

# MAKANDAY

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# THE BROKEN PROMISE OF CHAMA'S STRATEGIC ROAD

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## Living in a Trading Centre

*By Vincent Phiri | Chipata – Eastern Province*

How did a trading centre become a place people now call home?

What was meant to support small-scale businesses is now quietly transforming into a settlement.

At Tambalala Market Shelter in Old Jim Compound, in Chipata—Eastern Province, trading structures are being used as homes, without access to toilets, clean water, or proper sanitation.

To watch the full report of the growing sanitation crisis at Tambalala Market by Breeze FM visit our website: [At Tambalala Market Shelter in Old Jim Compound, in Chipata—Eastern Province, trading structures are being used as homes, without access to toilets, clean water, or proper sanitation.](#)

## On hollow ground: Zimbabwean town on the brink of collapse

The ground underneath Shurugwi is riddled with tunnels

*By Brenna Matendere/Mary Taruvinga*

Shurugwi, a mining town in central Zimbabwe, sits on one of the world's richest seams of mineral wealth. Yet, the ground beneath the town is riddled with tunnels, the result of decades of mining. Uncontrolled digging continues, often under political protection, raising fears that the town is about to collapse.

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# THE BROKEN PROMISE OF CHAMA'S STRATEGIC ROAD

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By Paul Ng'ambi | Kwenje FM | Chama district

In this week's [video report](#), we highlight the deteriorating state of the Lundazi–Chama Road in Eastern Province, a route residents say is no longer just a road, but a daily risk.

The report builds on our earlier investigation, "[Rains Lay Bare Years of Neglect on Chama's Strategic Roads.](#)"

The Chama–Lundazi and Chama–Matumbo roads in Chama district, eastern Zambia, have deteriorated to a critical state, with conditions worsening following the start of the rains.

Heavy rains have caused flooding in several sections, rendering parts of the roads impassable and leaving motorists, traders, patients and farmers stranded. What should be a vital transport corridor has instead become a daily struggle for the people who depend on it.

Roads are widely recognised as the backbone of economic and social development. They connect farmers to markets, children to schools, patients to hospitals and communities to economic opportunities. In Chama, however, poor road conditions have disrupted these connections, affecting livelihoods and undermining service delivery.

According to transport experts and government policy documents, inadequate road networks increase the cost of doing business, limit access to social services and slow down rural development.

The importance of the Chama–Lundazi and Chama–Matumbo corridor was formally acknowledged as far back as 2010 under the Link Zambia 8000 programme, when it was identified as a strategic national road.

In 2011, the government signed a US\$90 million contract with Shanghai Construction Group to rehabilitate the Lundazi–Chama section. The project was reaffirmed as a national priority in 2014. However, by 2021, parliamentary reports revealed that construction works had stalled due to financing challenges.

Subsequent expectations that international financing, including a US\$458 million Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) grant, would revive the corridor have not materialised, leaving the road largely unfinished to date.

Despite its strategic importance, the Chama–Lundazi and Chama–Matumbo roads have not seen full rehabilitation for decades. The corridor links Chama, one of the most remote districts in Eastern Province, to Lundazi, Chipata and Chinsali in Mushinga Province, and provides potential cross-border access to Malawi, Mozambique and Tanzania.

Currently, only about 30 kilometres from Chama town have been upgraded to bituminous standard, while more than 120 kilometres remain in extremely poor condition. During the rainy season, vehicles frequently get stuck, travel times double, and essential services are disrupted.

Residents say the situation has reached crisis levels. Those from areas such as Dunda to the Muyombe turn-off report that the road becomes almost impassable during the rains. Some travellers say they fall sick after enduring long journeys over deep potholes and muddy sections. Beyond inconvenience, the road poses serious safety risks to motorists and other road users.

Transport operators and motorists are among the hardest hit. Noah Banda, a motorist who frequently uses the Chama–Lundazi road, says vehicle damage has become routine.

"The road is very bad, full of potholes. Almost every trip the vehicle gets damaged, and we end up at the garage each time," he said. "A journey that should take three hours

now takes about five. Because of these costs, we are forced to increase charges."

The poor state of the road has also affected the movement of goods and people, driving up the cost of living. Zacks Goma, a long-time Chama resident and businessman, says transport delays and high charges have stifled business growth. He explains that suppliers charge exorbitant fees due to the bad road, forcing traders to pass on the costs to consumers.

"Since independence, we do not even have a fuel station here because the road is bad," he said. "Development starts with roads. During the rainy season, we are completely cut off. I hire trucks every month from Chipata to Chama at about K20,000. To recover that cost and still make a profit, commodity prices become very high."

