

# brave heart

As Zambia emerges as a potential breadbasket and energy giant in Africa, KERRY DIMMER investigates this landlocked country's success story



Luangwa River, Zambia



**There is an African proverb that says: I am because we are, we are because I am.** This is the essence of a classical African philosophy called *ubuntu*. Following this line of thought is largely the reason why Zambia is one of the few sub-Saharan countries that has enjoyed lasting peace.

When Zambia's first president, Kenneth Kaunda, came into power in 1964, he made a bold move in establishing what he referred to as 'Zambian humanism', which penetrated every aspect of society: political, economical and social. It brought the diverse tribes of the country together, cementing a unified national identity that loosely embraced socialism.

All political parties – other than Kaunda's United National Independence Party – were outlawed, effectively creating a one-party state until rising opposition forced Kaunda, in 1991, to allow Zambia's first multiparty elections. Frederick Chiluba, of the Movement for Multi-party Democracy (MMD), succeeded Kaunda in a landslide victory and immediately set about addressing Zambia's declining economy.

It was copper that motivated Zambian infrastructural development in colonial times, and the same metal that struggled through the country's economic crash during the 1930s Great Depression. Zambia's Copperbelt dependence was further compromised when Kaunda's government made the disastrous decision to nationalise its mines, effectively crashing global copper prices in 1973.

Chiluba liberalised the economy, restricted government interference and welcomed the privatisation of state-owned enterprises. But this proved to be yet another disaster. Declining GDP effectively halted vital development and a devastating drought in 2002 worsened an already untenable situation.

Zambia was bleeding. Among other things its HIV/Aids epidemic was out of control and without the desperately needed maize agriculture, poverty escalated in the rural areas. Two years later an excellent harvest was followed by rising copper prices, boosting morale, and so the resilient Zambians began, yet again, to rebuild.

The country's current government remains in the hands of the MMD, under the leadership of President Rupiah Banda, who came to power



Copper has been the bastion of Zambia's economic growth, but now government is looking to energy generation as a money spinner

in 2008 when President Levy Mwanawasa died during his term of office. Banda's style of leadership has been called hands-off, aloof and dictatorial by some media, but he argues that his MMD government has restored confidence and says it is 'on course

with prudent and meaningful national development programmes' that will prove the country to be a land of opportunity.

Does being landlocked by eight nations – Tanzania, Malawi, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Namibia, Angola and the DRC – hamper development?

'Not at all,' says Emmanuel Kasanga, the deputy high commissioner of the Zambian High Commission in South Africa. 'In fact it's an ideal location, giving access as it does to eight other marketing opportunities.'

***The government is keen to grow the economy beyond the current 5–6% to more than 10% to accelerate the pace of reducing its 60% poverty level***



David Livingstone's memorial on the edge of Victoria Falls

'A business in Zambia has the advantage of only crossing one border to facilitate trade with any one of our neighbours, which of course has a significant impact on costs.'

Kasanga points out that the government is keen to grow the economy beyond the current 5–6% to more than 10% to accelerate the pace of reducing its 60% poverty level.

'Such economic growth will also translate into increased employment opportunities,

not least of which is the development of new industries. On the whole, Zambia does not have a saturated economy and economists will attest that this bodes well for the country overall. It means

that mergers and acquisitions are far less active, that fewer competitors give rise to new business opportunities.'

Although copper remains a major exchange earner and driver of the economy, Zambia is weaning itself from its dependency on the metal and has begun to focus its attention on the energy sector. It's already supplying much-needed electricity to South Africa and soon, says Kasanga, will supply East Africa, including Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania.

'This is one area where we really got it right,' he says. 'After independence Zambia was relatively backward in terms of social amenities, so the government embarked on an ambitious infrastructure development programme that included energy resources.'

With the presence of Kariba Dam, supplemented by Kafue Gorge and the power station in Livingstone, Zambia is highly endowed with hydro potential.

'Ongoing investment means that within the next three years, we'll be generating enough power to supply the sub-Saharan region with electricity and the expertise that goes with it.' This persistent investment in education is giving Zambians a reputation for professionalism, especially within the metallurgy and geology sectors.

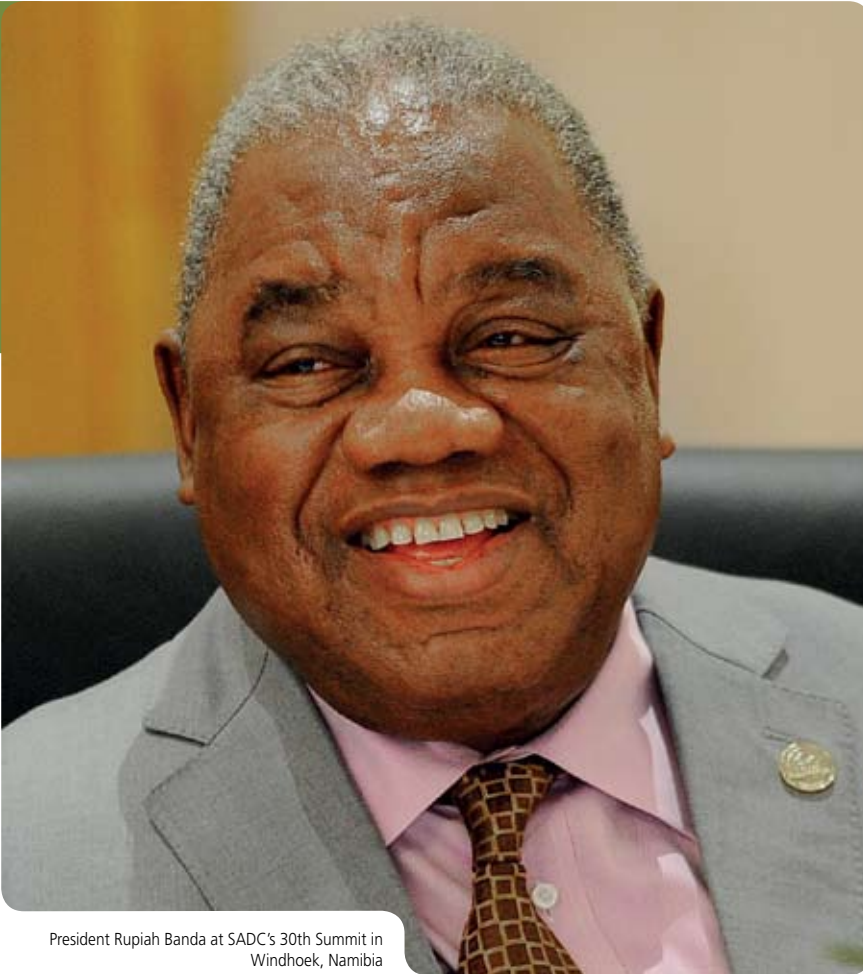
'Zambian doctors and property evaluators too, are highly regarded,' adds Kasanga. 'In fact, we're very proud that Zambia has a presence in the world through the export of competitively skilled professionals.'

