



## Circular letter No. 1 – July 2025

By Rainer Kašik - Vocational training needs infrastructure

An assignment from Comundo

## Designing Futures in Namibia – Infrastructure for Skills and Opportunity



Good vocational training thanks to improved infrastructure

### Dear Friends and Family, Acquaintances and Supporters

A few months ago, I embarked on a new professional chapter in Namibia – this time in the remote Zambezi Region, based in Katima Mulilo. Drawing on my background in architecture and urban development, my assignment with Comundo focuses on strengthening vocational education through better infrastructure, in close cooperation with local education authorities. This first newsletter offers you a window into my daily work, the living and working conditions in Katima Mulilo, and the partnerships that make our progress possible. Beyond my professional role, I have also experienced significant personal changes, which I am excited to share. I hope this update offers you a vivid picture of life and work in northern Namibia.

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### Arrival in Katima Mulilo

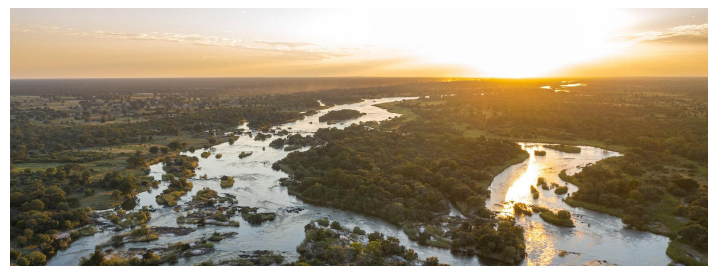
Katima Mulilo, my new place of assignment, lies in the Zambezi Region, formerly the Caprivi Strip. This narrow strip stretches eastward between Angola, Zambia, Botswana, and Zimbabwe, nearly reaching Victoria Falls. The region has a tropical climate and, with its hot and humid conditions, is among the wettest areas of Namibia. During the rainy season from December to March, rainfall is significantly higher than in central Namibia; large portions of the terrain consist of swamps, floodplains, and dense bushland. As a result, the landscape here differs substantially from the comparatively dry surroundings of Rundu, where I was previously based.

**Lush and Untouched Wilderness!**  
The former Caprivi Strip (today's Zambezi Region) is home to an abundance of wildlife, birdlife, fish species, and lush vegetation that is not typical of the generally arid Namibia. It is wild, unfenced, and untamed and in the former Caprivi, you can get a taste of the real Africa.

The wide Zambezi River shapes the townscape of Katima Mulilo – it flows steadily past the town and serves as a vital water source for the region. Even during the dry season (currently, in the local winter, with pleasant daytime temperatures of around 28°C), the Zambezi continues to flow and remains a lifeline for people and wildlife alike. Along its banks and surrounding national parks, one frequently encounters hippos, crocodiles, elephants, buffalo, antelope, and a rich variety of bird species – an unusually high level of biodiversity by Namibian standards. The proximity to wilderness is something I experience in everyday life here.

Katima Mulilo has a population of about 30,000 and, as the regional capital, serves as the economic and administrative centre of the Zambezi Region. Compared to Rundu (Namibia's second-largest town after Windhoek), Katima feels quieter and more village-like. The town centre is modest, with markets, small shops, and a few simple restaurants. Colonial architectural influences are largely absent; the town has a distinctly African character. Infrastructure remains basic: while main roads are paved, many side streets are still sandy tracks. A distinctive feature is the nearly 900-meter-long bridge, completed in 2004, that connects Katima with Sesheke in Zambia, facilitating regional trade and travel.

Although Katima has a small airport with a few weekly flights to Windhoek, the town's remoteness is tangible in everyday life. Goods are often more expensive or temporarily unavailable due to long supply chains—Windhoek lies 1,250 km away. Power outages and water supply issues also require a degree of improvisation, but after four years in Rundu, I've grown accustomed to these conditions. Despite such limitations, everyday life works, and people have adapted with remarkable resilience and pragmatism.



