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CDRC

January 2025, Vol. 9 No. 1

Digest

Content

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Geopolitical Rivalry, Global
Experiences, and Ethiopia's
Efforts*



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CDRC is a non-profit, independent Ethiopia-based policy institute engaged in research and analysis. The Centre looks at opportunities and key challenges in the Horn of Africa, and focuses on policy ideas on development, sustainable peace and security.

The CDRC Digest is the Centre's publication which endeavors to provide an African perspective on political, economic and social developments as well as mechanisms of sustaining peace and security in the Horn of Africa, the African continent and beyond. The publication is based on dialogue, rigorous research and analysis.

A publication of the Centre for Dialogue, Research and Cooperation (CDRC), in partnership with the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Ethiopia

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Corridorization, Geopolitical Rivalry, Global Experiences, and Ethiopia's Efforts

Introduction

Corridor initiatives are gaining significant momentum, marking a new era of connectivity and sustainable development. At the forefront of these projects is China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), announced in 2013 by President Xi Jinping. Widely regarded as the largest infrastructure project since the post-WWII Marshall Plan, the BRI represents an unprecedented global endeavor to establish a vast network of ports, roads, railways, and other infrastructure. While the BRI is often celebrated as a transformative trade initiative that addresses China's peculiar economic challenges in the northwest and manages the future generation of industrialization, it is equally a geopolitical strategy—a deliberate Chinese move to reshape global markets and international relations that could challenge the dominance of the United States in the post-Cold War global order.

The defining feature of corridorization lies in the linear agglomeration of economic activities and populations along the backbone of transport infrastructure. This concept is grounded in classic economic theories that emphasize integrating regions, connecting markets, reducing transaction costs, and fostering business clustering through snowball or agglomeration effects. In the 21st century, connected infrastructure serves as the foundation of globalization, defining the pathways for projecting influence and competing for valuable assets. These networks are not only transforming economic and geopolitical relationships but also transcending

traditional geographic boundaries, reshaping the way states interact.

Corridor initiatives serve as platforms for nations to modernize and transform their economies, develop their populations, and bolster their diplomatic confidence, making themselves attractive destinations for investment. However, it is critical to recognize that corridors are political constructs shaped by local, national, regional, and international dynamics. They often reconfigure border regions, assigning them roles that align with broader geopolitical and geo-economic objectives.

The modern proliferation of corridors spans various connectivity projects, typically grouped into three major categories:

1. **Transportation:** Highways, railways, bridges, tunnels, airports, and seaports.
2. **Energy:** Oil and gas pipelines, refineries, electricity grids, and power plants.
3. **Communication:** Internet cables, satellites, and data centers.

These corridors are conceptualized through different but overlapping approaches, including infrastructure corridors, economic corridors, growth corridors, and development corridors, each designed to meet specific objectives.

Corridorization and the Global Order

The contemporary world is increasingly defined by the geopolitics of connectivity and interlinked networks. Despite intensifying rivalries, such as those between the United States and China, these global powers remain deeply interconnected through trade and investment corridors. This connectivity logic drives priorities for governments, citizens, and the international community, shaping decisions about where, how, and why significant changes will occur

in specific regions. As corridor plans expand in scale and accelerate in implementation, the global patterns of trade and investment are undergoing a historic restructuring. The dominance of North Atlantic-centered capitalism is giving way to new economic hubs across the Indian Ocean and the Eurasian landmass. In this shifting landscape, Africa has emerged as a focal point, playing an increasingly important role in the realignment of global connectivity.

Analytical and Political Importance

Understanding the dynamics of corridorization—globally, regionally, and nationally—is essential for navigating this evolving geopolitical environment. These corridors are not merely infrastructure projects but strategic tools that shape economies, influence geopolitics and define the future of globalization. For Africa, and specifically Ethiopia, actively engaging in these processes offers opportunities to leverage connectivity for economic growth and regional integration while navigating the challenges posed by geopolitical competition.

Ethiopia's position within the emerging global framework underscores the need for carefully crafted policies and strategic investments to fully capitalize on the benefits of corridorization while minimizing associated risks. As the global race for connectivity accelerates, Ethiopia must position itself strategically to leverage the transformative potential of corridors. By fostering sustainable development, enhancing regional integration, and connecting with global trade routes, Ethiopia can secure its place in the evolving international order.

Infrastructure Corridors as Authority: Reshaping Cross-Border Relations and Interconnectivity

The increasing visibility of infrastructure

corridors on a global scale reflects significant shifts in trade relations, technological advancements, and the role of borderland spaces. In the 21st century, infrastructure corridors are reshaping much of the world, requiring new ways of thinking about a transformed, interconnected planet. These corridors have established unprecedented connectivity, with profound effects on economic integration and cross-border interactions.

The European Model: A Foundation of Integration

The story of infrastructure corridors radically shaping geopolitics began in Europe in the post-WWII era. Western Europe has become one of the most highly integrated regions globally, characterized by an expansive and dense infrastructure network. This region has established optimal governance structures that extend across various sectors, including financial services, energy, telecommunications, and transportation. The interconnectivity of Europe's energy grid, encompassing gas pipelines and nuclear power, exemplifies how corridors can facilitate shared governance and mutual reliance.

In this context, infrastructure corridors serve as the cornerstone for the vision of a united Europe, reinforcing regional cohesion, economic growth, and political stability. Europe's success demonstrates how well-planned corridors can transcend national boundaries and drive regional integration.