Goma notes that Chama has strong agricultural potential, producing crops such as rice and maize, and could benefit significantly from improved road connectivity. He adds that with better roads, the corridor could link to the Great North Road and the Nakonde border, increasing traffic and potential government revenue through tolling.

Farmers and traders echo similar concerns, saying poor roads lead to delays, spoilage of goods and missed markets. In some areas, such as Mwataluzi, trucks reportedly get stuck for days due to damaged bridges, forcing traders to hire manual labour at high cost and pushing prices further up for consumers.

The health sector has not been spared. At Chama District Hospital, Senior Resident Medical Officer said the poor road conditions delay drug deliveries and patient referrals. He explained that ambulances often take too long to transfer patients to Chipata for specialist health services, which hosts the provincial referral hospital.

"These delays worsen patients' conditions, increase pain and discomfort, and in some cases lead to life-threatening complications," he said,

adding that delayed care can result in organ failure or even death.

Responsibility for national road infrastructure lies with the Ministry of Infrastructure, Housing and Urban Development, working through the Road Development Agency (RDA) and the National Road Fund Agency (NRFA).

In response to concerns over prolonged delays, Minister of Infrastructure, Charles Milupi said funding constraints have been the main challenge. He explained that the US\$458 million MCC grant was earmarked to rehabilitate roads linking agricultural production areas to markets, including the Chipata–Lundazi–Chasefu route, which had been prioritised. However, changes in United States government policy led to the cancellation of MCC and USAID programmes, forcing Zambia to reassess its financing strategy.

"At the moment, government resources are limited due to debt and economic pressures," the minister said. "Public-private partnerships work where there is heavy traffic, but roads like Chama–Matumbo do not yet attract private investors. With the cancellation of the MCC funding, we have to look for alternative ways to finance these roads."

At district level, officials say efforts are being made to manage the situation. A district works supervisor observed that Chama was placed under a programme intended to improve feeder roads, but implementation has been slow due to coordination challenges with RDA.

Meanwhile, Chama District Commissioner Yobe Goma said government has been carrying out periodic grading and gravelling from Lundazi to the Muyombe turn-off and plans to continue these temporary measures while searching for funds to upgrade the road to bituminous standard.

Members of Parliament for Chama North and Chama South have also raised the matter in parliament, pushing for budget allocations and

Opinion | Why Zambia's Creative Economy Is Failing Its Own People Cont..

clear timelines. However, the roads were not included in the 2026 national budget, raising further concerns about when permanent works will begin.

Efforts to obtain clarification from project financiers and contractors have yielded mixed results.

Representatives of Shanghai Construction Group confirmed that their contract covered the Chipata–Lundazi and Lundazi–Chama sections under a concessional loan arrangement with the China Exim Bank. However, the company says the project did not commence because the financing agreement between the Zambian government and the lender did not take effect.

As the rains continue and communities remain cut off, residents of Chama are left asking the same questions: when will the Chama–Lundazi and Chama–Matumbo roads finally be rehabilitated, how will they be funded, and who will be held accountable for years of delays on a road that is central to the district's development and survival?

*Produced by Radio Kwenje in Chama for MakaanDay. The article has been edited and fact-checked by MakaanDay.*



From page 1

# On hollow ground: Zimbabwean town on the brink of collapse

The ground underneath Shurugwi is riddled with tunnels

By Brenna Matendere/Mary Taruvinga

Shurugwi, a mining town in central Zimbabwe, sits on one of the world's richest seams of mineral wealth. Yet, the ground beneath the town is riddled with tunnels, the result of decades of mining. Uncontrolled digging continues, often under political protection, raising fears that the town is about to collapse.

The danger is not just underground. Unregulated mining has also fuelled a rise in silicosis, an incurable lung disease caused by silica dust.

Founded in 1899, Shurugwi lies on the southern edge of the Great Dyke, a 550-kilometre ridge of

mineral-rich rock that runs through central Zimbabwe and ranks among the world's richest mineral zones. The formation contains vast deposits of chrome, platinum group metals, including platinum, palladium and rhodium, along with nickel and copper. Surrounding greenstone belts are also rich in gold, drawing both large-scale operators and artisanal miners for decades.

Much of the vast network of tunnels beneath Shurugwi dates back to operations by ferrochrome producer Zimasco Pvt Limited, which has mined the area since 1926.

Zimasco is now owned by the Chinese state conglomerate Sinosteel Corporation and is still operating in the area.

