



EAST AFRICA CORRIDOR DIAGNOSTIC STUDY

Photo essay, reportage and video messages

November 2009 - March 2010



Delegates at the first stakeholders' conference in Arusha, Tanzania, February 2010

Six accounts by the Corridor Diagnostic Study's communications officer, Arjun Kohli, written on two photographic missions along parts of the Northern and Central Corridors in November 2009 and April 2010.

- Leaving Nairobi and the truck drivers at Mai Mahiu
- A road accident
- Speed bumps
- Gilgil weigh bridge to Nakuru
- Nakuru to Kericho
- The lake port in Kisumu

LEAVING NAIROBI AND THE TRUCK DRIVERS AT MAI MAHIU

The car had been booked and Wachira, an experienced regional driver was waiting. Approvals to cross the border out of Kenya to take GPS photos of traffic flow along the corridors were still not processed so I used the opportunity to take a GPS lesson from Titan Avionics, who kept the device ready on a fast track instruction from Steve Walls at USAID/COMPETE.

I wrote a quick note to Shemmy before I left COMPETE with the invoices for the device. He'd been keen for one of his team members to come on the Northern and Central Corridor expedition with me. *"I can't leave yet. No clearance from USAID. Room in car, still a day to plan, it's such an opportunity. Ring me."*

All armed, with a newly purchased camera with which I could take high resolution video and stills to match the GPS codes and put them on the www.eastafricancorridors.org website with Mike Smith, I set off.

At Limuru my phone rang and I confided to a friend that it was late but I wanted to get to Mai Mahiu by dark and at least get a chance to spend time with the truckers who usually stayed there before proceeding up the Rift Valley escarpment to Nairobi or across to Kampala.

A dusty town minutes away from a makeshift camp hosting over two hundred internally displaced families, I knew it well. I'd helped to build that camp soon after the 2009 post-election violence, when petrol prices rocketed and trucks diverted from using the Northern Corridor. The truckers of course only come and go but they give potential livelihoods to the families who had settled close to the town following violence in towns like Molo, further along the corridor towards Uganda.

"He wants to talk to the drivers," said Wachira, who was driving a COMESA compliant safari green long wheel based Land Rover hired in Nairobi that I felt could handle the trucking route. I spoke in Kiswahili, breaking the ice and the crowd of truckers, who appeared out of curiosity to the windowsill in that first

hour of night, opened up. Silas had a face I immediately trusted.

"Have you eaten dinner?" I asked.

"Yes," he said, *"but we can go to one of the bars if you want to talk."*

"I'll guard the car," said Wachira.

I locked my door, gathered the newly bought equipment and walked with Silas and a large group across the dusty terrain worn in by heavy trucks, oil and diesel. We passed a butcher, two and three story hotels that the truck drivers stay in and several bars. I stopped at one and pulled aside the bright coloured cloth separating it from the jagged pavement.

"Not here" said Silas, guarding me. He knew it was a brothel.

We walked further.

"Here," said Silas.

It was a quieter bar and I said it's better to have that sort of an ambiance so we could talk. The TV was turned down and the waitress went back behind the

square grills separating her and the drinks from the drinkers sitting on the five or six blue tables in the small room.

"I'll buy a round, for those on this table," I said. The truckers, all aged between 25 and 40 enjoyed Tuskers and Guinness.

After a time I took out the Corridor Diagnostic Study brochure and asked the truckers if they recognised the picture on the cover. It depicted a long line of trucks at Malaba, but they did not recognize it immediately, perhaps because they never had the opportunity to view the situation they regularly face from a bird's eye view.

"Mombasa" said one, revealing the 7km line of trucks was not unique to Malaba.

We talked more and they examined the map on the brochure. I explained my assignment was to understand the corridors from them, who used it.

“Policy makers often disregard the view from ordinary people, but you are the ones that use the corridors so I’m here to take your voice to them,” I said.

Together we devised a plan and four volunteers from the table agreed to structure their comments thematically, so that I could get short one-minute interviews with focal areas in different locations on camera.

Anthony Mungai, traveling from Mombasa to Kampala carrying cement wanted to talk about robberies he regularly encountered. Steven Ngiru, carrying rolls of paper from Pan Paper to Eldoret to make toilet paper, said he wanted to speak about police roadblocks. He said he was given a bribery allowance but there were so many police blocks and at every stop he had to pay out. If he exceeded his allowance he had to pay himself and then sleep in the truck or outside for the rest of the trip.