Asia: The Belt and Road Initiative and Beyond

Asia's history of infrastructure corridors predates China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Institutions like the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), and the Asian Development Bank

(ADB) have invested heavily in Eurasian infrastructure for decades. However, the BRI, launched in 2013, introduced unprecedented capital and ambition, expanding existing networks and introducing new projects.

When fully realized, the BRI will create a dense map of connectivity across Eurasia, including high-speed railways, gas pipelines, road networks, hydrological projects, fiber-optic internet cables, airports, and seaports. These corridors will enhance China's access to Asian markets and consolidate borderland spaces, reinforcing economic and geopolitical ties throughout the region. The BRI exemplifies how infrastructure corridors can serve as instruments of statecraft, extending influence and reshaping regional dynamics.

Africa: A Revolution in Corridor Development

Emerging data highlights a massive surge in corridor development across Africa over the past 15 years, signaling a revolutionary moment in the continent's geopolitical and economic landscape. Prominent corridors include:

- **The Northern Corridor:** Anchored by the port of Mombasa, Kenya.
- **The Central Corridor:** Anchored by the port of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.
- **The LAPSSET Corridor:** Anchored by the port of Lamu, Kenya.
- **The Djibouti-Addis Ababa Corridor:** Linking Ethiopia and Djibouti.
- **The NACALA Corridor:** Spanning Mozambique, Malawi, and Zambia.
- **The Abidjan-Lagos Corridor:** Connecting West African economic hubs.

These corridors serve as critical transport routes for national, regional, and international trade. While challenges remain

in connecting major projects across the continent, these corridors are functioning as lifelines for the countries involved, bundling diverse infrastructure investments into cohesive systems that represent the vision for Africa's future.

Challenges in African Corridors

Despite their promise, Africa's transport corridors face significant hurdles. Many are criticized for being expensive, inefficient, and restrictive to business activity, limiting global competitiveness and intra-regional trade. According to the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), transport costs for landlocked countries in sub-Saharan Africa account for more than 70% of total import/export costs.

While transport corridors have the potential to reduce these costs, progress is hindered by several factors:

- **Lack of Connectivity:** Limited integration between major corridors impedes seamless trade and movement.
- **Fragmented Decision-Making:** Individual countries often make unilateral decisions, undermining regional coordination.
- **Overregulation:** Excessive bureaucratic barriers slow progress and discourage investment.
- **Unreliable Investments:** Inconsistent funding in ports and related infrastructure creates bottlenecks.
- **Security Concerns:** Instability in certain regions disrupts operations and deters long-term investment.

Infrastructure corridors are reshaping cross-border relations and redefining interconnectivity on a global scale. While regions like Europe and Asia have demonstrated the transformative potential of these projects, Africa's efforts highlight

both opportunities and challenges. Addressing inefficiencies and fostering stronger regional collaboration will be essential to unlocking the full potential of African corridors. As the continent continues its journey toward enhanced connectivity, these corridors could serve as powerful engines for economic growth, regional integration, and geopolitical influence.

Corridors “War”: A New Arena of Geopolitical and Geo-economic Rivalry

Infrastructure corridors have emerged as critical technologies and focal points in a new geopolitical and geo-economic competition era. This “corridorization race” can be viewed as a scramble for network centrality across logistics, production, resource control, telecommunications, and data cable networks, which serve as conduits for projecting power. At the heart of this rivalry lies the struggle for dominance between the United States and China, often framed as the beginning of a “Second Cold War.” The proliferation of large-scale infrastructure projects across continents, with trillions of dollars earmarked for future development, underscores the stakes of this competition.

China’s Corridorization Strategy

China has led corridor initiatives for decades, investing trillions of dollars in railways, roads, economic zones, and ports. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has been a cornerstone of post-2008 global infrastructure development, spanning continents and reshaping trade and production networks.

From 2000 to 2022, China loaned African governments over \$160 billion, financing projects ranging from roads and railways to ports and other infrastructures. Beyond physical infrastructure, China has rapidly expanded its influence in the telecommunications sector, particularly

through underwater cable investments. A notable example is the Peace Cable, a 25,000 km-long fiber-optic network connecting nearly a dozen countries across Asia, Africa, and Europe, demonstrating China’s ambition to dominate digital infrastructure as well.

Global and Regional Countermeasures

Other global, regional, and national initiatives have entered the corridorization space in recent years. Some align with the larger BRI framework, such as the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Corridor (CAREC), which predates the BRI but often intersects with it. Others are directly positioned as strategic countermeasures to China’s influence, reflecting concerns that the BRI is restructuring the global economy into China’s economic orbit.

The India-Middle East-Europe Corridor (IMEC)

The India-Middle East-Europe Corridor (IMEC) is a prime example of efforts to counter the BRI. This initiative, launched through a collaborative agreement involving India, the US, the EU, and Saudi Arabia, represents a significant investment in global connectivity. IMEC aims to foster economic integration between India, the Middle East, and Europe, forming a critical Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) component.

PGII, a G7-led initiative, seeks to bridge the infrastructure gap in developing nations and serve as an alternative to the BRI. IMEC’s supporters argue that it provides a more transparent and sustainable model for meeting global infrastructure needs, in contrast with the BRI, which allegedly creates debt dependency thereby favoring Chinese interests. No doubt, it is impossible to ignore that the view expressed might

indicate the existing rivalry among the major powers.

