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Floods: death toll reaches 91

The death toll in Mozambique from storms and floods this rainy season has reached 91, according to figures announced on 4 February by Rita Almeida, spokesperson of the government's Disaster Management Technical Council (CTGC). The latest three deaths have been reported from Ile district, in the central province of Zambezia, which has been lashed by moderate to heavy rains for the last fortnight.

Like other fatalities in northern and central Mozambique, these deaths were caused by the collapse of houses built of flimsy materials such as mud, bamboo poles and thatched roofs. 189 such houses have been destroyed in Ile, 25 in the neighbouring district of Gile, and 46 in Pebane district.

In Nicoadala district, in Zambezia province, the Mozambican relief agency, the National Disasters Management Institute (INGC), with the support of the National Civil Protection Unit (UNAPROC), has rescued 1,800 people.

The Zambezia storms have also destroyed homes in the provincial capital, Quelimane, and 25 displaced families are being sheltered in a temporary accommodation centre.

According to Armando Primeiro, the provincial director of education, 625 schools in Zambezia have been flooded, affecting more than 37,000 pupils. In some cases, classes have continued because religious bodies have provided space for the affected schools.

One of the major watercourses in Zambezia, the Licungo River, has now surpassed flood alert level for most of its length. The country's largest river, the Zambezi, remains above alert level on its lower reaches, but is gradually subsiding, as is the Pungoe River, in Sofala province.

The flood surge down the Limpopo, in the southern province of Gaza, which put the entire town of Chokwe under water, is now over. The river is returning to its bed, though it is still above alert level at Xai-Xai.

Across the country 211,000 people have been directly affected by the storms and floods. About 150,000 people are still living in temporary accommodation centres, mostly in the southern province of Gaza.

In Gaza 41 people died, with the flood on the Limpopo River the most serious since the catastrophic flooding of 2000. The province's the hardest hit towns were Chokwe, Guija and Chibuto. Parts of Chokwe district are still in a critical condition, notably the Chilembene administrative post, where some villages are still under water.

The worst of the crisis in the south of the country may now have passed, with the levels of most of the major rivers now receding. Claims that South Africa has opened floodgates on dams on its side of the border, and that a new flood wave will travel down the rivers of southern Mozambique, have proved unfounded.

"The levels of the Limpopo are continuing to fall", said Almeida. "It is true that in some places the waters are dropping very slowly, but we have no information about a new flood wave in the near future".

President pledges to mobilise more resources

President Armando Guebuza pledged in Maputo on 3 February that the government will continue to mobilise financial and other resources to build the infrastructures needed to reduce the impact of floods.

He was speaking at Maputo's Monument to the Mozambican Heroes, at a wreath-laying ceremony in memory of the founder and first president of Frelimo, Eduardo Mondlane, who was assassinated 44 years ago.

President Guebuza said that Mozambique needs to mobilise resources for flood control measures, notably the construction of dams at sites such as Mapai, on the Limpopo, as well as to rehabilitate the existing dams at Massingir and Macarretane. The Massingir dam on the Limpopo's main tributary, the Elephants River, is seriously damaged with its bottom outlet structures not functioning properly which may have contributed to the severity of the flood on the Limpopo.

President Guebuza added that dams are needed on rivers in the centre of the country, such as the Pungue and the Buzi.

"Today is the day when we remember those whose work we take pride in, particularly Mondlane", said the President. "This year we are celebrating the date in the midst of floods which have caused many thousands of Mozambicans to lose loved one and possessions. So this moment is dedicated to those who have been plunged into suffering".

This, he added, was a moment for reflection on measures to minimise the effects of natural disasters, at a time when available resources are scarce.

President Guebuza praised all these who have contributed to the flood relief effort, including government institutions, civil society organizations, and international partners.

In particular, President Guebuza stressed the support given by South Africa, which has provided aircraft to assist in the search and rescue operations.

For his part, the Minister of Public Works, Cadmiel Muthemba, said that, although it was too early to give exact figures, the damage done by the floods was "enormous".

United States to support reconstruction

The United States has promised to assist the Mozambican government in post-flood reconstruction, particularly in Chokwe, Guija and Xai-Xai districts, the areas most severely affected by flooding on the Limpopo River.

This pledge was given at a press conference in Maputo on 31 January by US Ambassador Douglas Griffiths, who had just returned from a visit to the Limpopo valley.

Ambassador Griffiths said that the US is also mobilising its partners to provide the assistance required to help people in the flood-stricken areas return to their normal lives.

“The reconstruction phase is very important and the United States will help the government support the victims in order to normalise their lives”, he said. “For example, the people will need agricultural inputs in order to resume production, and we are seeing, together with our partners, how we can help”.

Griffiths said he had been impressed with the organisation of the temporary accommodation centres set up by the government, with the spirit of mutual help among the flood victims, and with the government’s efforts to provide them with better conditions.

