

Cape Town port considers automation to address inefficiencies and boost agricultural exports

The Port of Cape Town holds a critical position in South Africa's agricultural export sector, with a significant portion of the country's fresh produce, including up to 80% of fruit exports, passing through its facilities. However, recent years have seen the port grappling with inefficiencies and backlogs, leading to its ranking by the World Bank as the least efficient among over 400 global ports in the 2023 Container Port Performance Index.

Transnet, the state-owned enterprise overseeing South Africa's ports, has contested the World Bank's findings and has committed to providing enhanced services to fruit exporters in the forthcoming period. The introduction of new equipment, including reach stackers and rubber-tired gantries, is anticipated to alleviate some of the port's operational challenges.

Equipment aging and susceptibility to Cape Town's harsh windy conditions have been identified as contributing factors to the port's underperformance. To address these issues, the port has recently acquired 75 new pieces of equipment, which are expected to aid in container stacking and the loading and unloading of vessels, according to Barbara Creecy, South Africa's Minister of Transport.

Despite a decline in the terminal's throughput and capital expenditure over recent years, there is optimism that automation and digital transformation could enhance port operations. Captain Naresh Sewnath from the Transnet National Port Authority highlighted ongoing efforts to customize digital systems to local operational needs and regulations.

While there is resistance from trade unions regarding automation and private sector involvement, due to concerns over potential job losses, some industry observers argue that increased port efficiency could bolster exports, benefit the agricultural sector, and ultimately create employment opportunities in other areas. The urgency for Transnet's turnaround strategy is underscored by the competition from more efficient ports in neighboring countries.

Source: Marketplace (<https://www.marketplace.org/2025/01/08/will-more-automation-solve-cape-towns-port-problems/>)

Publication date: Thu 9 Jan 2025

-

