OPINION

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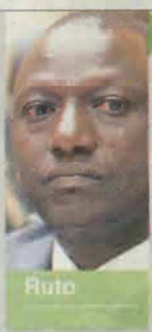
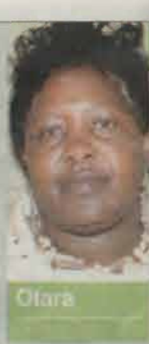

Ruto

"Amina Mohammed sits in the executive council of Africa Agenda 2063 and understands where we want to take Africa," **DP William Ruto seeking Chad President Idris Deby's support for Amina's bid to chair the AU commission.**


Otara

"The government will save billions of shillings paid to women nominated to attain the two-thirds gender rule if adequate women were elected to Parliament," **Kisii Women's Rep Mary Otara urging more women to vie for elective posts.**


Manyora

"These people coming before PAC (for grilling) should appear in prison uniform. They should have been jailed long time ago," **University of Nairobi don Prof Herman Manyora on NYS scandal suspects.**

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Editorial

Address concerns on pay-to-drive tax plan

The possibility that motorists could soon cough up to Sh380 billion to drive on four key highways and the second Nyali bridge, to recover the costs of construction and maintenance, is causing headwinds.

While plans to introduce road tolls—fees paid at a tolling booth for the use of specific roads—have been on Kenya National Highways Authority (KeNHA) wish list for a while, they keep raising a number of fundamental issues on their efficacy.

The initiative intends to improve the roads' kitty to enhance maintenance of particular roads and on that note the move must be applauded. However, it is the manner of execution which raises salient issues particularly on the findings of the infrastructure funding policy study.

Similar attempts failed to take off as consumers raised concerns about the model of funding infrastructure development and it was, therefore, expected the study and arising issues would be subjected to public scrutiny.

Given the interest on the matter since it was mooted last year, expectations are that the government would have conducted social-economic impact assessment and findings made public.

> *Will the toll money go towards construction and expansion of other roads or will it be solely for maintenance?*

As it is, the plan is a classic example of multiple taxation because, while motorists are currently parting with Sh18 per litre of fuel as Road Maintenance Levy, the expected pay-to-drive tax would be an additional levy on motorists who will use the facilities.

How will it be differentiated from the Road Maintenance Levy? Will the toll money go towards construction and expansion of other roads or will it be solely for maintenance? What happens to the Thika Super Highway, for example, which is currently in a maintenance agreement of sorts, yet it is one of those headlined for the new charges?

