

COVID-19 IMPACTS

INTRODUCTION

For Zambia, a country centrally located in the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the outbreak of the Coronavirus in December, 2019 in Wuhan City, Hubei Province in China seemed far - fetched. The threat of Covid-19 was not evident even after it was declared a Global Public Health Emergency on 30th January, 2020 and upgraded to a pandemic in early March by the World Health Organisation due to its wide and continued global spread.

The first two (2) cases of Covid-19 in Zambia were recorded on 18th March, 2020. Thereafter, more cases came up, necessitating Government to act to curb the spread of the pandemic.

Among the restrictions imposed were on the ban of non – essential travel to all Countries and controlled movements of goods and persons across borders.

Zambia was cognisant of the fact that a delicate balance had to be found in the border control measures to prevent the spread of the virus while ensuring continuity of economic activities and preservation of supply chains. Hence, the need for unobstructed transportation of goods and provision of services to maintain their availability.

Regional Guidelines

SADC Member States developed Regional Guidelines on harmonisation and facilitation of Cross Border Transport Operations across the Region and Standard Operations Procedures for the Management and Monitoring of Cross Border Road Transport at designated points of entry. Initially, focus was placed on the movement and clearance of essential goods, but with the realisation

that Covid-19 will be with us for some time, a revision was made to include all goods.

National Transport Emergency Guidelines

National Transport Emergency Guidelines were developed and outlined protocols on public transport, health measures, social distancing and provision of information on Covid-19.

Closure of International Airports

Three out of the four International Airports were closed.

Impact of Covid-19

Covid-19 has had a negative impact on the economy due to loss of employment, income and in some cases loss of business. However, the full impact is yet to unfold, but we are certain that the pandemic will halt the achievements reported during the Mid-term revision of the Vienna Programme of Action for LLDCs for the decade 2014 to 2024. The attainment of the 2030 Agenda for SDGs and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change will be affected. We will definitely encounter challenges in the attainment of sustainable transport with regard to access, affordability, safety, security and environmental impact.

We have observed an increase in Government spending due to the unforeseen Covid-19 expenditures and there has been a reduction in revenue collection. The transport sector will be affected in that there will be limited resources for the development and inter-connectivity of the four modes of transport for cost efficiency in service provision, optional maintenance and rehabilitation of existing transport infrastructure, promoting regional corridor competitiveness and promoting safe transport infrastructure and services as outlined in the National Transport Policy.

We have engaged Cooperating Partners to assist in the review of institutional mandates for the Road Sector Agencies. Zambia is also in the process of finalising the Road Sector Investment Plan.

Zambia is also striving to ensure road safety. Although a reduction in the number of fatalities and stability in road traffic crashes has been recorded, road traffic crashes, fatalities and injuries are still high. If SDG 3.6 has to be achieved there is a lot to be done from human behaviour, enforcement of road safety laws, public awareness to improved emergency care services.

Climate change also has contributed significantly to challenges faced in the transport sector. For instance, the Northern part of the Country experienced unusually heavy rains from January to April this year resulting in heavy floods and many rivers bursting their banks. A lot of transport infrastructure such as roads and bridges were damaged and thereby, cutting off some areas.

Opportunities presented by Covid-19

- We observed the greater use of ICTs in transport, transit procedures and access to international markets.
- Response transport measures to Covid-19 while noble, in some instances resulted in long queues at borders and congestion. The challenge of inadequate infrastructure at some border-crossing points was also exposed. This also exposed staff to higher risks of contracting the virus.

Conclusion

Zambia in conjunction with neighbouring countries and with the assistance of the international community needs to invest more in digital technologies for efficiency and reduce on physical contact at borders. This will also help in reducing transport costs and avoid the cost of commodities sky-rocketing as has been seen during the Covid-19 pandemic.