

DEVELOPMENT

Lamu project threat to wildlife - experts

Infrastructure development will disrupt the habitat of Grevy's zebra — a rare species found only in Kenya and Ethiopia



Commissioning of Lapsset project in Lamu. Picture: Gideon Maundu

KEY LINK

The Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopian Transport corridor (Lapsset) will cost approximately \$70 million.

The project involves the construction of a sea port, oil pipeline, road and a modern railway line linking the landlocked South Sudan and Ethiopia to the coastal town of Lamu.

The Lapsset Corridor will create the great equatorial land bridge that will connect the East and West coasts of Africa.

Conservation experts fear that the opening up of northern Kenya will attract poachers. Picture: File

BY MUCHIRI GITONGA
Special Correspondent

Concerns are emerging among regional conservationists that the \$70 million Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopian Transport corridor (Lapsset) could be a threat to wildlife in northern Kenya.

The project involves the construction of a sea port, oil pipeline, road and a modern railway line linking the landlocked South Sudan and Ethiopia to the coastal town of Lamu.

However, conservation experts are now calling for round table inter-agency discussions to weigh the impact of the grand project on wildlife habitats.

"These developments have great impact on tourism potential but we should also bear in mind the threat of poaching and habitat loss as well as human population increases," Dr Paul Mworia of Nature Kenya recently told a workshop in Nanyuki town, some 207km from Nairobi.

The workshop brought together wildlife experts from Kenya and Ethiopia to discuss survival strategies for the endangered Grevy's zebra.

The rare breed is listed on Appendix I of the United Nations Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) of wild fauna and flora, meaning it is protected from any form of commercial use.

The Grevy's zebra is well adapted to semi-arid areas and can go up to five days without water, except in the case of lactating females. It once inhabited Djibuti, Somalia, Eritrea and Sudan, but due to poaching, disease and limited access to water, the species is now found only in Kenya and Ethiopia.

Experts at the Nanyuki workshop said infrastructural development in northern Kenya will disrupt the animals' habitat. The Grevy's zebra population dropped from 15,000 in the late 1970s to 2,800 in 2008 when the last census was conducted. Another national census is slated for November this year.

The main fear is that the opening up of northern Kenya via the road and railway line will attract poachers as much as it will spur game drive tourism.

Additionally, a 6,000-acre area some 20 kilometres from Isiolo town, 200km from Nairobi, earmarked for the construction of a resort city, is said to be lie on a wildlife migration route from Samburu to Lewa Downs conservancy.

The Kenya Wildlife Society said both the Lapsset and resort city projects would further depress the Grevy's zebras population and other wildlife if measures are not taken early.

"It's a critical area which needs to be handled with care. But discussions are already underway within various government agencies," George Anyona, the KWS national Grevy's zebra liaison officer said.

KWS head of corporate communications Paul Udoto said the inter-agency consultations will centre on

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the development of eco-tourism activities among communities living along the Lapsset corridor.

The director of the Ethiopia Wildlife Conservation Authority, Kifle Argaw, said development of a cross-border strategy for the endangered zebra is critical for the survival of the Grevy's zebra since both countries shared challenges of poaching.

"We need a joint strategy because if one country fails it becomes a headache to the other," Dr Argaw told participants.

Besides enhancing Kenya's position as a gateway and transport hub to the East African and the Great Lakes regions, the Lapsset Corridor is also aimed at creating the great equatorial land bridge that will connect the East and West coasts of Africa.

Rhino poaching on the rise in Africa

By PAUL REDFERN
Special Correspondent

THE NUMBER of African rhinos slaughtered is on the rise in a number of range states including Kenya, South Africa, Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, according to reports from experts monitoring the situation.

The latest data released from wildlife conservation groups notes that over the past 18 months, hundreds of rhinos have been killed by poachers for their valuable horn, which is now fetching up to \$64,615 a kilogramme, mainly from China and Vietnam.

Chinese medicine and jewellery are the main markets, but recent rumours in Vietnam that rhino horn can cure cancer has seen demand there rocket.

As a result, the remaining rhino populations have been decimated across Asia and in November, the last known Javan rhino was found dead with its horn hacked off.

So serious is the situation that conservation groups including WWF, Traffic and Save the Rhino have warned that Africa's rhino could be extinct by the year 2025.

Most of the poaching is in South Africa but in Kenya — which has a rhino population of around 900 — 27 animals were lost in 2011 and four rhinos have been poached and dehorned in the past month alone, including one in the normally ultra secure Lewa Wildlife Conservancy.

Well armed

Organised criminal gangs are running the trade, experts say and they are well organised, well armed and well resourced.

Janse van Rensburg of Cites said: "If the world's enforcement authorities cannot stop this rising trend...we could see populations decline to highly endangered status in a very short time, which will be a tragedy in terms of conservation and for the rhino."

The surge in poaching, not only for rhino horn but also elephant tusks, is bad news for the tourism industry, with a number of gruesome television programmes showing carcasses being broadcast across Europe and the US in recent months.

"The poaching surge shows no sign of abating," said Tom Milliken, Elephant & Rhino Programme Co-ordinator with Traffic, the wildlife trade monitoring group. "Only a concerted international enforcement pincer movement, at both ends of the supply and demand chain, can hope to nip this rhino poaching crisis in the bud."

More pupils sign up for school but quality stays poor



Reports show that children starting school in Tanzania increased from 14pc in 1997 to 87pc in 2007. Picture: File

By ROSEMARY MIRONDO
Special Correspondent

TANZANIA HAS made significant strides in the enrolment of pupils in primary schools as well as reducing the drop out rate.

A recent report titled *Progress in Child Wellbeing* released by Save the Children shows that measures such as the abolition of fees plus introduction of school feeding programmes had contributed to these gains. Children starting school in Tanzania increased from 14 per cent in 1997 to 87 per cent in 2007. Other contributing factors to this increase are more stringent enforcement of age regulations and the development of alternative provisions for "overage" children.

However, the secretary general for Tanzania Association of Managers and Owners of Non-Governmental Schools and Colleges

Benjamin Nkonya, raised concern over the growth in enrolment while the quality of education was poor.

"Many of our children complete primary education without knowing how to read or write," said Mr Nkonya.

He also noted that there is massive theft in the education sector with more than Tsh3.6 billion (\$2.3 million) used to pay ghost teachers and more than Tsh4 billion (\$2.5 million) to pay those who are often absent from duty. "Sixty per cent of government teachers are always absent from duty and those present teach for less than two hours," said Mr Nkonya.

The *Progress in Child Wellbeing* report also shows that overall aid to education in 2009 doubled to Tsh7.3 billion (\$4.7 million) — which reflects commitments to Education for All and MDG Two of achieving universal primary education for all by 2015.