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THE ARCHITECTURAL ASSOCIATION OF KENYA

THE NEED FOR EFFICIENT AND ROBUST E-GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS

Rapid urbanization continues to exceed the capabilities of local governments to deliver services to their citizens. According to predictions, 91% of the world's urban growth will be in developing countries. The test that lies before the incoming national and county governments is to grow reasonably and deliver services sustainably. E-governance will be integral as it can amplify the benefits of rapid urban growth by enabling the government to provide and manage urban services better.

The Kenya E-government Strategy (2004) aimed at enabling access to information and services efficiently and effectively. Eighteen years later, this is far from being achieved. The process of obtaining construction permits remains to be a significant challenge to the built environment professionals and developers. Thus far, only seven counties (Nairobi, Mombasa, Kiambu, Machakos, Kisumu, Kajiado, and Kilifi) have developed e-permitting systems to improve the efficacy of development control in the counties. However, the systems are marred with inefficiencies, frequent downtimes, and delays, forcing professionals to visit the county offices to follow up on approvals and defeating the whole purpose of electronic systems. Unfortunately, these challenges have become precursors for issuing false permits by quacks and fraudulent professionals, resulting in the construction of unsafe and illegal structures.

Recent surveys conducted by AAK in Nairobi and Kiambu counties established that built environment professionals remain dissatisfied with the systems' design. Specifically, the need to print hard copies of drawings to be stamped after the online process negates the intended purpose of online permitting in Kiambu County. Notably, 80% of applications submitted by our members through the Kiambu eDAMS are still pending, with some applications taking more than one year to process.

The Nairobi Planning & Development Management System (NPDMS) users share similar sentiments. The main hurdle is the migration from eDAMS to NPDMS, a move that introduced an unnecessary feature of linking land ownership to construction permitting, requiring the developer to initiate an application. Usually, the consultant acts as an agent of the developer and has full control of the process. In addition, the systems lack timelines for the approval process and a communication channel for applicants to seek redress and discuss applications with the approval officers. Additionally, the portal only recognizes land registered as Land Registration Numbers (L.R. No.), leaving out those registered as block numbers. These systems are critical in enabling the business environment, and if not addressed, they will continue to discourage investments.

Similarly, the National Land Information Management System, also known as *ArdhiSasa*, has had numerous challenges since its launch in April 2021. The frequent system outages and difficulties in registering and upgrading professionals threaten the system's feasibility in the long run. In July 2022,



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the Ministry of Lands was pressured by protests over the delays in the platform resulting in the activation of 100,000 properties that unlocked transactions worth billions. The Kenya Bankers Association reported that delays in the land portal had put transactions worth KES 102 Billion on hold.

The Architectural Association of Kenya (AAK) implores the incoming national and county governments to be committed to improving the existing systems and fully automating more government services to ensure effective service delivery. We have other systems in Kenya that work efficiently, including the e-citizen platform, which should form a sound basis for comparison. The portals should also enable multiparty collaboration by linking all the construction permitting agencies on the platforms. A one-stop shop for all related agencies will facilitate a faster flow of development applications and optimize customer service while making the process less bureaucratic. This will also require increasing the technical capacity of government staff and sensitizing the public on the use of the systems.

The governments should also ensure that the platforms are devoid of human interaction to prevent ad hoc utilization, manipulation, or exploitation by unscrupulous individuals or agencies to maintain the systems' accountability and integrity. The portals should be end-to-end by enabling mobile money payment and adopting the affixation of Q.R. codes on the approved drawings to avoid submission of hard copies for signature and stamping. Additionally, all the information on the fees, documents required, procedures, and timelines for approvals should be made available on the platforms to enable easy navigation by users. Further, the development permitting systems should have a standardized format that is adopted in all the counties as opposed to each county developing its own.

For e-governance to work in Kenya, the appropriation of efficient digital systems should be integrated into the broader public management reform framework. This will enhance transparency by enabling easier access and verification of information, especially those relating to development applications.

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