

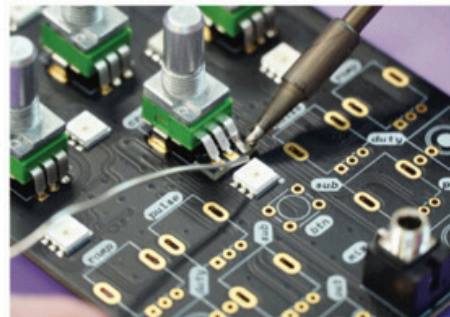
THE LOBITO CORRIDOR: A CONTROVERSIAL ROUTE TOWARDS PROGRESS

The Lobito Corridor, hailed as a beacon of progress, has attracted some controversy and skepticism among Africans and those invested in the continent's development. Far from being a cause for celebration some say it represents a continuation of colonial-era practices, particularly evident in its "Mine to Port Project" design. This railway system is designed to transport raw ores from the mines to the coast for shipment to the West, without any provision for passenger services, a stark departure from initiatives like the Tazara Railway which prioritized citizen mobility alongside freight transport.

Critics argue that celebrating the Lobito Corridor as a step towards Africa's economic advancement is contradictory, as it perpetuates an outdated model that African nations have long sought to escape. The absence of immediate plans for passenger services raises questions about its alignment with the region's developmental aspirations. In contrast, projects like the Tazara Railway, also constructed by Chinese investment, prioritize passenger services from inception, demonstrating a commitment to holistic development.

Key concerns surrounding the Lobito Corridor revolve around its singular focus on facilitating the export of raw materials to the West, rather than fostering intra-Africa trade or promoting value addition within the continent. African nations have repeatedly emphasized the importance of processing and refining minerals locally as a means of ascending the global value chain. However, the Lobito Corridor appears to prioritize the extraction and export of raw materials over value addition within Africa's borders.

Furthermore, the project's disregard for immediate provision of passenger services undermines its potential socio-economic impact on local communities. In contrast, the Benguela Railway,



another Chinese-built railway within the same corridor, boasts passenger services extending to the Congo border, demonstrating a more inclusive approach to infrastructure development.

The Lobito Corridor's divergence from the principles of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which aims to bolster intra-Africa trade, raises concerns about its overall contribution to regional economic integration. By predominantly facilitating Africa-West trade without fostering local value addition, the corridor fails to align with the objectives of AfCFTA and risks perpetuating dependency on external markets.

In conclusion, the Lobito Corridor, despite its

infrastructural significance, falls short of being a cause for excitement or celebration. Its emphasis on exporting raw materials to the West, coupled with the absence of immediate plans for passenger services, underscores a missed opportunity for Africa to advance its economic agenda. While devoid of bias against Chinese involvement, the critique of the Lobito Corridor is rooted in factual observations and a commitment to realizing Africa's developmental aspirations.

It raises the question, what if the investment was put towards projects that allow Zambia and its neighbours to process these materials and export finished products to Africa and beyond?