Zambezi Region ([www.namibiaexperience.com](http://www.namibiaexperience.com))

On a personal level, my arrival has been both exciting and enriching. I was warmly welcomed by my colleagues and predecessor, who helped me settle in. The local language, Silozi, is new to me. Unlike Rukwangali and other languages spoken in Rundu, Silozi is heard everywhere here – it functions as a lingua franca among various ethnic groups.





**Circular letter No. 1 – July 2025**

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It is used alongside English in schools, media, and public institutions. I've already picked up a few greetings and everyday expressions – much to the amusement of my Namibian colleagues, who kindly support me in improving my pronunciation. While English remains the official working language, understanding Silozi is invaluable in daily interactions, whether at the market or in informal conversations. The warm hospitality of the people has greatly eased my transition. While I noticed regional cultural differences, I gradually got to know this new place's distinct identity, rhythm, and atmosphere step by step.

I was initially assigned to the Professional Development unit, where I support the Senior Education Officer responsible for vocational education. From the outset, I was welcomed as an equal team member, not an external expert giving instructions. This collaborative and respectful approach aligns with Comundo's values and has been well received by my Namibian colleagues.

My project focuses on improving vocational education infrastructure over three years (February 2025 to January 2028). While Comundo has previously supported the development of vocational education curricula and content in the region, the current emphasis lies in creating an enabling physical environment: workshops, practical classrooms, and the appropriate tools and equipment necessary for hands-on learning.

At many schools, these resources are lacking. Vocational subjects are often theoretically taught, with few or no facilities available for practical application. As an architect and infrastructure planner, I support the Directorate in developing sustainable, cost-effective solutions appropriate to the local context and implemented in close coordination with relevant stakeholders.

Together with the Directorate, we have identified several priority schools and begun with needs assessments. We examined existing infrastructure during site visits and met with school staff to identify their most pressing challenges. Based on these findings, I will work on a series of project proposals—including constructing new workshops, renovating existing classrooms, or improving tool inventories and equipment.

Realising these proposals will require close cooperation with the Directorate's Planning and Development Department. One of the main challenges remains funding: the annual education budget is limited, and many planned interventions



*Caprivi Strip (Zambezi Region)*

## New Role at the Zambezi Directorate of Education, Arts and Culture

My assignment in Katima Mulilo forms part of my broader commitment as a Comundo co-worker. I am based at the regional Directorate of Education, Arts and Culture (DoEAC), which serves as the local branch of the Namibian Ministry of Education. The Directorate oversees over 100 schools and around 42,000 learners, supported by approximately 1,700 teachers.



## Circular letter No. 1 – July 2025

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depend on securing additional resources or identifying cost-efficient alternatives. Solutions must therefore be practical, locally grounded, and maintainable in the long term. Key questions, therefore, guide the approach:

- What construction materials are readily available locally?
- How can buildings be designed for low-cost maintenance?
- In what ways can schools and communities be involved in the process to foster ownership and responsibility?

This participatory and context-sensitive approach takes time and requires coordination, but it is essential for ensuring long-term usability and sustainability.

