

Swaziland Railway

Loliwe Magazine Article: - S.Z. Ngubane, Chief Executive Officer

When the 2016/17 Financial Year started we had revenue and tonnage figures at the same level as the previous year. The global low demand for commodities especially minerals coupled with prices that had dropped by 65% a year ago, made one predict tough times ahead. As a transporter or carrier we depend on what is produced locally for exports, from neighboring countries and the SADC region passing through Swaziland, we equally depend on what is consumed locally in the form of imports such as fuel and other finished goods. The severe drought, never experienced in decades, sealed the gloomy picture and indeed Swaziland Railway was affected when informed by the Swaziland Sugar Association (SSA) about a reduction in export volumes by 50%.

The performance of the 1st quarter (April to June) turned out completely different from the budget estimates. The quarterly budget in terms of profit was estimated to be a loss but luckily we made profit. Imports were very strong and exceeded budget so was transit traffic. Transit traffic was 36% above budget, imports 8% but unfortunately exports, dominated by sugar, were below budget by 22%. This level of performance has given hope that the year will be better than originally anticipated. We have also got to know that the demand for commodities is improving and have seen this through the rise in the export of coal through Maputo which had stopped in the past two years. The commodity prices have also increased from as low as US \$ 50 to US \$ 70, which is a big relief. The bulk commodities such as minerals are the ideal traffic for rail because rail strives on volumes and the available capacity is hungry for large quantities of cargo.

Safety of operations

During the quarter there were no major accidents that would have resulted in line closures. We are always concerned about accidents because they rob us capacity and are a financial drain. The effort of the SHEQ Section working with all departments is commendable, we have seen the weekly safety tips dissemination and I believe it is effective in raising awareness to each and every employee.

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Safety is a state of mind, when you think safety in all activities you are very likely to complete whatever process without an incident. Accidents hit you unaware but if you are alert they shy away, if you drive a car try to think about arriving safely at your destination by driving in full alert and you will arrive safely but if your attention is divided by chatting with passengers, using the phone or being distracted by side attraction including lady human being the probability of an accident is very high. The other aspect in operating trains safely is preparedness for your trip or shift, you must be well rested and have peace at home. We appeal to family members to support Train Personnel by keeping down noise level of any kind in the home, be it music or the human loud speaker. We particularly encourage spouses or partners to be considerate and caring, know the right time to report incidents, for example, allow the shift worker to relax first, refresh and rest before bombarding him/her with depressing reports. When a shift worker is resting/sleeping you do not wake him/her up when Malume has come or Babe loMKHULU, just let those relatives wait until he wakes up at the end of his /her sleep/rest. Even the Mother-in-Law has no right to wake up Mkhwenyana whatever the issue (including lobola debt).

Competitive Advantage

With the 1st Quarter excellent performance from a projected loss to a surplus, we are fired to maintain this level of performance but it depends on you and me. Every employee must come prepared to give his/her best, be in good health physically and mentally. Maputo Harbour is always ready to slash off the business through Swaziland and if we relax they will topple us anytime. We must prevent train delays by reporting for duty on time and making sure trains do not lose time along the way. We must work safely at all times, think about safety and be safe.