



# **Tazara And South-South Cooperation: China's Role In Tanzania's Rural Transformation**

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**Abstract-** This paper evaluates the Tanzania-Zambia Railway (TAZARA) as a pivotal infrastructure initiative in South-South cooperation, showcasing its socio-economic effects on rural development in Tanzania. The railway was constructed between 1970 and 1975 with financial and technical support from China. TAZARA was designed to reduce Zambia's dependency on apartheid-era transport routes and enhance rural connectivity in Tanzania. The study employs a qualitative methodology based on documentary review to obtain data and thematic content for analysis. Moreover, the study draws upon Modernization Theory and Keynesian Economics to assess how TAZARA impacted infrastructure, employment, trade, and social transformation. Data were collected from academic journals, government reports, and institutional publications. Key findings indicate that TAZARA significantly improved rural infrastructure, facilitated market access, and generated employment opportunities, especially throughout the building and early operation stages. Social mobility increased through better access to education and health services, while regional trade and economic diversification expanded. However, challenges such as aging infrastructure, limited reinvestment, and competition from road transport have undermined long-term sustainability. The study concludes that while TAZARA has had lasting developmental impacts, its full potential remains unrealized without renewed investment, modern governance frameworks, and inclusive stakeholder participation. Under cooperative international settings, the TAZARA case offers important insights into the potential and constraints of infrastructure financed by foreign sources in accomplishing rural development.

**Keywords:** TAZARA, South-South cooperation, Rural development, Chinese investment, Tanzania

## **I. Introduction**

In the post-independence era in sub-Saharan Africa, newly sovereign states have made concerted efforts towards economic self-reliance and regional unity, much of which has been enabled by the creation of infrastructure. According to the World Bank's 2024 Country Climate and Development Report, Tanzania has been focusing on sustainable development strategies to address climate challenges and promote economic growth (World Bank, 2024). With Julius Nyerere as the first president, Tanzania embarked on an ambitious agenda of socialism and national development through Ujamaa, its policy framework based on collective agriculture and rural development, aimed at the equitable distribution of resources (Magasi, 2024; Schneider,



2019). Despite these aspirations, one of the most significant constraints to rural transformation was the lack of robust

and integrated transportation infrastructure. The railways inherited from colonial administrations were primarily designed to extract raw materials for export to Europe and did little to promote inter-regional trade or domestic development (Whang, 2018).

At the same time, Zambia, a landlocked country rich in mineral resources, particularly copper, faced economic dependency on transport routes through apartheid South Africa and white minority-ruled Southern Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe. These routes were economically restrictive in addition to being politically unstable, particularly as anti-apartheid and liberation movements gathered momentum. Studies show that reliance on these corridors left Zambia vulnerable to external geopolitical pressures that could jeopardize its export capacity and economic sovereignty (Noyoo, 2021; Scotto, 2018). Therefore, both nations sought an alternative transportation network that could serve mutual interests by enhancing trade, securing access to international markets, and promoting internal development. Hence, the idea of constructing a railway between Dar es Salaam in Tanzania and Kapiri Mposhi in Zambia emerged in this context. However, Western nations and multilateral financial institutions, including the World Bank, were reluctant to support the project, citing high financial risks and low returns (W. Song, 2015). As a result, the search for a cooperative partner led Tanzania and Zambia to China.

China's engagement was rooted in its broader strategy of supporting anti-colonial movements and promoting solidarity with developing nations during the Cold War. With limited diplomatic alliances at the time, China found in Africa a strategic and ideological partner. The proposed TAZARA railway project aligned with China's foreign policy objectives of fostering South-South cooperation, counterbalancing Western influence, and expanding its geopolitical reach (Guo, 2019; K. Song, 2022). The agreement, signed in 1967, committed China to financing and constructing a 1,860-kilometer railway linking the two countries, with construction starting in 1970 and completing in 1975. Over 50,000 Chinese and African workers participated in this monumental effort (Monson, 2011).

In Tanzania, TAZARA was more than a transport corridor; it was a mechanism for rural development. The project was expected to catalyze the modernization of remote areas by improving access to services, markets, and urban centers. This aspiration was consistent with the principles of Modernization Theory, which posits that infrastructure and technological advancement can accelerate a country's transition from traditional to modern economic and social systems (Chaudhary, 2013; Goorha, 2017). TAZARA's reach through previously inaccessible regions made it a central component of Tanzania's rural development policy.

