

Journey Across Four African Nations



Introduction

This is an account of my experience travelling across four African countries by public transport. I am a Motswana mother of three, who has only been to South Africa and Zimbabwe before for church. I have volunteered with several civil society organisations, mostly working in health services and promotion campaigns. Prior to my engagement as a community organizer and facilitator with Success Capital Organisation, I had a small trading table next to a bar selling everything from crisps, snacks, cool drinks to cigarettes. This experience details moments of learning, observation, and conversations with many Africans in transit. This trip was uncertain as we did not have any confirmed funding to support it and I applied for a passport in with some faith a few weeks before. When the reality of no funding became evident a few days before, we deliberated a bit and I agreed to embark on a road journey to Nairobi.

Moving Through Botswana

Public safety has been a concern, particularly during the days before, just after and during public holidays in 2024. In leaving for Nairobi, I had to take the overnight bus to Kazungula. There are clear gaps in security measures to appraise passengers on how to exit during emergency and how to express concern where driving might not feel safe. Connectivity had blackouts; thus, communication and internet access are not consistent whilst on the road. However, the bus did have internet connection. There were migrants on the bus. I was concerned for them when at a roadblock. There

are police officers who check identification, and where there is none: migrants are forced to pay on the spot. On this trip, I was not aware of any receipt being given. If migrants cannot afford to pay, they are arrested for deportation. There are instances, where bribes are taken as I have taken this bus route several times. I have seen the anguish of a migrant father with toddlers who were born in Botswana, but without appropriate documentation, being forced to pay whilst enroute. One must budget for these unpredictable costs to navigate the public transport system.

Informal traders ply their trade in the hopes for meeting targets. The overnight bus seems to be more successful. Trading overnight seems to be more successful because there are less traders of food items, portable charging cables and refreshments. The single lane roads are quite challenging. Potholes, trucks, driver fatigue, and at some point, National Game Reserve wildlife compromise the safety of passengers.

Public toilets are available at most stops, at a minimal cost. However, whenever there are stops passengers relieve themselves in the bush. Personal hygiene at this point, remains a concern. The lack of handwashing facilities, personal

Moving Through Zambia

The immigration on the Zambian side of the border was a breeze. One lady was asked what she would do in Zambia, and I wasn't. The next task was to find transport to Kazungula town in Zambia. Interestingly, it cost me more money in Botswana than Zambia when converting to connect to the center of town. On arrival to the station, I boarded a bus to Lusaka. The bus was nicer than the previous nights, with a toilet inside. This allowed for some simple personal hygiene management whilst enroute. The toilets were occasionally cleaned whenever we made stops throughout the twelve-hour ride to Lusaka. Public toilets, however, were not hygienic. There were many checkpoints, I was informed that this was because officials

sanitisers and even face masks for those that might be ill aren't prevalent. The roads aren't too clear because there is not lighting infrastructure. This is a road safety concern even where cattle livestock can roam public roads.

Women can freely travel in Botswana with ease. In this journey there were no instances of harassment observed. It is commendable that bus staff made sure those who dropped off in the middle of the night, had provisions for ensuring they get to their end destination. Arriving in Kazungula in the morning, meant a swift cab ride to the border. Leaving the Botswana side was relatively easy without any lines or concerns.

wanted money. At most stops by law enforcement, they would get into the bus – whereas in Botswana, all passengers disembark. The bus rides felt more aggressive, with instances that would make one feel unsafe. The overtaking, speeding in some instances and driving over potholes would test one's character. They often used local languages, unless when realising a passenger is a migrant. Conductors, those who handle payments and passengers, normally advise migrants to prepare their documentation for inspection. This helps expedite the roadblock stop. The internet connection in the bus helped me communicate and update family and colleagues.

The language barrier often made me feel unsafe in some instances, as English is not universally spoken. In some instances, this would also mean higher costs for food items or other travel necessities because of not knowing the language. Although local dialect is common in Botswana, there are rare instances where traders charge higher prices because of language.

Interestingly, a lot of Botswana women buy stock in Zambia to trade back in Botswana. It seems they learned the local dialect and public transport system and its routes. I hitch hiked to transit for another area where I could take the bus to the Tanzanian border. However, I had to hitch hike at least two other times because whenever the number of passengers would disembark before the destination, we would be forced to drop off. This was the only way that drivers could make money, including overcharging. We had to insist on being taken the full route because the hour and half drive had been turned into a three hour one because of being dropped off twice.