Decades of industrial mining made the ground under the town unstable, and now a more aggressive wave of extraction by Zimbabwe Chenxi Investments (Private) Limited and unregulated artisanal miners has increased the risk of ground collapses.



Chenxi is mine's heap leaching process

Residents and civic leaders are frustrated over the government's inaction on long-standing complaints, particularly about Chenxi. Chenxi has cleared large tracts of land for gold mining at the Boterekwa Wolfshall Pass, which is the town's famous natural attraction, and has been blasting near residential areas.

Chenxi is chaired by Collins Mngangwa, son of President Emmerson Mnangagwa. Residents and civic leaders believe the company's political connection enables it to operate with impunity.

His association with the company was publicly confirmed in 2024 by Chenxi's then general manager, Simon Karimanzira, during a handover ceremony in Shurugwi.

The company had renovated the local offices of the ruling ZANU-PF party and has continued to make donations at events attended by senior party and government officials.

Karimanzira has since become a director of the company.

Bulle Madzitire, a former mayor of Shurugwi and now chair of the town's Residents and Ratepayers Association (SRRA), warned that the entire town is under threat because of tunnels and continued blasting by Chenxi and artisanal miners.

"A disaster can happen at any time," he said.

"We do not know where the tunnels run," he said. "Mining plans were never shared with the council. With each blast, the ground becomes weaker. Homes could collapse or disappear altogether."

Cracks are appearing not only in old houses but in new ones too."

He said the residents' association had asked Chenxi to reduce the frequency and depth of blasting, but violations continued. Constant blasting, he added, had sharply reduced property values across Shurugwi.

SRRA spokesperson Pardon Machocho described the town as "a ticking time bomb".

"We are all under threat," he said. "It is not just homes - it is also hospitals like Shurugwi District Hospital and White Maternity Hospital. It is a crisis."

Chenxi dismissed concerns about its mining activity in the area, calling them exaggerated. Zimasco declined to comment.

## On hollow ground



A sink hole opened at a home owned by a Shurugwi Town resident

Residents told journalists from Pachena how blasts regularly trigger violent tremors that crack walls, collapse ceilings and threaten entire neighbourhoods.

Pachena's visit to the Sebungu Extension, Motel Plots and Ironsides areas found 10 severely damaged houses. The actual number is far higher, as many residents declined to be interviewed or allow access to their homes, citing fear of victimisation or jeopardising hopes of their homes being rehabilitated.

"Each time they blast, the whole town shakes," said Anthony Sigauke, a local businessman, whose home sits above old tunnels. "Windows crack, children cry and run for cover."

Sigauke said a massive crack once split his property from gate to cottage, slicing through to the main house. Another blast left a hollow beneath his tiled floor.

"We reported it. Authorities promised experts. Nothing came," Sigauke said. "We just filled the cracks and hoped for the best. But each day we live knowing we could wake up swallowed by the earth—or not wake up at all."

**On hollow ground: Zimbabwean town on the brink of collapse  
Cont....**

Sigauke says he has spent a lot of money over the years to reinforce his house because of the constant blasting which has resulted in his property being structurally weak.

“The blasting is very intense. I assure you that you will shake and shiver if they start blasting. It’s very unpleasant and a threat to our properties and lives,” he said.

**When the ground gives way**

In 2009, Anna Mazvovere was swallowed alive when her bedroom, in a house in Shurugwi town that she was renting from Zimasco, collapsed into an underground shaft. Despite rescue efforts, her body was never recovered.

“They said it was too dangerous,” a resident recalled. “Then the story just died.”

Mazvovere’s daughter, Nicia Ketara, said the trauma still haunts her.

“At 17, I had to become an adult overnight. To this day, my mother has never been accounted for,” she said.

She said Zimasco paid US\$3,500 in compensation.

Access to the site remains heavily restricted.

“We cannot even go near the crater,” Ketara said. “We stand about 100 metres away. They say it’s dangerous, but we are the ones living with this danger.”

**Mining companies respond**

Chenxi director Simon Karimanzira said claims that the company’s blasting operations were damaging homes were being exaggerated by “enemies of progress” concerned about the company’s success.

He acknowledged that residents had complained about blasting but said some of the explosions blamed on Chenxi were carried out by other mining companies.

“We blast between 5.30am and 6.45am in the morning, but some of the blasting in Shurugwi is occurring around 3am,” he said.

Karimanzira said the company had not received any complaints linking its operations to cracked houses and had not been approached by the Ministry of Mines.

“We also have nothing to do with underground tunnels in Shurugwi. You said they were constructed by Zimasco, why are you not getting a comment from them?”