Despite these goals, the effectiveness and long-term impact of TAZARA have faced scrutiny. Although it initially functioned as a vital trade and mobility lifeline, the railway's performance has declined due to aging infrastructure, insufficient investment, poor management, and competition from road transport. Moreover, the anticipated spillover effects on rural economies have been uneven, with some communities experiencing transformation while others remain marginalized (Vhumbunu, 2016). The present study is motivated by the need to reassess TAZARA not only as a historical symbol of South-South cooperation but also as a



developmental instrument. While previous literature has focused on its diplomatic and ideological dimensions, there is a growing necessity to understand its practical implications for rural development in Tanzania. Specifically, this paper investigates whether the railway has delivered on its original promise of transforming rural livelihoods, enhancing infrastructure, and fostering inclusive growth. The study proposes that TAZARA, as a product of international cooperation outside traditional donor-recipient models, offers valuable lessons for contemporary development practice. As countries across Africa continue to grapple with infrastructure deficits and rural poverty, understanding the TAZARA experience could inform future partnerships and project designs. The study examines the railway's outcomes using qualitative analysis and explores policy recommendations for its revitalization and long-term sustainability.

## **II. Literature Review**

### **1. The Goals and Effects of Chinese Infrastructure Investment in Africa**

Significant academic focus has been drawn to China's expanding involvement in Africa's infrastructure development, especially in light of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and larger South-South collaboration. However, prior research tended to see Chinese investments as either detrimental or profitable (Han & Webber, 2020). More delicate analyses have since emerged, portraying China as a pragmatic partner driven by mutual benefit, diplomatic strategy, and a desire to promote industrialization in developing regions (Colom-Jaén & Mateos, 2022; GRACHIKOV, 2019). TAZARA is one of the earliest and most iconic examples of this engagement.

Many studies emphasized that Chinese aid differs from that of traditional Western donors by avoiding conditionality and emphasizing infrastructure over social sectors. They argued that China uses aid as a diplomatic and developmental tool rooted in its history of nation-building (Deyassa, 2019; Kishi & Raleigh, 2015; X. Wang et al., 2014). In the case of TAZARA, China's involvement was largely motivated by solidarity with anti-colonial movements, Cold War alliances, and the desire to export its development model (Guo, 2019). Such motivations aligned well with the ideological aspirations of Tanzania and Zambia during the 1960s and 1970s.

According to recent research, while Chinese infrastructure projects can significantly improve connectivity and access to services, their success is contingent on local governance structures and long-term maintenance strategies (Ashfaq Ahmad et al., 2021; Weng et al., 2021). In the TAZARA case, the initial impact was transformative, but the failure to establish sustainable management and reinvestment frameworks has hindered continued progress (Yangailo et al., 2023).

### **2. Theoretical Perspectives on Infrastructure and Development**

The justification for "development" programs such as TAZARA has usually been couched in developmental terms, associated with Modernization Theory and Keynesian Economics. For modernization theorists, infrastructure, and transportation most specifically, is a precondition of transforming traditional rural-based economies into modern and industrial ones (Bernstein, 1971; Harris, 1996). Indeed, the railways, in particular, have acted as instruments of economic advancement, linking hinterland producers to urban



markets, stimulating urbanization, and promoting knowledge diffusion. The reasoning behind this was crucial to TAZARA's strategy and execution. The railway was viewed by the Tanzanian government as a means of improving rural communities and strengthening national cohesion (Monson, 2021). Improved mobility was expected to give rural communities access to education, healthcare, and trade opportunities, thereby accelerating human capital development.

Keynesian theory also provides insight into the TAZARA project. As Keynes argued, large public investments in infrastructure can stimulate aggregate demand, reduce unemployment, and catalyze economic recovery or transformation (Tcherneva, 2012). TAZARA created tens of thousands of jobs during its construction and continues to provide employment, even though at lower levels. China's injection of capital, labor, and expertise into Tanzania and Zambia was a practical demonstration of Keynesian investment principles applied in a development context. However, various studies point out that the critics of both theoretical models highlight the risks of overreliance on top-down, capital-intensive development strategies. If local institutions are weak or public investment is not accompanied by governance reform and community engagement, projects can become unsustainable or produce limited long-term benefits (Appleby, 1978; Feldman, 2019; Harcourt, 2016).

### **3. Rural Development Outcomes of Railway Projects in Africa and Beyond**

Railways have played a pivotal role in shaping economic and social landscapes across the Global South. In Africa, colonial-era railways facilitated resource extraction but did little for inclusive development (Michalopoulos & Papaioannou, 2020). The post-independence period saw attempts

to reverse this trend through more equitable infrastructure investments, with TAZARA being a leading example. Research by Limodio (2011) examined Western-funded infrastructure projects and found that success depended heavily on political will, institutional quality, and alignment with local needs. Similarly, Verdini & Sirayi (2021) emphasized the role of cultural alignment and community participation in determining the outcomes of Indian-funded rural projects in Africa. In the context of Latin America, Leiva (2021) assessed the long-term sustainability of railway investments in Peru, finding that while short-term economic gains were notable, insufficient planning for maintenance and stakeholder inclusion compromised long-term impacts. These findings mirror the TAZARA experience, where the absence of consistent reinvestment and innovation has reduced the project's efficiency.