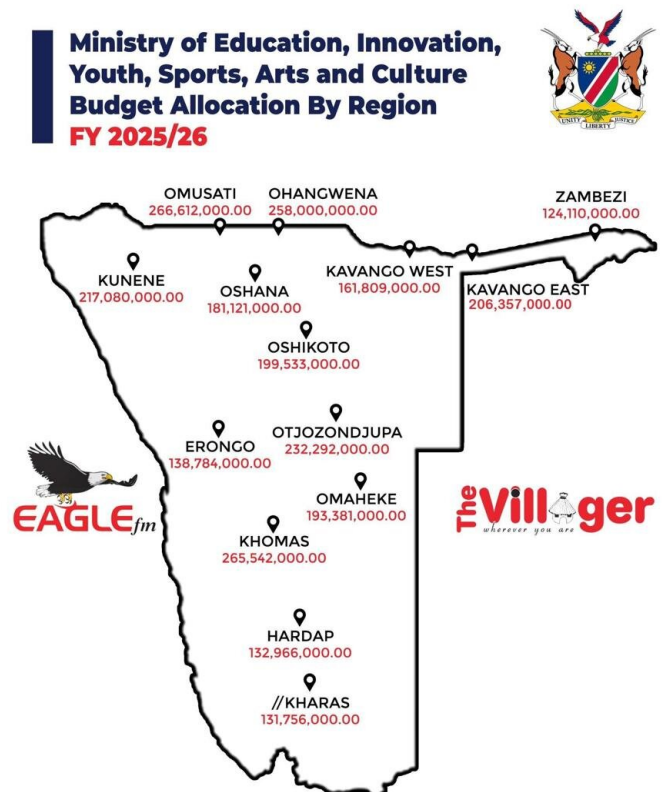
Over the past few months, I have visited both urban and remote schools, including some near the Botswana border. These school visits have highlighted the stark contrast between ambition and available resources. There is a strong motivation to strengthen vocational education, but material constraints often limit implementation. Nevertheless, we are laying the foundations for tangible progress. I remain optimistic: with the combined commitment of the regional authorities, school communities, and Comundo's support, we can take meaningful steps forward, towards a more practical, inclusive, and forward-looking educational landscape in the Zambezi Region.

## Educational Reality in the Zambezi Region

The Zambezi Region is among the most structurally disadvantaged areas in Namibia. Many families rely on subsistence farming or fishing, and opportunities for formal employment are limited. Youth unemployment exceeds 40% nationally and is likely even higher in this region. At the same time, nearly 40% of Namibian

drop out of school—two closely linked statistics: limited educational opportunities contribute to unemployment, and unemployment weakens the incentive to stay in school.

The Namibian government has acknowledged these structural challenges. As a result, education receives a comparatively high share of national public expenditure. However, vocational education and training (VET) remains underdeveloped. A dual system, such as those found in Switzerland or Austria, which combines classroom instruction with hands-on training in the workplace, does not exist in Namibia. This leaves many young people who do not pursue university studies with few viable career pathways. The consequences are visible: youth unemployment remains high, and many young people migrate to larger cities for work, further exacerbating rural brain drain and causing a shortage of skilled labour at the local level.





## Circular letter No. 1 – July 2025

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In recent years, vocational training has increasingly been recognised as a key strategy to interrupt this cycle. In the Zambezi Region, 24 schools offer practical subjects such as agriculture, home economics, or basic construction skills. Additionally, the Zambezi Vocational Training Centre (ZVTC) in Katima Mulilo offers structured vocational training programmes. These encouraging developments show a growing policy shift towards recognising practical skills training as essential.

What has particularly impressed me in the past weeks is the strong motivation of many learners. Some students walk several kilometres to school each day, often arriving hungry, yet still eager to learn. Disciplinary problems are rare, and their enthusiasm and commitment reflect the high value they and their families place on education, even under challenging conditions.

Nonetheless, considerable obstacles remain: inadequate infrastructure, a shortage of learning materials, and understaffed rural schools continue to limit educational access and quality. Yet there is a growing sense of momentum. Suppose we succeed in strengthening vocational education and aligning it more effectively with local labour market needs. In that case, we can help to reduce youth unemployment, offer young people concrete prospects, and contribute to the empowerment and resilience of local communities.



*School Interior in the Zambezi Region*

## Encounters and Cooperation

I was introduced to the Regional Director and Deputy Director of Education upon arrival. Both welcomed me with interest and expressed appreciation for the technical expertise that Comundo contributes. The Director, Mr. Alex Sikume, is a dynamic local leader with experience at the national level. He emphasised the importance of external support in addressing the region's educational challenges. His deputy, Mrs. Norah Munembo, an experienced education administrator, also signalled her enthusiasm for collaboration.

