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BUSINESS REVIEW - Royal Zambezi Lodge set to boost tourism in Chiawa

By Brian Hatyoka

ZAMBIA'S tourism sector has great potential to enhance foreign earnings for the economy, thereby improving the country's revenue base.

Once fully harnessed, the sector could be one of the major contributors to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). So far, the Zambian Government has recognised the significant economic contribution that tourism contributes to national economic development.

Tourism currently enjoys a second priority status after agriculture, and this commitment is reflected through several strategies that the Government has put in place to support the sector.

Currently, Zambia also enjoys various favourable macro-economic parameters that have attracted investors in the tourism sector. Most business experts are of the view that the current inflation levels and the lending rates obtaining from commercial banks are favourable for investors to conduct business.

It is because of such conducive investment climate that many investors have thought it wise to bring their investment in Zambia. One such investment is the setting up of the Royal Zambezi Lodge based at the Lower Zambezi river in Chiawa area operated by the Chiawa Investments and Development Limited.

About US\$3.2 million has been invested to refurbish the five-star lodge, which created employment for about 100 people during the construction stage.

In this regard, the lodge's contribution to employment and wealth creation in Chiawa area is far-reaching. The local people have welcomed this investment because it will empower them economically.

The development has also cheered them because, apart from ensuring that they have money in their pockets, they will be able to see many other several benefits that will accrue from setting up of such a facility in their area.

This milestone, as far as the pursuit for development in the rural areas is concerned, has not been lost on the local community.

Speaking in Chiawa in an interview, Royal Zambezi director, Philip Pascall, hailed the Government for the favourable investment climate in Zambia.

Mr Pascall, who is First Quantum Minerals chairperson and chief executive officer, said Zambia offered attractive investment opportunities for investors in various sectors of the economy.

"We feel the investment climate in Zambia is favourable and that is why we are able to conduct business here," Mr Pascall said.

And commenting on the refurbishment of the Royal Zambezi Lodge to a five-star lodge, Mr Pascall said the renovated facility would cater for various clientele on the market.

He explained that the lodge was currently offering various activities like game viewing, boat cruise, fishing activities and canoe safari, among others.

However, Mr Pascall called for the improvement of the road network and the airstrips leading to the lodge and other areas in order to woo more tourists.

The setting up of the Royal Zambezi Lodge in Chiawa has a multiplier effect to the communities in the area.

A beaming Chieftainess Chiawa, in whose area the Royal Zambezi Lodge has been established, said in an interview that the establishing of the lodge in her area marked the beginning of an economic boom that would benefit the local people in the area.

She said the massive levels of investment in her area like the one by Royal Zambezi Lodge had added value to the local communities.

The traditional ruler said people in her area would be able to find a ready market and sell their various products to the lodge thereby improving on their income levels.

"This is a great opportunity not only to Chiawa people but also to the nation because the investment will contribute favourably to enhancing the country's revenue base," she said.

She also urged the Government to improve the roads and other infrastructure in tourism-oriented areas to attract more tourists.

The Royal Zambezi Lodge has been operational in Zambia for the past 15 years under different managements.

Its current management under Mr Pascall took over the lodge and started refurbishing it in late 2005.

The result of which has seen an increase in bed capacity to 28 in 14 secluded and luxurious tented suits, as well as four delux chalets spread out along the river bank under the trees.

The Royal Zambezi Lodge also has two treatment rooms, jacuzzi and a refreshing swimming pool.

Ministry of Tourism, Environment and Natural Resources Deputy Minister, Michael Kaingu, commended management at the lodge for refurbishing the facility.

Mr Kaingu urged the lodge proprietors to ensure quality so that more tourists could be attracted to Zambia.

"With this kind of seriousness shown in enhancing tourism in Zambia, I can foresee Zambia becoming a major tourism destination of choice and compete favourably with major tourist giants like South Africa," the deputy minister said.

He said this in Chiawa last Friday in a speech read for him by Lands Minister, Bradford Machila, at the official opening of the refurbished lodge.

He said the refurbishment and upgrading of the Lusaka-Chirundu road and the re-gravelling of the road from Chirundu to the Lower Zambezi National Park were efforts being made by the Government to improve operations in the tourism sector.

"It is, therefore, gratifying to see the private sector partnering with the Government as can be seen from what the Chiawa Investments and Development Limited who have not only invested in the Royal Zambezi Lodge but have also regraded the airstrip," Mr Kaingu said.

The Chiawa Investments and Development Ltd is also helping to build new roads and will soon start constructing a power line.

According to Mr Kaingu, the five-star luxury lodge has opened a way for tourists not only to visit Livingstone and return to their countries, but extend the tourists' stay in Zambia thereby spending more money in the country.

He also said tourism brought a lot of benefits to the communities which included employment, improved standards of living, construction of schools, clinics, boreholes and also in the conservation of forests.

Such efforts being made by the Royal Zambezi Lodge investors to supplement the Government efforts in creating job opportunities to rural communities and improving the tourism sector should be commendable.

There is need for other investors to emulate this good gesture by setting up various investments in the country.

With increased investments in the tourism sector, Zambia is on the firm path to attract additional tourists.

The private sector must also partner with the Government in enhancing infrastructure development if Zambia is to ensure further growth in the tourism sector.

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