Several African scholars have highlighted how TAZARA contributed to regional integration, trade, and mobility. For instance, ElGanainy (2023), viewed TAZARA as both a developmental and symbolic project, one that simultaneously connected remote areas and reinforced South-South geopolitical alliances. However, they also noted that neoliberal reforms and privatization pressures in the 1990s undermined its sustainability. Social impacts have also been recorded. Monson (2013), observed that TAZARA stations became nuclei for emerging rural economies, facilitating cross-cultural interaction and access to goods and services. Yet, Monson (2006) caution that such benefits are not evenly distributed and may come at the cost of local cultural erosion or displacement if not properly managed.



#### **4. Scope of the Study**

The study primarily looks into how TAZARA has affected Tanzanian rural development. Using qualitative, documentary analysis, it looks at how the railway affects employment, economic diversification, interactions, and shifts in society. Only where it is required for comparative perspective is Zambia's experience mentioned.

### **III. Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative research approach centered on a documentary review to investigate the rural development impacts of the Tanzania-Zambia Railway (TAZARA) within the broader context of South-South cooperation. Given the historical and developmental nature of the subject, qualitative methods are most appropriate for capturing the diverse socio-economic and political dimensions of TAZARA's implementation and outcomes (Lewis, 2015; Porak & Reinke, 2024). The documentary review technique allows the researcher to synthesize and critically examine

existing data from a wide array of credible sources, offering insights into patterns, relationships, and implications relevant to the case (Trautrim et al., 2012).

The study's primary data sources include peer-reviewed journal articles, government reports from Tanzania and China, academic dissertations, historical records, and publications from international organizations such as the World Bank and African Development Bank. These sources were accessed using digital academic databases, including Google Scholar, Web of Science, JSTOR, and SpringerLink. Search terms included "TAZARA railway," "China-Africa cooperation," "rural development in Tanzania," and "South-South cooperation." By employing these keywords, a comprehensive set of literature was collected and filtered to ensure academic relevance. Both historical documents and recent analyses were included to enable a longitudinal understanding of the railway's development and its evolving impact over time.

Furthermore, the study is grounded in two theoretical paradigms: Modernization Theory and Keynesian Economics. Modernization Theory provides a lens to assess how TAZARA contributed to Tanzania's transition from a traditional to a more industrial and connected society. The theory posits that infrastructure, particularly transportation, plays a key role in promoting economic growth, national integration, and social modernization (Roxborough, 1988). Keynesian Economics complements this by emphasizing public investment as a stimulus for job creation, economic expansion, and infrastructure-led development (Commendatore et al., 2024). These theories allow the study to interpret TAZARA not merely as a transportation initiative but as a broader catalyst for socio-economic transformation in rural Tanzania. The study area is the TAZARA railway in Tanzania, which covers the rural areas surrounding the railway line from Dar es Salaam to the Zambian border, via the Mbeya region. These were deprived regions with no access to decent transport. Through these areas, it examines how the train developed its economic and social structure.

The documentary review data was subjected to thematic content analysis. This approach consists of detecting and understanding patterns linked to the enhancements of infrastructure, connectivity, trade promotion, job creation, and cultural sharing. The analysis also factored in issues related to operational ineffectiveness,



deteriorating infrastructure, and constrained reinvestment. This theme-based approach offered a structured yet flexible means of gaining insights at a range of levels of analysis in the field of rural development (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). While the absence of primary data, such as interviews or field observations, restricts direct engagement with affected communities, the extensive use of verified secondary sources allows for triangulation across a broad spectrum of academic and institutional viewpoints. Ethical considerations were adhered to

throughout the research by ensuring transparency in citation, avoiding plagiarism, and maintaining intellectual honesty in interpretation (Tabuena et al., 2021).

## **IV. Results and Discussion**

### **1. Rural Infrastructure Development**

One of the most significant impacts of TAZARA has been the development of rural infrastructure along its corridor. Before its construction, many of the areas through which the railway now passes were isolated and lacked basic transportation infrastructure. The railway line introduced a modern and reliable mode of transport that connected rural Tanzania to major trade hubs such as Dar es Salaam and Mbeya. This enhanced accessibility facilitated the flow of people, goods, and services, which in turn supported local development initiatives and rural-urban integration (Said, 2018). According to Wang & Wu, (2015), rural communities situated near railway stations experienced marked improvements in infrastructure, including roads, markets, and service centers. The strategic positioning of TAZARA stations contributed to the expansion of ancillary infrastructure, such as feeder roads and commercial centers, transforming previously disconnected rural economies into semi-urban clusters. The railway thus functioned not merely as a transport corridor but as a catalyst for local economic growth, particularly in southern and southwestern Tanzania.

