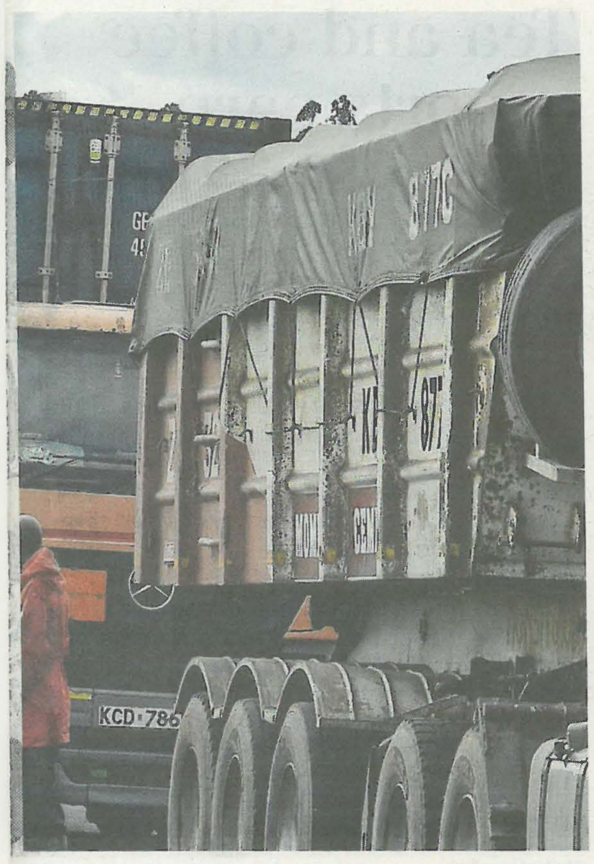

Trucks waiting clearance to enter Uganda from Malaba, at the border with Kenya. Pic: File

the border post.

"Inadequate parking area and an incomplete and narrow road delays scanning of goods, a process taking up to 10 to 15 minutes per truck," said Simon Omondi of Kenya Transport Association.

"Our roads are narrow. They are not responding to the growth in traffic.

"We need to improve the roads network and also the border posts."

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Queue of trucks in kilometres on the Northern Corridor awaiting processing

Tit-for-tat bans

Trade wars between Kenya and Uganda that saw unilateral bans on products such as maize, milk and poultry importation by Kenya has contributed to slow movement of goods at the Malaba and Busia borders.

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C&F agents seek exemption of Customs rent on bulk products exceeding this number of days at Mombasa port

Traders decried the impounding of fish from Kenya destined to the DR Congo worth Ksh40 million ($380,000) in October 2021 by Uganda and import ban on eggs and sugar by Kenya.

"Covid-19 restrictions on lockdown collapsed businesses for small-scale cross-border traders. We call for the removal of product bans such as sugarcane and eggs as these are commonly traded goods under the EAC Simplified Trade Regime," said Mariam Babu, chairperson of Busia Women Cross-Border Traders – Uganda.

Kenya International Freight and Warehousing Association (Kifwa) are concerned about the safety of truck drivers.

"There are no police deployed to protect drivers and cargo despite the long queue of trucks. A vaccination station for drivers, sanitation facilities and other social amenities should be set up for drivers at the border," said Kennedy Osiya, chairperson of Kifwa.

Further the storage and parking space for the cargo is wanting at border posts.

Leaders of clearing and forwarding associations want exemption of Customs rent on imported bulk products exceeding 21 days at the port of Mombasa.

Traders want a review of the information systems at the border to allow access to information that would enable cross-border traders make sound decisions.

"There is a need for more support to modernise the trade information desk to enable traders to access information on currency rates, most selling products for the season such as foods, and information on new regulations among other data," said David Erulu, chairperson of Busia Cross-Border Association, adding that these will allow for smooth trade at the border with Uganda.

appetite for $3b in revenues

Board CEO said.

The country also expects the new drive to increase the number of jobs in the sector from about 600,000 to 667,600 within the same period.

The pandemic with its lockdowns and travel restrictions badly affected the sector with more than 200,000 people losing jobs and livelihood according to official figures.

According to the secretary to the Treasury Ramathan Ggoobi, tourism is among the sectors the government is prioritising with funding next financial year to turn around a battered economy in the short run. Tourism has over the years been underfunded.

Tourism minister Col (Rtd) Tom Butime said that before the Covid-19 pandemic, tourism in Uganda was on a strong and positive trajectory, accounting for 7.7 percent of GDP and about 6.3 percent of all formal employment in the country.

