

SGR SPECIAL REPORT

InBrief

Shelving of research to blame for food insecurity



Kenya could not be in the current food situation were it not for the huge disconnect existing between researchers and policy makers, a research strategist in food security, Dr David Ameyaw has said.

He said, in an exclusive interview yesterday, the government has data that can cushion the country from food emergency situations but policy makers have failed to utilise it.

"Some of the research data available in this country - especially with the Kenya Agriculture Livestock and Research Organisation (KALRO) - can have immediate impact and benefit to those who desperately need it," Ameyaw told *People Daily*.

According to Ameyaw, the President, International Center for Evaluation and Development, policy makers should pay attention to available research on ability to predict changes in climate in order to produce and store in abundance.

"For instance, we have information that the Food and Agriculture Organisation last year shared satellite images of predicted drought in some parts of the country," he added.

Kenya's maize consumption per year requires an estimated 3.1 million tonnes of the grain but Ameyaw said, the country produces a paltry 2.1 million tonnes, which is not sufficient. Much of this is 70 per cent dependent on unpredictable rains, he added.

"Policy in agriculture requires that governments consider the whole food value chain," he said ahead of the first ever East Africa Evidence to Action Conference in Nairobi tomorrow and Thursday.

This particular value chain covers the whole range from research to development encompassing crop breeding, type of soil, distribution of inputs, mechanisation, warehousing and marketing. Policy, according to Ameyaw, must be able to tell how farmers prepare their land, produce and store their food.

-GEORGE KEBASO

Rail unleashes jobs for locals

In SGR construction contract between Kenya and China, for every Chinese hired, 10 Kenyans would be employed

by Wangui Githungo



The Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) has employed more than 30,000 Kenyans since its launch on November 28, 2013 at Mariakani.

In the Sh327 billion contract between Kenya and China for construction of the SGR, it was stipulated that for every Chinese employed to work on the site, 10 Kenyans would be taken up. It is estimated that 2,200 Chinese comprising railway engineers and managers worked on the project.

The move allowed citizens living around the railway line to get jobs as both non-skilled and semi-skilled workers.

John Kiai Ndung'u, a driver at Section 9 in Kibwezi said the SGR had transformed his life immensely and revealed that he was "just a hustler in Meru" and is now an owner of a five-acre piece of land courtesy of the salary he earns as a driver.

"Owning land seemed like an impossible dream for me but it was made possible by the good returns I get from offering transport services to SGR management," said Kiai.

The jobs created in the past three years, according to China Road and Bridge Corporation (CRBC) officials, are sustainable as the railway will need maintenance from time to time.

Among other achievements, most regions especially in the Eastern area of the country where the railway passes, have had trends of boreholes



The Standard Gauge Railway Athi River Station. Some critics said the project would not beat deadlines set by China Road and Bridge Corporation. PHOTO: HELLEN MUTURI

dug, improving accessibility of water in the dry region.

Many issues have been raised around the SGR ever since Kenya and China governments sealed the deal to construct it. In the agreement, Kenyan government through the Railway Levy Development Fund would contribute 10 per cent of the amount while China government through Exim Bank of China would part with 90 per cent.

Environmental groups

Some critics said the project would not beat deadlines set by CRBC, its main contractor, due to lack of enough funding and complaints from environmental lobby groups and SGR workers.

Some of the major concerns for experts revolved around SGR affecting wildlife, with some citing that the long term benefits of parks and the natural environment are at stake.

While the railway passes through Tsavo Park, a section of the railway going through Voi terminal had its electricity lines destroyed by elephants

despite underpasses with heights of above 4.7 metres being created for them to pass.

Structural Engineer Robert Karisa however said the fence was destroyed because the SGR was not electrified and affirmed that once the areas are powered, the elephants would not be of any worry.

"The elephants are not used to the route we created for them through the under passes and that is why some seem to be trespassing," said Karisa.