However, residents’ association representative Machocho said complaints had been formally raised with the company.

“That’s why we called for meetings with them,” he said. “The blasting is causing cracks and threatening properties and lives. In response the company agreed to reduce the intensity and depth of the blasting.”

Zimasco spokesperson Margaret Mukumbi declined to comment on allegations that the company had not shared maps of its underground tunnels. She said company manager, Pindukayi Musarandega, would respond, but no comment was provided.

Shurugwi’s current mayor, Fanuel Machiya, also declined to comment despite requesting written questions.

Midlands provincial mining director John Makandwa declined to comment, while mines permanent secretary Pfungwa Kunaka also did not respond to questions about the tunnels or the risks facing the town.

**Mining company linked to Zimbabwean president is destroying famous landmarks**

**Chenxi Investments has been fined but continues stripping vegetation and polluting rivers**

*By Brenna Matendere and Mary Taruvinga* Feature

- Open-cast mining by Chenxi Investments has stripped about 12km<sup>2</sup> of vegetation in Shurugwi, leaving parts of the Boterekwa Escarpment and Dunraven Falls scarred and vulnerable to erosion.
- Mining methods using chemicals like sodium cyanide have polluted rivers and streams.

Activists warn of long-term environmental harm and potential disasters such as landslides

- The company, chaired by Collins Mnangagwa, appears to be operating with impunity despite past fines and illegal activity findings, with authorities seen as unwilling or unable to act.

A gold mining company linked to President Emmerson Mnangagwa’s son has stripped vegetation from the land in central Zimbabwe, and polluted rivers and streams.

Satellite imagery confirms what residents and environmental activists in Shurugwi have long feared. In just five years, open-cast gold mining by Chenxi Investments (Private) Limited has stripped about 12km<sup>2</sup> of pristine vegetation from the town’s most famous tourist attraction. Part of the Boterekwa Escarpment, also known as Wolfshall Pass, and the Dunraven Falls, now lie scarred and bare.

Since the company started mining in the area in 2021, residents, traditional leaders and environmental activists have complained. Rivers and streams are polluted by mining sediment and chemical run-off from heaps of crushed ore.

But the company has dismissed the complaints, insisting its operations are lawful.

Chenxi’s chairman, Collins Mnangagwa, son of President Emmerson Mnangagwa, is widely perceived as untouchable, and critics believe this has protected the company and allowed it to continue mining.

We travelled to the area and saw how heavy machinery is levelling hillsides and burying indigenous trees in massive dumps. Chenxi uses a method known as heap leaching, piling crushed low-grade gold ore into large heaps and spraying it with sodium cyanide to dissolve gold and silver. The solution is then processed through resins, washed and re-dissolved before final recovery of solid gold. The process can take several weeks or months and leaves toxic waste if not properly contained.

A 2022 investigation by the NewsHawks revealed that Chenxi had partnered

with Ansh Blue 4/8 (Private) Limited, which is owned by a local businessman identified only as Mahara. Mahara had approval for underground shaft mining but expanded operations with Chenxi into open-cast mining and heap leaching at the Boterekwa Escarpment.

Ansh Blue, which was the licence holder at the time, was found by the Environmental Management Agency (EMA) to have illegally embarked on open cast mining on the picturesque mountain range.

Benson Basera, provincial EMA manager in 2022, confirmed that the mining activities were illegal. “The miner has an environmental impact assessment for shaft mining,” he said.

Basera said EMA ordered the mining company to stop unapproved open-cast and vat leaching operations, fined Ansh Blue ZW\$300,000 for doing this without an Environmental Impact Assessment, and noted that the illegal work had disfigured the scenic area.

But despite the fines and orders to halt illegal activity, operations continued, and Chenxi obtained licences from the Ministry of Mines.

Chenxi now operates under its own licence, making its mining activities lawful. But Chenxi director Simon Karimanzira acknowledged that the company has also incurred fines.

The Shurugwi Residents and Ratepayers Association says the damage is shocking.

“Boterekwa is a national treasure. People from across Zimbabwe came for scenic viewing and picnics, but that beauty is being destroyed,” said spokesperson Pardon Machocho.



**Mining on hill slopes has left the Boterekwa Escarpment scarred and vulnerable to soil erosion. Photo: Mary Taruvinga**

**Mining company linked to Zimbabwean president is destroying famous landmarks Cont...**

Ratepayers association chairperson Bulle Madzitire said, “Before Chenxi arrived, mining was done by artisanal miners. It was on a small scale, so it did not cause major concern. Chenxi’s giant operations, backed by the first family, are entirely different.”