"The launch of the brand is part of a response to the recovery. The launch of the Destination Brand is both vital to the restarting and rebuilding of the tourism sector as it provides a positive, recognisable and firm assurance of the beauty we radiate as a people and landscape of Uganda," he said.

Kenyan cement makers eye massive DR Congo market

LUKE ANAMI
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

The "saut-de-mouton" bridge as part of the DR Congo President's "100 days" project. There is a lot of construction ongoing. Picture: AFP

Kenyan cement companies have stepped up expansion plans with an eye on the estimated 10 million metric tonnes annual demand of cement in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) market.

The East Africa region's installed cement capacity is currently estimated at 15.6 million tonnes, with 8.6 million tonnes of that figure produced in Kenya according to data from the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics.

Cement firms are expanding their total clinker production capacity by 70 percent to 10.7 metric tonnes per year by 2023 from the current 6.3 metric tonnes as part of their strategy to expand in the EAC region.

East African Portland Cement Company (EAPCC), National Cement, Bamburi Cement, Karsan Ramji & Sons, Rai Cement and Savannah Cement plan to add a total of 4.4 metric tonnes annually to their clinker capacities.

"In the past 10 years, EAPCC has been missing from the infrastructural agenda due to competition among other challenges. Now we have come up with a five year strategic plan as we want to revamp our operations," said Oliver M. Kirubai, managing director at the EAPCC.

"We are targeting the East African market, including the DRC. We are getting inquiries from Rwanda as well."

Agenda Four

All the EA countries have infrastructure projects lined up.

"Uganda and Tanzania want to do roads and the Standard Gauge Railway. In Kenya, the growth in cement production and consumption is attributed to President Uhuru Kenyatta's Agenda Four pillars including housing and manufacturing sectors," he said.

"Despite Covid-19 pandemic, the cement demand has been growing. The cement industry is growing at a double digit growth because of government spending on infrastructure."

Infrastructural projects such as the Nairobi Expressway, Dongo Kundu bypass, James Gichuru-Rironi highway, Nairobi Western bypass, as well as construction of mega dams in various parts of the country have seen increased consumption of cement.

"In our industry, competitive advantage lies in operational efficiency and low production costs," said Kirubai.

The DRC, which is set to join the EAC regional bloc this year, is a country in need of infrastructure development.

Last week, the DRC Deputy President and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Christophe Lutundula Apala Pen'Apala said one of the things they want to do is surface infrastructure.

"We have embarked on a national programme of reconstruction in various sectors including infrastructure, agriculture, energy and environmental conservation," said Pen'Apala.

"We already import our goods through Mombasa port and therefore road construction especially in the eastern Congo is part of our major plans. We are seeking partnerships and investment in major infrastructure projects."

The EAPCC welcomed DRC's entry into the EAC regional bloc saying its 92 million people population offers a huge market for industrial products from Kenya.

"Cement consumption in sub-Saharan Africa at the moment is 113 million metric tonnes. In DRC, the demand would be lower but DRC in-

What the DRC premier is talking about is that surface infrastructure requires a lot of cement

Oliver M. Kirubai, managing director at the EAPCC

stantly needs 10 million metric tonnes of cement of which they don't have such capacity to deliver," Kirubai explained.

Clinker investment

"We plan a plant refurbishment to deliver operational excellence and therefore contain production costs and enable us venture into DRC and her environs."

EAPCC, Bamburi and National Cement are among firms that own their own clinker plants, while Savannah Cement, imports clinker.

Savannah plans to put up a clinker plant in Kitui County with a capacity of 8,000 tonnes per day or 2.7 million tonnes annually.

Savannah also plans to venture into cement making in neighbouring Uganda.

"We have been spending a lot of money importing clinker whose shortage in the country is well documented. We plan to put up our own Clinker plant whose investment is valued at $350 million," said acting Savannah Cement CEO Samson Shivina.

"We are already supplying the Eastern part of DRC with our product. Eventually we will have a presence in DRC."

Apart from DRC, Savannah also exports cement to South Sudan and northern Tanzania.

National Cement, which acquired assets of ARM Cement in Kenya in 2019 for $50 million and on an aggressive expansion drive (target: 3.5 metric tonnes) is currently Kenya's largest cement manufacturer.

Owned by the Devki Group of companies, it already has a presence in Uganda in the name of Simba Cement brand with growing interest in the larger EAC.