

## Note of the visit to Zambia Statistics Agency (Zamstat) and the Avani Victoria Falls resort – the venue for the Zambia 2020 IAOS conference in May 2020.

### **Tuesday 12 November:**

We arrived on time into Kenneth Kaunda International Airport in Lusaka at 12:30 local time (GMT+2). Although the airport was busy, we purchased our visas at immigration which for us was quite straightforward as we had cash available (USD). The credit card processing machine at the immigration desk was not working and several tourists were being turned away to find alternative cash – I would advise travellers to have some USD with them on arrival. Zambian Kwacha can only be obtained in country.

Our first meeting was with Aine Ni Shuilleabhain, the DfID economic advisor for Zambia at the British high Commission. We were able to share with her our main objectives and some background on why Zambia should be the host for the 2020 IAOS conference.

Our next meeting was with Sheila Mudenda assistant Director and National Statistics Development Strategy Coordinator at Zamstat and head of the local organising committee for the IAOS conference and her assistant Petronella Kaputu Sabi from the Zamstat gender statistics unit to discuss our busy agenda for the following days.

### **Wednesday 13 November**

We arrived at Zamstat for an 08:30 am meeting with the Interim Statistician General (ISG) Mr Mulenga J J Musepa, Mr Goodson Sinyenga (former acting Director) and Sheila Mudenda. Mr Musepa began discussions with his appreciation that Zamstat are hosting the 2020 IAOS conference, the first of this type in Zambia. He is keen to use the success of the conference to help him strengthen the importance of statistics with the Zambian Government and to encourage their investment in the future. He touched briefly on some of the plans Zamstat have to develop their National Statistical System and achieve a more coordinated approach for producing official statistics across all the regions in Zambia. He also gave an insight into some of the good preparatory work being carried out for their Census and how they were overcoming the challenges of collecting data across each province.

Mr Sinyenga explained that good progress was being made with the conference organisation. He also provided an overview of the latest (second) National Statistics Development Strategy (NSDS2) which will focus on the coordination of statistical production across twelve distinct sectors, which is a new approach for Zamstat.

At 09:30 we met with Sheila Mudenda to discuss progress with the conference organisation. We agreed that the timing of communications around the conference will be very important over the next couple of weeks and Sheila was hopeful to have all the necessary communications in place and ready for publication by the end of the year. Some practical support on the ground would be needed and we felt Oliver Chinganya (UNECA) may be able to help facilitate this.

At 10:00 we met with Sheila and some of the Zamstat experts involved in the local organising team including Mr Frisco Mponela the Chief Accountant. Zamstat confirmed that they are confident about setting up the online registration process which could be hosted in-house. Both John and Sheila agreed to monitor the conference budget closely and ensure transparency.

We shared advice on the call for papers and suggested the need to encourage submissions from within Zamstat and other Zambian agencies. There was specific interest in the themes of skills for Africa in the era of data and statistics making a difference in public health prevention and cure. A paper or session on Big Data would be another key area of interest to Zamstat. Sheila suggested that a side event or training opportunity on drafting papers/posters/reports would be useful – this could be something to pick up with Oliver Chinganya and discuss further.

We considered the conference registration process and how this might be designed and managed. Zamstat confirmed that they could design and implement an online registration process in-house which could be hosted on their website and ready in time for January registration. Wi-Fi arrangements at the conference venue were also considered and Zamstat seemed confident that negotiating a suitable band width specifically for delegates use would not be a problem. (Avani resort also indicated this would be possible)

Our next meeting at 11:30 was with Mr Mulele Maketo Mulele of the Ministry of National Development Planning, which is situated within the same complex as Zamstat. Mr Mulele was very encouraged with the development of the conference planning. Mr Mulele also asked Sheila to add two additional Ministry representatives to the local organising committee – Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Monitoring and Evaluation. Mr Mulele suggested that he could lobby some specific African countries to attend through his connections with the SDG Centre for Africa, which is based in Rwanda, but has a regional presence in Zambia. He seemed positive that sponsorship opportunities would be possible through his Ministerial contacts, suggested articles in inflight magazines ahead of the conference and to approach MTN Zambia to sponsor SIM cards etc.

