

When did the port of Antwerp conclude a sister port agreement with Matadi?

On 15 November 2003 a sister port agreement between the Antwerp Port Authority and the "Office National des Transports" [ONATRA] in DRC was signed.

How did this agreement come about?

Only a few weeks after the transition government in the Summer of 2003 came into function, the then Congolese minister of transport, Joseph Olenghankoy, visited Belgium and also the port of Antwerp. He pleaded to help his country in the reconstruction of the vital transport sector, and the sea ports in particular, in order to improve the import capacity of DRC.

The then president of the port of Antwerp, Baron Delwaide, responded positively and the sister port agreement was born. A few weeks later a first fact finding mission was sent to Congo, and 3 months later a technical team of the port of Antwerp was in Matadi to elaborate a detailed audit report.

Are there any other collaborators involved ie World Bank?

The port of Antwerp has from the beginning searched for support, not only within the framework of the World Bank programmes for DRC, but also within the context of the Belgian Development Cooperation. It has been essential in our approach to work together with all the important international and local actors active on the field, in order not to present an isolated project.

What areas are covered under this collaboration agreement?

The first phase saw the port of Antwerp providing technical assistance. Since 2005 we started a 12,000 m² rehabilitation project at the Quai de Venise thanks to a subsidy of the Belgian government.

Another important aspect of the agreement is institutional assistance, where the port of Antwerp tries to accompany the port of Matadi in its progress towards a landlord port model with public-private partnership. A third element is related to capacity building. Antwerp offers scholarships to the Congolese authorities for attending seminars of the APEC Port Training Center in Antwerp.

Can you expand on specific projects that have been successfully completed such as the repair works on the Quai de Venise?

For the moment, about 10,000 m² of the Quai de Venise is rehabilitated. We hope to continue in the next months with a extra 2,000 m². On top of that, we hope to replace the Venise Bridge with a new one, in order to create a supplementary access road for trucks to the port of Matadi.

The APA are also involved in rehabilitation works in Boma Port, can you expand?

We have also started the first rehabilitation works in the port of Boma this month, which are perfectly complementary with the works in Matadi. The principle is the same as in Matadi: we are trying to rehabilitate an operational zone (in Boma quai n°1) by making a good concrete surface and repair where necessary.

Are you involved in the Quai de Matadi works?

No. We have regular meetings with the World Bank and try to coordinate the efforts. This is the reason that we do not touch the Quai de Matadi because the Bank is focussing on that zone. [Local reports state the World Bank has partially agreed to provide US\$20 million and that Quays 1-4 are currently closed and will not be operational before early 2008.]

Have you seen a growth in trade between the two countries since this plan was established?

The agreement was signed with only a domestic goal: to improve the import capacity of the port of Matadi. There is no focus on an increase of Congolese-Belgian trade. We have noticed an important increase in the Matadi port statistics during the last 24 months and we hope that the new operational zone at the Quai de Venise will be able to help the port authority and its clients to tackle congestion problems.

Is there a future action plan?

In close cooperation with the Belgian Development Cooperation, a new detailed action plan for the transport sector linked to the Congo river will be discussed and later presented to the Congolese government. Of course, the ports of Boma and Matadi will play an important role in that project.

Any pending visits to Matadi?

A new visit is foreseen for next week.

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