The Lobito Corridor

Another example of corridor initiatives challenging Chinese dominance is the Lobito Corridor, which connects Angola, Zambia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. This project underscores the growing efforts of international coalitions to create alternative routes for resource transportation and economic activity. The Lobito Corridor highlights the competition to influence the continent's infrastructure and economic policies focusing on Africa's development priorities.

The Lobito Corridor is a 1,300 km railway stretching across Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Zambia. It has gained prominence due to U.S. concerns about China's dominance in critical mineral extraction and resource control in the region, particularly about critical resources for future technologies like copper and other minerals. As the world transitions from traditional energy sources to greener technologies, copper will play a central role. The Lobito Corridor is envisioned to facilitate the movement of key commodities from the Copperbelt, challenging China's economic leverage in Africa.

The emergence of infrastructure corridors as geopolitical battlegrounds marks a significant shift in global power dynamics. While China's BRI remains unparalleled in scale, initiatives such as IMEC and the Lobito Corridor highlight efforts by the US, EU, and other actors to counterbalance China's influence. The West is also strategically aligning with Gulf actors to dilute China's leverage in global connectivity. This evolving "corridor war" is redefining the global economy and reconfiguring geopolitical alliances, positioning

infrastructure as a pivotal instrument for asserting power and influence in the 21st century.

The United States increasingly views China's expanding infrastructure networks as a significant security threat, posing risks across economic, technological, and even military domains. In response, the U.S. has begun revisiting its approach to global connectivity, seeking to curb China's reach in strategic regions. One of the most prominent examples of this shift is the Lobito Corridor.

However, the U.S. faces significant challenges in persuading countries, especially low-income nations, that its investments and strategic concerns outweigh the tangible benefits of Chinese state-led investments, which are often quicker in realization and more extensive. The Lobito Corridor exemplifies the current global infrastructure race and could perhaps mark the beginning of a more focused U.S. corridor investments in Africa.

U.S. Efforts to Strengthen Business Ties with Africa

The outgoing Biden administration placed a renewed focus on Africa, aiming to strengthen commercial relations with the continent. In 2022, the U.S. announced a new US-Africa partnership, committing \$55 billion for investments in infrastructure and development. This marks a significant shift, as the U.S. has traditionally lagged in its business engagement in Africa. How these efforts will evolve under the incoming Trump administration remains to be seen.

Regional Rivalries in South Asia and the Middle East

Infrastructure corridors also reflect and amplify regional rivalries, as nations vie for control over trade routes and strategic

infrastructure.

- **South Asia:** The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), part of China's BRI, has heightened India's concerns as it passes through disputed territories and deepens Pakistan's economic ties with China. In response, India has partnered with countries like Japan to develop alternative routes, such as the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC), emphasizing sustainable and inclusive infrastructure development.
- **Middle East:** Rivalries between Saudi Arabia and Iran are similarly mirrored in infrastructure projects. The North-South Transport Corridor (NSTC), involving India, Russia, and Iran, aims to create a trade route connecting the Indian Ocean with Central Asia and Europe, reducing reliance on Gulf Arab-dominated maritime routes like the Red Sea and Suez Canal. These corridors are not just economic but also deeply strategic, reflecting underlying political and sectarian tensions in the region.

Risks of Corridor Competition

While the competition over infrastructure corridors provides low-income countries with greater choices, opportunities, and investments, it also brings substantial risks. Eroding trust among global powers heightens the potential for destabilizing scenarios, including disrupted railway lines, halted oil and gas flows, and the use of infrastructure as a tool for territorial expansion. The lessons of the Cold War serve as a stark reminder of the dangers of repeating history.

Corridors can also be weaponized, as demonstrated by the geopolitical fallout from the Russia-Ukraine war. Energy pipelines became a focal point of the conflict, with Russia leveraging energy connectivity

as a geopolitical weapon to weaken European interests. In turn, Europe sought to reduce its energy dependency on Russia by turning to alternative sources, often at significant cost to its population. One such alternative is the Southern Gas Corridor, which transports gas from Azerbaijan to Europe via Türkiye, offering a strategic means of diversifying energy supplies and reducing reliance on Russian energy.

China's Strategy and Its Challenges

China's infrastructure investments are not entirely free of conditions, as they often involve political alignments, economic concessions, or the bundling of investment resources with the implementation of projects by Chinese companies. In Southeast Asia, the China-Laos Railway has strengthened connectivity between the landlocked country and China but has also increased Laos's debt and economic dependency. This model has drawn criticism, prompting the U.S. and its allies to promote alternative investment approaches that emphasize transparency and sustainability. However, Chinese investment packages often offer cost advantages that appeal to developing countries. A significant portion of global infrastructure projects is carried out by Chinese firms, tailored to the financial capacities of the host nations.

Corridors as Spatial Technologies of Control

Beyond their economic and strategic importance, corridors are increasingly becoming tools of spatial control. Maintaining authority over key corridors enables nations to exert influence over life in a territory without full occupation. A stark example is the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) control over the Netzarim and Philadelphi Corridors in Gaza, which allowed Israel to manage strategic access and movement in the region.

