Long-term environmental damage from transportation projects in Kenya, scientists warn

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The Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) runs from Mombasa to Nairobi in Kenya. Credit: University of York

The construction of a major railway through Kenya will have long-term

environmental impacts on the area, suggesting more work needs to be done to limit the damage on future infrastructure projects, a major study reveals.

The biggest impact of the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR), which runs from Mombasa to Nairobi, was pollution and contamination of soil, water and air, as well as disruption of natural processes.

The research, led by the University of York and part of the Development Corridors Partnership project, also showed environmental issues as a result of breaking up large areas of habitat into smaller, more isolated patches, that may not be able to support long-term natural processes.

The SGR project was given the go-ahead following the completion of two Environmental and Social Impact Assessments, but scientists question how effectively recommendations were implemented in the development, given the evidence of widespread environmental degradation that can be seen in the area.

Professor Robert Marchant, from the University of York's Department of Environment and Geography, said: "African nations are looking forward to large-scale infrastructure investment as a catalyst for economic growth, but our research shows that before this can happen more work is needed to quantify ecological impacts on the land.

"Not only this, but should issues arises once the projects are complete, there must be a ready-to-go mitigation strategy that can be applied to reduce further damage quickly."

The researchers recommend that environmental impacts are integrated into the planning of largescale infrastructure projects at every stage, and call for a particular focus on engaging and consulting key stakeholders in the design and implementation phases of the project.

Dr. Tobias Nyumba, Post-Doctoral Researcher at the Development Corridors Partnership, said: "These steps are essential, if a 'transportation corridor' is to become a true 'development corridor', bringing sustainable development and social wellbeing to a country such as Kenya, while minimizing or eliminating environmental damage."

Provided by University of York