

The

Eastern Africa

Journal of Policy and Strategy

GLOCEPS

Weekly Influential Bulletin (WIB)

Monday 23rd - Friday 27th March, 2026

THEME:

Unlocking Eastern Africa's Connectivity and Integration Prospects

Eastern Africa is undergoing a rapid transformation in regional connectivity, trade, and industrial development. The Kenya–Uganda Standard Gauge Railway is strengthening the Northern Corridor by linking Mombasa, Nairobi, Kisumu, and Malaba, reducing logistics costs and improving freight efficiency for landlocked economies. In 2025, cargo volumes reached 7.48 million tonnes while revenue rose by 18.6 percent, reflecting growing demand for efficient regional transport. At the same time, ports in Mombasa, Lamu, and Dar es Salaam remain vital trade gateways but face increasing exposure to global supply disruptions. Modernization, digital customs integration, and complementary infrastructure, such as the proposed Nairobi–Mombasa highway, will ease congestion and support emerging industrial corridors. Combined with expanding telecommunications networks and future nuclear energy capacity, these interconnected investments could anchor a more integrated, resilient, and globally competitive Eastern African economy.

Contributors: *Julius Minyori, Stephen Kiema, Michael Owuor, Stephen Nduvi and Denis Muniu*

Editor-in-Chief: *K O Asembo, PhD*

For Journal Articles: <https://press.gloceps.org/index.php/eajps>

Website: www.gloceps.org | Email: info@gloceps.org

Kenya–Uganda Standard Gauge Railway as a Driver of Regional Integration in Eastern Africa

The Kenya–Uganda Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) is a transformative infrastructure project with the potential to reshape transport, trade, and regional integration in Eastern Africa. Developed under Kenya's Vision 2030 strategy, the SGR modernizes rail connectivity from the Port of Mombasa through Nairobi to Kisumu and Malaba at the Kenya–Uganda border. Historically, the region's rail network was outdated and underutilized, leading to high logistics costs, long transit times, and overreliance on road transport. The SGR addresses these challenges by providing a faster, more reliable, and cost-efficient system for moving goods and people, particularly benefiting landlocked economies such as Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The railway has already improved cargo movement and transport efficiency. Data from the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) show that SGR cargo volumes grew to approximately 7.48 million tonnes in 2025, up from 6.53 million tonnes in 2024, reflecting increasing reliance on rail over road freight.

Revenue rose 18.6 percent to KSh 21.4 billion, while passenger traffic reached 2.7 million, an 11.6 percent increase over the previous year despite fare adjustments. These trends highlight the SGR's growing role as a preferred transport mode, enhancing reliability and connectivity across the region.

Lower logistics costs associated with rail transport have direct implications for trade competitiveness. Rail freight reduces the cost per tonne-kilometre relative to road transport, particularly over long distances where road congestion and fuel expenses are significant. For exporters in Uganda and other inland economies, the SGR provides quicker access to the Port of Mombasa, improving predictability, supply chain reliability, and product diversification. Agricultural exports such as tea, coffee, and horticultural produce benefit from faster transit, enabling compliance with international standards and market demands.

Beyond freight and passenger movement, the SGR catalyzes broader economic and industrial development. It encourages investment in



Photo Credit: msn.com

Monday 23rd March 2026

logistics hubs, warehousing, inland container depots, and industrial estates along the corridor. Strategic cities such as Mombasa, Nairobi, and Kisumu are emerging as multimodal trade nodes where rail, road, and inland water transport converge. This integration supports the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the East African Community (EAC) objectives by facilitating seamless markets and reducing non-tariff barriers.

Realizing the SGR's full potential requires coordinated policy, regulatory alignment, and institutional collaboration among participating states. Harmonized customs procedures, joint maintenance, and cross-border governance are essential to extend the network into Uganda and beyond. With sustained coordination, the SGR

can become a cornerstone of Eastern Africa's industrialization and economic resilience, strengthening connectivity, attracting investment, and enabling the region to compete more effectively in continental and global markets.

