

NATIONAL

South Sudan pins hope on LAPSSET project



Ship parked at Lamu Port project site in Kenya. [Keji Janefer/The City Review]

By Keji Janefer

As African countries embark on improving infrastructural development, the government of South Sudan says the Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) corridor project will be implemented adding that it will benefit the country in many ways.

The LAPSSET Corridor Program, one of Eastern Africa's largest and most ambitious infrastructure projects, brings together Kenya, Ethiopia, and South Sudan.

The mega project consists of seven key infrastructure projects that include a new 32-berth port at Lamu (Kenya), interregional highways, crude oil pipelines from Lamu to Juba, and Addis Ababa, interregional standard gauge railway lines, three international airports, three resort cities, and the multipurpose High Grand Falls Dam along the Tana River.

Kenya implements Lamu port, roads linking South Sudan and Ethiopia to the port, and a standard gauge railway while South Sudan and Ethiopia are tasked with implementing the project's road network and railway line.

Speaking at the project site of Lamu port late last month, Eng. Lado Tagon, the Acting Director General for Road Transport and Safety in the National Ministry of Transport in South Sudan sounded an impression with the progress made by the Kenyan government on the construction of Lamu port.

Eng. Lado said the visit of a South Sudanese delegation to the project site of Lamu port to see for themselves would encourage the government of South Sudan to expedite the process of implementing the road network project connecting the country to the northern corridor.

He said the port will provide another alternative transport to open South Sudan to the world to access outside market and another opportunity that opens to travellers and transporters to address the long distance hurdle through crossing two borders using Mombasa port.

"Lamu port is important to South Sudan in the sense that this is another way, another transport opportunity because South Sudan is only using Mombasa as a way to the world. But now by having this facility, it is now

another opening of South Sudan to the world," Eng. Lado noted.

"This is another opportunity which actually opens to our traders, our people, and our transporters as an alternative," said Eng. Lado.

The LAPSSET Corridor Program is a regional flagship project intended to provide transport and logistics infrastructure aimed at creating seamless connectivity between the Eastern African Countries of Kenya, Ethiopia and South Sudan.

The project would connect a population of 160 million people in the three countries. Additionally, the LAPSSET Corridor is part of the larger land bridge that will connect the East African coast from Lamu Port to the West coast of Africa at Douala Port in Cameroon.

Lamu port is one of the components of the LAPSSET project, which is the base from which South Sudan and Ethiopia will be connected to Kenya, and the second important component of the port is the road construction, which Ethiopia and Kenya have implemented except for South Sudan.

However, to make the port functional and beneficial, the three states involved in the LAPSSET project, Kenya, South Sudan, and Ethiopia, must all take the responsibility of doing the road infrastructure.

The authorities in Kenya said the country has completed 80% of the work of road construction and Ethiopia has completed its except for South Sudan.

Eng. Lado said the visit by a delegation of experts from South Sudan to Lamu port would encourage the government to move faster than before in expediting the process of constructing the highway that will connect South Sudan to Kenya, pointing out that "if you see a facility like this and you are not able to benefit from it, why, because you have not done your obligation, you will definitely run faster than before."

"The project is now a reality and we should now hurry up to do our part to make this project useful and operational to South Sudan because each and every country now is doing its obligation and am sure my government will do its obligation because it is not that we have not started. We have started," Eng. Lado explained on behalf of the government of South Sudan.

The magnitude of the project means opening areas that have never been touched since the creation of the world and that poses a lot of challenges to governments in many ways, including the resources required for their implementation.

But Mr. Francis Osiemo, a consultant with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, said the United Nations and African Development Bank have already accepted to facilitate the implementation of the various components of this important corridor. He said "our government should rest assured that they are not alone in the journey to develop this corridor."

He added that LAPSSET project is among the ten important corridors in Africa under the African Union (AU) presidential infrastructure champion initiative category which has been given special status so that the AU can monitor the implementation of this important project according to Denial Osiemo.

"So, each time the African Union heads of States are meeting, there is a report that is given at that level. And for now, the President of Kenya is the champion. If this responsibility is given to the president of South Sudan next time, he will be required to give a progress report to other heads of state whenever they are meeting," said Denial Osiemo, a consultant at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa.

This is not just an ordinary project; this is a project that has been recognized by the African Union and falls under a special category called the Presidential Infrastructure Champions Initiative. So, it is very important for the policymakers in South Sudan to understand that and know that they are not alone," Mr. Osiemo encouraged South Sudan.

"We want business people from South Sudan to also take great interest in this project. They can come and see for themselves and find out where they can invest" he called on South Sudanese.

Stephen Ikua, Director General, LAPSSET Corridor Development Authority of Kenya, said it requires a lot of planning and designing for the project to take a good shape and make good progress, stating that a lot of time has been spent on designing so that "we get it right from the very start".

Stephen and Peter Masinde, Lamu Port Authority directors, said that eighty

percent of the work on the second and third berths has been completed.

"We now have ships that are docking within the port of Lamu. If you had a truck today, you could comfortably drive all the way from Lamu to Ethiopia through Moyale" said Mr. Stephen.

"We are still working on the stretch to join Turkana, but basically in terms of the road network, we can say the Kenyan side is eighty percent complete," he added.

The project is about interconnectivity, starting from the port, then the road, the railway, and the business of evacuating the crude oil, which comes in and all the auxiliary of the port.

Lamu port was operationalized on May 20th, 2021 by Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta, according to the port authority. The port begun receiving consignments destined for the island satellite countries, basically Zanzibar and those that go back to the main land of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania.

"So far we have handled an average of two vessels per month, majorly Transurban consignments. Basically, these are the few businesses we have handled and we are very happy that we have so far secured another market that is a transit market to Ethiopia," he explained.

The LAPSSET Corridor Project is the first single integrative infrastructure project the government has initiated and prepared under the Vision 2030 Strategy Framework without external assistance.

For various reasons, the project was initially conceived in 1975 but never took off. The project was later revived and included in the vision of Kenya 2030. In 2009, the cost of LAPSSET was estimated at \$16 billion. Recent estimates arrived after studies now put the cost of the project at between US \$22 billion and US \$23 billion.

The timeline of the project is not clear, including when it started and when it should be finished. At the peak of the project, between 2013 and 2018, it is expected that the Kenyan government will be spending about 6% of the country's Gross Domestic Product or 16% of its annual budget on the project.

In 2013, Kenya's government announced the setting up of a government agency, the LAPSSET Corridor Development Authority, to manage the project on behalf of the Kenyan government. The cost of the project was also put at KSh. 2.5 trillion (\$29.24 billion).

Kenya is spearheading the development of the Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia-Transport (LAPSSET) Corridor Project to strengthen the country's position as a gateway and a transport and logistics hub to the East African sub-region and the Great Lakes region to facilitate trade and promote regional economic integration and interconnectivity between African countries. The project is managed by the LAPSSET Corridor Development Authority (LCDA), which is domiciled under the Presidency.

The project studies that were completed in 2011 on the LAPSSET Corridor project components showed great economic viability, with most of the project components registering high economic internal rates of return of between 17% and 23.4% compared to the acceptable industry minimum standard of 10% for infrastructure projects.