

Thoughts on the Critical and Strategic Need for Planning in Ghana

By

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3/22/2010

Introduction

These notes attempt to capture my thoughts on the critical and strategic need for planning in Ghana at this moment. I felt compelled to write down these thoughts about Ghana after having gone through the same thought process to guide the recovery of Haiti following the earthquake. Ghana does not need to wait for a natural disaster before embarking on such a course of action. Yet Ghana is on the cusps of a new-found revenue source, which should not be squandered, but should rather be put to efficient use to spur economic development and create a better place for future generations.

The Argument

Here are the simple arguments for planning:

1. Any community of people need a vision for the future
2. The vision does not have to be constrained by availability or lack thereof of funds
3. The visioning (or planning) results in the identification of needs.
4. Alternative ways of attaining the needs are explored, costed and assessed to find the “best bang for the buck” and to decide on which alternatives to adopt
5. Then available or potential funding is considered to determine how to prioritize which needs should come before others. Sometimes the satisfaction of certain needs provides opportunity or funding for implementation of other needs. This is strategic planning.

Specific Recommendations for Ghana

For Ghana specifically I have certain general planning recommendations. Without the benefit of having performed a field assessment of conditions and issues, I feel strongly about the following:

1. The government should establish a trust fund system into which certain small percentages of oil revenues go to be dedicated to specific needs.
2. The key areas of need are (a) infrastructure, (b) education and (c) technology – specifically alternative energy

3. Infrastructure should include an efficient system of transportation that would go hand in hand with land use planning and location of activities. The transportation system should emphasize and prioritize high capacity means of travel. I refer to my Bus Rapid System Plan for Accra as an example (<http://digitalcommons.calpoly.edu/focus/vol3/iss1/12>).
4. Infrastructure should include the provision of utility systems for water and waste water, similar to how rural electrification and phone distribution systems were done during previous regimes.
5. Infrastructure should include tapping our vast lake water resources with irrigation canals to serve the vast plains. If government invests in the infrastructure, it can sell the water to individual land owners for farming. Indeed firms will see the need to acquire these lands and go into commercial farming as is done here in the US. Plentiful supply of affordable food is a sine qua non for economic and technological development. US, India, China and others proved it; The EU, US, Japan and others protect this sector. The inability to achieve this food sufficiency contributed to the failure of the USSR.
6. There are enough educationists to comment on educational needs. But we should find a way to provide universal education at extremely affordable cost to nationals as a way of leveling the playing field and tapping Ghana's human resources to its utmost. The traditional system of sieving should be replaced with multiple channels of opportunity to absorb everyone according to his or her talent.
7. Technology development should include research and incentives for deployment of emerging green industries. Either oil reserves will be depleted or alternatives will be developed that would lower its value on the world market. Ghana should use part of the oil revenue to position itself advantageously in alternative sources and use of energy.
8. While entrepreneurs come along, the government should establish a system of assessing impacts to avoid the creation of a mess. The number of people, the capacities of services, utilities and infrastructure and maintenance should all be key considerations in the assessment process. We can help develop and establish these. Similarly, requirements should include provisions to close the gaps in any of these areas of consideration.

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