“Look at me” he said. “I wear ksh 100 slippers and I drive a truck with three axels and I earn ksh 7000 a month. And I have a wife and child.”



The truckers would be up before dawn, as would Wachira and I. We then set off, away from the all night music and trucker's dens along the low road recently paved by the EU, past the IDP camp and the foot of Mount Longonot, to Naivasha.

A ROAD ACCIDENT

Several container trucks were parked on the easy flowing dual carriageway passing through Naivasha town. Perhaps it was the truckers who wanted to keep away from the rowdy bars and brothels at Mai Mahiu that stayed

there the night. It was a short distance on the good road after the dairy shop belonging to the Delamere Ranch that the traffic jam began. A white capped traffic police man ushered the build up of trucks along and soon we saw the familiar scene of a shocked and stranded public looking on to a head on collision that took place minutes before. The victims from a crumpled school van and mashed matatu had already been taken away, but the group of onlookers had gathered after their matatu driver took the noble decision to throw them out and rush the school children to the nearest hospital in Gilgil town. I asked the traffic policeman permission to take photographs but it was only in the evening, when logging that I understood the extent of the tragedy. In one photo and completely by chance I snapped the moment when a Nairobi bound bus was passing the school van. The bus had the label "Destny" on its metallic front, passing at great speed across the corridor. "Destny's Child" I wrote to the picture chief at Reuters. I couldn't stop looking at that as the irony sunk in.

At the small Gilgil hospital nurses and doctors struggled to find medication for the serious victims and nursed the others. Teenage children in maroon



school sweaters limped into casualty as an ever-growing queue of expectant mothers and local sick people waited patiently on the wooden benches outside. It was no time to film. It was a tragic morning filled with shock and death and I left the hospital for the corridor again as accident victims used their last seconds of credit to call for support. *"I hate this aspect of my profession,"* I thought. If I'd filmed I'd have produced a result for the greater trajectory of road safety, but it seemed a cruel thing to do at the time.

SPEED BUMPS

The car screeched and all maps and camera, GIS gear and no longer rooted fruit hit the floor. "Lets turn around" I said to Wachira a few hundred metres after, he seemed apologetic as if it was his fault he did not see the unpainted road curve upwards in a few inches as a choppy wave might on hard coral. Shocks gone.

I got out of the car as we approached the bumps again. I looked at the twenty-metre line of skid marks either side and recalled the divorce case I witnessed as a child when a French neighbour drove over such a bump thrusting his wife into paralysis. Their relationship did not withstand the pain or the blame she inflicted on him for not seeing it. But how many had similar experiences? I thought.

With that in mind I approached the young men selling chickens and eggs, passion fruit and other farm produce from the fertile belt along that part of the corridor.

“What do you think of these bumps?” I asked. “Do you see many accidents?”

Their perspective turned me aback. “Yes many. Small children get run over.”

“So you’re glad for the bumps?”

“Yes – and there’s a sign” said the man selling passion fruit, “So people slow down, especially as the children come out from school.”

I looked at the skid marks and thought of the divorced couple.

“Highways should not have bumps,” said Wachira.



GILGIL WEIGHBRIDGE TO NAKURU

It took some time before a long green container truck pulled to a halt at the dusty weighbridge. The weighbridge conductor at Gilgil said about 100 trucks pass that station each day. Empty trucks go on and only loaded trucks get weighed. The three that passed in the hour that I was there were all within the weight limit and moved on within five minutes each. He said he was a government worker but some weighbridges were privatised. I filmed a short interview and continued the drive taking photos of seamless traffic flow along the four-lane road through Nakuru town.

Looking at the papers, I read that along feeder roads coming to Lake Victoria, and in Northern Kenya near Isiolo there were floods that blocked traffic flow. I went to the police station at Nakuru to enquire and phoned back to the office that concluded, if I pursued that story, I might get stuck in a flood and would not be able to carry on along the corridor.

“How’s traffic flow in Nakuru?” I asked the traffic police officer.

“Medium to good,” he said.

"If you want to know about washed away bridges you've got to go to the ministry of works or the Red Cross," he said.

