the local governments look critically into ways and means of attracting and retaining economic investments within the counties that will go a long way in reaping maximum benefits from their comparative advantages amidst the global economic meltdown. But how can the mini governments do this? A few ideas suffice.

The need to start by developing an Investment Master Plan cannot be gainsaid. Each County Government needs to prepare a comprehensive master plan showing land use and the locations of various investments that she will require for development. The master plan should incorporate a physical scope plan which should also show the requirements in terms of settlements, physical infrastructure, utilities, social amenities, and earmarked sites for various development projects including private investments.

Secondly, each local government ought to identify and document investment opportunities available within the County by doing a series of activities that must include the conduct of a county Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis. Each county should then develop a County Investment Promotion Strategy, draw up a list of potential sectors to be targeted and profile all investments projects for the County in order to adequately be ready.

Then, the preparation of investment packages for the promotion of the County as a viable investment destination follows from here. It is also important that the County identifies and resolves impediments to investment in the County which usually include bureaucratic and corruption laden land transactions, slow approval of building plans, dragged licensing, infrastructure & utilities to smoothen the way. Counties must also invest in pre-feasibility and feasibility studies to get a clear picture using scientific methods in the prevailing scenarios. In order to reach out to the investing entities and individuals, Counties must then invest in the development of a live, active and vibrant working internet website in order to promote the County with constant and regular updates. It saddens that some counties have photos of the previous government executives six months into a new government and completely nothing at all on investment options and opportunities in the said counties.

Counties must also continuously set aside land for investment purposes at competitive terms in order to attract and retain investors. The need to invest in adequate infrastructure i.e., power, water, roads etc to act as incentives to attract investments must be prioritized in the County budget. Counties are also encouraged to facilitate and offer aftercare services to investors to avoid delays in investments. The elimination of corruption and reduction of bureaucracy are very attractive to investments. Public entities will be competing over private investment hence the need to develop a conducive environment for both programming and implementation of prioritized investment projects. Done together, each of these interventions will go a long way in attracting and retaining investments not just in the counties but also at the national level.

Obviously, key prerequisites for success include political goodwill and support, an enabling environment, proven expertise, all-inclusive project prioritization & preparation characterized by central planning and local involvement and standardization of agreements to reduce bureaucracy and achieve maximize stakeholder comity in the overall implementation cycle. The need to resolve the current political impasse by the warring parties to avoid the ongoing political toxicity cannot therefore be gainsaid. Attracting and retaining investments is possible.

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