Africa has many ingredients of industrial success. To unleash this potential, African countries must embark on aggressive agenda through public and private partnerships to enhance the industrial transformation. Through industrialisation, African countries can create jobs, improve environment, provide education, and enhance trade between countries as envisaged in the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

To witness part of the Industrialisation efforts in the Southern part of Africa, The Trade Law Centre (tralac) organised an industrial visit on 17th May 2024 for more than 70 participants who were attending the annual Alumni conference training in Lusaka, Zambia. The tralac Alumni participants represented from 33 African Countries visited to two companies based in MFEZ and Lusaka Provincial Office. The industrial yard, is the Zambia hub of economic transformation through inclusive industrialisation, job creation and value addition.

The tralac alumni visited the Trade Kings Group, a regional player in soap and detergent production. The Zambia owned company serves over 250 million consumers from 9 countries which translates to about 20% of the sub Saharan population.
The company started in 1992 with one local brand and has increased its production and diversified its products to serve the growing markets. Currently the company has capacity to produce detergent powders of about 1800 tonnes per week which are packaged in 12 different brands, household care products about 433 tonnes per week which are packaged in 11 brands, paste which is produced 570 tonne per week and repackaged in 8 different brands and soaps packaged 500 tonnes per week which are repackaged into 15 different brands.

In 2020, amidst the Covid 19 pandemic, the company witnessed growth through its ground breaking of the construction of the MFEZ homecare site which comprise of a 15 tonnes per hour detergent tower amongst other homecare business units, to be followed later by the commissioning of its sodium silicate production plant in 2022.
Speaking to the tralac alumni present, the Trade Kings homecare limited Head of manufacturing Panganai Chatapura said over 83% Sodium silicate inputs are locally sourced from the country therefore supporting the supply chain which instrumentally impacts Zambian communities and livelihoods. A small percentage of the materials i.e. soda ash is imported from Kenya and China. The majority of its packaging material is made in-house. Currently the company employs 2500 people out of which 1750 are permanent employees while the rest are casual labourers.

In a bid to support its production capacity, the company is segmented into several business units which include soap business unit, detergents, plastic, household goods, detergent, paste, silicate mill factory, boilers plant and finished goods warehouse.

Trade kings is Zambia’s biggest fast moving consumer goods company and also exports to nine African countries under the existing COMESA and SACU trade regimes. The company Group Corporate Affairs Director, Phil Daka says the company is also taking advantage of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) amidst the identified challenges such as Non-tariff Barriers (NTBs). He noted most of the African countries support through ratification but only small percentage of the countries are following the treaties due to protectionism. Most of the companies, businesses associations in Zambia are engaging in open door discussions to address some of the identified issues that hinder trading between countries to enhance business growth.

The Company faces energy challenges caused by the electricity rationing currently experienced in the country as well as water supply due to climate change conditions which have affected the region leading to drought. Some of the mitigation strategies the company is exploring include solar installation and sinking water boreholes to supplement existing water sources.

Big Tree Beverage Company MFEZ Lusaka, Zambia
The tralac Alumni participants also visited the Big Tree Beverage Ltd, a Trade Kings Group sister company located in the MFEZ industrial yard. The company is fully industrialised with top notch equipment and machinery to support the 27 beverage brands which include water and other carbonated products. One of the machines produces 15,000 thousand bottles per hour which supports the huge demand of beverages in the country.

The company has several labs in place that observe local and international regulations to ensure high quality standards in the production of the consumable products.

The industrial visit is a testament that African countries have capacity to industrialise and promote economic development in all countries.
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