“When it is raining, all the cyanide and toxic waste is washed into rivers and dams,” says Farai Maguwu, executive director of the Centre for Natural Resource Governance, which has been campaigning to stop the environmental destruction for years .

“This is a major problem, not only for Shurugwi but the whole country. Our rivers are now polluted. I will also not be surprised if this kind of mining does not result in landslides in the near future. It’s just a question of time before nature hits back,” he said.

“In private, officials at government institutions in Shurugwi express concern with Chenxi’s operations but the feeling is that those running the company are above the law. There is no political will,” Maguwu said.

He said the EMA and National Water Authority remained silent.

“This is because their hands are tied. They are afraid to ruffle the feathers of people and families behind the project,” said Maguwu.

Bhasera said the agency monitors Chenxi and produces quarterly reports for the Minister of State.

“Mining requires coordinated action by government, local authorities, and communities to ensure sustainability. We are one part of the process, but all stakeholders must act together,” he said.

Karimanzira said EMA fines were a normal part of mining. “We comply with regulations and seek guidance where needed. We are committed to rehabilitation, slope stabilisation, and tree planting, including hosting National Tree Planting Day.”

Shurugwi villagers complain that the company has blocked access to and destroyed indigenous forests where they used to pick mushrooms and wild fruits.

Resident Misheck Moyo said, “Chenxi has taken over large areas around Boterekwa and we no longer have access to our ancestral lands, including grazing areas. Our lifestyles have been destroyed and we are no longer free in our movement because they have placed armed guards around the mines.”

#### **How we used satellite imagery**

Source of images: The investigators used images from Google Earth and the Sentinel-2 satellites (part of the European Union’s Copernicus Earth observation program). These satellites can monitor land and vegetation over time.

What was observed: The satellite images showed that about 12km<sup>2</sup> of land and vegetation were destroyed in the Wolfshall Pass / Boterekwa Escarpment area of Shurugwi between 2021 and 2025.

How this was analysed: Imagery called “false colour” images, where vegetation appears red was used. This makes it easier to see the amount of plant cover and to identify areas that are cleared over time.

#### **Timeline of changes**

November 2021: Before mining started, the area had dense vegetation.

November 2022–2025: Images show progressive clearing of vegetation, indicating significant environmental destruction over these years, likely due to mining activities by Chenxi.

*This is the second of two articles about Chenxi’s mining operations in Shurugwi*

*This story was produced by Pachena and syndicated by the IJ Hub on behalf of its member centre network in Southern Africa.*



*Mining on hill slopes has left the Boterekwa Escarpment scarred and vulnerable to soil erosion. Photo: Mary Taruvinga*

From page 1

## **Opinion | A Road That Reveals the Real State of Development**

The reportwe published this week, is not just about a bad road. It is about what happens when infrastructure failure quietly rewrites the lives of citizens far from the centres of power.

At face value, the story documents the deteriorating state of the Chama–Lundazi Road in Eastern Province, a once-critical route now reduced to a “dangerous and unreliable” stretch that disrupts transport, raises costs, and isolates communities. But beneath that lies a deeper truth—this is not a transport story. It is a governance story.

What stands out most is how the road has shifted from being a connector to becoming a barrier. In rural Zambia, roads are not luxuries, they are economic arteries. When they fail, everything else begins to fail with them. The report highlights how communities are effectively cut off from healthcare, education, and markets, especially when it rains. That single detail captures the scale of the problem: a road collapsing into disrepair is, in reality, a system collapsing into neglect.

This is where the story succeeds powerfully. It translates infrastructure into human consequence. Rising transport costs are not just numbers, they are higher prices for goods, missed clinic visits, and children struggling to reach school. Delays are not inconveniences, they are lost opportunities and, in some cases, life-threatening risks.

There is also an uncomfortable historical undertone. Reports indicate that this route has remained largely underdeveloped for decades, becoming nearly impassable during rainy seasons. This suggests a pattern that is all too familiar in Zambia, infrastructure promises made, but never fully realised, especially in rural regions.

The Chama–Lundazi Road reflects a broader national imbalance. While urban centres see periodic upgrades and visible investments, rural connectivity continues to lag behind. Yet it is precisely these rural roads that underpin

agriculture, trade, and local economies. When they fail, development does not just slow down, it reverses.

What makes this story even more significant is its timing. Zambia is heading toward a crucial election cycle, where infrastructure is often used as a political talking point. But stories like this expose the gap between rhetoric and reality. Roads are frequently announced, budgeted for, and even launched, but not always completed, maintained, or prioritised where they matter most.