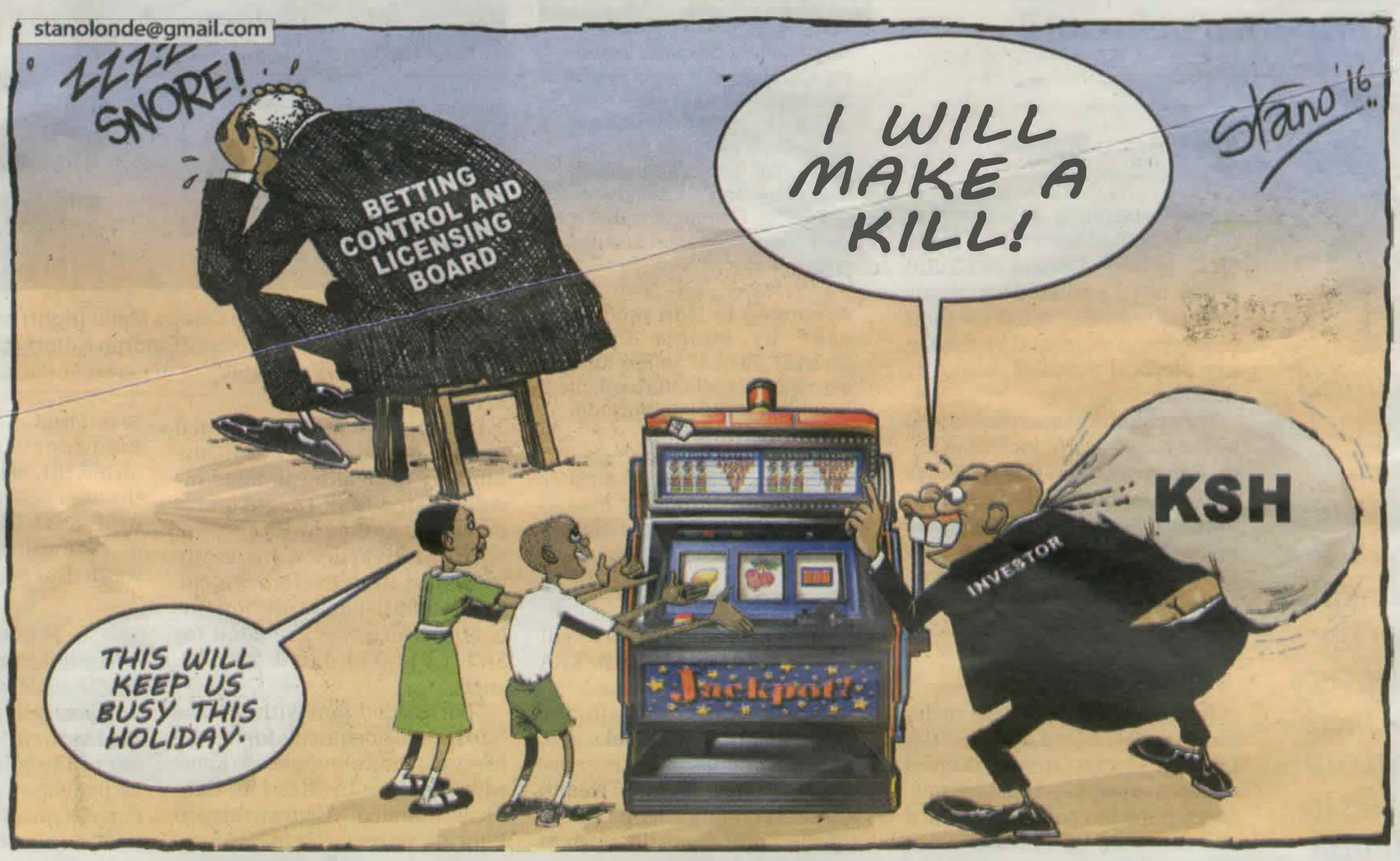
Unanswered questions

These are some of the burning questions that beg for urgent and apt answers to.

Another concern is the likelihood of the move being discriminatory against those who will not be in a position to pay for the new roads and what penalties such motorists would face should they find their way to these highways.

Therefore, as KeNHA rightly accepts—the concept is very new in Kenya—and it is expected that they would have educated the public better on how the initiative would improve the motoring experience.

How different will the new roads be? Will the maintenance include timely fixing of potholes, damaged guards rails, broken streetlights, coupled with speedy emergency and evacuation services?



Mike Njeru

Building a green economy through PPP initiatives

In 2015, world leaders adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that aims to end poverty, inequalities and combat climate change. Over 190 countries adopted the first-ever universal, legally binding global climate deal. The agreement set out a global action plan to put the world on track to avoid dangerous climate change by limiting global warming to below 2°C, thus the birth of the Paris Climate Agreement.

There are 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), one of which calls for urgent action to combat climate change and its impact. Impacts of climate change have continued to have adverse effects on people worldwide.

The Paris deal acknowledged the vital role of forests in combating climate change. It is widely acknowledged that trees help to regulate the climate by absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. So, when they are cut down, that benefit is lost and the carbon stored in the trees is released into the atmosphere, adding to the greenhouse effect.

A successful, sustainable development agenda needs partnerships between governments and the private sector. Many stakeholders have joined hands to ensure the threat of deforestation is nipped in the bud through concerted Public Private Partnership (PPPs) efforts.

With the government taking most of the responsibility to drive climate change solutions that address the needs of the poor and vulnerable communities, it has become increasingly clear that businesses need to be essential partners in this fight in working towards building a green economy. Businesses have come to appreciate the risks and economic impacts of environmental degradation. Environmental experts agree that forests have important benefits, including water catchment conservation and acting as carbon sinks. The area under forest and tree cover in Kenya is estimated at 6.9 per cent which falls short of the required standards of 10 per cent.

Yet forests are essential for life. They sustain the livelihoods of people who depend on them for food, medicines and fuel. They are also the lungs of our planet and help to regulate our climate.

> *The government has singled out environment, water and sanitation as among drivers of socio-economic growth*

Land and environmental degradation is one of the most serious challenges affecting the country, causing an estimated annual economic loss of $390 million or three per cent of the country's GDP. The principal driver of deforestation is commercial agriculture, fuelled by growing populations with increasing incomes, which have sent demand for key commodities soaring.

The government has singled out the environment, water and sanitation as among the major drivers of Kenya's socio-economic well-being. Vision 2030 social pillar—Environment and mineral resources—prioritises projects and programmes within the environment, water and sanitation sectors, with an overarching goal of attaining a clean, secure and sustainable environment by 2030.

The importance of environmental conservation and management of natural resources in steering the socio-economic development of the economy can't be gainsaid. This therefore calls for concerted efforts from all fronts including the private sectors and government alike, to ensure sound management of the environment for a sustainable future.

A number of government entities and corporates have joined hands to bring to life this important aspect of greening the economy through environmental sustainability programmes come to mind. One of these is the partnership between Bamburi Cement, KenGen Foundation and Better Globe Forestry Foundation. The Green Initiative Challenge programme, now in its second phase is a schools afforestation project around the 7-Forks power stations targeting schools in Embu, Kitui and Machakos counties. It aims at complementing and supporting various government initiatives in addressing environmental conservation, which ultimately will make the country a better place.

The writer is the Managing Trustee of KenGen Foundation