The African Development Bank (AfDB) 2024 Country Focus Report highlights significant investments in rural infrastructure, noting that these are aligned with broader objectives of enhancing connectivity and economic opportunities. The report emphasizes how TAZARA has helped lay the foundation for integrated development zones by providing a structural backbone for trade and mobility in Tanzania's less-developed regions (African Development Bank, 2024). For example, in the Mbeya Region, improved access through TAZARA has allowed local farmers to expand their agricultural market reach significantly. The availability of cost-effective rail transport reduced post-harvest losses, increased the frequency of market transactions, and facilitated the movement of agricultural inputs such as fertilizers and improved seeds. These developments, in turn, contributed to productivity gains and a rise in household incomes in surrounding communities (World Bank, 2024).

Furthermore, TAZARA's role in rural transformation is also evident in the rise of informal commercial centers that have emerged near station towns such as Tunduma and Makambako. These towns have grown into vibrant trade and service hubs due to increased footfall and logistical connections enabled by the railway. According to the UNDP Tanzania Results Report 2019–2022, rural transport improvements are vital for equitable growth, and rail infrastructure projects like



TAZARA is instrumental in reducing regional disparities in access to services and opportunities (United Nations Development Programme, 2023). In addition to physical infrastructure, TAZARA contributed to social infrastructure development, including access to schools, healthcare centers, and financial institutions, especially where station towns attracted NGOs and government services. The increased public sector investment in these areas was driven by the recognition of improved connectivity and economic viability. Generally, the construction of TAZARA and its continued operation have had a transformative impact on rural infrastructure development in Tanzania. It has served as both a symbol and instrument of South-South cooperation, enabling China to support Tanzania's long-term rural development goals not only through financing and construction but also by facilitating a structural shift toward inclusive and regionally balanced growth.

## **2. Employment and Skill Development**

TAZARA significantly contributed to employment creation and skill development in Tanzania, particularly during its construction and subsequent operational phases. During the 1970s construction period, over 38,000 Tanzanians were employed alongside approximately 15,000 Chinese workers (Monson, 2011). This massive labor mobilization not only addressed short-term unemployment challenges but also fostered long-term skill development among local workers. Through collaboration with Chinese engineers and technicians, Tanzanian workers gained exposure to advanced construction techniques, railway engineering, and mechanical operations. As such, the railway served as a practical site for knowledge transfer and technical capacity building. Moreover, beyond the construction period, the post-commissioning phase saw sustained employment generation through railway operations, station administration, and cargo handling. The research done by Zhu et al., (2023) highlights that the railway continues to offer formal jobs in track maintenance, logistics, and rail operations. These positions have played a crucial role in stabilizing household incomes in regions intersected by the railway line, notably Dar es Salaam, Morogoro, and Mbeya. Employment along TAZARA has enabled local communities to reduce reliance on subsistence agriculture and diversify income sources through wage labor.

In addition to direct employment, TAZARA catalyzed a range of indirect job opportunities. These emerged in sectors such as retail, hospitality, food services, and informal trade, particularly around growing station towns like Tunduma, Makambako, and Mpika. For instance, the influx of passengers and freight traffic created demand for lodging, restaurants, and local markets, thereby stimulating micro-enterprise development. Local women and youth, in particular, found employment selling food and goods to travelers, enhancing their economic participation and

agency. The report offered by the African Development Bank (2024) emphasizes that transport infrastructure projects like TAZARA have a multiple effect on employment across the value chain from construction to operation to support services. In the context of this project, regions that were once marginal and economically stagnant, TAZARA has effectively functioned as a labor mobilization corridor. Furthermore, the World Bank (2024) reports that infrastructure-induced job creation is particularly vital in Tanzania, where youth



unemployment remains a national development challenge. Projects such as TAZARA have played a formative role in absorbing surplus labor, especially in rural and peri-urban areas.

Haifang & Monson, (2011) argues that vocational training expanded as a result of TAZARA's project in various parts of Tanzania. The project spurred the development of technical institutions and workshops aimed at training railway personnel and maintenance staff. Some former trainees later found employment in related sectors, such as construction, road engineering, and automotive repair, demonstrating the broader applicability of skills acquired during the TAZARA era. The establishment of TAZARA's training schools in Tanzania and Zambia created a regional pool of skilled railway professionals who contributed not only to operations but also to future transport initiatives. Generally, TAZARA has provided both direct and indirect employment benefits while fostering a culture of skill development. It helped formalize labor markets in rural areas, diversified income opportunities, and contributed to poverty reduction in communities along the railway corridor. These outcomes exemplify how infrastructure projects, when embedded within a framework of South-South cooperation, can deliver inclusive and long-term socio-economic impacts.

