



materialised in March 2012. The occasion was marked when the then East African heads of states Kenya's Mwai Kibaki, Ethiopia's Meles Zenawi and South Sudan's Salva Kiir laid the port's foundation stone.

In its early ambition, the Lamu port figured as connecting the landlocked East African economies to global trade routes. More specifically, it was envisioned as an alternative outlet for South Sudan's oil, which is currently pumped via the Greater Nile Oil Pipeline to Port Sudan.

With South Sudan mired in continuous war and Ethiopia upping its stakes in the ports of Djibouti and, most recently, Berbera, the international ambitions of the transport corridor shrivelled somewhat.

Yet, as a cornerstone of the Kenyan government's Vision 2030 development plan, it is now branded as a "game changer" project.

Its new aim is to integrate marginalised northern Kenya into the Kenyan economy and the nation. Plans for the corridor include a pipeline, a railway line, a road network connecting Lamu, Garissa, Isiolo, Moyale and Turkana, a dam along Tana river, airports and resort cities. There are also plans to establish numerous industrial areas along the corridor.

We show in our research that most of the plans are real on paper and government websites only. Nevertheless, the implications for communities across northern Kenya are very concrete. Beside the completion of the 500km Isiolo-Moyale road, the official opening of Lamu port marks the project's most salient achievement so far.

Constructed by the China Communication Construction Company, the first three of the planned 32 berths come at a cost of US\$367 million.

What opportunities does the port present?

Mobilising projections about future trade, the Kenyan government has persistently argued that the Lamu port will become a viable and necessary complement to the hub of Mombasa. Local authorities specifically invest their hopes in plans for a special economic zone, though to date these have rather been elusive. This promises significant investments in the port

