

## **THE UGANDA RAILWAY**

This was the railway line that was built from Mombasa (Kilindini) harbour at the coast of Kenya through Kenya to Kampala and then extended to other parts of Uganda.

Construction began on 30<sup>th</sup> May 1896 and Sir George White House was the chief engineer.

Labour was mainly provided by the Indian Coolies.

From the start, the line was called the Uganda railway because the British wanted to effectively exploit the economic resources of Uganda since Kenya offered less prospects.

### **Reasons for the construction of the Uganda railway**

The British constructed the line to establish effective control over Uganda and Kenya.

The railway line also intended to ease the transportation of Military personnel, Colonialists, arms or weapons and administrators in Uganda.

The line was built purposely to open the interior for trade and commerce i.e. to enable East Africa carry out trade with the outside world.

The line was built to help in the elimination of Slave trade because it would enable the abolitionists move into the interior of Uganda and Kenya.

The line was meant to encourage cash crop growing like cotton, tea e.t.c which would lead to the economic development of Kenya and Uganda.

The line was built to provide a cheaper quicker and easier means of transport to replace the slave trade that involved moving long distances on foot.

The line was constructed to ease the work and movement of the missionaries who wanted to spread Christianity and civilize Africans

The British built the line in order to conform to the doctrine of effective occupation as demanded by the Berlin conference of 1884 — 1885.

The line was also constructed in order to stop other powers like the Egyptians who had also shown interest in controlling Uganda because of the source of the River Nile.

The British wanted to provide employment opportunities for the people of Uganda and Kenya through the construction of the railway e.g. people were to be employed as cleaners, mechanics and in the loading and off loading sections.

The line was constructed because the Imperial British East Africa company (IBEACO), had recommended it and it had even surveyed its route.

The line was intended to make Uganda and Kenya self reliant and enable them to pay for their own administration.

After the signing of the second Anglo — German agreement of 1890 (Heligoland treaty), the British had no fear of investing their money in Uganda and thats why the line was constructed.

The line was intended to open up the remote areas of E.Africa to develop them into urban centres.

It was constructed to link the landlocked Uganda to the East African coast.

### **Extension of the Uganda railway (1896 — 1965)**

The idea of building the railway line was introduced by William MacKinnon of IBEACO.

In 1892, a survey of the route was done.

On 30<sup>th</sup> May 1896, the project eventually began at Kilindini (Mombasa).

Sir George white house was the Chief engineer.

Over 32,000 Indian coolies were recruited for the job since Africans were not interested in the work.

In 1898, the railway line had reached Voi.

By 30<sup>th</sup> June 1899, the line had reached Nairobi and this is where the central store of materials was located.

By 1900, the line had reached Nakuru.

By 20<sup>th</sup> December 1901, it had advanced to Kisumu where it was connected to Uganda through a steamer service ship (ferry) across Lake Victoria.

In 1913, the Nairobi-Thika line was extended to the European farms of Nyeri and Nyahururu.

From 1921, there was a major expansion of the line in Kenya e.g. in 1926 the Nakuru to Solai line was constructed and then it was extended to Eldoret during the same period.

In 1913, the Naivasha-Gilgil-Thomsons falls line was also constructed.

From Eldoret, the line was extended to Kitale to the European farms in the area.

## **IN UGANDA**

From Kisumu where the line had reached in 1901, it was connected to Uganda through a regular steamer service (ferry) across Lake Victoria to Port Bell.

In 1912, Sir Hesketh Bell built the line that connected Kampala to Port Bell to reduce on congestion at the port.

In the same year (1912), the Jinja —Namasagali line was constructed to encourage cotton growing in Busoga.

In 1928, the Namasagali-Tororo line was constructed to tap mineral potentials and cotton.

From Tororo, the line was connected to Eldoret in Kenya to reduce on the congestion at Port Bell.

In 1929, the Tororo - Soroti line was constructed through Mbale to encourage cotton and coffee growing and enable the transportation of cattle.

In 1931, the line crossed the Nile and reached Kampala.

This was to ease the transportation of goods like coffee from the East to Kampala.

In 1956, the Kampala — Kasese line was constructed to transport copper from Kilembe mines to Jinja for smelting.

In the 1960s, soroti was connected to Lira then to Gulu to transport cotton, simsim and cattle.

By 1965, the line had reached Pakwach to transport tobacco, simsim, Cotton and coffee from Northern Uganda.

## **Problems faced during the construction of the railway line**

Physical obstacles like forests, steep relief, steep escarpments of the rift valley and rivers caused engineering problems especially in Kenya.

Wild animals like Lions in the Tsavo region of Kenya delayed the projects as people feared and failed to work for over a month.

Hostile African tribes also made the construction difficult e.g. the Nandi stole the construction materials before disappearing into their hills.

The harsh climate like heavy rains and scorching sun also made the construction work very difficult.