Infrastructure corridors are not just pathways for trade and connectivity; they are instruments of geopolitical power. Whether as tools of collaboration or competition, they have the potential to reshape global alliances and economic systems. The challenge lies in balancing their promise for development and integration with the risks of dependency, rivalry, and exploitation.

Corridorization in Africa: Proliferation and Africa's Agency

For decades, Africa was often viewed as peripheral to global trade and production networks. However, recent years have witnessed a surge in investment in Africa's critical infrastructure. New ports, railways, roads, and gateway corridors are reshaping the continent's engagement with transnational politics and the global economy. Funding and expertise from Europe and North America now openly compete with those from China, the UAE, and other players, leading to a wave of development projects that are re-spacing Africa's economic and geopolitical landscape. Africa's increasing assertiveness and the vision outlined in Agenda 2063 have been instrumental in driving this progress. The sustainability of these efforts hinges on the consolidation of African agency and the extent to which major and emerging powers align their engagements with Africa's priorities and aspirations.

The Role of China in Africa's Corridorization

Africa's infrastructural transformation has coincided with China's internationalization of its companies and growing demand for infrastructure funding on the continent. Since 2017, when Africa was formally integrated into China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a substantial number of

infrastructure projects have been branded as part of the BRI. Chinese contractors and funding bodies have become dominant players in Africa's corridorization, building railways, highways, electricity transmission networks, digital infrastructure, and special economic zones. The Africa-China cooperation through FOCAC has significantly advanced economic collaboration between the two regions. China's role in Africa's infrastructure boom is monumental, yet it also raises concerns about dependency and control. These developments often present challenges, including issues of debt sustainability, technology transfer, job creation, and the quality of investments.

Competing Stakeholders and Global Rivalries

Africa's growing importance in the global economy and its vast untapped market have attracted a range of stakeholders eager to invest. Major powers like the U.S., EU, and China, alongside emerging players, are vying to access Africa's burgeoning markets, create job opportunities, and secure profits.

A critical factor driving this competition is Africa's wealth of critical minerals, essential for modern technologies. A rival's control of Africa's resources and markets would tilt the balance of forces, hence triggering further contestations. Minerals like cobalt, nickel, and lithium are indispensable for renewable energy technologies, consumer electronics, and defense systems. The International Energy Agency predicts that by 2050, demand for nickel will double, cobalt demand will triple, and lithium demand will increase tenfold. This growing demand underscores the importance of supply chain corridors in Africa.

For the West, offering a credible alternative to China's BRI is essential. While China has excelled in delivering rapid and large-scale

infrastructure projects, Western nations must demonstrate their ability to provide sustainable and equitable development.

Benefits and Risks for Africa

The increased attention from global powers offers Africa substantial opportunities for development, including enhanced connectivity, economic growth, and technological advancement. For the first time in history, the continent is at the center of a strategic rivalry that could lead to meaningful investments and infrastructure improvements. This competition could also serve as a platform for showcasing the effectiveness of different governance models, with tangible benefits for African nations.

However, these developments come with significant risks.

1. **Unequal Benefits:** Not all African countries may equally benefit from corridor projects, leading to disparities between regions.
2. **Geopolitical Tensions:** The intensifying rivalry between global powers could exacerbate existing divisions and create new geopolitical fault lines.
3. **Economic Dependency:** Heavy reliance on foreign investments might deepen Africa's dependency on external actors, limiting its sovereignty and its ability to control its destiny.
4. **Governance Challenges:** Weak state apparatuses, coupled with corruption and inefficiencies, can delay projects and reduce their long-term impact.

Reclaiming Africa's Agency

As foreign investments in infrastructure grow, African leaders and citizens face a critical challenge: reclaiming agency in the face of external involvement. This requires a strategic and unified approach to negotiating with global powers. African

governments must prioritize transparency, ensure equitable distribution of benefits, and align infrastructure projects with national and regional development goals.

Fostering regional cooperation through organizations like the African Union can additionally strengthen Africa's collective bargaining power. By taking control of its narrative and leveraging the competition between global powers, Africa can position itself not as a passive recipient but as an active player shaping its development trajectory.

Corridorization in Africa marks a turning point in the continent's global role, offering unprecedented opportunities for growth and integration. However, it also presents risks of dependency and loss of sovereignty. The challenge for African leaders lies in navigating these dynamics to ensure that infrastructure investments contribute to sustainable and inclusive development. By reclaiming agency and fostering strategic partnerships, Africa can turn this moment of geopolitical competition into a catalyst for long-term progress. However, all this is contingent upon Africa being able to address the security challenges it is facing, as it is manifest in the case of the Horn.

The Horn of Africa in the Global Corridorization Power Play

The Horn of Africa occupies a pivotal position at the crossroads of major global trade routes, making it potentially a key player in the evolving dynamics of corridorization. Its location along the Red Sea and proximity to the Bab al-Mandeb Strait—one of the world's busiest maritime chokepoints—grants the region immense strategic importance. These trade routes connect Europe, the Middle East, and Asia, drawing growing attention and intensifying

competition among global and emerging powers to influence the region's corridors. Over the past decade, foreign powers have significantly increased investments in critical infrastructure across the Horn of Africa, each vying for a share of the region's economic and geostrategic potential.

