

BUILDING A CONTINENT'S NEW INFRASTRUCTURE

The border town of Namanga between Tanzania and Kenya is a colorful and chaotic place.

A constant stream of human and vehicular traffic moves across a no-man's land between two frontier posts on foot, bicycle, beaten-up old buses, tourist coaches and tough, four-wheel-drive vehicles. Heavily laden trucks are parked everywhere, many with a sheen of dust which suggests they have been there for days or weeks.

Herd of goats bleat loudly and hawkers sell everything from currency to maize cobs.

It is a scene reminiscent of virtually every border crossing in Africa, and it is also a major impediment to the continent's economic well-being.

Such frontier crossings are so inefficient, time consuming, and often corrupt that they are a major reason why the African Development Bank (AfDB) estimates continental transportation costs

can be two-and-a-half times higher than in Asia, effectively stifling national and regional development.

But something is stirring at Namanga on both sides of the border, where new buildings are under construction and vast areas are being cleared for access roads and truck parking.

One Stop Border Post

When completed, the facilities will be part of a Japanese concept known as the One-Stop Border Post (OSBP), which aims to eliminate the daily border crossing nightmare with a sleek and efficient system embracing all border procedures, such as customs, immigration and vehicular clearance.

As some of the trucks at Namanga attest, crossings can literally take days or weeks. Officials estimate that an efficient OSBP system could cut the transit time to as little as half an hour with truck drivers or tourists able to clear all formalities at just one stop on either side of the border.

The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), together with local authorities and such partners as the AfDB, has introduced the border concept in various parts of Africa as part of an overall concentration to improve the continent's basic infrastructure, such as roads, ports and energy supply, which in turn should lead to higher economic performance and improved social conditions.

In addition to the frontier crossing, JICA and the AfDB have already helped finance the rebuilding of the major trunk road from the Tanzanian city of Arusha to the Kenyan capital of Nairobi.

In addition to accommodating the faster and more efficient movement of vehicular and human traffic, the OSBP and the new highway are also already spurring economic growth in and around Namanga itself and along various sections of the highway.

It is already far easier to move along the highway to places even further away, such as the Ugandan capital of Kampala.

An Urbanizing Africa

JICA is also assisting in other forms of highway development in other areas.

Africa for years has been transforming itself from a predominantly rural region to an increasingly urban setting, and in the next few years, for the first time in history, more of the continent's 1 billion population will live in towns and cities.

This mass migration is putting major pressure on all forms of urban infrastructure, such as roads and highways.

In the bustling Tanzanian port city of Dar es Salaam, JICA has provided grant assistance of some US\$53 million to widen to four lanes and build three new bridges for one of its most heavily overloaded road arteries, the New Bagamoyo Road.

Across the continent in the West African nation of Ghana, JICA has provided ¥8.3 billion in

grant assistance and teams of Japanese consultants and experts to upgrade a large section of the vital Trunk Road N8 running through the center of the country's economic heartland, or the so-called Golden Triangle.

The highway is not only a vital artery for Ghana's own economy but is expected to grow in importance—and use—in the coming years as a major transit highway for neighboring landlocked countries, such as Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali.

According to Japanese engineering consultant Suelo Hirose, the history of Trunk Road N8 underlines another problem facing the continent in its efforts to upgrade infrastructure.

Japan helped finance an earlier reconstruction of the road in the early 1990s, but in the intervening years "There has been little maintenance," he said. "The road has deteriorated more rapidly than expected," particularly due to the heavy traffic and the harsh climatic conditions of West Africa.

New infrastructure projects capture public headlines, but as in many regions of the world, governments have constraints in allocating funds for long-term and "unexciting" maintenance. Unless this obstacle is removed, according to experts like Hirose, Africa's efforts to improve the continent's economic performance will be constantly undermined.

**One-Stop
Border Post will
eliminate the
daily border
crossing
nightmare with
a sleek and
efficient system
embracing all
border
procedures**

A new one-stop border post on the Kenya-Tanzania border



TURNING ON THE POWER

The Japanese and Tanzanian engineers carefully checked the electrical dials on the panels in front of them. Using long, insulated rods, they gingerly tested the overhead cables. Satisfied, a key was turned, and a new electrical substation was activated.

In the background shimmered the most iconic geographical feature in Africa, the gleaming snow-capped Mount Kilimanjaro, the highest peak on the continent.

The experts recently were putting the finishing touches to a two-year, US\$27 million grant aid project by JICA to upgrade electricity supplies in Tanzania's Kilimanjaro region, which included rehabilitating three existing electricity substations and various transmission lines and building two new substations, including the KCMC substation that the engineers were commissioning during a recent visit.

Kilimanjaro is not only one of the most spectacularly beautiful regions in Africa but also one of the most important economic centers for Tanzania, being an important tourist hub, farming center and growing industrial base.

But like most areas of Tanzania, regular power supplies are fragile, and homes, businesses and even hospitals suffer almost daily electricity failures. Boosting output, improving basic infrastructure and strengthening personnel training are keys to the country's economic and social well-being.

Among the visitors to the KCMC inauguration were representatives from the nearby hospital, one of the largest and most important in Tanzania, which will be a major recipient of the improved electrical grid, providing the complex with more sustainable and ultimately cheaper power supplies.

Providing Training

From the perspective of human resource development, JICA has also been conducting a five-year training project with the country's sole power and transmission company, TANESCO, which began in 2009.



Japanese and Tanzanian experts make a final inspection before the inauguration of a new electricity substation in Kilimanjaro.

For almost a decade from the mid-1990s, the organization, which employs 6,000 people, did not have its own training system and facilities, though electric power is key to Tanzania's economic well-being.

JICA started the work from the ground level; curriculums, syllabuses and text materials were developed for the target technicians to inject the right knowledge and encourage high performance, and so far training courses have been conducted for more than 400 personnel—engineers, technicians and "artisans"—running from several weeks to several months. Japan's famed *kaizen* industrial approach has also been introduced to the organization.

The eventual aim is to increase both the number of personnel and the scope of the training itself and to have the workers apply the outcome of the training to their workplace.

In practical terms, more qualified personnel will guarantee more sustainable electrical supplies and improved economic and social conditions.

For instance, currently the country as a whole suffers from some eight electricity outages each month. The aim is to reduce that figure to two per month, which is the average in South Africa, the continent's leading power supplier.