

Caleb M Fundanga: Relations between the Embassy of France and the Bank of Zambia

Speech by Dr Caleb M Fundanga, Governor of the Bank of Zambia, at the signing ceremony of the memorandum of understanding between the Embassy of France and the Bank of Zambia, Lusaka, 18 January 2005.

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- Your Excellency, the Ambassador
- Members of the Press
- Distinguished Invited Guests
- Ladies and Gentlemen

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to the signing ceremony of the memorandum of understanding (MoU), governing the conduct of French lessons, between the Embassy of France and the Bank of Zambia.

For some time now, our two institutions have been collaborating closely on the details of this MoU to ensure that it captures the mutual interests and aspirations of our two institutions. Although it has taken a bit of time to complete due to circumstances beyond our control, it is pleasing to note that we are now able to conclude it.

Your Excellency

Let me begin by stating the reason for our existence as a central bank. Our Mission Statement is to, I quote:

“formulate and implement monetary and supervisory policies that ensure price and financial system stability” End of quote.

In order for us to achieve this Mission Statement successfully, we need competent and skilled staff who are able to communicate effectively with a wide range of clientele at international, regional and national fora where the bank's and, indeed, the nation's interests are advanced.

We note that whereas most of our colleagues from Francophone countries are able to speak English fluently, our employees cannot even exchange a simple greeting in French without the aid of an interpreter.

As you are well aware, Your Excellency, Zambia has eight neighbouring countries amongst whom, at least, one is French speaking; two are Portuguese speaking and the rest are Anglophone. As neighbours and countries falling under the same sub-regional and regional groupings, we collaborate a lot amongst ourselves on a number of regional cooperation agreements where inability to speak, read or write French or Portuguese is sometimes a major communication barrier. For instance, in Africa Zambia belongs to three regional groupings, namely SADC, COMESA and the African Union (AU). All these groupings include Francophone member states, and, at times, our interests, as a nation, have not been well articulated to our Francophone counterparts in these regional groupings due, in part, to our inability to communicate effectively in French.

Further, as I stated earlier, Zambia shares a border with one of the largest and populous country in Africa - the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) - where the official language is French. However, in spite of being neighbour to this huge market, Zambian enterprises have not captured the enormous business opportunities offered by the DRC, largely, on account of their inability to communicate effectively in French. The same also applies to Angola where there is a huge reconstruction programme going on, in which Zambian enterprises could participate. But on account of communication barriers, Zambian businesses might not take advantage of our close proximity. This goes to show Your Excellency that our reliance on English as a lingua franca is detrimental to our national interest, especially in our quest to alleviate poverty in our society. In this regard, the need for us to speak, read and write French so that we communicate effectively at the regional and international level cannot be overstressed.

Furthermore, recent developments in the global economy dictate that we should be able to interact effectively at various international fora where appreciation of the cultures, values and customs of other people is important.

Therefore, in view of the foregoing, we, at the Bank of Zambia, have realised that there is a compelling need to overcome our communication barrier by developing our employees' multi-lingual skills, particularly, in French so as to, among other things:

- (i) develop the required patience in their interactions with our non-English speaking counterparts;
- (ii) acknowledge the unique talents and contributions of others;
- (iii) uncover and show concern for the pressures and constraints which others face and modify the demands we may place on them;
- (iv) actively seek facts and data that explain and support others' views and incorporate others' feelings and values when restating their perspectives; and
- (v) reduce the cost of hiring external interpreters which impacts adversely on our limited resources.

Your Excellency

Allow me also to state one issue that is of particular importance to, especially, developing countries, like ours. It has been established that effective national capacity-building requires adoption of international best practices. But for a developing country to benefit from this process effectively it would require citizens who are not only technically competent, but also fluent in writing, reading and speaking major international languages, among which French is key. For this reason, most professionals from Anglophone countries, Zambia inclusive, have failed to secure jobs in international organisations, mainly on account of their inability to communicate in a major international language other than English, such as French, which most often is a requirement for securing employment in international organisations.

In this connection, we are happy to sign this MoU, whose principal objectives are to:

- (a) establish a framework in which the French embassy can facilitate capacity building in the French language among the Bank of Zambia employees;
- (b) promote multi-cultural awareness and appreciation of a diversity of languages necessary for bank staff to transact effectively and efficiently in social and professional fora where the knowledge of French would be beneficial; and
- (c) enhance opportunities for bilateral and/or multilateral co-operation between the Bank and relevant French-speaking authorities and clients.

Notwithstanding the above, the French lessons programme is a very challenging one to our staff in that students are not only required to attend, at least, 90 per cent of class work conducted twice a week for two hours, but are also required to take examinations every ten (10) weeks; implying that only those employees who succeed in the examinations are allowed to proceed to the next advanced level.

Your Excellency

Following the commencement of the French lessons, I am pleased to inform you that this programme has already started showing encouraging results, as evidenced by the fact that at the end of the first segment of the beginners' course, all those who took the examinations passed and are progressing to the next stage. The results could have been even better had all the 78 enrolled students attended tuition and taken the examination as scheduled.

Let me also clarify here that some employees missed the examinations due to the call of duty and not out of lack of commitment. In this regard, I wish to assure Your Excellency that as a sign of commitment on the part of individual employees and the bank, a crush programme has been put in place to enable those who missed the first examination to sit for it and catch up with the rest of the class by April this year.

Further, may I also take this opportunity to inform Your Excellency that our French lessons programme has become so popular among staff that we are sponsoring another class of beginners and six (6) more staff with appreciable knowledge of the language at the Alliance Française.

Finally, I will be remiss in my speech if I did not thank Your Excellency for the assistance we have continued to receive in form of:

- (i) meeting the full cost of hiring two tutors from Alliance Française - Lusaka and Ndola;
- (ii) supply of study materials;
- (iii) coordination of examinations; and, most importantly,
- (iv) your unwavering moral support.

To this end, we, at the Bank do sincerely believe that although this MoU will expire in September 2005, its legacy shall linger on and that the signing of this MoU will further cement the cordial relations existing between the Embassy of France and the Bank.

I thank you.