

A vigorous Angola springs back to life

Country focuses on maritime infrastructure as the pathway to national development

Ten years ago, Angola was in a desperate situation: Years of civil war and political instability had ravaged the country and depleted its resources, while its infrastructure was in tatters.

Today, however, this South-west African nation is poles apart from that world, with rebuilding, rehabilitation, and foreign investment programs

— most notably from China — helping it revitalize.

Angola is in the middle of a transformation process and, as is the case with any country whose economy is based on the export of goods that are in global demand, it needs to invest in its transport network to expedite its international trade.

The maritime infrastructure is the entry-exit point of nearly

all of Angola's trade, so it is the key to the national development plan.

Minister of Transport Augusto Tomás has explained, "Our ports and our entire maritime system, including all the logistics associated with international trade, are the determining factor in our economy."

Tomás went on to say that, "Countries that do not invest in infrastructure, and in particular their ports, will fall behind in international competition."

These remarks have a special resonance in Angola's case: It has a long coastline and many marine advantages, and it is fully aware of the fact that it needs to take advantage of them.

Shipping is of course the mode of choice when it comes to exporting crude oil and minerals that finance the government's rebuilding program. However those importing essential goods like foodstuffs and medicines also rely on shipping, and increasingly ports are the point of entry for the vast



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Angola's main challenge is now to change the ports into real transit areas — not just storage locations.

amount of construction materials the country needs.

So, the country's aim is to make marine transportation more efficient, while reducing the cost of importing and exporting, for both domestic

and foreign companies.

Tomás pointed out that, "The Transport Ministry has a number of objectives that we must reach. We must support the growth of maritime transport while cutting the cost of goods

entering and leaving Angola. And, we must continue down the path of investing in new and emerging ports that bring with them modern, efficient infrastructure and practices."

Thanks to its coastline, it is

easy to understand why, in addition to wanting to improve the movement of goods for its own purposes, Angola is also looking to become a regional supplier for neighboring landlocked countries.



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AUGUSTO TOMÁS
MINISTER OF TRANSPORT



IMPA: The force behind improvements

After all the major people involved in Angola's maritime industry clearly recognized the need to make improvements and the need to get more investment, only two questions remained: Who would lead the charge, and how would they do that?

Four years ago, this task was given to Angola's Maritime and Ports Institute (IMPA).

This independent entity was established precisely for the purpose of coordinating and administering Angola's maritime businesses, covering all the harbormaster duties and port operations, transport, and a range of related maritime and logistics activities.

IMPA does report to the Transport Ministry, it is true,

but it retains complete control of its own management, finances, and assets and is fast becoming the driving force behind the maritime sector's massive rebuilding projects and investment initiatives.

Victor de Carvalho, an engineer and director-general of IMPA, can be quite vocal about his organization's role in seeing to it that Angola's growth is not hindered by logistical problems.

He is adamant in saying that the maritime industry must shape up and prepare for the future.

"Our ports have a fundamental role in making our economy more dynamic. The more modern they are, the more modern our approach and efficiency in operations, and the better our equipment and services will be. Our contribution to a better, stronger Angolan economy will be all the more significant," de Carvalho explained.

Two years ago, it was decided

that some serious reforms were needed, and IMPA has worked hard, since then, to get Angola's ports on the path to world-class competence and competitiveness.

One early example of its reach and influence was when it worked together with the port of Luanda, and in partnership with stakeholders, to cut the amount of government red tape that was halting the import process.

In fact, IMPA's intervention sped up the handling and processing of materials that were vitally needed for reconstruction programs.

Preparing the industry

IMPA has worked hard to get the industry prepared for the future and has seen many improvements since its relatively recent beginning.

Congestion was a stumbling block at the port of Luanda and hindering trade

so IMPA forced the operators to comply with regulations, thereby relieving the congestion.

IMPA has concrete objectives and makes certain that they are followed. De Carvalho explained, "We do not allow either the ports or the operators to get distracted. We make all of them follow the rules."

He also supervised the building of more terminals and other facilities at the port, including a dry terminal.

In supporting the government's reconstruction program, IMPA has come up with many ways to improve conditions across the country. From work on existing ports to new port operations, it is heavily involved at all stages of the development.

The port of Cabinda will eventually get a new deepwater terminal, while some facilities at Lobito have been expanded or improved, with a dry port and a

pier to facilitate offloading.

The ports at Soyo and Namibe are also getting some much needed investment.

In addition, there are plans for a new port at Barra do Dande, in Bengo province, next to Luanda.

"With new ports such as the one we're building in Dande and deepwater terminals such as the one in Cabinda, we're creating a modern infrastructure that is the rival of any facility, anywhere," de Carvalho said.

Chinese investment

Another development that IMPA is really pleased with is the positive involvement of the Chinese companies and investment.

In fact, many of these initiatives would not have got anywhere were it not for the Chinese involvement.

It was the Chinese who made the work at Cabinda possible, and the projects at the port of

Lobito are the result of a line of Chinese credit.

At the same time, as de Carvalho pointed out, "These improvements also provide more opportunities for Chinese companies in the future."

One new opportunity has already proven interesting for the Chinese — the possibility of creating a maritime passenger-transport network in Luanda, with eight terminals serviced by catamarans, according to an Angolan government study.

China has a history of maritime activities and there are possibilities for Chinese involvement in education, training, and research in that sector.

And there are still other areas of possible interest to China that de Carvalho believes will provide opportunities.

After all, "China is contributing enormously to our country," he concluded.



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VICTOR DE CARVALHO
DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF IMPA



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