

Will the Biogas Sector hold any Promise in Africa?

Recently the biogas sector in Kenya was treated to high drama by local contractors clashing via email and social media. Problem: promises not kept!

I believe in global perspective of issues. Fragmented approach to looking at issues has its place but it is the holistic analysis that will give the most comprehensive overview with dependable cross-cutting analysis and output.

This is the reason why when I see problems or challenges in the Biogas sector in Kenya or East Africa, I am also interested to see the emerging issues in Africa or in the entire globe. Further I believe that order stems from fragmenting the whole and not vice versa.

Having operated in the Biogas sector and renewable/bioenergy fields in Kenya and East Africa in the last 15 years, including in the arena of global standards development, I am more than convinced that piecemeal solutions will not work when regional and international boundaries are shrinking by the day.

For example, when I hear squabbles amongst contractors in the local sector; I begin to wonder what has not happened in the realm of national policy and regulatory framework. And when I move my bio-clean products to Rwanda and have to produce KEBS certification, then I know East Africa common market protocol is still too nascent. I am then interested to see what is happening in SADEC and ECOWAS and pick out what comparative advantage there is. Then comes Asia and I begin to wonder why they have managed to construct over 100,000 plants in Nepal in less than 20 years only while Kenya is still struggling to reach palsy 20,000 in the same period.

I believe the biggest challenge to the growth of Biogas sector in Kenya, East Africa or in Africa as a whole is not in technology or business knowhow but in lack of coherent approach to growing the sector (see my earlier submitted papers). With the emerging and fast growing interest in African partnership by Western and Asian investors, it is a good opportunity to scale up to a continental view point in all our sectors of economy, and trickle it down by borrowing from a broad spectrum of experience and expertise.

Hence I propose Biogas Forum Africa, Biogas Forum East Africa, and Biogas Forum Kenya Chapter in that order. I further propose thematic formations to cater for various aspects of Biogas value chains e.g. Technology Build, Biogas Commercial Enterprises (BCE), Bioslurry etc through stakeholder and BMO forums. In this way order will be created, sector authority will be enabled and policies will be enhanced.

With the Technology well proven, large projects of scale undertaken and many individual livelihoods improved through domestic and commercial installations in the past decades, what the Biogas sector needs now is delineation of individual, selfish and parochial interests to grand scale approach that will provide greater benefits to the wider community.

Only then can Biogas keep its promise as the clean tech that will serve both the poor and the grandiose alike.

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