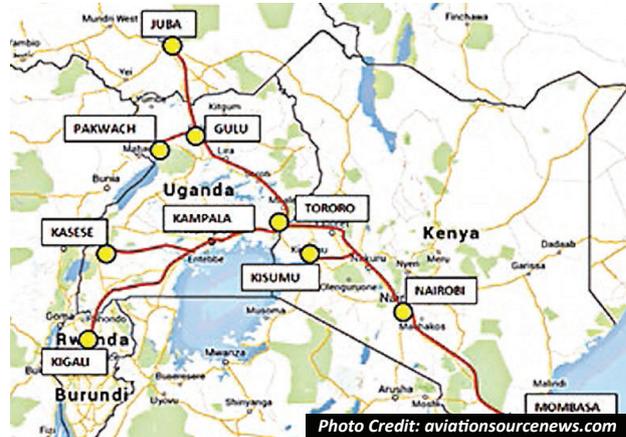


Photo Credit: aviationsourcenews.com

Tuesday 24th March 2026

Building Resilience in Eastern Africa's Ports amid Global Supply Disruptions

Eastern Africa seaport landscape, currently dominated by Mombasa and Dar es Salaam, now forms the vanguard of a maritime world crisis precipitated by the 2026 conflict between the US, Israel, and Iran. The war has diverted sea traffic away from the key waterways like the Red Sea and the Strait of Hormuz. This has added seven to fourteen days as ships are increasingly undertaking trips around the Cape of Good Hope. Equally, traffic at the Strait of Hormuz has fallen by 70%. Such schedule delays have impacted 5-9% of the world's container vessel capacity. This emerging burden, coupled with existing dynamics at Mombasa, where container dwell time averages 5.6 days and 94% of shipping experiences delays, exacerbates the present challenges. Likewise, this war has reduced global oil supply forecast thus heightening inflation and maritime insurance premiums. This directly impacts import-driven East African states. Consequently, the African ports business, estimated at \$5.3 billion worth of annual trade, is under threat, and households throughout the continent are exposed to the burden of rising food and fuel costs.

The crisis has unearthed infrastructural gaps that need immediate remedy. It also provides the opportunity to modernize and diversify East African port ecosystems. For instance, the new Kipevu terminal in Mombasa has not only saved waiting time by 51% but also serves larger vessels. This is indicative of an impactful investment decision on port infrastructure. In the same vein, Lamu port contributed the greatest maritime capacity improvement in the region by adding an annual capacity of approximately 800,000 metric tons in 2025. The Lamu port enjoys deep water berths, which can handle bigger ships. This is a crucial infrastructure since the Red Sea remains a conflict-prone zone.

However, the viability of these port facilities illustrates the necessity of interregional collaboration. The usage of Tanzanian ports and Mombasa as the main gateways by South Sudan and Uganda demonstrates that landlocked countries are diversifying their supply chains. This trend must be enhanced by eliminating tariffs and impeding corridor management

agreements. It is also imperative to strengthen maritime security.

Likewise, most Eastern African states are dependent on foreign naval power. Going forward, the region should diversify and enhance its joint patrol capacities and information-sharing arrangements for long-term progress and sustainability in maritime security. Moreover, digital customs integration across the region are opportunities for shortening port and customs delays while enhancing cargo handling transparency.

In conclusion, the ports of Eastern Africa can leverage their neutrality in this transformed geopolitical atmosphere to be reliable intersections on the Cape route and convert a disruptive shock into a source of resilience. The Cape of Good Hope is no longer an expensive diversion, but a major route. Thus, ports that provide convenient and complementary services and quick clearance are going to secure permanent trade benefits. Devoid of accelerated infrastructure development, coordinated regional policies, and continued digital improvements, these waterways that support the livelihoods of over 300 million people will remain susceptible to long-term conflict.

Competition should therefore give way to complementarity by integrating Mombasa, Dar es Salaam, Lamu, and Bagamoyo into an interlinked system. This would not only aid the region to thrive in the current perilous storm but, importantly, leverage its port infrastructure as a stable and consistent maritime hub. The economic impact of inaction is already apparent in the increasing dwell times, skyrocketing transport expenses, and stressed national budgets. The way to be resilient is through decisive, collaborative action, where regional states transform the current disruptions into future strategic maritime advantages.



