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Improved modern highways sell Kenyan brand globally



A section of the Thika Superhighway under construction in Nairobi city, Kenya, April 6, 2012. Xinhua/Daniel Namale

Modern roads and highways being constructed in Kenya, mainly by Chinese companies, have been praised as enabling the east African nation to improve its branding to attract investors and holiday makers.

Kenyan business leaders say the roads, especially the Thika Superhighway, a 50km ten-lane road linking the capital Nairobi to the industrial town of Thika has helped improve the country's image.

"Previously when Kenyans travelled to countries like South Africa, they would marvel at the roads. Today, those types of roads are coming to Kenya and this gives our people pride," said Chris Kirubi, a prominent Kenyan businessman with interests in manufacturing, real estate and financial services.

Kirubi was speaking on Friday in Nairobi during the launch of a new survey that ranks African countries based on the value of their brands. "If Kenya has to import, it has to import quality goods and services that meet the acceptable global consumer standards. Roads built by the Chinese for instance are of high quality and will help this country move ahead," said Kirubi.

In addition to image building, the roads have made it easier to do business in the country by facilitating easy transport of people and goods. Thika Superhighway, the Eastern Bypass and Northern Bypass, are helping to decongest the capital city Nairobi and opening new areas for development.

The survey revealed that South Africa is the Most Valuable African Nation Brand in Africa, reinforcing the county's image as one of the most favored destination for holiday makers and investors. The survey was conducted by South Africa-based Brand Africa in association with Brand Finance.

The top ten Most Valuable African Nation Brand for 2012 were named as South Africa, Egypt, Nigeria, Morocco, Algeria, Angola, Tunisia, Kenya, Ghana and Ethiopia, in that order.

Kenyan participants during the launch called on the country's media to devote more energy to highlighting positive issues about the country rather than dwell on the negatives.

"Most of what is written by the local press is on the negative. It becomes very difficult to market Kenya as a good tourist destination when only 20 per cent of what is in the media is positive," said Cecily Mbarire, the Assistant Minister for Tourism.

Participants called on Kenya government to increase the country's marketing budget, especially to the ministries of tourism and the state corporation responsible for branding the country, Brand Kenya to enable the brand value of the country to improve.

"It is very easy for Kenya to increase its number of tourists from the current 1.8 million to 5 million in two years if we have adequate marketing budget," said Mbarire.

Now in its second year, the Most Valuable African Nation Brands' list feature a new entrant on the list, Ethiopia, which replaces Libya on the tenth spot, with Ghana and Kenya swapping positions. Kenya moved one spot up from position 9 in 2011, to position 8 and Ghana moved one position lower to occupy position 9. The rest of the countries still remain in the same position as last year's rankings.

"The Top 10 Most Valuable African Nations are without question among the most dynamic African nations at the forefront of re-inventing the Africa's image, reputation and competitiveness," Thebe Ikalafeng, Founder & Chairman, Brand Africa.

"More than half of the world's fastest growing economies are from Africa, paving the way for Africa to transform itself from being a net importer of goods and services to being self-sufficient and a contributing rather just a consumer member of the global economy," he added. (Xinhua)

