Zambia hosts National Kaizen Conference

It is not often you see employees from the services and manufacturing sector donning their best garb and outshining each other in a bid to grab the trophy for the best performer. This scenario is generally reserved for the more glamorous and glittery events such as The Oscar Awards however Zambia had their own Oscar Awards with a different feel when they ran the 2019 Kaizen Awards.

The 2019 Zambia Kaizen Awards were held as part of the 2019 three-day Zambia National Kaizen Conference Programme. The conference held in February this year at the well-known Mulungushi International Conference Centre Lusaka, Zambia aimed to bolster the implementation of the Kaizen concept in Zambia and also share knowledge and experiences with international counterparts. The Kaizen concept is a Japanese management philosophy that enables the implementation of best workplace practices to yield higher productivity levels.
Fig One: Delegates arrive at the Zambia National Kaizen Conference Programme. Seen here is Pan African Productivity Association (PAPA) secretary, Ms Mokgadi Mahlakgane from South Africa and Acting Chief Executive Officer of Botswana National Productivity Centre (BPC) Mr. Teedzani Majaule

The theme of the conference was “Continuous improvement Towards Business Excellence through Quality Control Circles”. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Kaizen Institute of Zambia (KiZ), Mr. Chola Mwitwa, said the rationale behind the conference was to enhance capabilities and competitiveness of Zambian companies by promoting the concept of Kaizen
through mutual learning process of know-how and practical experiences of Kaizen activities in Africa, Asia and Latin America as well as sharing information on Africa Kaizen Initiative.

Participants at the conference comprised of Zambian companies that had implemented the Kaizen and were vying for the trophy of the company that had illustrated best application of Kaizen and consequent productivity improvement. The yardstick to measure the companies ‘success included a measure of the quality, cost and delivery of the company products. Amongst the audience, there was a healthy presence of Zambian private and public sector.

International guests included members from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) who had flown in from Japan to be part of the 2019 Zambia Kaizen Conference. JICA is a Japanese governmental agency that coordinates official development assistance for the government of Japan. JICA aims to assisting with economic and social growth in developing countries, and the promotion of international cooperation.

Since 2006, JICA has been implementing Technical Cooperation Projects regarding introduction and dissemination of Kaizen approach in about nine African countries namely Cameroon, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania, Tunisia, and Zambia to promote industrialization. Furthermore, more than 25 countries in Africa has government official and productivity consultants to training by JICA held in Japan.

Fig Two: The Chief Executive Officer of the Kaizen Institute of Zambia (KiZ), Mr Cholwa Mwitwa (red suite) congratulates some of the participants in the Zambia Kaizen 2019 Awards while JICA’s Deputy Director Ms Suzuki Momoko looks on.
In recent years the achievement of Kaizen has attracted the interest of an increasing number of countries in Africa. At the occasion of the sixth Tokyo International Conference of African Development (TICAD VI) in 2016, Kaizen received high attention as a promising method in raising quality and productivity, and competitiveness and one unique pillar of Japan’s cooperation. JICA recognizes Kaizen as an approach to enhance the foundation of firm capabilities necessary for firms to grow and innovate.

Other guests at the Kaizen Conference in Zambia included Kaizen practitioners from Africa, Asia, and Latin America who shared their experiences and elaborate action plans for promotion and implementation of Kaizen. This included the National Productivity and Competitiveness Council of Mauritius (NPCCM), Argentina’s Instituto National de Tecnologia Industrial (INTI), Botswana Productivity Centre (BPC) and Productivity SA (South Africa).

The conference was given the status and importance it deserved when the Zambian Minister of Commerce, Trade and Industry (MCTI), Mr. Christopher Yaluma, opened proceedings with a welcome address. In his opening address, Yaluma echoed Zambian President, Edgar Chagwa Lungu’s belief that a strong economy and sense of nationalism is key for the development of Zambia. The Japanese Ambassador to Zambia, Hidenobu Sibashima reiterated Japan’s commitment to cooperation with African countries in enabling industrialisation.

The CEO of KiZ, Mr. Chola Mwitwa, said the National Kaizen Conference in Zambia is now recognised as a national premier event for organisations to practicing continuous improvement through Quality Control Circles (QCC) to showcase their improvements. Mwitwa said that since the establishment of KiZ in 2014, the institution has been spearheading Kaizen Education and Training, Kaizen Awareness Creation and Kaizen Consultancy Services in all sectors of the Zambian economy. He said this was in line with KiZ’s goal of giving equal opportunity to every sector to benefit from Kaizen.

JICA’s Deputy Director for Private Sector Development, Ms. Momoko Suzuki, said the key objectives of the conference included a need to inculcate a culture of problem solving within the companies through creativity and also adding value to society.
Various speakers ascended the podium to share experiences and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of National Productivity and Competitiveness Council NPCC, Mr. Deepak Balgobin, outlined the strategic plan of Quality Control (QC) operations in Mauritius, importance of QCC and how to expand QCC in Africa.

