

# navigating safe waters

Samsa, the South African Maritime Safety Authority, is leading efforts to protect the continent's oceans. At its helm is Commander Tsietsi Mokhele. By Kerry Dimmer

## What is true for the rest of the world

is also true for Africa – more than 85% of world trade is carried to market by water. For Africa that percentage increases by more than another 5%, with the inclusion of the world's largest inland waterways of an estimated 350 000 km<sup>2</sup>.

South Africa is unique on the continent, surrounded as it is on all three sides by a 3 000 km coastline – the longest of any African country. The entire South African maritime zone totals 4 million square kilometres in assets, making Samsa the most experienced and largest maritime authority in Africa.

Its mandate is to ensure marine safety, environmental protection and facilitate maritime development of the exclusive territorial rights that facilitate fishing and seabed mining for oil, gas and minerals.

Samsa also provides much-needed search and rescue operations to the international community, giving the organisation a reach of 27 million square kilometres, effectively influencing operational performance of maritime across the continent.

'You cannot undervalue the crucial role water transport plays in the development of the economies of all African states,' says Samsa's Commander Tsietsi Mokhele. 'And because the continent has not developed its shipping capacity to any significant extent,

there is enormous economic and monetary wastage and this is particularly tragic for the 16 nations that are landlocked.'

A case in point lies in the limited ability of agricultural producers to transport their goods via neighbouring countries where infrastructure is poor or inefficient. The resulting tendency is to produce and use what they can, and lose the rest. More importantly, the safety and security challenge surrounding water transport limits the amount of trade that Africans can do with other Africans, let alone globally.

This is where Samsa is most effective on the continent. 'Our prime task is to ensure the safety and security of water transportation,' says Mokhele, 'and when you remove the risks associated with ocean transport, you effectively increase the chances of prosperity all the way down the supply chain.'

In terms of the UN shipping laws, coastal states and shipping nations must commit to the protection and safety of the oceans. This includes freedom from pollution, assistance to distressed ships and the protection of sea species. 'In its basic form, coastal states have agreed to certain obligations, laid out by the UN, to ensure these critical protections and in so doing they then acquire the right to use the world oceans to build their own economies,' says Mokhele.

'The mathematics of this is that countries prosper on the basis of sea-borne or ocean trade with the condition that a portion of proceeds made from this will be spent in keeping order at sea.'

It is impossible for the 39 African sea-border nations to avoid such obligations, but as the commander explains, nothing compels a country to use the waterways for economic development, although it may be foolhardy not to take the opportunity.

Given these issues, Samsa has undertaken a number of initiatives on the continent, including raising the awareness of the value of maritime to Africans, so that everyone can take on the responsibility of caring for this natural water heritage.

Somali presents a disturbing case study. The dependence of Somali coastal communities on the ocean resources and their inability to protect it has had devastating consequences. Of major concern is piracy, the depletion of fishing stocks and threats to lives.

'International fleets have illegally dumped tons of waste, inclusive of toxic and nuclear, at a meagre cost US\$2.50 – just 1% of the US\$250 per ton usually charged to dump in legal areas,' says Mokhele. 'When the catastrophic tsunami of 2006 moved the waste into the inland rivers, people were affected and died.'

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Illegal fishing by European and Asian countries further depleted the Somali marine resources, and in combination these disasters gave rise to the dangerous business of piracy.

'The Somalis' lack of capacity to protect their waters created a monster that is now difficult to control. Had the country achieved a balance of cultivating and harvesting economic benefits from the ocean, with proper safety and security measures, the socio-economic rewards would have been evident by the resulting increase in trade and prosperity. Somali proves that if you don't balance the two, you end up in a lot of trouble.'

Samsa is working with the AU to develop an African integrated maritime strategy that addresses issues of economic development by removing maritime security and safety risks. Together with port state agreements, international compliance systems and multilateral instruments, Samsa is changing the maritime face of Africa.

'We participate in multiple ways, bearing in mind that international laws talk to the commonly held heritage of oceans in general, so we function out of multilateral instruments that are binding on all,' says Mokhele.

'Further, we are active in county-to-country relationships that give maximum effect to international obligations, like safety, rescue, environmental protection

and, more importantly, maritime capacity building in Africa, be that information sharing, research or expertise.

'This includes subscribing to an African maritime charter, an agreement between African nations on how to work together in the maritime development arena.'

This means getting involved in many different ways in each nation. For example, with Mozambique and Namibia, Samsa is sharing expertise and training. Tanzania and Kenya benefit from technical expertise on accident reports and investigations, piracy and security issues. With Nigeria, Samsa shares the ambition to push for African maritime development.

The installation of long-range identification and tracking has resulted in Ghana operating off Samsa's infrastructure with applications for the same from Liberia and Ethiopia, and collaborations with North African states working on creating an electronic marine highway through the Mediterranean Sea.

'Ship ID and tracking is vital to smooth operations,' says Mokhele. 'After all, you can't manage what you can't see. Now we can account for not just how many ships are on the seas, but where they are and what they are doing, which also improves response time in perilous situations.'

Aside from African trade, the East and West is vitally dependant on using waters and ports of Africa for enabling trade, situated as it is in the centre of interna-

tional seaways. 'I envision South African ports serving as the international premier shopping mall for global shipping services, be that offloading, restocking or repairs,' says Mokhele. 'This is how we can position South Africa as a global shipping centre with world-class systems, competitive processes and know-how that is required by our stop-over guests.'

In raising the profile of maritime affairs and creating awareness, Samsa will, later this year in September, be hosting the first South African National Maritime Careers Expo and a Maritime Jobs Summit. 'All interested parties and social partners will be coming together to discuss how to create and retain maritime skills and jobs, which may number as many as 400 000,' says Mokhele.

Further, and considering that South Africa is spending an annual estimated US\$5.13 billion to contract foreign shipping transport of its own goods for trade, Samsa will soon be launching an aggressive campaign to rebuild the country's shipping register to carry significant volumes of trade.

'Unless we develop the maritime sector across the entire continent, Africa will not be in a position to grow and sustain the benefits that are beginning to mount from the commodity boom and a growing pool of international investors. Shipping safety, supply security and competitive trade are prime considerations,' says Mokhele. **AD**