

Sub-Saharan Africa's construction sector is entering one of its most consequential periods. At the centre of this transformation is the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA), a continent-wide initiative designed to close critical infrastructure gaps by 2040 through more than 400 priority projects spanning energy, transport, ICT, and transboundary water systems.

With over \$360 billion committed, PIDA represents not just a pipeline of projects, but a blueprint to unlock regional integration, industrialisation, and long-term economic growth across Africa.

This unprecedented scale of ambition, however, places delivery capability under the microscope. As governments accelerate infrastructure investment, new research from Project Management Institute (PMI) warns that the region faces a 57% talent gap in construction project professionals by 2035, one of the highest growth rates globally. Demand for construction project professionals across Sub-Saharan Africa is projected to rise from about 260,000 in 2025 to more than 410,000 by 2035, leaving a shortfall of nearly 150,000 professionals. The challenge is part of a broader global trend, with PMI estimating that nearly 2.5 million additional construction project professionals will be needed worldwide by 2035 to meet growing infrastructure demand.

The report underscores a defining paradox in the region's growth story: construction is one of the most powerful contributors to GDP expansion and job creation, yet it remains one of the most complex and waste-prone sectors of the economy. PMI data shows that approximately 10% of global project investment is lost annually due to poor performance. In a region deploying hundreds of billions of dollars into infrastructure, that inefficiency translates into billions in unrealized value.

"Construction sits at the heart of the region's development ambitions," says George Asamani, Managing Director, PMI Sub-Saharan Africa. "From transport corridors and energy infrastructure to housing, healthcare, and digital connectivity, projects are the vehicles through which we build our future. But without the right project management capabilities, we risk delays, cost overruns, rework, and, ultimately, lost value."



George Asamani, Managing Director of PMI Sub-Saharan Africa.

That urgency is underscored by the pace of activity on the ground. Across Sub-Saharan Africa, large-scale infrastructure investment is accelerating, driven by demographic growth, urban expansion, and regional trade integration. PMI's research identifies the region as having the highest percentage growth in demand for construction project professionals globally. Countries such as Ethiopia are leading this surge, with projected annual demand growth rates of 7.8%, among the highest worldwide.

Construction projects are inherently complex, involving one of the largest stakeholder mixes of any industry, including governments, regulators, contractors, financiers, communities, environmental bodies, and international partners, among others. Misalignment among these groups can lead to inefficiencies, duplication, and costly rework. The report highlights that inadequate communication and collaboration remain persistent challenges, often resulting in financial waste and subpar outcomes.

In an industry where design and scope changes are common, poor coordination between on-site and off-site teams can quickly escalate into delays and budget overruns.

"Construction is highly visible and deeply scrutinised," Asamani adds. "Every bridge, hospital, or power plant carries public expectations. When projects go wrong, the impact is felt not just financially, but socially and politically. That is why professional project management is not a luxury, it is what safeguards value, protects public funds and ensures infrastructure delivers its intended impact."

While construction continues to fuel GDP growth across Sub-Saharan Africa, it has historically lagged behind other industries in productivity and technology adoption. PMI's research highlights digitalisation, including Building Information Modelling (BIM), digital twins, and artificial intelligence, as critical levers to unlock efficiency, improve transparency, and reduce costly rework and waste.

Employers report shortages in core project management competencies such as scheduling, planning, and resource optimisation, alongside essential power skills including communication, collaborative leadership, and stakeholder engagement. At the same time, infrastructure financing is increasingly tied to ESG standards, carbon management, and responsible procurement, creating demand for project leaders who can integrate sustainability into delivery from day one.

Closing the construction talent gap will require more than accelerated recruitment; it demands a deliberate strategy to retain, develop, and elevate project professionals over the long term. PMI's research underscores that improving working conditions, investing consistently in professional development, and creating structured career pathways for emerging and mid-career professionals are essential to building a resilient talent pipeline. Specialised training and certifications, such as Construction Professional (PMI-CP), are helping equip professionals with the skills required to manage the growing complexity of modern infrastructure projects, alongside thought leadership and professional networks that enable practitioners to continuously strengthen their capabilities.

"If we want infrastructure to be a true engine of GDP growth, we must professionalise the way we deliver it. We cannot afford to treat training as a cost. It is an investment in national competitiveness," Asamani concludes.