



SUCCESS STORIES



Zambia | Story 7 – 2020

One region 16 nations Towards a common future

From the beginning of time, the principles of Ubuntu have guided African societies. Best described as an African philosophy rooted in a deep awareness of: “I am because of who we all are”; the spirit of Ubuntu resonates in every fibre of SADC’s existence – past and present. The 40th anniversary of SADC in 2020 commemorates a journey of progress on the complex road to achieving peace and security, development and economic growth. This “SADC Success Stories 2020” series shines a spotlight on the positive impacts achieved through regional integration in communities and in the lives of the people of the SADC region.

This story ‘Getting through Nacala Corridor through Great East Road’ is based on the SADC Protocol on Transport, Communications and Meteorology, adopted in 1996.

Getting through Nacala Corridor through Great East Road

“I know what a bad road can do to a family, a community, and above all a region. While on the road delivering goods, I have witnessed a lot of fatalities. I can safely say that the region’s road fatality share is huge, all because of the bad roads,” says Musonda Chitala, a Zambian truck driver. “Not only do bad roads cost lives, a poor transport system also acts as a non-tariff trade barrier.”

In Zambia, the route connecting to the Nacala Corridor – which ends in the Mozambican port of Beira, which handles the import and export of cargo for Zambia, Malawi, Zimbabwe, and even the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) – is the Lusaka-Mwami Border Road. In 2013, in line with the Nacala Transport Corridor expansion plan, government rehabilitated the 375 kilometre stretch of this road from Luangwa Bridge to Mwami Border, at a cost of €168.7 million.

Malawian truck driver Edwin Banda describes the road as a perfect link within southern Africa: “I wish the works on the Luangwa-Mwami Border Road can be extended to cover the Luangwa-Lusaka Road and also the Katete-Chanida Border Road. I say so because, from my understanding, this road project is meant to open the Nacala Corridor to Beira, in Mozambique, but without working on these missing links, the connection will not make sense,” he says. “The dream will not be realised.”

Banda says that poor infrastructure leads to the cost of transporting goods in the region being high.



“I have been a truck driver for 32 years now and from my interactions and experience, I have come to learn that SADC goods compete less with those from other regions on the continent because of poor transport facilities,” he says.

“A good road network is crucial for economic growth. Roads open up more areas and stimulate economic and social development. Road infrastructure is the most important of all public assets.”

But it is not only the truck drivers who appreciate the importance of a good road network. Marjory Simwamba, a cross-border trader, says that the Luangwa-Mwami Border Road has eased her movements between Lusaka and Blantyre in Malawi. “Before the road was done, travelling from Luangwa to Mwami Border was taking over six hours by bus, but now, we take three to four hours, which is good for us as traders because the longer you spend travelling, the more expensive it becomes,” she says.

Chipata City Council Mayor Sinoya Mwale says that connectivity and low-cost transport facilities like good road networks provide opportunities for any country. He says that reducing the distance between people, markets, services and knowledge, or simply getting people connected, is a great part of what economic growth is all about: “Transport and communication systems have an important bearing on economic integration and development because they can be significant non-tariff barriers.”

The National Authorisation Office – which is under the Ministry of Finance and is mandated to manage funds from the European Union through the European Development Fund, which helped to finance the rehabilitation with a grant – is impressed with the road works on the Lusaka-Mwami Border Road. Co-ordinator Chasiya Kazembe says that the road will make a crucial contribution to economic development and growth, and will bring important social benefits to the Nacala Corridor as well as to Zambia.

Giving context to this transport challenge, Southern Rhodesia’s Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1965 affected Zambia, which was only months old as an independent country, badly. The UDI turned out to be a major blow for Zambia because it had been tied to the southern African trading system since the beginning of the 20th Century.

Zambia’s external trade depended on Rhodesia Railways and was routed through South Africa and Mozambique. Copper was exported through the ports of Durban, Port Elizabeth and Beira and imports were mainly sourced in South Africa, until the establishment of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, when Southern Rhodesian industry developed and became the main supplier of the Zambian market. Products not available in South Africa and Rhodesia continued to transit through the ports of South Africa and Mozambique but, only five weeks after UDI, Zambia’s access to these routes was cut off. The country spent five years trying to divert its imports and exports from the southern African ports to Dar es Salaam.

Much has changed since then, with all the countries in the region gaining majority rule and opening up to regional integration. As the countries embrace regional initiatives such as the Southern Africa Development Co-operation (SADC) and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), we continue to find ways of overcoming southern Africa’s regional transport hurdles.

The Lusaka-Mwami Border Road project is co-financed by the EU through the European Development Fund, and loans from the European Investment Bank, the French Agency for Development, and the African Development Bank.

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