There is also a strategic dimension that cannot be ignored. The Lundazi–Chama corridor links into wider provincial and national road networks, forming part of the broader access routes that connect Eastern Province to the rest of the country. When such links deteriorate, they weaken not just local mobility but regional integration and economic resilience.

What the report ultimately does, quietly but effectively, is challenge the definition of development. It asks: can a country claim progress when entire communities remain physically cut off? Can economic growth be meaningful if it does not reach the people who depend most on basic infrastructure?

The power of this story lies in its restraint. It does not overstate. It simply shows. And in doing so, it forces the reader/viewer to confront a reality that is often ignored, neglect is not always loud. Sometimes it is a road that slowly disappears.

If there is one takeaway, it is this, roads like Chama–Lundazi should not have to become crises before they are fixed. Because by the time a road becomes impassable, the damage has already gone far beyond the surface.



This week in the Buletin & Record

# Zambia's airline industry - in search of a future

From page 1

In some ways, Zambia has not recovered from the loss of its national airline, Zambia Airways. A number of privately-owned local airlines operating regionally have tried to fill the void, but the odds have been stacked against them, and they failed. The only scheduled airline now is Proflight, which operates on mostly local routes although the company is expanding regionally, and charter companies meet other aviation demand. However, the industry has been plagued with inconsistencies, confusion and corruption from their governing body, the Department of Civil Aviation -- but hopefully, change is in the air. Charles Mafa reports.

Zambia's civil aviation industry is a bit like a family in a soap opera. It is rich, divided, deep in crisis, has intimations of corruption and spends much of its time squabbling.

Aviation operators raise concerns about their industry, including recent confusion caused by the Department of Civil Aviation's (DCA) decision to enforce the Air Services Act Cap 446 which dictates that local airline operators give priority to the "employment of suitably qualified and experienced Zambian pilots".

That sounds perfectly normal except that some officers within DCA have taken it upon themselves to describe this enforcement as a ban on the employment of foreign pilots. That set the cat among the pigeons, simply because there are not enough suitably qualified Zambian pilots to fill the jobs available. If there were indeed a ban on foreign pilots with commercial ratings, then sections of Zambia's air industry would likely go out of business.

However there is more to it than that. Some within the industry describe the enforcement decision with its connotations of restricting foreign pilots as "a battle for control of the aviation industry".

It does seem that senior pilots from the Zambia Airways era who had left for better-paid posts abroad when Zambia Airways failed,

but are now struggling for jobs on their return home, have influenced the DCA's utterances on the subject

The Zambia Professional Pilots' Association did not officially confirm this but some members agreed that they're the ones behind this move. In fact, the B & R has established that this is one of the reasons why the association, which started operating on April 17, 2012, was established in the first place.

"One of the objectives is what you (the writer) talked about, things like employment of foreign pilots," said one of the senior members of the Association, who did want to be named. "That is one of the functions because you can't have a situation where Zambian pilots are not doing anything but you're bringing in foreigners. We will not accept that."

Some senior Zambian pilots have entered the fray, but a number of them think they can't win. "There are pilots yes, and these are pilots that worked for Zambia Airways, older guys like me who cannot fly my type of equipment," remarked a charter operator who opted to remain anonymous. "They only want to fly jets or other big planes. They had left Zambia and worked in many countries. They have flown everywhere in the world, now they have got to an age where they can't carry on because those countries have young pilots coming up."

There are others too who agree with these sentiments and say the issue of pilots is an itch the DCA cannot scratch. Mr Kenneth Silavwe, a former DCA director and working pilot said: "What we experienced when I was at the DCA over those years as a regulator was that the majority of ex-Zambia Airways pilots who had flown generally bigger planes like 737s, DC 10s, ATRs, were more akin to seeking job opportunities outside of Zambia .... where they fly larger aeroplanes as opposed to smaller 'bush pilot' planes."

Charter airline operators feel that any heavy-handed moves against the employment of foreign pilots by the DCA

"will put to death the very soul" that keeps the fragile aviation and tourism industries alive, because there are not enough local pilots at the moment. There are some 10 charter companies and one scheduled airline operating in Zambia, and a new national airline is scheduled to start operations in June. (See accompanying story.)

Officials might insist that Zambia has enough local pilots, but statistics show a different story. According to a November 2013 report by the technical committee of the new national airline project, there are currently 83 registered Zambian pilots, the majority of whom are employed in other parts of the world. Bearing in mind that International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) regulations dictate that commercial pilots can only fly up to the age of 65, some 22% of Zambian registered pilots are over the age of 60, and 37% are aged between 51 and 60 years -- in other words, retiring soon.