Wednesday 25th March 2026

From Fragmented Networks to Shared Regional Infrastructure: Eastern Africa's Telecom Shift

Eastern Africa's telecom growth is increasingly shaping regional connectivity by linking networks, markets, and users across borders. Ethiopia's market opening adds capacity to an already active system led by Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, and Rwanda through mobile money, fibre expansion, and rising cross-border demand. Collectively, these markets are no longer isolated telecom spaces but parts of an emerging regional network where communication, finance, and digital services increasingly spill across national boundaries.

This transformation is being driven by both infrastructure expansion and user behaviour. The rapid growth of mobile money platforms, cross-border trade, and digital services has created a demand for seamless connectivity that national systems alone cannot efficiently support. Fibre optic backbones are expanding inland from coastal landing points, while mobile network coverage is deepening across borders. However, these developments remain uneven and often uncoordinated. Operators build parallel infrastructure, regulatory frameworks differ signifi-

Wednesday 25th March 2026

cantly, and cross-border interoperability, especially in pricing, data usage, and service access, remains limited.

As a result, the region operates as a patchwork of connected but not fully integrated systems. A user moving across borders may still face high roaming costs, inconsistent service quality, and limited access to digital services tied to their home network.

For businesses, particularly small and medium enterprises engaged in regional trade, these frictions translate into higher transaction costs and reduced efficiency. This fragmentation undermines the full economic potential of telecom investments and slows the emergence of a truly regional digital economy.

The policy opportunity, therefore, lies in reframing telecom infrastructure from a national asset to a shared regional system. This requires synchronising investment decisions to avoid duplication, particularly in fibre backbone development and cross-border links. Rather than parallel networks stopping at borders, countries can prioritise interconnected corridors that mirror trade and transport routes.

Harmonising operating standards such as licensing regimes, spectrum allocation, and data regulations would further reduce barriers and enable operators to provide more consistent services across markets. Equally important is addressing the user experience of connectivity. Lowering roaming charges, enabling mobile money interoperability, and ensuring that digital services function seamlessly across borders would make regional integration tangible for citizens and businesses. This shifts the focus from infrastructure alone to how people actually use and benefit from connectivity in their daily lives.

If implemented effectively, this approach would reduce costs, expand access, and unlock scale for digital services and innovation. It would also position Eastern Africa as a more attractive destination for investment, as larger, integrated markets tend to offer stronger returns and lower operational complexity. Ultimately, moving from fragmented networks to shared regional infrastructure is not just a technical adjustment; it is a strategic shift that could redefine how the region connects, trades, and competes in the global digital economy.



Photo Credit: innovacion.apba.es

The Nairobi–Mombasa Infrastructure Corridor: Catalyzing Trade, Industrialization, and Regional Integration in Eastern Africa

President William Ruto's proposal for a new Nairobi–Mombasa highway, unveiled during the International Conference on Nuclear Energy in Nairobi, signals a strategic shift in Eastern Africa's approach to regional connectivity and economic integration. The efficiency of the corridor has been constrained by congestion, limited road capacity, and logistical inefficiencies, which have slowed trade and increased costs for landlocked economies such as Uganda, South Sudan, Ethiopia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. While rail expansions and the Port of Mombasa's modernization have improved throughput, road infrastructure remains a critical bottleneck. A modern highway offers the opportunity to address these structural limitations and position Eastern Africa as a more connected and investment-ready region.

Efficient transport infrastructure is foundational for modern industrial and trade

systems. By reducing transit times and lowering logistics costs, the highway can unlock the movement of goods across borders, particularly for agricultural, manufacturing, and export-oriented sectors. Industrial clusters along the corridor, including special economic zones and agro-processing hubs, will benefit from faster access to both domestic and regional markets. The highway also complements rail networks and inland container depots, creating multimodal logistics solutions that increase supply chain resilience and reduce dependence on a single mode of transport. These improvements will enable producers to integrate more effectively into cross-border value chains and compete in regional and global markets.

The highway's strategic value extends beyond transport efficiency. It has the potential to attract both domestic and foreign investment by enhancing predictability,



Photo Credit: [hivisasa.africa](https://www.hivisasa.africa)

Thursday 26th March 2026

lowering operational costs, and supporting industrial growth. Investors in manufacturing, energy-intensive industries, and logistics services are likely to respond positively to improved connectivity. By linking key economic nodes, the corridor facilitates economies of scale, encourages regional specialization, and supports the development of clusters that can drive innovation and productivity. Over time, this infrastructure investment can shift Eastern Africa's economic structure from a reliance on raw commodity exports toward higher-value, diversified production.