Informal trading in along the journey in Zambia occurs day and night. However, the cost of food items increased at night. This had not been budgeted for. Conveniently, foreign currency could easily be changed enroute. As Zambia does not allow public transport to drive overnight, I was forced to wait it out at a filling station.

I felt safe as the employees allowed us to remain inside the convenience store, whilst another lady was sleeping on the floor. They even assisted with finding additional transport for me to connect. The next bus did not have internet access or a toilet, but I was appreciative that I could progress in my journey. The roads throughout the journey seemed bad. There is a need to invest in Zambia's roads.

As I moved through villages and rural areas, I could see that buildings are quite old. There is little development. Whereas in towns and cities, there were large buildings and significant construction. Mobile money is easily accessible and transferable in Zambia, Tanzania, and Kenya. This made life easier if one had MPESA. Zambians are resilient, despite economic challenges people can survive. They are friendly, hospitable, and helpful for migrants trying to navigate their public transport system. I also admired how they dressed culturally, all genders, reflecting pride in their heritage. I was consistently offered help, conversation, marriage at some point and suggestions for places to visit.



Moving Through Tanzania

My welcome in Tanzania after two days of travel was met with an injection for the yellow fever vaccine in the evening. As a first-time traveller to this region, I found myself navigating nausea and further language barriers. Luckily, I did not have to change buses as it was a direct bus to Dar Es Salam. Trying to connect to Arusha from the border became a challenge, because there were no connections in the middle of the night. Thus, I headed to Dar Es Salam. I did notice that there were many trucks on the way, reflecting significant trading routes.

Mid-way, I ended up changing to another bus that was connecting to Nairobi. This shifting and changing was dependent on the people I was travelling with. They gracefully called other buses to connect, and I found a travel buddy to accompany me in the journey. She was a Tanzanian lady also heading to Nairobi to start tertiary school. Tanzanian roads were comparably like Zambia, this improved towards Arusha compared to the

other days of the journey. I could barely see the outside or the infrastructure as we travelled overnight. The bus I was on to Nairobi improved my experience. There was Wi-Fi and a toilet, improving my experience. I felt safer throughout the bus ride as it was less turbulent. The language barrier further compromised my experience. It was difficult being ignored at times when seeking information or trying to purchase something.

Public toilets were costly and unclean. After three days of travel, this was a frustration for me.

There were few lights far and few in between the overnight travel, this was a concern for me as I observed in small towns and villages. All stops were like Zambia, including law enforcement, creating some familiarity with my experience in Zambia. My travel buddy did not have a yellow fever card and rather paid for it without getting the injection. This became a clear similarity in most of my travel as I arrived at the border.

Finally, Kenya

The ETA on arrival smoothed the questioning at immigration. As we stepped out of the border offices, it was the first time I saw Masai women selling cultural items. Upon inquiry with another traveller from Kenya, I found out that Kenya allows indigenous groups build temporary shelters as they migrate regularly as and when needed. The

road infrastructure was good and beautiful. The scenery whilst travelling was lovely. The traffic, however, was a culture shock for me. As we arrived at the main station, I was shocked at how populous and busy it was. Navigating how to get a ride share car was quite a challenge.

My travel buddy helped me leave the main station to get to the guest house. I finally got to rest, freshen up and reflect after over 90 hours travel across three countries. It was an exhilarating, exiting, and enriching for me. I learned about cultures and saw things I read about. Using MPESA universally across three countries was efficient. Informal and formal traders, foreign currency and

unlike Botswana, even international numbers could have MPESA. Despite this, I felt Kenya was the most expensive of them all. As I spoke to a Bookshop employee, I realized the money he earned was not enough to sustain his livelihood. The material impact of its economic disposition is aggravating inequality and making life hard.

Conclusion

Although I missed our engagement. There were invaluable lessons learned throughout the journey. The back and forth and moments of silence often frustrated my colleague, anxiously waiting for updates from me after taking three flight connections because of using their airline miles. We made it work and came out with a few stories to tell. I met so many different people who were willing to share their own experiences and help me connect even when it was out of their way. I had a few marriage proposals, a new pair of shoes and seemed to be adopted by others. I saw how people are eager to learn each others' languages, especially because they regularly travel the neighbouring countries. My return, thanks to our founder's hustling during my short stay; meant I could board a flight for the first time in my life. A pleasant and surprising end, to a journey for experiencing a piece of Africa in different ways.

This account was narrated by Dineo Office and drafted & edited by Dumiso Gatscha.

Highlights of Success Capital Organisation at the United Nations Civil Society Summit can be viewed here: [Highlight 1](#), [Highlight 2](#), and the [Plenary Impact Coalition Feedback](#).

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