Further, since the demise of Zambia Airways 20 years ago, there hasn't been much by way of serious pilot training in the country. As a result of economic reforms that came with the reintroduction of multiparty politics, the Zambia Air Service Training Institute (ZASTI), the country's sole flying training institution, has faced numerous challenges ranging from lack of equipment and spares for aircraft, plus a now dilapidated and inadequate infrastructure. This has created a huge gap between the younger and older generations of pilots.

"When ZASTI started having a slight slowdown, which was caused by the demise of Zambia Airways, they also lost out financially because Zambia Airways was one of their main customers," says Mr Silavwe. "Because it could not meet the required standards, they (ZASTI) were advised to cease training commercial pilots, somewhere in the 1990s."

The situation at ZASTI is drastic. The technical committee of the national airline project (see accompanying story) says the institution has one Cessna 152 single engine aircraft available which is currently being used for private pilot licence (PPL) training. For the aircraft to be used for instrument flying, it would need an ADF (automatic direction finder), which is yet to be procured. A twin-engine aircraft, a Piper Aztec (PA 23), is at the moment parked, as it requires spares and repairs before it can be used.

One of the young trainee pilots said it took him more than a year to complete a course which normally would last for about six to eight weeks. He said the PPL is such a basic licence that it can only be used for "leisure flying", not to land a job. "The institution is in intensive care. At the time I went there, it was either there was no instructor or no money for fuel, or sometimes the plane was down, so we had to wait for practicals," he explained.

Training of fresh cadet pilots doesn't come cheap. The technical committee of the national airline project estimates that the all-up cost of training a pilot for a commercial licence is K412,879.00..

As the Government is reportedly seeking funding to re-launch a new national flag carrier, the country is grappling to find the pilots needed. There is a suggestion that the five Zambia Air Force (ZAF) pilots holding commercial licences will have to be integrated into the new airline. "Going by the information and knowledge available, this number may still not be sufficient, especially on co-pilots," reported the committee. "More officers will need to be seconded to the national airline to supplement the existing numbers."

Manoeuvres from within DCA and elsewhere to block foreign pilots are not a solution to staffing in Zambia's aviation industry. The B & R understands that the DCA suffers from staff vacancies of more than 30% -- and in the case of technical staff the shortage is acute.

**Zambia's airline industry - in search of a future Cont..**

In fact, an insider said the institution couldn't attract qualified staff and sometimes key duties such as marking of exams are carried out by clerical staff. "We do employ qualified staff but because of poor remuneration and conditions of service, they just sniff and go," the B&R was told.

Then there is the matter of corruption, among them accusations that DCA staff on official duties demand phoney allowances from airline operators. One operator said his company had to pay DCA staff K 400 each per day for meals and K300 each for transport, for inspections that may or may not be required procedure. "In addition, we pay them about 400 US dollars a day if they have to go out of the country to inspect a plane we want to bring in. On average it costs us 1,000 US dollars in cash on top of providing return air tickets." The underlying implication is that if the money is not paid, the inspection will not be approved.

A government worker is entitled to a K50 lunch allowance, while those who have to spend nights away from home get an amount ranging from K650 to K800. Their allowances are paid by the DCA, not the operators.

Sources confirm there is a "brown envelope" factor in some decisions made at the DCA, and there is occasional government interference too, which can impinge on safety. In July last, Government officials, not aviation experts, over-ruled DCA's advice not to allow the Boeing 747 used by former US president, George Bush and his wife from landing at Harry Mwaanga Nkumbula Airport in Livingstone.

That runway is meant to accommodate planes up to the weight of a Boeing 767, which is smaller and lighter than the 747. "Government and the Americans were told that landing would be at their own risk but they went ahead and landed anyway. When taking off, the plane blew off the edge lights and some tarmac on the runway," said one of the DCA inspectors on the scene.

Beyond all this murk, however, efforts are being made to improve things. The Government, with support from the EU, is seeking to transform the

DCA into the Civil Aviation Authority, which was established in law in 2012, and building staff skills to prepare for ICAO (International Civil Aviation Authority) recommended changes.

A part of those changes is to do away with political interference in the way aviation structures work. Mr Silavwe said the DCA had been weakened by the sweeping policy and economic changes of the 1990s and that regulation was left weak. He added that law changes made in 1996 were "superficial" in that they did not change the way that local aviation regulations were governed.

