



TAZARA Railway: The Limits of Infrastructure- Led Development

The rehabilitation of the Tanzania–Zambia Railway (TAZARA) – linking Zambia’s Copperbelt to the Indian Ocean – remains a lasting symbol of China–Africa partnership. A \$1.4 billion trilateral agreement between China, Zambia, and Tanzania seeks to modernize this aging corridor and restore its strategic relevance. However, without parallel gains in local value addition and employment, the upgrades risk accelerating raw mineral exports more than advancing the long-term economic agency of African producers.



Tanzania-Zambia Railway Authority.

BACKGROUND

Built in the 1970s with Chinese financial and technical assistance, TAZARA provided Zambia with an independent route, reducing its economic reliance on apartheid-era South Africa and white-ruled Rhodesia



Source: *The Economist*



TAZARA revamp seeks to raise freight volumes from 100,000 to 2.4 million tons annually

CHALLENGES



While necessary, the rehabilitation exercise will increase the debt burdens on Zambia and Tanzania



Concerns over lack of capacity to develop domestic engineering, maintenance, and manufacturing capacity alongside the railway

Emphasis on moving raw minerals rather than building integrated industrial value chains



Decades of limited investment and irregular maintenance have left tracks, bridges, tunnels, and exchange points in need of significant rehabilitation.



Tazara Infographic Bibliography

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