In recent times the government has also put tremendous effort into improving the delivery of healthcare. Kasanga says they have a long way to go but that those efforts are starting to yield results. 'Yellow fever in Zambia has been eradicated; health experts advise that measles is almost non-existent; the incidents of HIV/Aids have been reduced, as have malaria infections ... it all looks very promising.'

Agriculture is a high potential export earner and is currently thriving. Traditionally, Zambia's main agricultural sector has focused on cereal crops like maize, a product that is in serious surplus at the moment. Last season Zambia's maize production weighed in at 2.8 million metric tons of which the country only required 1 million metric tons.

***Zambians have retained a sense of peace and tranquillity, which is remarkable given the civil conflicts that have plagued their neighbours***





President Rupiah Banda at SADC's 30th Summit in Windhoek, Namibia

## CAPITAL CITY

Lusaka

## POLITICAL STATUS

Republic

## HEAD OF STATE

President Rupiah Banda

## OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Bemba, Nyanja, Tonga, Lozi, Chewa, Nsenga, Tumbuka, Lunda, Kaonde, Lala, Luvale, English

## INFLATION RATE

7.7% (2010)

## GDP PER CAPITA

US\$1 600

## CURRENCY

Kwacha

## TOTAL AREA

752 618 km<sup>2</sup>

## POPULATION

13 460 305

## POPULATION GROWTH RATE

3.19% (2010)

## LITERACY

80.6%

'Some are saying,' says Kasanga, 'that Zambia is capable of being the food basket for the whole of Africa, especially if supported by aggressive investments that are enhanced by the natural endowments of good soil and water. Such arable land is most attractive to Zimbabwean tobacco farmers, so we have seen our tobacco exports grow significantly as a result.'

Tourism is yet another blossoming money-spinner for Zambia. Prior to 2001, the tourism industry was classified by the government as a social rather than economic sector, so investment was insignificant at best. With the private sector now involved, Zambia's tourism is clearly showing potential for robust activity.

'It is not quite there yet,' says Kasanga, 'but we're quickly catching up to our neighbour Zimbabwe, especially in Livingstone and its surrounds where we're seeing some phenomenal investment.'

Livingstone is most famous for the Victoria Falls, brought to the world's attention in 1855 by explorer and scientist Dr David Livingstone's

journey down the Zambezi River. Nothing could have prepared him for the magnificence of the thundering curtain of water that he described as scenes 'so lovely they must have been gazed upon by angels in their flight'.

Livingstone's exposure to and subsequent fight against the slave trade so endeared him to the locals that upon his death, they cut out his heart and buried it under a Mvula tree in Illala, before returning the rest of his body to England. A note attached explained: 'You can have his body, but his heart belongs in Africa.'

The Victoria Falls, as one of the Seven Wonders of the World has, to a large extent, limited the scope of Zambia's other attractions. With 250 000 km<sup>2</sup> of national parks and game management areas covering more than a third of Zambia's land mass, the country is teeming with some of the finest animals, waterfalls, lakes, inland beaches and countless landmarks characterising a unique and mystical heritage.

Ancient cultural traditions, like the Kuomboka Ceremony in Western Zambia have begun to attract large numbers of tourists. They are drawn to the gathering of the Lozi tribe to witness the story of the migration of people by water. Local folklore says that 'he or she that drinks from the River Zambezi, must come again and again to drink'.

Zambians have retained a sense of peace and tranquillity, which is remarkable given the civil conflicts that have plagued Zambia's neighbours. But the country's beauty and natural resources are not to be taken lightly.

'To be fair to ourselves as Zambians,' says Kasanga speaking as a citizen, 'we need to do more. I am not sure we realise the full importance of this yet, but if we speed up the pace of maximising what we have, the welfare of individuals and communities will be enormously enhanced. Zambia is a rough diamond that is yet to be polished ... there's more to be gained if we commit to our collective development.'

There is an intense awakening and activity in Zambia, both internally and externally, unseen probably since independence – or possibly since Livingstone introduced the world to Africa.

Zambia has explored its options, made its mistakes, learnt its lessons well, and is finally on the mend. True to Livingstone's famous words – 'the end of exploration is the beginning of the enterprise' – although it's taken Zambia a very, long time, the country is finally ready to energise its economy. **AD**