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The big infrastructural projects revamping the coastal economy

Mombasa Port's capacity as the gateway to the Northern Corridor is being expanded.

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In the sweltering heat of Mombasa, excavators bite off a chunk of what was once marshy land, hurl it up and empty it into a waiting tipper truck. Another truck is queuing for its scoop and another.

Metres ahead, a viaduct is nearing completion, and all around it, surveyors stand, with real-time kinematics (RTK) machines planted solidly behind them.

At the Fujitsu (the main contractor) works yard, men are at work knitting up the scaffolding for the piers and the beams some of which will be laid on Mteza Bridge which at 1.4km, is the longest in the country.

This is part of the ongoing construction that forms Mombasa Southern Bypass which once complete, will ease the logistical nightmares experienced while crossing into the South.

It means that the tourist paradise of Diani in the South Coast and Kwale will be accessible by road and by air.

Visitors will not have to go through Nyali, and then the crowded Likoni Ferry, to get to their destination. Besides opening up the tourism-rich region, the ongoing road and bridge network has led to an appreciation of property value in the South Coast.

Mombasa Port is the region's biggest handler of sea cargo, with two berths handling 1.5m twenty-foot equivalent unit (TEU) per year. This is expected to rise.

Conceptualized over 40 years ago, the roads with the three largest bridges in the country, will be complete and in use soon.

At least 14.2ha of mangrove has been cleared to pave way for the road. The bill is being footed through corporation between Japanese and Kenyan governments.

The Mombasa Port Area Road Development Project - carried out in what the contractors have classified as Three Packages - is expected to improve efficiency and



Deputy Director, Kenya National Highway Authority, Eng Kungu Ndungu explains the Dongo Kundu Special Economic Zone construction plan. The longest bridge in Kenya, Mteza Bridge, will be constructed to connect Miritini and South Coast. [Omondi Onyango, Standard]

thereby increase capacity at the port with the expected linkages to the Special Economic Zone besides opening up the inaccessible hinterland.

The 38km road from Tsunza to Mazeras has been upgraded into a gravel standard access road - the grading works are complete and gravelling is at 99.8 per cent completion- reducing commute time from nearly a day to around an hour.

Package one of the road goes from Miritini to the port. The second package, branching off package one, starts at Mwache junction to the Mteza section through Tsunza, while the third starts at Mteza and ends at Kibundani. The first package cost Sh11 billion, the second Sh24 billion while the third cost Sh4.7 billion.

The Mombasa Port's capacity as the gateway to the Northern Corridor is being expanded. JICA partnered with Kenya in the construction of berths

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Dr Steve Mogere, Infrastructure and Evaluation Advisor, JICA.

cover 33 per cent of the container cargo handling capacity of the country, which is expected to rise to 47 per cent once Phase 2 is completed.

Phase 1 was completed in February 2016, and phase 2 is set to be completed by end of May 2022. By 2030, phase 3 will be complete, with a huge chunk of land reclaimed for the expansion.

"In 2021, the container handling volume will be approximately 1.5 million TEU, with container Terminal 1 handling 1 million TEU and container Terminal 2 handling 500, 000 TEU. When berth 22 of phase 2 is complete, container terminal 2 will manage to handle 1million TEU a year," said Dr Steve Mogere, the Infrastructure and Evaluation advisor at JICA..

Dr Mogere lists the trickle-down effect of the expansion. He is wary of what inaction will do to the regional economy.

"If Mombasa Port does not expand, it

becomes a feeder port. That means other ports will receive the large ships and it can only get cargo from them. The double handling will be very expensive," he said. The cost of maintaining containers stuck at sea due to slow processing will also be eliminated. Right across the port, on 3,000 acres of land, the Dongo Kundu Special Economic Zone is taking shape.

Two berths and a free trade area will serve people on the SEZ. Meshack Kimeu, the CEO of the Special Economic Zones Authority (SEZA) says the programme is "strategically designed to improve Kenya's competitiveness as an investment destination.

Dr Kimeu also says the SEZ will facilitate forward and backward interlinkages at the port, and will be "an eco-friendly, modern economic zone".

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Overall, some 1,713 residents of the area were affected by the regeneration of the port area. They are awaiting compensation from the National Land Commission.

Kiyonori Matsushima, JICA Project Advisor, says that once the Dongo Kundu SEZ, which will have major manufacturing, logistic, tourism and services hubs, is complete, more than 100,000 direct jobs will be created.

Over Sh200 billion is also expected to be pumped in direct investment into the Mombasa ecosystem. At the port, where over 10 mil-

lion paving blocks were laid as the phase 2 of the reclamation and port expansion was done, over 3,000 people were employed.

The SEZ will have its own power and water supply, port access roads among other amenities.

All these as Japan and Kenya collaborate in the quest to discover a free and open Indo-Pacific trade route, with the Port of Mombasa as a major trading hub along the East African coast.

Dr Mogere says that once the Gate Bridge is complete, it will connect Mombasa to the South Coast, offering a more viable exit to the city

than the ferries at Likoni.

Towards the North is the Nyali bridge, the only permanent evacuation route out of Mombasa. An expressway is expected to come up to complement this road.

Caroline Nzioka, the Program Officer Transport Sector at JICA, says local contractors ought to come together and form consortiums that can enable them bid for equally large contract projects.

"The construction industry has become more vibrant in the recent past due to a major shift in strengthening our infrastructure. As a result, since there were no major infrastructure

projects to learn from or construct, there was a challenge in organizational, political and financial arrangements in the local industry," she says.

"In addition, performance guarantee becomes a major deterrent as well. Formation of consortiums, or joint ventures, among locals could give them an upper hand."

Eustace Mutea, from Uniconsult Engineering Consultants, says that locals have been big beneficiaries of the construction works, with all the unskilled labourers sought from the neighbourhood where the construction is cutting through.