

Chapter 1

BACKGROUND OF THE PROJECT

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The TANZAM Highway is an international trunk road that starts from Dar es Salaam, the capital city and largest sea port in Tanzania. It passes through the west of Tanzania and terminates at Lusaka, the capital city of Zambia, having a total length of 1,400 km with the Tanzanian section being about 920 km.

The TANZAM Highway not only provides access to sea transport for the landlocked and nationhood countries of Zambia, Malawi and Congo, but also serves as a transportation road for agricultural products and cash crops for export from primary agricultural production areas e.g. Iringa and Mbeya regions in western Tanzania. Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy of these regions and supports the living level of the farmers that make up the majority of the poor population. The highway is nominated as the most important road in Tanzania from the viewpoint of direct benefit to people who live along the road, movement of agricultural products and cash crops, and distribution of physical products.

The "Kitonga Gorge" has steep grades and frequent sharp curves for a section of about 10 km in mountainous terrain located on the TANZAM Highway in Iringa region, 450 km from Dar es Salaam. After improvement of the road with an asphalt concrete surface of 2 lanes in 1973, no substantial rehabilitation has been conducted, even though serious deep rutting appeared due to the increase in heavy-vehicle traffic. While other parts of the TANZAM Highway have been rehabilitated by various donor countries, the serviceability of Kitonga Gorge section is very poor and is well-known for its high accident rate because of the damaged road surface, improper drainage facilities, eroded shoulders and inadequate traffic safety facilities

The poor condition of the road at Kitonga Gorge has been preventing the vital movement of agricultural products and inputs such as fertiliser. Establishment of the reliable transport systems between the high agricultural potential areas and the capital and seaports is a fundamental necessity for national and regional economic development. Under the above circumstances, the TANZAM Highway was evaluated as the highest priority road for rehabilitation in IRP-II (Integrated Roads Project), and a feasibility study of the road, including the Kitonga Gorge section, was carried out by the ODA fund in 1993.

With this background, the Government of Tanzania made a request for grant aid for the project for rehabilitation of the Kitonga Gorge section of road on the TANZAM Highway in October 1997 taking into account its high priority.