China's Expanding Influence

China views the Horn of Africa as a vital component of its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), integrating the region into its global trade and connectivity vision. Djibouti has emerged as a critical hub in this strategy, benefiting from Chinese investments in port infrastructure, railways, and free trade zones. Notably, China established its first overseas "military logistics base" in Djibouti, underscoring the region's strategic importance to Beijing's economic and security objectives.

Ethiopia has also become a major recipient of Chinese infrastructure investments, including railroads, highways, and industrial parks. These projects form part of a broader effort to secure trade routes from the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean. Ethiopia's integration into the BRI remains a model for other Horn of Africa countries. Meanwhile, the Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) Corridor exemplifies how China's investments aim to create alternative trade routes and reduce reliance on congested or geopolitically sensitive corridors.

China's partnership with the Horn of Africa illustrates how economic and geostrategic interests shape new corridors. Investments in the region enhance economic cooperation and extend the strategic reach of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) into the southern Indian Ocean.

The Western Response

The United States has historically maintained a strong military presence in the Horn of Africa, focused on securing trade routes, countering terrorism, and leveraging the concern with rival powers—particularly China and Russia—to gain a strategic foothold. However, the U.S. has traditionally been a minor player in corridor investments across the continent, including the Horn of Africa.

In recent years, the U.S. has taken strategic steps to challenge China's dominance through its Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII). Promoted as a "democratic" alternative to the "autocratic" BRI, the PGII prioritizes financing critical infrastructure projects in clean energy, digital infrastructure, and transportation. This policy shift reflects a renewed U.S. commitment to investing in economic corridors and competing with China's extensive regional influence. However, the U.S. faces significant challenges in countering China's entrenched presence and delivering tangible benefits to the region. Critics argue that while the U.S. and the West may be seen as promising partners, they often fall short in delivering impactful solutions. Furthermore, the West appears more focused on curbing China's influence than on providing alternative mechanisms to help developing nations address pressing challenges such as poverty, peace, and security.

The Gulf States and Emerging Players

The Gulf States, particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE, have deepened their engagement in the Horn of Africa, aiming to secure Red Sea trade routes and expand their influence through investments in ports, energy, and agriculture. These efforts represent a strategic move to reshape traditional trade corridors and alliances.

The UAE has developed a proven strategy for advancing its interests through accelerated port and logistics infrastructure development. Its investments in Berbera Port and the Bossaso Port deal highlight its focus on controlling critical trade corridors. Beyond economic aims, the UAE pursues political objectives, such as denying Iran a strong presence along key maritime supply lines.

Saudi Arabia's involvement is similarly driven by economic and political considerations, including ensuring food security and strengthening its geopolitical position. Turkey has also emerged as a significant player, making substantial infrastructure investments in the Horn as part of its broader strategy to secure a foothold in this increasingly competitive region.

Risks and Opportunities

The renewed interest in the Horn of Africa presents both opportunities and challenges. Increased investments in infrastructure could spur economic growth, improve connectivity, and integrate the region more deeply into global trade networks. However, the growing involvement of external powers also carries risks:

- **Geopolitical Rivalries:** The Horn of Africa risks becoming a battleground for competing global and regional powers, exacerbating tensions.
- **Economic Dependencies:** Overreliance on foreign investments could compromise the region's sovereignty and economic independence.
- **Uneven Development:** Infrastructure projects may favor certain areas or countries, deepening inequalities within the region.

The Horn of Africa is at the heart of a global

corridorization power play, with China, the U.S., the Gulf States, and other players competing for influence. While this competition presents significant opportunities for economic development, it also underscores the need for regional cooperation and strategic leadership. The challenge for the Horn of Africa lies in leveraging foreign investments to serve regional interests while avoiding the pitfalls of dependency and geopolitical entanglements. By adopting a unified and strategic approach, the region can position itself not merely as a site of competition but as an active participant in shaping its economic and political future.

As global power rivalries intensify, the Horn of Africa is emerging as a pivotal region in the global corridors race, both on land and at sea. Djibouti and Somalia host some of the world's most critical maritime chokepoints, with the Bab al-Mandeb Strait serving as a vital artery for global trade, especially oil shipments from the Gulf to Europe and beyond. On land, Ethiopia and Kenya possess significant potential to act as bridges, linking the Horn of Africa to broader economic corridors spanning Asia, the Middle East, and Africa.

The region's resource potential further underscores its strategic value. Ethiopia and Somalia hold vast renewable energy reserves, including solar, wind, and hydroelectric power, while Eritrea and Sudan are endowed with mineral wealth and untapped oil and gas reserves. Together, these assets position the Horn of Africa as a future hub for global energy corridors and a regional power center.

Opportunities and Challenges

The immense strategic value of the Horn of Africa makes it a focal point for competing regional and global connectivity initiatives.

This race for corridor control brings both opportunities and challenges:

Opportunities:

- **Strategic Investments:** Countries in the region can leverage the competition among global powers to secure substantial investments in infrastructure, renewable energy, and economic development.
- **Development Catalysts:** Investments in critical infrastructure could transform one of the world's poorest regions into a key player in global trade and energy networks.
- **Negotiation Leverage:** By fostering cooperation and leveraging their strategic positions, nations in the Horn can negotiate more favorable terms for development projects and partnerships.