### **3. Facilitation of Trade and Economic Diversification**

The most transformative effects of TAZARA have been its substantial contribution to economic diversification and trade facilitation in rural Tanzania. Before the railway's development, many rural communities were heavily dependent on subsistence agriculture and lacked the means to scale production or engage in regional trade. The introduction of TAZARA significantly reduced the cost and time associated with transporting goods, thereby enabling smallholder farmers and rural entrepreneurs to access broader markets with greater ease and consistency. Farmers situated along the TAZARA corridor, including regions in Mbeya, Iringa, and Ruvuma, have expanded into larger-scale production, encouraged by the reliability of rail transport to deliver their agricultural produce to urban centers like Dar es Salaam and even across borders to Zambia and beyond. For instance, trade volumes in staple crops such as maize, beans, and sunflower have increased markedly, with many local producers now operating in coordinated farmer groups to meet growing market demand. According to Said (2018), these shifts are directly attributed to the improved transport logistics that TAZARA has made possible.

In addition to primary agricultural trade, the railway has played a crucial role in stimulating the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Near major station towns such as Makambako and Tunduma, new business activities have emerged in agro-processing, cold storage, and input supply chains. The increased demand for warehousing and packaging services reflects a broader trend toward value addition within rural economies. As noted by Fontagné et al., (2023) the integration of rural areas into transport corridors often triggers the emergence of micro-industries and informal markets that were previously absent due to high logistical constraints.

TAZARA has also enhanced access to cross-border trade opportunities. In regions like Tunduma, located near the Zambian border, local traders and cooperatives now engage in bilateral commerce, exporting surplus produce and importing goods such as manufactured food items and farm inputs. The improved ease of



movement across borders has encouraged the formalization of trade and increased tax revenues for local authorities. This aligns with findings by the World Bank, (2024) which underscores that the well-developed transport corridors significantly boost regional trade and rural economic complexity in sub-Saharan Africa.

Moreover, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (2023) reports that rural economies with access to rail infrastructure demonstrate a faster transition toward mixed livelihoods, where non-farm activities like small-scale retail, services, and manufacturing coexist with traditional farming. This diversification not only improves income resilience but also fosters rural innovation and entrepreneurship. For example, the establishment of small-scale maize milling plants in Morogoro and solar-drying facilities for horticultural products in Mbeya were directly supported by the availability of efficient rail transport to urban and export markets. In sum, TAZARA has facilitated more than just the movement of goods, it has enabled structural shifts in rural economic patterns by linking producers to markets, lowering transaction costs, and encouraging investment in diversified rural enterprises. These outcomes illustrate how infrastructure, as part of South-South cooperation, can serve as a foundation for inclusive and sustainable rural development.

#### **4. Social Transformation and Mobility**

Beyond its economic contributions, the Tanzania-Zambia Railway Authority (TAZARA) has significantly influenced social transformation in rural Tanzania. By connecting previously isolated communities, the railway has enhanced mobility and access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and administrative centers. This increased connectivity has facilitated cultural exchange and national integration, fostering a sense of unity among diverse populations along the railway corridor (Monson, 2011). Educational outcomes have notably improved in areas adjacent to TAZARA stations. Students from rural communities now have better access to secondary schools and colleges located in urban centers, leading to higher enrollment rates and educational attainment. For instance, students from villages near Makambako and Ifakara can commute to educational institutions in Mbeya and Morogoro, respectively, broadening their academic opportunities. This accessibility has been instrumental in bridging the educational gap between rural and urban areas (Monson, 2011)

In addition to that, healthcare access has also seen significant improvements due to the railway. The enhanced mobility allows rural populations to seek medical services in better-equipped hospitals located in larger towns. This is particularly vital for vulnerable groups such as pregnant women and the elderly, who previously faced challenges in reaching healthcare facilities. ODUFUWA (2006) emphasizes that the mobility provided by TAZARA has been crucial in improving maternal health outcomes and reducing mortality rates in remote areas. Furthermore, the railway has played a role in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. By facilitating access to education and employment opportunities, TAZARA has enabled women in rural areas to participate more actively in socio-economic activities. For example, women have taken up roles in small-scale trading and entrepreneurship along the railway corridor, contributing to household incomes and community development (Monson, 2011).