NAKURU TO KERICHO

I wondered whether I should phone Silas and ride along with him through a border or police check. We'd begun to climb up a hill and I realised that despite the stops I still might overtake him, as he would be crawling up those hills. As I made up my mind I realised it was getting late already and I'd better think about accommodation that night. Kakamega was ambitious but Kericho was possible and we turned off onto a side road. Metres on we came across a mangled truck being towed by a team onto a lorry that would take the remains for recycling in Mombasa.

"When did this happen?" I asked.

"This morning" said the tanned Sikh driver.

"You're going to have quite a time getting that wreck onto the back of that truck," I said sympathetically.

"I do about two of these a week" he said. He had a kind face and there was an immediate sense of solidarity as we belong to similar tribes.

"Why do so many accidents like that happen?" I asked.

"They go down hill just before Gilgil and freewheel to save fuel," he said.

We got to Kericho as the sun set over the tea plantations and trucks poured in for the night to load the tea for transport along the corridors the next day.



There is no written account of the rest of the road trip, but experience it in photos by watching the photo essay. A second photography trip was made to the lake port in Kisumu.

THE LAKE PORT IN KISUMU

As the small plane glided across Lake Victoria the woman who feared flying over water released her tight grip on my arm and we touched down onto a warm, mosquito-laden runway in Kisumu. Collins, the Regional Manager of SDV Transami, one of the largest logistics companies in East Africa, was there, having come and gone three times as a result of delays. When we got into our rented car I texted his boss, Auni Bhaiji, to thank him for his support and tell him our trip had begun.

“Do you think we’ll be able to see some land to ferry port activity by the Lake?”
I asked.

Collins said that there wasn’t much activity, but there was a sleepy port.

“There’s so much potential in this place” he said as friendly security guards opened the gates and directed us to the there stationed Kenya Revenue Authorities. Permission to photograph granted, we walked past the dilapidated colonial building, flanked with palms, to an oil tanker offloading petrol onto a small ship, the M.V. Allez. Her captain, John Rueben, said that the vessel

kills 12-13 42,000L trucks in one go. Once a fortnight he makes the journey from Kisumu in Kenya to Mwanza in Tanzania or Port Bell in Uganda. He's employed by Moil Kenya. *"There's one other ship like mine owned by the Marine Service Company, but it's not been operational for three to four years,"* remarked the captain.

Moving further along Lake Victoria's calm shore we passed empty container warehouses and idle port police, who were curious to know our business. Impressed with the mandate, they were happy to share their thoughts on the idle port. *"A lake this size and not a single passenger vessel to take people between the countries. There is one between Mbita in Kenya and Luanda Kotieno in Kenya, but it's a short distance, about 20km"* remarked Benson Mwara from the Kenya Marine Police. *"What about cargo vessels, like the one over there?"* I asked, pointing to a larger vessel that was docked, mouth open, with connecting railway tracks between it and the land.

"There are six" he said *"The MV Victoria, which goes from Bukoba to Port Bell; the MV Uhuru owned by the Kenyan government; the MV Umoja owned by the*

Tanzanian government and a Ugandan vessel called Pamba and Kaawa.”
He paused and then added, *“Kabalenga sank in 1999. There have been two accidents like that.”*

Joining in, Collins lamented on the ports hey day, when it was bustling with activity. *“There’s so much potential here to take trucks off the road.”*

And he’s right of course. As we moved towards the there docked Uhuru ship, kissing the shore at the railway line, the captain said that 22 wagons carrying 40 tonnes each could board that vessel. *“They carry rice, cotton seed and fish meal from Tanzania; slippers, books, sweets, salt, cooking oil, clothes and hardware from Kenya.”*

We left as Rift Valley Railway staff ate lunch with the ship’s crew on a sunny deck flanked with lake birds who formed a line on an otherwise lifeless anchor chord. *“Times getting on. We’d better make our way to Malaba.”*

** For GIS coded photographs of the journey from Malaba to Kampala and on to Kigali and Dar es Salaam please visit the website at www.eastafricancorridors.org and watch the DVD! To access individual photographs please use library CD 1.*



Facilitating transport
through Mombasa port

TTFA
Central Corridor Transit Transport Facilitation Agency