Challenges:

- **Security Threats:** Persistent instability, terrorism, and inter-state rivalries pose significant risks to infrastructure projects and foreign investments.
- **External Influences:** Growing involvement by global powers increases the risk of dependency and the potential erosion of sovereignty, as countries may become entangled in the agendas of foreign players.
- **Militarization Risks:** As competition intensifies, the risk of militarization and conflict in the region grows, potentially leaving local populations vulnerable to the fallout of these power struggles.

The Horn of Africa stands at a critical juncture. If regional governments can address security challenges, foster cooperation, and assert their agency in negotiations with foreign powers, the region can harness this competition to drive economic growth and development. Investments in renewable energy, infrastructure, and trade corridors have the potential to transform the region into a

critical player in the reshaping of global trade and energy routes.

However, if external influences are mismanaged or if tensions escalate, the region risks becoming a battleground for competing global interests, with devastating consequences for its people. The Horn of Africa's future as a vital corridor depends on its ability to balance these opportunities and challenges wisely, ensuring that the benefits of development and connectivity are shared equitably and sustainably.

Urban Corridorization: International Experiences and Issues to Consider

Urban infrastructures and corridors are reshaping global cities through significant techno-territorial restructuring. This process plays a pivotal role in shaping urban forms, their socio-economic functions, and the political dynamics within them. The rapid expansion of urban infrastructure projects reflects a deliberate attempt to navigate uncertain urban futures and reconfigure cities to meet the demands of global connectivity and economic growth.

Globally, urban corridor experiences highlight that states often mobilize capital for spatial projects promising enhanced transnational connectivity. These projects are viewed as pathways to attract foreign investment, facilitate industrial upgrading, and promote export-driven economic growth. Examples of this narrative can be seen from Eurasia to Africa and Latin America. However, these initiatives are not isolated; they are deeply influenced by domestic actors, including elites, bureaucrats, politicians, and ordinary citizens, as well as by party politics and environmental contexts.

Key Issues to Consider

Urban corridorization often brings about significant socio-political debates, requiring

a thoughtful and multi-dimensional analysis. Below are some critical considerations:

1. **Historical Contexts:** Urban corridors must be planned with an understanding of the historical contexts in which modern urban planning has evolved. Current plans are often iterations of long-standing strategies, carrying forward and adapting previous logic to new eras. Recognizing this continuity can provide valuable insights for better planning and execution.

2. **Symbolism and Discourse:** Understanding the narratives, imaginaries, and symbolisms surrounding urban corridor projects is crucial. These elements shape public perception, stakeholder engagement, and the broader cultural and political implications of corridorization.

3. **Competing Objectives:** Urban corridors are often designed to balance infrastructural, urban, and developmental goals. Policymakers must navigate competing priorities to ensure these projects align with broader urban and social objectives rather than being driven solely by narrow economic or political interests. However, critics frequently highlight the shortcomings of such initiatives over their successes, making it challenging to harmonize objectives and foster consensus.

4. **Social Impacts:** The development of urban corridors reshapes relationships among population groups, particularly in how they live, work, and travel across urban spaces. Policymakers must interrogate the inequalities and injustices that such projects often generate, including precarious labor conditions, land dispossession, and displacement. Studies indicate that these impacts frequently lead to protests and contestations, highlighting the need for socially inclusive planning.

5. **Territorial and Spatial Reconfiguration:** Urban corridor projects reconfigure spaces, redesign territories, and reproduce material geographies of power, capital, and the state.

Policymakers should critically examine how these projects transform spatial arrangements and geometries to ensure they do not perpetuate inequities or create unintended consequences.

6. **Economic Inequalities:** Without strategic oversight, urban corridorization can exacerbate local socio-economic inequalities, as these projects often benefit certain groups disproportionately while marginalizing others. Thoughtful planning and equitable distribution of resources are essential to mitigate these risks.

Urban corridorization presents opportunities for enhancing global connectivity and fostering economic growth. However, these projects must be carefully designed and implemented to avoid exacerbating social and economic inequalities. Policymakers should adopt an inclusive approach that integrates historical, social, and spatial considerations while prioritizing the needs of affected populations. By addressing these issues thoughtfully, urban corridors can become engines of equitable development rather than sources of division and contention.

Ethiopia's Urban Corridorization Efforts: Opportunities, Challenges, and Lessons for the Future

In recent years, Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa, and other major cities have undergone significant urban transformations through corridor development initiatives. The Corridor Development Project (CDP) has catalyzed notable changes in various parts of Addis Ababa. The Ethiopian government underscores that these transformations are pivotal for long-term urban development, despite the challenges they pose to neighborhoods and business owners. The project aims to modernize infrastructure, enhance urban landscapes, and elevate Addis Ababa's status as a

continental capital.

The role of infrastructure in economic growth, social progress, and development is universally acknowledged. Significant improvements in connectivity are essential for urban advancement and higher productivity, which are central to sustainable development. In Addis Ababa, poor infrastructure increases the cost of doing business and negatively impacts residents' quality of life. The city often lacks clean, well-maintained spaces, further underscoring the need for robust urban infrastructure investment. Such investments can unlock the city's economic potential, stimulate long-term GDP growth, and make it a more attractive destination for inward investment. Additionally, infrastructure corridor projects have enhanced the cityscape, providing residents with landscaped freeways and improved connectivity.