The social cohesion fostered by TAZARA is evident in the increased interactions among diverse ethnic groups along the railway line. These interactions have led to the exchange of cultural practices and the strengthening of national identity. Community events and markets near railway stations serve as melting pots for different cultures, promoting mutual understanding and cooperation among residents (Monson, 2011). Therefore, TAZARA has been instrumental in transforming the social landscape of rural Tanzania. By improving access to essential services, promoting gender equality, and fostering cultural exchange, the railway has contributed to the overall social development and integration of rural communities into the broader national framework.

### **5. Cultural Exchange and Community Development**

The Railway (TAZARA) has played a pivotal role not only in economic and infrastructural development but also in fostering cultural exchange and promoting community development along its corridor. The railway, constructed through a partnership between China, Tanzania, and Zambia in the 1970s, was a rare example of South-South cooperation during the Cold War era. Its construction and subsequent operations brought together people from diverse ethnic backgrounds, including Tanzanian, Zambian, and Chinese workers, creating an environment ripe for intercultural interaction and cooperation (Monson, 2021). These intercultural engagements extended beyond the workforce and permeated local communities situated near the railway. As railway towns and stations developed, they attracted traders, laborers, and service providers from different regions. This migration fostered multilingualism and interethnic marriages, as well as the adoption of new cultural norms and practices. Marketplaces in towns such as Kapiri Mposhi and Tunduma evolved into cultural melting pots where language, dress, cuisine, and customs were exchanged freely. According to Lee (2019), these market areas served as informal centers for cultural diplomacy, where shared economic interests nurtured deeper social cohesion and mutual respect.

Community development was also accelerated through these exchanges. The commercial activities around TAZARA stations led to the growth of micro-enterprises, local associations, and social services. Informal networks, including savings groups and cooperatives, flourished in response to increased economic activities. These developments improved not only the material well-being of communities but also their social capital and resilience. For example, in areas like Mpika and Makambako, local communities organized cultural festivals and exchange visits, which became opportunities for tourism and intercommunity bonding. However, these cultural integrations have not been without challenges. Some researchers have raised concerns about the potential erosion of indigenous traditions and values as a result of prolonged external influences (Guo, 2019). Cultural homogenization, loss of native languages, and shifts in traditional social structures are seen as possible unintended consequences of increased exposure to non-local ways of life. Hence, there is a growing call for policies that balance development with cultural preservation. Overall, TAZARA has significantly contributed to building inclusive and dynamic communities, promoting interethnic understanding, and strengthening regional identity through the facilitation of cultural exchange and community-based development.

### **6. Management and Reactions from Stakeholders**



The study revealed that management and stakeholder perceptions of the Tanzania-Zambia Railway Authority (TAZARA) reflect both its symbolic importance and the practical challenges it faces as a key infrastructure asset in East and Southern Africa. Since its inception, TAZARA has been jointly managed by the governments of Tanzania and Zambia, with substantial support from China, particularly during the railway's early operational years. The Tanzanian government continues to regard TAZARA as a flagship project symbolizing Pan-African solidarity and South-South cooperation, particularly with China, underpinned by ideological alignment during the post-independence era (Monson, 2006). Efforts to revitalize the railway's operations have included institutional reforms, capacity-building programs, and periodic capital injections. For instance, Chinese partners have provided technical assistance, new rolling stock, and infrastructural rehabilitation under various cooperation platforms, including the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). Notably, the 2018 TAZARA Revitalization Framework Agreement, signed under FOCAC, emphasized the need for modernized management practices and digital integration in railway operations (Makundi et al., 2017).

However, despite such interventions, operational inefficiencies and administrative challenges have persisted. Aging infrastructure, limited investment in human capital, and bureaucratic inertia have often hampered performance. In many cases, trains suffer from delays, cargo losses, and inconsistent scheduling, which affect both local traders and regional logistics firms (World Bank, 2022). This inconsistency undermines the railway's competitiveness compared to road transport and has led to the underutilization of several stations, especially in remote rural areas such as Ifakara and Kilombero. Community reactions have been mixed but generally favorable in areas where economic and infrastructural benefits are visible. Local stakeholders often highlight improved access to markets and public services, which has stimulated entrepreneurial activity and interregional trade. In the town of Makambako, for example, traders report significant reductions in transportation costs since the rehabilitation of TAZARA freight services, enhancing their ability to expand supply chains into neighboring Zambia and Malawi. Nonetheless, criticisms have emerged, particularly from communities that perceive themselves as marginalized or inadequately served. Delays in passenger services, poor maintenance of station facilities, and a lack of effective communication with local users have fueled dissatisfaction in regions such as Mpika and Tunduma. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society groups have therefore advocated for more inclusive governance structures, emphasizing the importance of involving local communities in decision-making processes related to TAZARA's development.

