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Building Beyond Distance

In a vast country with a finite purse, every road, runway and port has to be built to last.

Dear Michelangelo readers,

I was born in Otshitutuma village in the Omusati Region during Headmanship of Tatekulu Johanness Gweshuku. It was a very different Namibia then, so too, a different village. Our population was estimated at just over 900,000 people, independence was more than twelve years away, and the nation we know today was still waiting to be born.

Nearly fifty years later, much has changed. The country we inherited is no longer a promise waiting to happen -it is our reality and our responsibility. We owe it to those who sacrificed for this land to build with precision, and we owe it to those who follow, to leave behind something that lasts.

Our population has tripled within a single lifetime, yet Namibia remains one of the most sparsely populated nations on Earth, with roughly 3.7 people per square kilometre. That sounds like a statistic until you try to build roads, schools, hospitals, power networks, and economic opportunity across 824,000 square kilometres. Then it becomes a stark national reality. We are building a vast country with a relatively small population and a strictly finite national purse.

Every Namibian dollar must work hard. Our national road network stretches across approximately 48,538 kilometres, which is enough to circle the Earth and keep going.

Etosha National Park offers a clear, practical picture of what this takes. Between 2019 and 2023, we spent approximately N\$164 million rehabilitating just under 276 kilometres of roads inside the park. That is the stubborn economics of gravel: you grade it, the rain comes, the traffic comes, the corrugations return, and eventually, so does the grader.

When we evaluate upgrading critical routes to sealed roads, the question cannot simply be, *What will it cost to build?* We must also ask, *What will it cost not to?* Sometimes the higher initial investment today is the far cheaper path over twenty years.

Of course, doing this responsibly brings its own hurdles. Environmental assessments, regulatory processes, and feasibility studies matter because our heritage requires protection and future generations deserve well-considered decisions. But the future does not stand still while we complete another report. Our task is to protect what we have without delaying what we need.

A road in Namibia transcends gravel and asphalt to form part of a crucial economic chain. A single visitor who stays at a lodge in Etosha supports an airline, an airport, a car rental agency, a fuel station, a guide, a restaurant, a conservancy,

an artisan, and a local farmer. Most of these people will never meet, yet economically, they sit at the very same table. Investment in transport infrastructure reaches far beyond the road itself.

That same ambition drives our work beyond our borders. The Trans-Kalahari Corridor extends for over 1,900 kilometres, and the Walvis Bay–Ndola–Lubumbashi Corridor reaches 2,500 kilometres into Southern Africa. Our domestic market may be compact, but our economic reach does not have to be.

Walvis Bay is perhaps our finest example of refusing to let geography dictate potential. When expansion was required for a modern container terminal and no land existed, we reclaimed 40 hectares from the Atlantic Ocean and built strategic infrastructure where there was once only sea, more than doubling container capacity. Tell a Namibian there is an obstacle, and before long, someone is asking where we can build the solution.

We bring that determination to our regional rail links and the expansion of our aviation network. Aviation, in particular, demands a human perspective. Namibia's vastness is one of our greatest privileges, but distance extracts a cost. Time with the people we love is our most precious commodity. Expanding air access and opening new routes does more than link destinations. It shrinks distance, giving time back to our people.

Ultimately, infrastructure is a statement of faith. It tells an investor: *you can reach a market*. It tells a traveler: *you can reach the experience*. It tells an entrepreneur: *your business can grow beyond the town where it was born*. and most importantly, it tells every Namibian, whether in a bustling urban centre, a homestead in Omusati, or a remote settlement in Karas, *that distance will not be allowed to decide their destiny*.

Welcome to the Land of the Brave. Enjoy the journey. 🌍