While the Addis corridorization project symbolizes modernization and economic growth, it also raises significant trade-offs that must be carefully evaluated. A project of this magnitude affects multiple sectors and stakeholders, and the balance between investing in ambitious urban projects and addressing other critical priorities is crucial. For a low-income country like Ethiopia, considering the huge investment corridorization efforts, competing expenditure demands in areas such as health, education, and rural development must not be overlooked. A country's future heavily relies on extensive industrialization, and resources must be strategically directed toward this goal. While some argue that the private sector should primarily drive industrialization, others contend that the government has a crucial role to play—not necessarily as a producer but as a facilitator. The government's focus should be on

creating the necessary infrastructure and enabling conditions for industrialization to flourish, making this a high priority for national development.

However, conflicting views on prioritization persist within communities, fueling ongoing debates about the optimal role of the government and the allocation of resources. These differing perspectives contribute to the immense challenges and pressures faced in aligning industrialization efforts with broader developmental objectives. Thoughtful policy decisions and stakeholder engagement are essential to navigating these complexities and ensuring that industrialization drives sustainable and inclusive growth.

The government must incorporate productivity-enhancing measures to stimulate economic growth while addressing pressing fiscal challenges. This includes focusing on reducing the budget deficit to stabilize markets and ease the debt servicing burden. These considerations are particularly important in the current global context, where economic shocks have strained both national and international economies.

Urban transformation and resettlement are inherently complex processes, further complicated by a range of interconnected challenges. One prominent issue is how to ensure the effective integration and interaction of economic, social, and administrative functions within newly relocated spaces. For many neighborhoods impacted by the Corridor Development Project (CDP), residential spaces were more than just homes; they were vital economic livelihoods where residents engaged in activities, including rents on properties. Relocation to new areas often disrupts these economic networks, although ridden with

poverty, leaving residents at risk of losing their sources of income, although very marginal. While relocation can offer improved living conditions and access to better housing, it is equally critical to address the transformation of livelihoods to ensure the long-term resilience and sustainability of these communities. Simply providing housing could be insufficient. Policies and initiatives must focus on enabling relocated individuals and communities to economically engage within their new environments, fostering integration into local economies.

Encouraging active participation in new economic activities not only improves their chances of recovery but also contributes to better overall outcomes for the community. Developing and implementing policies that prioritize community economic development—such as restructuring local economies to align with the specific needs and skills of the relocated population—can play a transformative role. These policies might include creating micro-enterprise opportunities, offering skill development programs tailored to the local economy, and facilitating access to markets and services.

Ultimately, urban transformation efforts should adopt a holistic approach that balances improved housing with robust livelihood support mechanisms. This dual focus will help create more resilient and sustainable communities, turning challenges into opportunities for inclusive growth and long-term development.

A key question remains: can Ethiopia generate sufficient revenue to sustain such large-scale fiscal spending, foster consistent economic growth, and control inflation without exacerbating existing challenges? Given the country's internal political and economic pressures, the path forward

appears complex and fraught with uncertainty. Thoughtful planning and inclusive governance will be critical to achieving a balance that promotes development without overburdening the economy or its citizens.

Unlike broader geopolitical infrastructure investments in the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia's current corridor development efforts in Addis Ababa exemplify an internally driven approach. These initiatives reflect the country's agency in shaping its urban and economic landscape. However, implementing a project of this scale brings diverse implications across multiple sectors, revealing both opportunities and challenges.

Key Challenges

1. **Investment Prioritization and Resource Allocation:** Striking a balance between competing urban priorities remains a critical challenge, with disagreements over where to focus resources. This is a serious challenge that can only be effectively addressed within a framework of serious consultation with affected citizens.
2. **Land Acquisition and Compensation:** The acquisition of land for corridor projects often disrupts livelihoods, leading to compensation disputes and challenges in resettlement and rehabilitation efforts.
3. **Environmental Concerns:** Urban corridor projects must address climate-related risks, including the sustainability of infrastructure and vulnerability to extreme weather events.
4. **Governance and Corruption:** Transparent governance is essential to minimize corruption and ensure equitable implementation of projects.
5. **Technological and Human Resource Gaps:** A lack of advanced technologies and skilled

professionals hampers the efficiency and effectiveness of urban corridorization efforts.

6. Cultural and Historical Preservation: Modernization efforts risk erasing historical neighborhoods and undermining the cultural fabric of cities unless policies explicitly address preservation.

Opportunities

To maximize the benefits of corridorization while addressing these challenges, Ethiopia can adopt a strategic and inclusive approach:

1. Stakeholder Engagement: Regular consultations with affected communities, business owners, and civil society organizations can help bridge gaps, foster trust, and ensure equitable outcomes.

2. Policy Reviews: Revisiting urban policies to balance modernization with the preservation of historical neighborhoods and the rights of residents is essential for sustainable development.

3. Global Inspirations: Ethiopia's corridorization efforts can draw lessons from international experiences:

- Integrating Economic and Transport Hubs: Connect major cities such as Addis Ababa, Bishoftu, Adama, Dire Dawa, and Hawassa with smaller towns through industrial zones and transport infrastructure. Build economic corridors that link urban centers with industrial parks and rural areas.
- Promoting Regional Integration: Leverage Ethiopia's geographical position to connect with neighboring countries, fostering regional cooperation and positioning the country as a land bridge within East Africa. Strengthen ties with IGAD member states and beyond.
- Developing Mixed-Use Urban Zones:

Create integrated zones combining residential, commercial, and industrial functions to promote balanced urbanization and economic activity.