In response to these challenges, collaborative governance approaches have been proposed, involving partnerships between national governments, international donors, and local stakeholders. The African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD) has recommended decentralizing certain management functions to regional authorities to enhance responsiveness and operational efficiency (AUDA-NEPAD, 2021). Moreover, participatory planning initiatives are being piloted in some regions, where local governments engage communities in prioritizing railway services and facilities based on grassroots needs. In conclusion, while TAZARA continues to be celebrated as a symbol of unity and strategic cooperation, its sustainability



and impact depend heavily on improved management, stakeholder engagement, and adaptive policies that reflect the evolving needs of communities along its corridor.

### **7. Current Challenges (Infrastructure, Finance, and Competition)**

Despite its historic achievements and contributions to regional development, the Tanzania-Zambia Railway Authority (TAZARA) faces a series of critical challenges that threaten its continued operation and effectiveness. The study revealed that these challenges are rooted in structural, financial, managerial, and competitive factors, each compounding the other and limiting the railway's capacity to function as a modern transportation corridor. The most pressing of these challenges is aging infrastructure. Constructed in the 1970s, much of TAZARA's rail network, stations, bridges, and rolling stock have not seen substantial rehabilitation or modernization. As a result, the railway suffers frequent breakdowns, derailments, and service delays that compromise both safety and reliability. Tracks have worn out, bridges have weakened, and many locomotives and carriages are beyond their intended lifespan. According to Mwansa Kamukwamba (2020), lack of investment in track maintenance has led to reduced train speeds and increased safety risks, which in turn discourage commercial use and diminish public trust in the railway.

Additionally, there is a severe lack of financial capacity to address these maintenance issues or implement upgrades. The TAZARA Council of Ministers (2023) reports that inconsistent government support from both Tanzania and Zambia has constrained the authority's ability to undertake capital-intensive projects. Operating on limited revenue and subsidies, TAZARA cannot independently generate enough profit to invest in modern technologies such as automated signaling, online booking systems, or fuel-efficient locomotives. Furthermore, the cost of spare parts and specialized technical labor has increased, making basic repairs more expensive and often delayed. Attempts to secure concessional loans or attract private investment have been hindered by governance issues and low confidence in long-term returns. The operational inefficiency of

TAZARA is also exacerbated by institutional and managerial challenges. As a bi-national enterprise governed jointly by Tanzania and Zambia, decision-making is often bureaucratic and slow. Any changes to management, policy, or financial direction require consensus from both governments, leading to delays in critical decision-making. This structure also impairs the authority's ability to adapt to changing market dynamics, including responding to competition or forming commercial partnerships. Southern Africa Railways Association -SARA (2022) reported that coordination problems between the two countries had delayed procurement contracts for over 18 months, further stalling progress on urgent repairs and expansion projects.

Furthermore, the competition from road transport presents an existential challenge to the project. Over the past two decades, both Tanzania and Zambia have invested heavily in upgrading road networks through funding from the World Bank, African Development Bank, and China's Belt and Road Initiative. These new or rehabilitated highways are faster, more flexible, and better suited for last-mile delivery. Trucks can operate on tighter schedules and reach remote destinations more effectively than rail, which is limited to fixed routes. As a result, freight operators increasingly prefer road transport, particularly for perishable goods, high-value cargo, and just-in-time delivery systems. A report by the World Bank, (2022) indicated that over 70% of



cargo that could be moved by rail is now transported by road across Tanzania, diminishing TAZARA's market share and revenue. Moreover, the rise of private logistics companies offering digital tracking, integrated warehousing, and door-to-door services places additional pressure on TAZARA, which continues to operate largely using outdated systems. The inability to provide competitive services has led major clients, including agricultural exporters, mining companies, and wholesalers, to opt for trucking services, even at a slightly higher cost, due to the reliability and transparency they offer.

Community perceptions and local government responses also reflect growing dissatisfaction. While communities acknowledge TAZARA's historical importance, many complain about unreliable services, underutilized stations, and the lack of tangible economic benefits in recent years. Several rural stations that once served as trade hubs have seen reduced activity, affecting smallholder farmers and local traders who once depended on the railway for market access. In Mbeya and Morogoro regions, for instance, community leaders have called for public-private partnerships to revitalize station areas and improve service delivery. The situation is further complicated by environmental vulnerabilities. Climate change has increased the frequency of floods and extreme weather events, damaged rail infrastructure, and led to service suspensions. TAZARA's limited disaster preparedness and lack of early warning systems exacerbate these disruptions. In the 2023 rainy season, a landslide near the Kilosa District halted service for two

weeks, straining local supply chains and increasing dependency on road transport (AUDA-NEPAD, 2021). Given these compounding challenges, there is an urgent need for a coordinated strategy to rehabilitate, restructure, and reposition TAZARA in the modern transport ecosystem. Potential solutions include mobilizing infrastructure financing through development banks, adopting public-private partnership models, digitizing freight and passenger services, and strengthening managerial autonomy to enhance responsiveness. Without strategic reforms and investment, TAZARA risks fading into obsolescence, becoming a legacy project rather than a functional pillar of regional integration and rural transformation.

