



Ship to shore container terminal at Mombasa harbour, Kenya

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including Durban, making it an ideal proxy for the major regional shipping hub and just a step away from the regional giant of commerce. The second reason is that Maputo port is not hemmed in by a major metropolis, as Durban is: there's room to grow – and now the money to do so.

But all this talk of potential and capacity is misleading – matching capacity with capability is often an entirely different matter.

Cristina Lozano principal trade regulatory officer for the African Development Bank calls congestion 'a way of life' in sub-Saharan Africa and notes that African ports lose out on competitiveness because throughput doesn't match capacity.

The problem – and this is seen in ports all over southern Africa – is not merely of

inefficiencies within the port, but also an issue of low supply volumes.

In short, no matter how much new infrastructure one installs in a harbour, things will only run as smoothly as the roads and railways that bring cargo to and from the port. As such, it's becoming increasingly common for development initiatives to cast their net farther afield than the ports themselves.

In Maputo, for instance, Grindrod has been negotiating with the South African railway operator Transnet for assurances that the rail system can respond to the likely increased demand for magnetite and coal, the main minerals exported through the Matola terminal.

These kinds of public-private partnerships

become increasingly important to ensure development opportunities bear fruit.

Overall inefficiency within the ports continues to be a challenge for African trade hubs. According to Lozano, sub-Saharan African ports continue to handle less cargo than the international standard, at higher costs. In most African ports, you can expect containers to move at a rate of about 7–20 per hour, while the international standard is closer to 30. On average, container handling is more expensive in Africa than the international standard – US\$100–US\$320 per container in African, ports as opposed to the international norm of US\$80–US\$150.

These are the sorts of challenges that African port operators need to tackle. Maputo port is an encouraging case study for up-and-coming trade hubs in a regional economy that leans heavily on international shipping.

As private operators continue to invest in development alongside state partners, it will soon have all the gleam it needs to be a world-class port. For Maputo port, it's a matter of matching 'capacity' with reality. **AD**

This year, Maputo's port development director announced that the facility will process 8.7 million tons of cargo in 2010, with projections that this will rise to 26.2 million tons in 2015