Together, we are addressing several cross-cutting infrastructure challenges:

- Decongesting overcrowded schools, especially in Katima Mulilo
- Clarifying land titles for schools in rural areas
- Planning and implementing renovation projects for facilities in disrepair

I am formally assigned to Mrs. Elizabeth Nchindo, the Senior Education Officer for Vocational Education. Unlike my predecessor, I work with her less frequently. Her extensive experience and deep familiarity with the region's schools mean she requires relatively little support in her day-to-day responsibilities. Nevertheless, we will collaborate closely on the major Kapani project. This initiative involves repurposing former housing units for Chinese road workers into a technical training school, and includes site evaluation, design adaptation, and integration into the broader regional educational strategy.

My work has shifted increasingly toward collaboration with the Planning and Development Department,





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particularly with Mr. Nestor Sibeya, Chief Education Officer, Mr. Sydney Muyaukwa, Planning Officer, and Mr. Matongo Likukela, Chief Works Inspector for Building and Maintenance.

These collaborative efforts are demanding and essential for the long-term improvement of the region's educational infrastructure.

The team culture within the Directorate is respectful, though formal and hierarchical. Major decisions require approval from senior management, and internal processes can sometimes be lengthy. To help clarify my role and streamline workflows, I am preparing a "Get an Impression" presentation for late July. This presentation—part of a broader Comundo format for introducing assignments—will present my initial findings, outline planned activities, and support more precise coordination with other departments.

In addition, I regularly participate in the monthly PQA (Planning, Quality Assurance, and Advisory) meetings, which provide a valuable platform for progress updates, coordination, and interdepartmental exchange. I have been included in these meetings—a gesture of trust and openness that I value highly.

Of course, occasional frustrations arise, particularly due to limited financial resources and the slowness of bureaucratic procedures. In such situations, I try to act as a mediator, offering realistic alternatives and helping navigate institutional constraints. My position as an external advisor allows me to provide a constructive perspective while maintaining balance and respect for local processes.

## Personal Note about the Wedding

On a personal note: In March 2025, Selma and I were married in Windhoek at the Katutura Magistrate Court. After four years together in Rundu, where we shared our lives with her children – Kauto, Nassymani, and Kathale

– as well as her extended family, including Sister Siku and Brother Gideon, we decided it was time to formalise our partnership. While practical considerations such as visa matters and legal status certainly played a role, it also felt like a natural step after all we had experienced and built together.

Selty and the children remain in Rundu, primarily due to school and work obligations. We visit each other as often as possible – not easy, given the more than 500 kilometres, but the long-distance bus connection makes it manageable.

This civil ceremony is not intended to substitute for a traditional Ovambo wedding in Outapi, Selty's hometown. We hope to celebrate this step properly—together with family and friends from Namibia and Europe—once the time and circumstances allow.



Selty & Rainer



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## Together for a fairer world

Comundo is the leading Swiss organization for development cooperation through the exchange of people. We currently have nearly one hundred active co-workers working in seven countries in the Global South. Every day, they collaborate closely with colleagues from local partner organizations to find innovative and sustainable solutions to combat injustice and inequality. We use three main tools to create lasting change: the exchange of co-workers, the funding of projects, and the promotion of networking.

At Comundo, we believe that each of us has a responsibility to act against injustice and inequality. Choosing to engage with us is a concrete way to contribute. Together, we can foster long-term change toward a fairer world. We are convinced that change is possible through an exchange between North and South based on mutual respect and trust.

Our mission is to promote networking, exchange, and cooperation among people and organizations from different continents, cultures, and religions. Our vision is guided by the belief that a world in which all people live together in equality, dignity, and peace is possible. In this way, we contribute to achieving the goals of the 2030 Agenda.

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## Contact Details

Thank you for your interest and support. Every message—whether a short greeting or detailed feedback—means a lot to me. Special thanks to all who support my work through Comundo.

For questions or further discussion, you can reach me at [rainer.kasik@comundo.org](mailto:rainer.kasik@comundo.org) or via WhatsApp (my Namibian number +264 81 437 0076). Please allow for possible delays due to occasional internet issues.

If you've received this newsletter in error or wish to unsubscribe, just let me know. Feel free to share it with anyone interested.

Kindest regards from northern Namibia—take care and stay in touch!

**Rainer Kašik**