Sheila then took us to the University of Zambia School of Humanities and Social Sciences to meet with Dr Musonda Lemba, senior lecturer, researcher and consultant for demography and social science research. It was a very busy time for Dr Lemba as the university was in the peak of their exam timetable, but he was open to encouraging students and members of the faculty to submit papers or posters and to enter the Young Statisticians Prize competition. He felt the themes and topics being considered for the conference were long overdue and hosting the conference in Zambia could be a ground-breaking opportunity. He was particularly interested in the application of statistics beyond the public sector and seemed keen to investigate how graduates were using demography statistics in their working environment. He highlighted that there had been a decline in student take up for demography and economics as their preference appeared to be for non-numerical degrees such as law, which he felt identified a need to 'demystify statistics'. He liked the idea of holding a side event on statistical literacy in or near the university, or the possibility of live-streaming some of the conference sessions for students. Sheila agreed to follow up some of the discussions with relevant association heads.

We also met with several professors of mathematics whilst we were at the university. We discussed the recruitment rate in mathematics (low but rising) and ideas for student collaboration before and after the conference – IAOS student membership, journal articles and sustainable skills development. They agreed that this was an important opportunity to improve the relationships between the University and Zamstat. They were also keen to increase the current 1% of student applications for mathematics in their first year. Sheila agreed to provide them with further communication material and to consider how the University might have input into the IAOS Scientific Programme Committee. We recognised that there would be resource issues for students intending to participate in the conference and agreed to consider potential priority for Zambian students.

## **Thursday 14 November**

We took a short flight from Lusaka to Livingstone to view the conference venue facilities at the Avani Victoria Falls resort. The resort has 212 rooms and suites and is situated directly within the Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park which means guests share the grounds with Zebra, Impala, Gibbons and Giraffe. A code will be offered to delegates choosing to stay at this resort for a reduced rate. The resort staff were welcoming, and the facilities offered look to be very suitable for the planned conference itinerary. The combination of available plenary and parallel rooms were of a good size with delegates not having to walk too far to get from room to room. There was a human resources conference taking place during our visit with approx 200 attending delegates, but the resort didn't appear to be overly busy or crowded. The car parks very close to the resort (10m) could be used for air-conditioned marquees to hold some parallel IAOS sessions. The event manager at Avani seemed to be very competent and experienced in hosting events such as this. He was able to confidently answer all our questions about wi-fi, presentation screens, translation, sound proofing, refreshments etc. Sheila will continue to liaise closely with the events team at Avani.

Whilst at the Avani we met with the representative from the Zambia Tourist Agency and discussed a variety of packages that could be considered for conference delegates. A list of available Hotels surrounding the Avani resort was being prepared with help from the tourist agency to negotiate reduced rates. There appeared to be one major road into the resort with most of the hotels located along the way, so a shuttle bus for delegates not staying at Avani seemed to be a straightforward possibility. Access to the Victoria Falls is free for Avani guests, but non-residents would need to pay a fee of \$20 USD. There were several options available for local game drives at delegates own expense.

We were fortunate to be able to take a short walk after our meetings to the Victoria Falls (5 mins walk from the Avani's exclusive gate). Due to the drought conditions there was little water flowing over the falls, but it was still an impressive sight. Hopefully by May next year the falls will be in full flow.

## **Friday 15 November**

After a final meeting with Sheila to run through our check list, we left the Avani resort for our flight back to the UK via Johannesburg. Livingstone airport is new and modern, fairly small but seemed very efficient. Visas can be purchased directly on arrival into Livingstone airport as they were for Lusaka.

Jo Green

21 November, 2019