

FOCUS ON THIKA: TOWARDS AN INDUSTRIAL CITY

What should a smart, sustainable Thika city look like?

Stakeholders need to strategise and agree on how to build the city's resilience before it acquires its intended status

BY EVANS ONGWAE

The dream to make Thika a Smart Industrial City is unfolding at an interesting time. Globally, the focus is on how people can, through smart initiatives, achieve the Sustainable Development Agenda by 2030.

Throughout the world, the climate change crisis is pushing authorities and communities to pay greater attention to sustainability and resilience.

Additionally, the plan to elevate Thika's status is being implemented when urbanisation is gathering pace in the country. More people are migrating from rural Kenya to towns such as Thika, an already established industrial hub. More and more Kenyans can be expected to stream into the proposed smart city.

All these developments have implications for the anticipated smart city.



SHUTTERSTOCK

As the city's population grows, energy consumptions will rise. A similar trend will be observed in the industrial sector. More manufacturing plants will require more energy. The question is: In line with the national quest for sustainability, will house-

holds and industries in the smart city adopt cleaner, renewable energy?

As a smart industrial city, Thika should prioritise environmentally-friendly practices and policies. Widespread use of renewable energy is one such practice. Sustainable

transportation is yet another. Thika residents and visitors will also look forward to seeing more green spaces established in the city.

Cleaner, more efficient energy such as solar panels can be mounted on public buildings as well as in facto-

ries and homes. That is a key aspect of sustainability.

On transport, more paths for pedestrians and users of bicycles can go a long way towards improving transport in the city.

Thika already has in place a wide variety of infrastructure that is needed in a smart city. What remains is to build on this. Unlike Konza Technopolis that is being built from the ground up from a masterplan, Thika is an existing town that cannot be brought down to plan it afresh. However, as other features of a smart city are incorporated into Thika, it is necessary to weave sustainability into them.

Yet another aspect that needs to be considered is resilience.

Kenyans have in the past witnessed the helplessness that engulfs victims of disasters such as fires and floods. Given that such emergencies can strike any place, the smart industrial city of Thika should display resilience. That means stakeholders must strategise and agree on how to build the city's resilience before it acquires its intended status. The city should be able to adapt to and recover from unexpected shocks and emergencies.

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