Labour shortage mainly because most Africans were not interested in constructing the railway line.

The British resorted to the Indian coolies who were very weak and they caused unnecessary delays.

Tropical diseases like Malaria, jiggers and small pox also proved to be a problem because they claimed the lives of many Indian Coolies.

Inadequate funds also made the construction work difficult because the cost of the line was too high i.e. the British spent about 8 million pounds and yet the initial budget was 2 million pounds.

The constructors faced hostility from the Germans who frequently attacked the line e.g. at Voi in order to make the constructors work very difficult.

Lack of food was another big problem because the constructors had to depend on supplies from Europe.

Language barrier also affected the construction because the British, Africans and Coolies couldnt easily communicate with each other.

There was also lack of communication between the constructors and the colonial office in London where orders were supposed to come from.

There was a problem of poor transport and communication especially when it came to transporting heavy construction materials with in East Africa.

Lack of co-operation between the railway authority and local leaders was also a problem e.g. the local leaders accused builders for not consulting them.

British engineers were very few and this always led to acts of indiscipline, disorder and wastefulness on the part of the Coolies.

Inadequate port facilities in Mombasa caused a problem because it was difficult to off load heavy rail way machinery.

## **Effects of the Uganda railway**

Transport and communication from the interior to the coast was made easy for example a journey that used to take months was now covered in a week.

The line stimulated economic growth and promoted international and local trade e.g. agricultural products could now be exported using the railway.

The construction of the line stimulated the growing of cash crops e.g. Cotton, Coffee and Tobacco.

Towns developed especially along the railway routes e.g. Kisumu, Nakuru, Voi, Nakuru, Kitale, Tororo, Mbale and Jinja.

Construction of the line brought many Indians into E.Africa e.g. a fifth of all the Indian coolies who came to construct the railway remained behind to do business.

There was loss of lives especially in areas where the stubborn Africans were refusing the line to pass through their lands e.g. during the Nandi resistance.

Construction of the line caused an influx of Europeans into E.Africa who came to do trade and agriculture for example in the Kenyan highlands.

Construction of the line created many employment opportunities for many people e.g. station managers, locomotive drivers, engineers, mechanics.

The influx of whites and Asians resulted into political conflicts especially in Kenya and this resulted in the Devonshire white paper declaration of March 1923.

Construction of the line brought slave trade and human portage to an end and legitimate trade was introduced.

The construction of the line eased the British administration of Uganda and Kenya i.e. troops and administrators were easily transported for supervision.

The line speeded the development of feeder roads which connected areas where goods were produced to railway stations.

The movement of missionaries with their property was made easy and this led to western civilization and spread of Christianity.

The construction of the railway line led to the transfer of Kenya capital from Mombasa in 1907 to Nairobi which was more central.

Africans like the Nandi and Masai lost their lands because they originally occupied areas where the line passed

Small scale industries e.g. cotton ginneries, copper smelting and coffee processing plants were established to reduce on the bulk of goods for export.

### **The contribution of Allidina Visram in the economic development of Uganda**

Aldina Visram was an Indian born in 1863 in India.

He came to Uganda as a result of the construction of the Uganda railway.

He began his commercial career in Zanzibar in 1870 during the prosperity of the Indian Ocean trade and Long Distance trade.

He later moved to the interior of East Africa and set up a base at Bagamoyo.

During the progress and development of the railway line inland, he set up commercial posts and centers along the line.

He was the most enterprising Indian trader in Uganda of his time.

He bought produce from African farmers for sell e.g. cotton, coffee and tobacco.

He built cotton ginneries in Uganda e.g. in Kampala to process the cotton.

He lent out money to African and Indian traders in East Africa.

He introduced the banking system e.g. he built the National Bank of India and Commerce.

He reached Kampala and established himself as a powerful trader by 1898.

He opened the first shop in Uganda.

He established stations along the river Nile and had agents in Jinja.

He organized caravans which were sent between Uganda and the coast.

His trade was mainly in the export of ivory and cotton.

He acquired a lot of wealth and invested in oil mines, saw mills and a soda factory.

He was a kind hearted man who gave out many donations e.g. to Namirembe cathedral.

Many streets in Kampala and Jinja were named after him because of his contribution to the economic development of Uganda.

### **Revision questions**

1. a) Why was the Uganda railway constructed?  
b) Explain the **problems/obstacles/difficulties** faced during the construction?
2. a) Describe the development of the railway system in Uganda between 1912 — 1965.  
b) What were the effects of the railway construction?
3. a) To which parts and for what reasons was the Uganda railway extended after 1912?  
b) Show its importance in the development of Uganda in the same period.
4. a) Describe the development of the Uganda railway in Kenya and Uganda between 1896 — 1962.  
b) How did the building of this railway affect the peoples of East Africa?
5. a) Describe the role played by Aldina Visram to the economic development of Uganda.