Balgobin said Kaizen interventions assist enterprises in improving their productivity (labour, capital, multifactor) thereby contributing to economic growth. He said the government in Mauritius is committed to improving productivity at enterprise level and several measures have been put in place over the years to attain this objective. Budget provision has been made by the government for a Productivity Improvement Fund for Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and the NPCC is working closely with SME Mauritius organizations. Along the same line, NPCC will obtain funds from Southern African Development Community (SADC) to improve productivity in 40 manufacturing companies in Mauritius.

Balgobin said the productivity level of a country is measured by GDP per capita. The higher the productivity, the bigger the GDP per capita. Kaizen interventions will increase output at enterprise level and the sum of all those productivity improvements will impact on the GDP for the sector and ultimately at national level. He says Mauritius concentrates on
manufacturing sector. However the country also conducts consultancy in the retail sector, seafood sector and logistics (warehousing) and also has experience in the services sector.

Balgobin said Mauritius implemented Lean Management tools 5S (good housekeeping), Quality and Innovation circles, Suggestion Schemes, 7 wastes elimination, Industrial Engineering tools such as Time and Motion Study, Value Stream Mapping, Process Improvement, Statistical Process Control and Strategic Visioning and Planning to up the productivity of companies.

The Technical Directory at Argentina’s Instituto National de Technologia Industrial (INTI), Mr Marcos Rodriguez, said INTI started to implement Kaizen in 90s in collaboration with JICA and since then Argentina has advanced in the dissemination of Kaizen in Argentina.

In 2010 INTI implemented a certification system for consultants to implement Kaizen. Rodriguez says Argentina is currently training professionals throughout Latin America and Africa due to the cooperation with JICA. He says INTI is initiating a project to intervene with Kaizen in 60 pilot companies and 60 control companies that measure the impact of Kaizen and quantify public policies to support Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs).

JICA expert and New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) representative, Mr Tomoyuki Yamada, acknowledged the importance of Kaizen and said in 2017, NEPAD and JICA launched Africa Kaizen Initiative (AKI). Yamada says the initiative aims to amongst others accelerate industrialization and economic transformation, create employment develop innovative human resources with competitive skills through advocacy at policy levels and standardizing Kaizen in Africa.

Productivity SA ‘s Regional Manager based in Durban, Ms Amelia Naidoo, said although South Africa has not yet institutionalised Kaizen, the country has companies that have implemented Kaizen. Naidoo drew similarities between Kaizen and Productivity SA programme, the Workplace Challenge Programme (WPC) which is geared towards assisting South African organisations to enhance productivity and competitiveness through improving workplace relations, implementing world class practices and sharing and disseminating experiences.

Zambia Kaizen Awards

Once the speakers had shared their experiences, focus shifted towards Zambian companies that had been shortlisted for the 2019 Zambia Kaizen Awards. About 19 companies were shortlisted for the 2019 Kaizen Awards. At stake for the winners was a trophy and opportunity to represent Zambia in Yokohama, Japan in August.

The companies that were selected had undergone a selection and adjudication criteria that was underpinned by three pillars of workplace evaluation, presentation evaluation and paper evaluation. The evaluation criteria included a look at issues such as Solution
Formulation and Implementation, Root Cause and Analysis plus standardisation within the company operations using Kaizen tools.

According to the Kaizen Award Handbook produced by JICA, The Africa Kaizen Award is given to organizations which conduct excellent Kaizen activities that serve as model cases, with the primary objective to explore and share best Kaizen practices in Africa and to make effectiveness of Kaizen widely known to the public.

The Africa Kaizen Award is given to organizations selected from those recommended by Kaizen organizations in African countries, as implementers of best practices, to the Examining Committee of the NEPAD Agency Secretariat. Kaizen organizations in each country conduct a field survey at each possible candidate organization to confirm implementation of their Kaizen activities.

The companies submit an entry form eight months before the event and the winners are selected two months prior to the Kaizen Conference. The winners for the Zambia Kaizen Award for 2019 were:

**Manufacturing Sector:**
- Gold Award: Universal Mining and Chemical Industries Limited
- Silver Award: SAKIZA Spinning Ltd
- Bronze Awards: Strongpak Ltd

**Non-Manufacturing Sector:**
- Gold Award: Kanyama Level 1 Hospital
- Silver Award: Toyota Zambia Ltd
- Bronze Awards: Lukanga Water & sewerage Company Ltd

In the closing address, JICA’s Deputy Director, Private Sector, Ms Momoku Suzuki said “Zambia’s Quality Circles have a very high potential and she found all 19 presentations to be quite informative and insightful and she hopes to see the winners at the TICAD VII Conference to be held in August in the city of Yokohama, Japan.