Phase one of the SGR runs from Mombasa to Nairobi through seven counties while phase two, expected to kick off construction in the next two months, will run across parts of Nairobi, Kajiado, Kiambu, Nakuru and Narok counties. It will traverse through Mai Mahiu escarpments and pass south of Mount Longonot into Naivasha.

The second phase will pick up from West end of the Nairobi South hub, the end point of the Mombasa-Nairobi railway, and turn south westwards through the Nairobi National Park.

Affordable fares will breathe life into tourism

by Reuben Mwambingu



As the clock ticks towards May 31, Kenyans await the official launch of the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) commuter services with bated breaths.

Tourism players envision SGR as likely to breathe new life into the sector whose prospects have in the past been haunted by among other factors, the ghost of insecurity and poor infrastructure.

Players observe that SGR will offer an alternative and cheaper mode of transport for both domestic and international tourists visiting the Coast and other parts of the country.

According to Kenya Coast Tourist Association (KCTA) Chairman Mohamed Hersi, affordable SGR transport is likely to bolster appetite for travels around the country.

Hersi, who spoke to *People Daily* is confident hotels at the Coast will now be accustomed to 100 per cent bookings especially during high seasons.

Hersi said due to the railway's proximity to the southern bypass (Dongo Kundu), the SGR will open-up the South Coast tourist destination which has for long faced transport crisis at the Likoni Ferry.

Diani Beach Resort Chief Executive Titus Kangangi on his part said the SGR will create job opportunities and investments within the sector.

"SGR will also unlock economic opportunities for businesses that complement the hotel industry," said Kangangi.

Travellers Beach Hotel, Marketing Manager, Wafula Waswa said tourists will have a feel of what Kenya has for attractions as the pass through and above the expansive Tsavo National Park aboard SGR commuter trains.



Luke Mulunda

Good management of the line will benefit Kenyans

The Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) is now a reality. In a matter of days, it is expected to start operations with passenger services in June, while cargo transport will follow a few months later.

A lot has been said about SGR, both constructive and destructive. Yet at the end, we all know that SGR is a long-term project whose impact will run the next 100 years. Basically, it will benefit the children of our children for those in the middle age, unless changes in technology bring us something funkier.

Economically speaking, SGR is a major plunk. Apart from cutting travel time and moving goods, the ripple

effect will be felt in end-user prices, which are bound to come down as cost of transport decreases.

The fact that more people will be travelling on SGR and more goods being ferried on the line means a big relief to the roads, which are pummeled day and night by heavy trucks and buses. This has been blamed for the fast wearing out of roads that keeps serving the government with constant repair bills.

A life and death benefit is the reduction in road accidents. Less vehicular traffic on the roads means less likelihood of accidents. This will lead to less deaths, and a

“Less vehicular traffic on the roads means less likelihood of accidents”

healthier population and even low medical expenses for families and government.

Insurance companies will also experience a reduction in claimants. Mombasa Road leads in accidents and attendant deaths and injuries. Taking off a number of vehicles will deliver instant results.

These are some of the quick

benefits, not to mention the low fares that SGR will bring on board forcing road transport operators to follow suit.

Being a government project, many are already seeing management challenges often associated with public organisations. If the services will not be diluted few months into operations (timing and customer service especially), critics will argue, a good chunk of the money generated may well find its way into private pockets and starve SGR of the cash-flow needed to keep it up to speed with modern and international standards.

Such things would eventually

reduce a life-changing project into another milk cow for state officers. SGR should learn from the failures of Kenya Railways Corporation and avoid the pitfalls that led to its near-collapse and consequent concessioning.

With so much money and emotions invested in SGR, we expect superb management. You would even wish that such a project to be run by a private management firm, but it's key role in the economy means it should remain in government hands.

An alternative is to have an independent organisation to run SGR to avoid the bad legacy of Kenya Railways filtering in. We can't afford to derail this dream.

The writer is the Managing Editor of *Business Today* (www.businesstoday.co.ke). Email: lmulunda@businesstoday.co.ke