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New hope as Songea Airport fixes, handles bigger planes

By Guardian Correspondent, Songea

THE refurbishment of Songea airport in Ruvuma Region which includes expansion of the runway has brought new hope to people in the southern part of the country, as the facility is now able to handle bigger planes as compared to the past.

Operated by Tanzania Airports Authority (TAA), the facility is located seven kilometers west of Songea Municipality and now has the capacity to handle six "Bombardier" types of planes at one time.

Songea Airport Manager, Jordan Mchami said rehabilitation of the airport includes expansion of the runway from the current 1,625mt to 1,740mt to enable it handles big planes. He said previously the airport was able to handle small planes carrying not more than 13 passengers.

"The Songea airport was established in 1950, owned by an individual who later on in 1963 returned it to the government. When the government took over the airport its runway was not at tarmac level, the government decided to start

repairing it in 2017," said the manager.

Tanzania National Roads Agency (TANROADS) Manager in Ruvuma Region, Eng Lasack Alinanuswe said that construction works are done by a Chinese contractor-CHICCO under the supervision of TANROADS.

According to Eng Alinanuswe, the Songea airport uplifting project would cost 37bn/- until completion. He said repair includes the construction of the plane's stop way measuring 60mt at each side of the airport. He said they are also constructing parking lots for small planes and another one with the capacity to park six big planes.

He added that the construction of the new passengers' lounge which will accommodate 150 passengers at one time has also been completed. He said the previous passenger's lounge was able to accommodate 75 passengers only.

The TANROADS Manager said once completed, the airport will offer business opportunities to Songea residents because it will have business parks where people can open shops, restaurants, and hotels.

He said there will be an opportunity for taxi drivers to carry passengers from

the airport to different destinations across the region.

He said since Air Tanzania Company Limited (ATCL) resumed the Dar es Salaam- Songea routes in February this year, a good number of people have started using the services instead of buses.

He said more people prefer travelling with ATCL because it offers better fares of 250,000/- per trip compared to the previous fare of 500,000 charged by small planes carrying 13 passengers.

According to him, the arrival of Bombardier serves residents of Ruvuma Region as they would now pay 400,000/- Songea-Dar return journey.

He said the new building for the passengers' lounge will hold 150 passengers at one time has also been completed.

Songea Regional Commissioner, Christina Mndeme said that completion of the Songea airport was a rare resource that can boost Songea's economic growth and the entire Ruvuma Region, especially in the tourism sector, following the launch of a strategic plan to spur tourism in the region.

Songea airport was built between 1974

and 1980 and its runway at tarmac level will enable it to handle planes during all seasons.

Ruvuma region is located in the southwestern part of Tanzania between latitude 9-12 degrees and longitudes 34-39 degrees and is the sixth-largest region of Tanzania and covers an area of 63,498 km2 of which about 5% is cultivated.

The region is composed of four districts: Songea urban, Songea rural, Mbinga, and Tunduru, Songea town, the capital, is located in Songea urban district.

Agriculture accounts for a major part of the region's economy, providing over 90% of regional production and employment. Agriculture is predominantly carried out by smallholders, cultivating about 2-5 acres. Maize is by far the most important food and cash crop in the region. Dominant cash crops include coffee, tobacco, and cashew nuts.

Ruvuma is supplied with fish mainly from Lake Nyasa, situated in the southwest of the region. Over 90% of fish production from Lake Nyasa, which is 20,000 to 30,000 mt of fish, are landed in Ruvuma Region

Destruction of tropical forests sees sharp increase in 2020

By Special Correspondent

An area of pristine rainforest the size of the Netherlands was burned or hacked down last year, as the destruction of the planet's tropical forests accelerated despite a global economic slowdown, according to research Wednesday.

The worst losses were in Brazil, three times higher than the next highest country, the Democratic Republic of Congo,



Almost a third of the Pantanal was scorched, including indigenous lands and jaguar habitats and researchers said it could be decades before the region recovers.

Appetite for destruction

One bright area was in Indonesia, which reduced its rate of forest loss by 17 per cent from 2019 and dropped out of the global top three for the first time in the 20 years of Global Forest Watch monitoring.

Forest destruction has slowed