

## **Reassessing The Role of Culture in International Project Management – The Cases in Africa**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In today's Africa, where technological infrastructure and democratic institutions are lacking but poverty, corruptions, diseases, wars and terrorist activities are abounding, project management has become a critical tool for the developed world and international organizations and companies to carry out economic development and social changes. With the increasing impact and continuous development of project management practices, we find that the cultural and geographic aspect of project management has been overlooked, which may have been largely responsible for the failure of a good number of high-profile projects in Africa. To list a few, the Chad-Cameroon oil pipeline to the Atlantic Ocean funded by World Bank cost \$4.2 billion but Deby's government took away oil revenues to fund purchases of weapons. Lake Turkana fish processing plant in Kenya carried a \$22-million price tag but was shut down a few days after its completion due to Turkana's nomadic culture without history of fishing or fish consumption. The Lesotho Highlands water project to divert fresh water from the mountains for sale to South Africa and for electricity was ordered to be shut down by court due to severe environmental and economic damages. Tens of thousands of local residents were displaced due to water diversion. In summary, despite the commonly recognized role in managing international projects, culture may have been underestimated in African projects, resulting in increased risks of project management and failures.

Following a multiple case study methodology, we decide to select five representative countries in Africa: Egypt (North), Nigeria (West), Kenya (East), South Africa (South), and Democratic Republic of Congo (Central) as hosts of international projects. Based on data to be further collected from leading international organizations, including World Bank and IMF, and private companies, including Coca-Cola, Chevron and Shell, which have long managed large projects in these regions, we set out to identify a correlational relationship between project failures and cultural misunderstanding. We further aim to build a theoretical framework for studying the moderating role of culture in international project management.

**Key Words:** Culture, International Project Management, Africa

### **Major References:**

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