- Leveraging Green Growth: Ensure sustainable corridorization by incorporating renewable energy, efficient transportation systems, and climate-resilient infrastructure.

Ethiopia's urban corridorization efforts present a unique opportunity to modernize its cities, enhance regional integration, and stimulate economic growth. However, realizing this vision requires a long-term, inclusive approach that addresses social, environmental, and governance challenges. By learning from global best practices and fostering collaboration among stakeholders, Ethiopia can ensure that its corridorization projects lead to equitable and sustainable urban development, setting a benchmark for other countries in the region.

Conclusion

The contemporary world is witnessing a global "era of corridors," characterized by an intense restructuring of economies and heightened geopolitical competition, particularly since the 2008 financial crisis. The trajectory of global development since then has highlighted the emergence of corridors as critical infrastructures that extend across territories, facilitating modernization and economic connectivity while commanding trillions of dollars in investments.

Corridors are not merely platforms for economic growth or spatial fixes for national economies; they are also instruments of geopolitical strategy and tools for advancing national and regional interests. This dual role underscores how geopolitical competition and political rivalries are reshaping corridor projects, transforming

them from infrastructure initiatives into strategic assets for exerting geo-economic and geopolitical influence. These transformations have profound implications for global trade, regional development, and political stability, positioning corridors as pivotal elements in the contemporary geopolitical landscape.

Nowhere is this transformation more evident than along the Horn of Africa's coastline, which has evolved into a strategically significant corridor. This region, with its critical location at the crossroads of global maritime trade routes, has become a focal point of geopolitical interest and economic ambition.

While corridorization offers immense opportunities for economic growth and regional integration, particularly in Africa, the reality often diverges from the ambitious visions associated with these projects. Many of the new generations of corridors are designed through top-down approaches, driven by imagined futures of investment, modernity, and economic prosperity. However, in practice, these projects frequently face significant challenges, including fragmented regional development, disparities in resource allocation, and social exclusion. The gap between the lofty aspirations of corridor plans and the on-the-ground realities highlights the need for more inclusive and realistic approaches to planning and implementation.

To address these challenges, it is essential to prioritize well-coordinated policies, inclusive development strategies, and sustainable practices. Policymakers must adopt a holistic perspective that considers the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of corridorization. This includes fostering local participation, bridging regional disparities, and ensuring that the

benefits of corridor projects are equitably distributed. By doing so, corridorization can realize its full potential as a catalyst for economic growth, regional stability, and global connectivity while mitigating the risks of fragmentation and inequality.

Corridor connectivity introduces a significant level of complexity, making it difficult to predict geopolitical outcomes straightforwardly or linearly. The interconnected and dynamic nature of corridors demands strategic thinking and the development of a robust, systemic understanding that accounts for their inherent messiness, non-linearity, complexity, and networked characteristics. This is particularly true for urban corridors, which often serve as hubs of economic, social, and political activity.

To effectively harness the potential of corridor connectivity, it is essential to conduct a thorough evaluation of both the economic and political implications of these initiatives. Such assessments should not only focus on the immediate benefits but also consider the broader, long-term impacts on regional stability, equity, and development.

Corridorization transforms regions into dynamic economic hubs by fostering connectivity, attracting investment, and enabling the flow of goods, services, and people. This process significantly enhances the area's economic potential, creating opportunities for businesses and individuals alike. As the region develops, the demand for properties, office spaces, and infrastructure often surges, leading to substantial increases in their market value.

This rapid escalation in property and infrastructure prices can resemble a "deck of cards" in two key ways. On the one hand,

it demonstrates the interconnected nature of development, where progress in one sector—such as transport or industrial infrastructure—triggers growth in other areas, including real estate and commerce. On the other hand, it highlights potential vulnerabilities. If the development is not carefully planned or managed, the sudden price rise can lead to speculative bubbles, affordability challenges, and uneven growth. Additionally, over-reliance on external investments or a single industry could create instability, where the "deck" collapses if the foundation of growth weakens.

To maximize the benefits of corridorization while mitigating risks, it is essential to adopt an inclusive, sustainable approach. Policies should ensure balanced urban planning, equitable access to opportunities, and robust regulatory frameworks to prevent speculative practices. This will allow corridorization to catalyze long-term economic prosperity rather than create short-lived booms.

Urban corridorization projects, in particular, must grapple with a series of critical questions to ensure inclusive and sustainable outcomes:

- **Where do corridors actually unfold their potential?** Identifying the geographical and economic zones where corridors can deliver the greatest impact is crucial for strategic planning.
- **Who benefits from these corridors?** Understanding the distribution of benefits helps ensure that projects are not skewed in favor of certain groups, regions, or industries at the expense of others.
- **Which places and people are neglected by corridor planning?** It is important to recognize the areas and populations that may be left behind and develop strategies to mitigate these

disparities.

- **What measures are taken to address these gaps?** This involves designing targeted interventions that promote inclusivity and address inequities in access to resources and opportunities.
- **What are the consequences for value chain development?** Corridors can transform value chains, altering production, logistics, and market dynamics. Evaluating these effects is essential for maximizing economic gains while minimizing disruptions.

By addressing these questions and adopting a holistic, adaptive approach to corridor planning, policymakers can better navigate the complexities of connectivity initiatives and align them with broader goals of regional integration, sustainable development, and geopolitical stability.