Zambia had continued as a member country of the ICAO without transitioning to new practices "where you have an autonomous civil aviation regulator, with "a law which provides for legal power to carry out inspections, audits, checks and control of aviation to ensure safety." It is in this area that Zambia ran foul of European aviation practice and was blacklisted from operating in European airspace. The ICAO, a UN agency, and the European Union consider that the Zambian DCA is not up to speed with new demands within the sector.

In shedding more light on the ban, Mr Silavwe pointed out that the minister issues an air service permit but under the new regulations of ICAO, an air operator certificate is supposed to be issued not by a minister, but by a qualified expert from the local aviation authority. Those permits are for economic regulation of aviation, while an Air Operator Certificate (AOC) provides technical regulation. A qualified person as recognised by ICAO only issues the latter after an applicant offers an evaluation of their operational and maintenance capability.

Finally, there is an apparent assumption among some people that the DCA and the aviation sector generally are too small to worry about, given the country's other problems. Is this true? Definitely not, according to Weston Mapani, who is leader of the national airline project. "This (the aviation sector) is the engine of our economy, our tourism, our connection to the

outside world." Aviation experts welcome planned investment in aviation for a land-locked nation that has few transport options available, but the country needs to bolster its international air networks if the mining, tourism and other industries are to not remain dependent on foreign airlines for international connectivity.

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**This week in the Bulletin & Record**

## Zambia Airways II about to take off?

*By Charles Mafa*

Zambia appears to be on the verge of having a new national airline, 20 years after the demise of Zambia Airways.

The groundwork has mostly been done but there are some uncertainties to be sorted out before the projected launch date of June 30. The biggest of these are: where will the money come from, and where will the pilots come from? (See main story.) People within the project do not know if finance has been secured; they await word from Government on which finance option has been chosen. Reports a few months ago said that President Sata was seeking Chinese assistance for the project.

The proposed new airline is to be called Zambia Airways (2014) Ltd.

The project's technical committee, which has completed its work and now awaits approval from Government, has recently been joined by the Air Force Commander, Lieutenant General Eric Chimese, who is believed to have the ear of the president.

It is understood that the committee has chosen Boeing, the world's largest aerospace company, as preferred supplier of aircraft for the business. Aircraft will be leased with the option of buying by 2015.

Mr Weston Mapani, a member of the 19-man technical committee

overseeing the project, said lessons have been learnt from the demise of Zambia Airways and failures by private airlines to take its place. "We have had too many failures," he said. "It is time we got it right this time around. And in terms of safety, there is more safety consciousness when it is government owned because they would not want to flout the regulations."

He said that the idea of coming up with the national airline was a result of concerns by the public and institutions that demanded Zambia have its own national airline. "Looking at the economic development of the nation since the demise of Zambia Airways in 1994, there has been little activity in the airline industry, we have lost a lot on that score."

He pointed out that last year, Kenya Airways brought in something like 3 billion US dollars in foreign exchange for the Kenyan economy, "but the situation in our country is that we are not earning anything from the air industry; foreign carriers are earning in this country and they remit (proceeds) to their countries."

The airline project started in January last year. The business plan is with government; aircraft manufacturers from Boeing, Airbus, ATR, plus engine manufacturers including General Electric, have made

**Zambia Airways II about to take off? Cont...**

presentations. “Now, we are at the point where we have identified which equipment to buy.”

Two ownership options are considered -- 100% government owned, or government owning 60% and equity partners 40%.

According to Mr Mapani it is only government that has the kind of muscle to set up an airline. “The problem in the aviation industry is - number one, it is so complex; number two, it requires a lot of money; and three it requires good

management because it is very easy to burn your fingers in the airline industry. So you need big muscle and as things are at the moment, it is only government that has that kind of muscle.”

ZASTI (the Air Service Training Institute, see main story) was badly affected by the closure of Zambia Airways, and needs recapitalisation. The institute is tied to the new airline project and Mr Mapani adds “the EU is saying you need to revamp ZASTI as well”.

The EU would provide the required equipment to ZASTI. “Everything is now tied together – the airline, transforming the Department of Civil Aviation into a Civil Aviation Authority, and ZASTI.”

Zambia Airways led the way in numbers of flights to certain destinations. For example, on the Lusaka – Johannesburg route, ZA had four flights per week, while South African Airways had three. To Nairobi, ZA had three flights a week while Kenya Airways had two.

Into London, ZA had 3 flights in a week, while British Airways had two, and into Bombay, Zambia Airways had two flights while Air India eventually withdrew altogether.

Mr Mapani believes the local aviation industry is primed to grow as a result of formation of a national airline, coupled with expansion of KK International airport. The idea of government, he said, was to make Lusaka a regional airways hub.

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