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The Vridi Terminal has the first RTGs operating in African ports

THE ABIDJAN BENCHMARK

At 18 meters above ground, high up in his cab, Julien Tahno Say has a view over the Abidjan lagoon. He is one of fifty operators in a bright red Rubber Tired Gantry (RTG) in the Vridi Terminal, the container port of the economic capital of the Ivory Coast.

"The view is ideal. In front of Crane Operator **Julien Tahno Say** the blue of the sky melts into the blue of Billionaires Bay. Not yet the open sea, the self-sustaining port of Abidjan is on the Ebrié lagoon. Ships have to use the Vridi canal to get to the Atlantic Ocean.

"I've been going up since June 7, after passing a series of exams that test our technical knowledge, reflexes and physical condition," explains Julien Tahno Say, one of the elite operators.

The port, a great provider of jobs in Abidjan, is a clearly organized city within a city: quay one for fruits, quay two to ten for cereals and grains, ten to fourteen for bulk products etc. On the last five quays (twenty-one to twenty-five) is the Vridi Terminal, the container terminal managed by the French Bolloré Group.

Twenty-four hours a day the cargo ships come and go with two peaks; the meeting at nine in the morning and four in the afternoon. The morning meeting in Bolloré's subsidiary and terminal operator Société d'Exploitation du Terminal de Vridi, SETV´s tower takes place with good humor. The order of the ships' dockings is established at each quay. It is a provisional order since docking is often changed during the day.

Rubber, magnesium, and cocoa

When we visited the terminal, the transferred containers mostly contained rubber, magnesium, wood and cocoa (petite campagne) secondary agricultural season—the country is the world's top producer of cocoa. The high season, when cashews and cocoa (grande campagne) principal agricultural season beans are harvested is over.

Say's machine bears the number fourteen and is part of the second lot of RTGs delivered by Konecranes to the port. After the first order of eight cranes arrived in Abidjan in 2008, the company (SETV) operating the Vridi terminal bought eight more, assembling the RTGs on site this time. When we visited, four RTGs were still being assembled.

The imposing RTGs

It takes only six mechanics and six electricians to assemble the imposing RTGs. At the top of number sixteen, **Julien N'dha**, in a white t-shirt under a fluorescent security vest, welds the last parts.

N'dha has been a dockworker here for more than fifteen years and has witnessed the Vridi terminal modernization.

The Konecranes RTGs are a symbol of this evolution for him.

Crane Operator Julien Tahno Say moves cranes from the cabin of a Konecranes RTG crane.

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He points to one of the cranes already operating, "When I see these huge cranes load and unload, I think that I have had a little something to do with it. And I'm proud of it." With a big smile, he turns back to his work while a breeze from the sea cools the air.

At the west end of the terminal, **Jani Riikonen** supervises a small team that's handling the last of the assembly work.

"They do good work here," he says. "Obviously we have some communication challenges. Few Ivorians speak English very well. But on the technical side, the drawings help us a lot! "

The Abidjan Port, the benchmark

Jean-Michel Maheut, Ivory Coast Director of Bolloré Africa Logistics, the managing company of the Abidjan Port, talks to us in the round tower of the SETV that faces the sea. Behind him a huge window overlooks the port.

"The partnership with Konecranes is part of the technical assets we have relied on to continue to make Abidjan a benchmark port," he explains.

Indeed, for the Bolloré Group, working all around in Africa, the Abidjan Port is number one. The merchandise being unloaded under the window of Maheut feeds the Ivory Coast—it represents 30 percent of the country's customs revenue—as well as most of West Africa.

The large ships coming from China or Europe benefit from the modern infrastructure of Abidjan to transship their containers onto smaller boats to destinations from Cotonou to Benin, or to Kinshasa in Democratic Republic of Congo following the Congo River upstream and as far as Luanda in Angola. From the twenty-first quay, a railroad line goes directly to the port of Burkina Faso.

The first RTGs operating in African ports

For the Bolloré Group, the use of new generation Konecranes RTGs at the Vridi terminal has served as an example. Today, the Konecranes cranes also equip the Tin-Can Island Container Terminal in Lagos, Nigeria, of which Bolloré is also a shareholder.

For Konecranes, the Abidjan Port is also a showcase for its know-how. "These two sales represented our first contract with the Bolloré Group. It also involved the first RTGs operating in African ports," explains **Antoine Bosquet**, Konecranes Sales Manager for Europe, Africa and the Middle East, who oversaw the purchases.

In Abidjan the choice of RTGs is catching on confirms **Eric Codron**, Technical Director.

The Vridi container port is just 30 ha "no bigger than a handkerchief for such an important logistics terminal". With the increase in traffic, the only solution is densification. One of the first advantages of the RTGs is that they can stack six boxes, one alongside the other, while the previous equipment only stacked four.

"Moreover, when moving containers the RTG crane that spans the stacks of containers only needs a few meters that correspond to the width of the machine's legs," adds **Etienne Memevegni**, one of the technical managers, demonstrating with a scale model.

Four new Konecranes RTG cranes are being assembled at the Abidjan container terminal.

There are nearly 500 Konecranes lift trucks in Africa and they have also an important role to play. They provide the best means for materials handling in modest sized terminals or logistics platforms in the hinterland.

The terminal storage capacity has risen

In total, the SETV has invested more than 26 million euros, if the civil works are added to the purchase of the sixteen RTGs. "And the results are what we had hoped. The terminal storage capacity has already risen from 14,068 TEUs before the RTGs arrived to 23,000 TEUs. Even though they are not all operating yet," explains **Laurent Kassi**, in charge of operations planning.

Another advantage—delivery—the most sensitive question when you manage a port, is faster due to the RTGs.

To recover a container stored in the middle of a block, the RTG will have to make a maximum of four movements, compared to up seventeen for other equipment.

With the arrival of the RTGs the entire system has been modernized. Each cab communicates with the operations management via a new onboard IT system. The RTG operators receive their mission orders in real time on the screen to their right. Therefore, when one truck comes to pick up cargo stocked in an area where the RTG-14 is stationed, an operator inputs the reference of the container or containers from the gate house at the port entrance.

At eighteen meters above ground, Julien Tahno Say receives his mission order on his screen. Even before the truck has entered the terminal.

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