Regional integration and policy coordination are essential for realizing the corridor's full potential. Harmonized customs procedures, cross-border trade facilitation, and coordinated infrastructure planning within the East African Community frameworks will be critical. Lessons from regional corridors elsewhere highlight that infrastructure alone is insufficient without supportive gover-

nance structures, institutional capacity, and long-term maintenance strategies. Public-private partnerships and collaboration with regional bodies can ensure that the corridor remains operational, safe, and financially sustainable over time.

Ultimately, the Nairobi–Mombasa highway represents more than a transport project; it is a catalyst for long-term economic transformation and regional integration. By reducing logistical bottlenecks, strengthening supply chains, and supporting industrial and cross-border economic activity, the corridor enhances Eastern Africa's competitiveness and resilience. If implemented with careful planning, robust governance, and regional coordination, this infrastructure investment can reshape the region's development trajectory, creating a more connected, productive, and industrialized Eastern Africa capable of leveraging its strategic position within continental and global trade networks.

Friday 27th March 2026

Powering Regional Integration: Nuclear Energy and Eastern Africa's Next Infrastructure Shift

Eastern Africa's push toward nuclear energy, highlighted by the Nuclear Energy Conference in Nairobi 2026, signals a significant shift in how the region is approaching long-term energy security and economic transformation. For decades, countries across the region have relied heavily on hydropower, fossil fuels, and renewables such as wind and solar. While these sources remain important, they are increasingly constrained by climate variability, disruptions in supply chains, rising demand, and the intermittency challenges associated with renewable energy. Nuclear energy, by contrast, offers a stable and continuous source of baseload power, capable of

supporting sustained economic growth.

This shift has important implications for regional connectivity and integration. Reliable electricity is a foundational requirement for modern infrastructure systems, particularly in transport and industry. Electrified railways, for example, depend on a consistent power supply to operate efficiently across long distances. With expanding projects such as standard gauge rail networks linking Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and potentially extending toward Rwanda and Ethiopia, nuclear power could provide the steady energy needed to make these systems viable and cost-effective over time.

This, in turn, strengthens trade corridors and enhances the movement of goods and people across borders.

Beyond transport, nuclear energy also supports energy-intensive industries such as manufacturing, mineral processing, and digital infrastructure. As Eastern Africa seeks to move up the value chain and reduce reliance on raw commodity exports, access to affordable and reliable electricity becomes a critical enabler. Nuclear power can help stabilise national grids, reduce dependence on expensive diesel generation, and complement renewable energy by providing a consistent supply when solar and wind output fluctuates. This hybrid energy mix is essential for building resilient economies that can withstand both environmental and market shocks.

At a regional level, the development of nuclear energy opens up opportunities to deepen cross-border power trade. Power pools such as the Eastern Africa Power Pool (EAPP) can benefit from more predictable generation capacity, allowing countries to export surplus electricity and import during shortages. This reduces the need for redundant infrastructure investments and promotes a more efficient allocation of energy

resources across the region. However, realising this potential requires deliberate coordination. Differences in regulatory frameworks, safety standards, financing models, and technical capacity could slow progress if not addressed collectively.

There are also important governance and security considerations. Nuclear energy development requires strong regulatory institutions, adherence to international safety standards, and long-term investment planning. Regional cooperation will be essential not only for infrastructure integration but also for knowledge sharing, capacity building, and risk management. Partnerships with experienced international actors can support this process, but local ownership and institutional strength remain critical.

Ultimately, Eastern Africa's growing commitment to nuclear energy reflects a broader strategic recalibration. It is not merely about adding another energy source, but about redefining the region's development trajectory through reliable power, integrated infrastructure, and coordinated policy action. If managed effectively, nuclear energy could become a cornerstone of a more connected, industrialised, and resilient Eastern African region.





**THE GLOBAL CENTRE FOR POLICY AND STRATEGY
(GLOCEPS)**

Research | Knowledge | Influence

Runda Drive 100, Nairobi, Kenya

P. O. Box 27023 - 00100, Nairobi.

Telephone: 0112401331

Email: info@gloceps.org

Web: www.gloceps.org