Improving East Africa's Inland Logistics

New International Bridge and Customs Post Facilitate Cross-Border Transport

The Rusumo International Bridge at the border of Rwanda and Tanzania is a key logistics link for the inland countries of East Africa. The bridge is on the Central Corridor, an arterial roadway from the Indian Ocean to Rwanda. For many years it was subject to constant congestion due to traffic limits made necessary by the bridge's structural deterioration and to the complexity of customs procedures. To address this problem, the Japanese government extended JPY 3.72 billion (USD 35.4 million) in grant aid to undertake the Project for Construction of Rusumo International Bridge and One Stop Border Post (OSBP) Facilities, aimed at achieving a dramatic decrease in the amount of time required to cross the border. This major project, based on technical cooperation from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), included both construction of a new bridge and the introduction of OSBP facilities to streamline customs formalities.

The new two-lane bridge, built with high-level Japanese technology, eases passage by allowing two-way traffic. And the new OSBP complex reduces congestion and promotes smoother cross-border trade: Whereas previously it was necessary to go through customs separately on both sides, a process that could take about 14 hours, now the procedures can be completed more expeditiously in one stop. Over a period of eight years the Japanese government worked steadily with various government organs in Rwanda and Tanzania and with the East African Community (EAC), which has been promoting the adoption of the OSBP concept, to support the enactment of relevant legislation. JICA also assisted with the preparation of operational manuals and technical training for customs officials. On March 1, 2016, the long-awaited OSBP was inaugurated, greatly shortening the time required to clear customs. JICA estimates that in the first year of operation, the new facility will result in savings of USD 1.8 million in costs for round-trip transportation between the port of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania and Kigali, capital of Rwanda. And the improvement of the Central Corridor logistics network will promote the flow of goods and contribute greatly to the economic development and modernization of East Africa's inland nations.

The project has also produced positive effects in enhancing the capabilities of the local engineers who were involved. Ryutaro Murotani, acting senior representative at the JICA Rwanda Office, notes, "Rwandan engineers who worked on this project have put their experience to work on another project: the construction of an OSBP on the border between Rwanda and Uganda." Representatives of local construction companies also report that working with a Japanese company on the bridge-building project offered them a good opportunity to learn Japanese civil engineering technology and high-quality construction techniques.

JICA'S goal is to see a uniform system of one-stop border posts adopted throughout Africa's distribution network so as to enhance the interconnectivity among the countries of the continent. The agency is now at the preparatory stage, working on a sourcebook together with the regional organizations and national government organs currently operating OSBPs based on their own systems. Support for the Rusumo International Bridge project has been a part of this undertaking, and the project's successful outcome will be a step toward further support for Africa's development.

1. Overview of the new Rusumo International Bridge and One Stop Border Post (OSBP) complex. The area beyond the curve in the river on the left is the site of the OSBP on the Tanzanian side of the border. 2. A commemorative panel at the approach to the bridge displays the flag of Japan along with those of Rwanda and Tanzania. Local university architecture students visited the site frequently to see the Japanese launching erection method used in constructing the bridge. 3. An engineer from a Japanese construction company (left) provides guidance to local engineers as they work together on the project.

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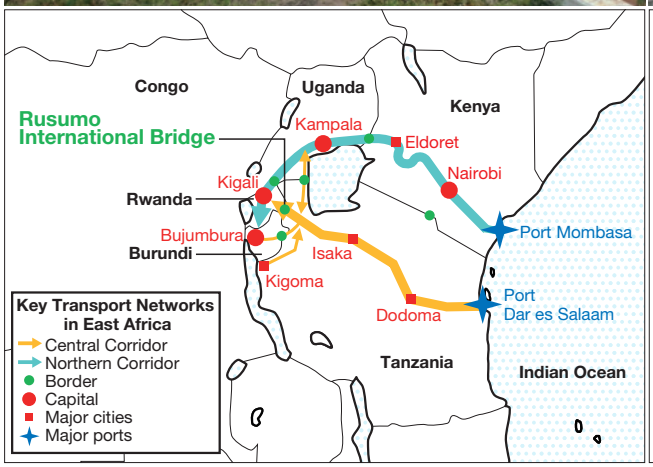

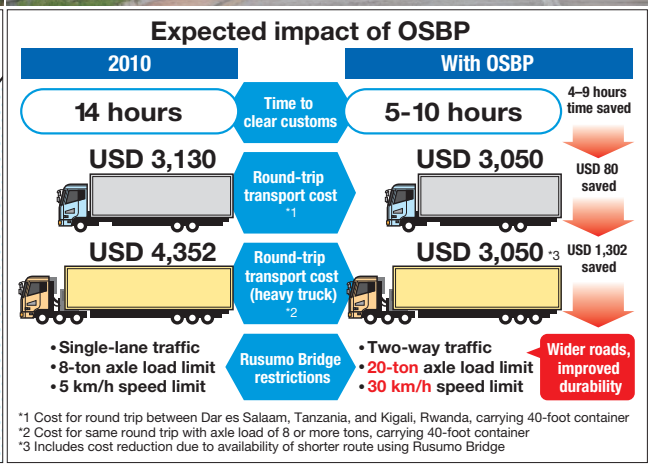

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4. Congestion on and around the old bridge. The Rwandan side of the border is in the foreground. On the far side, in Tanzania, a line of trucks wait to cross the border. The former bridge had an axle load limit of only 8 tons and the speed limit was 5 kilometers (3 miles) per hour; only one large truck at a time could cross it. 5. A view of the new bridge from the Tanzanian side. The yellow-fenced pathway-like structure on the left is the old bridge. 6. The major roadways for transport of goods from the Indian Ocean to inland areas. The Northern Corridor was formerly the most-used route, but two border crossings made it time consuming. With the inauguration of the new bridge and OSBP, the Central Corridor has come to play a much bigger role as a transport route. 7. Improvements expected to result from the project: In addition to the lowering of transportation costs thanks to the introduction of OSBP facilities, the opening of the new bridge will allow the passage of trucks heavier than the former limit of 8 tons.