## **8. Opportunities for Renewal**

In 2023, the TAZARA Council of Ministers emphasized the urgency of revitalizing the railway by accelerating partnerships with strategic investors, particularly the China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation (CCECC). The proposed concession aims to inject fresh capital, overhaul aging infrastructure, and reestablish full operational functionality within a specified timeline. This partnership represents a critical juncture, offering a renewed opportunity to restore TAZARA as a linchpin of regional integration and economic development. The proposal includes a comprehensive rehabilitation plan targeting locomotives, rolling stock, signaling systems, and station facilities, many of which have seen little modernization since their original installation in the 1970s. In addition, digital systems for scheduling and cargo management are expected to improve efficiency, reduce delays, and attract commercial freight services back from road transport. According to the Southern Africa Railways Association -SARA (2022), modernization of railways across the region could increase rail freight volumes by 30% if proper upgrades and service reliability are ensured.



Beyond infrastructure improvements, the study observed that the renewed investment would also expand employment opportunities, reintroduce skill development programs, and enhance regional trade connectivity. For example, rural agricultural cooperatives could benefit from better access to urban markets and export zones, while new transport logistics hubs could attract SMEs engaged in agro-processing, manufacturing, and warehousing. In this context, rural communities situated along the TAZARA line would likely experience increased socio-economic mobility and diversification. Zhu et al., (2023) emphasize that infrastructure-led development initiatives like TAZARA's renewal must balance external financing with community inclusion, environmental safeguards, and long-term sustainability. Without this balance, such investments risk becoming extractive or unsustainable. A participatory model that integrates local government, the private sector

stakeholders, and civil society can ensure that the railway remains responsive to evolving transportation needs and inclusive in its developmental impacts. Generally, the revitalization of TAZARA holds vast potential, not only to restore its historic significance but also to position it as a flagship model of South-South cooperation. Through renewed Sino-Tanzanian collaboration and adherence to inclusive governance practices, the railway could once again become a catalyst for rural transformation and cross-border connectivity across East and Southern Africa.

## **V. Conclusion**

The TAZARA railway scheme is a rich testament to the potential of infrastructure, when guided by strategic cooperation and political commitment, to become an agent for rural transformation. In this study, it has been shown that TAZARA enabled unprecedented levels of rural access, economic diversification, employment, and availability of basic services across the Tanzanian countryside. For instance, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) results report underscores the importance of integrated development approaches, which resonate with the multifaceted impacts observed from the TAZARA project on Tanzania's rural transformation (United Nations Development Programme, 2023). As a South-South development project, the railway line was not only a symbol of diplomatic solidarity but also a functional instrument of development, particularly in long-peripheralized regions of the continent. However, the long-term sustainability of TAZARA has been undermined by infrastructural degradation, budgetary constraints, and increasing competition from alternative modes of transportation. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-stakeholder approach of renewed investment, institutional reform, and inclusive stakeholders' engagement. Resurrecting TAZARA under new public-private collaborations and collaboration with the external world has the potential to regain its efficacy and usefulness as an instrument for contemporary development planning. This example demonstrates the potential of infrastructure-driven transformation when interventions are located within locally responsive, strategically controlled contexts. As African nations continue to look for models on achieving rural transformation and inclusive growth, TAZARA continues to be a significant benchmark to measure the long-term implications of foreign-financed infrastructure projects and the dynamics of equilibrated South-South partnerships.

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#### **Author Contributions**

Sophia Jacob Turuka was the sole contributor to the conception, design, and execution of this study. She conducted the documentary research, selected and reviewed the literature, and performed the qualitative data analysis using thematic content methods. She also developed the theoretical framework by integrating Modernization Theory and Keynesian Economics to guide the interpretation of findings. All writing, editing, and refinement of the manuscript were completed by the author. Additionally, Sophia coordinated the acquisition of data and ensured that ethical research practices were upheld throughout the study. She verified the accuracy of references and was responsible for the final organization and structure of the paper. The author confirms that he has read and approved the final version of the manuscript and takes full responsibility for its content and originality. Sophia Jacob Turuka and Rehema Ally Yassini are acknowledged as co-authors for their advisory support during the proposal stage and academic supervision. Both authors have reviewed and approved the final manuscript and accept full responsibility for its originality and content.

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