He was pleased that the aid the US has already sent to support the victims is indeed reaching its intended destination.

“We saw good leadership given by the National Disasters Management Institute (INGC)”, the ambassador said. “The centres are organised, the people are organising themselves, and this is what impresses me about Mozambicans. Yesterday we saw aid arriving for affected people in remote areas, and we are satisfied with this”.

For her part, the director of the Maputo office of the US Agency for International Development (USAID), Polly Dunford, said “the INGC’s organisation for responding to an emergency situation was much better this year than in previous years. We are seeing progress, but we have to look at the preventive aspects and we are willing to help the Mozambican government and people in this aspect”.

The US has already made available \$1.7 million worth of aid for the flood victims, in the shape of food, water purification and sanitation equipment, tents and support for managing the accommodation centres.

Renamo threatens to sabotage elections

Mozambique’s main opposition party Renamo has once again threatened to sabotage the municipal elections scheduled for this year.

According to the daily newspaper “O Pais”, the Renamo political delegate in the central province of Manica, Sofrimento Matequenha, addressing a meeting of Renamo militants from all Manica districts in the provincial capital, Chimoio, declared not only that Renamo will boycott the municipal elections, but that it will not allow other parties to participate either.

Matequenha, who had just returned to Chimoio from the base set up by Renamo leader Afonso Dhlakama in the bush of Gorongosa district, in the neighbouring province of Sofala, claimed that sabotage of the elections was justified by the “lack of consensus” over the electoral legislation between Renamo and the government. He made it clear that he was transmitting instructions from Dhlakama.

Matequenha added that Renamo will hold “a peaceful demonstration” throughout the country, and that “if the Frelimo government tries to prevent our demonstrations by using the riot police, we shall respond in the same way, and

our fire will not end before we have dislodged Frelimo from power”.

The threat of nationwide demonstrations is very familiar. Renamo has been making exactly the same threat since the day after its defeat in the October 2009 presidential and parliamentary elections. Over three years have passed and not a single Renamo demonstration has been held anywhere in the country.

Matequenha argued that Renamo was under pressure from “the people” to hold demonstrations, “and our tolerance has already reached its expiry date. We have no more time to lose. We have not yet defined the dates, but it will certainly be soon”.

He claimed that Renamo had received requests from former guerrillas living in Manica to go and join Dhlakama in Gorongosa, “but we have told them they will not all go there, just the masterminds of guerrilla warfare. During our demonstrations, we will need them in all the districts – so we told them ‘wait in the districts, you will be useful when the time comes’”.

The Renamo guerrillas were demobilised almost 20 years ago – so that many of them are now too old to go back into anything resembling active military service.

A Renamo boycott of the elections will turn them into a straight contest between the ruling Frelimo party, and the Mozambique Democratic Movement (MDM), which looks set to displace Renamo as the country’s main opposition force.

World Bank announces \$700 million in loans

The World Bank has announced that it will provide Mozambique with \$700 million in soft loans over the next two years. The Bank’s Vice-President for Africa, Makhdar Diop, announced this funding on 30 January, after an audience with President Armando Guebuza.

The money takes the form of soft loans from the International Development Association (IDA), the World Bank affiliate set up to provide money on easy terms to poor countries. The money is to be repaid over 50 years, and no interest is charged.

The government can use these resources for various types of activity, including support for the state budget.

Diop added that during the audience President Guebuza had expressed interest in receiving support from the World Bank for dams, rural roads, and for investment in agriculture.

Diop expressed his solidarity with the victims of the current floods in Mozambique, and announced a donation of \$50 million to support the flood victims.

In an overall assessment of the country’s situation, Diop stressed the macro-economic successes achieved, but pointed to challenges that require the attention of the authorities including poverty reduction and job creation.

“We agreed that the challenge for the future is to create jobs and to speed up the reduction of poverty”, he said. “To achieve this, it is important that there should be greater development of agriculture, to increase production and productivity and generate more employment”.

Diop said he had also told President Guebuza of the World Bank’s concern at the quality of education in Mozambique. He said reforms were needed to bring the Mozambican education system into line with the needs of the productive sector, and to expand technical training, thus giving young people more employment opportunities.

“It’s very important to go to school”, he said, “but it’s still better to leave school with qualifications that will be useful for the productive sector”.

Attorney-General attacks corrupt judges

Attorney-General Augusto Paulino has launched a stinging attack on those judges, prosecutors and lawyers who “act in the service of criminals”.

Speaking at a Maputo ceremony where 18 new district attorneys were sworn into office, Paulino warned them that during the course of their work “you will meet some colleagues, fortunately not many of them, among prosecutors, judges and lawyers who are genuine servants of organised crime”.

Criminals, he continued, take careless or vulnerable judges, prosecutors and lawyers “and turn them into their puppets”.

There were judges who feared to risk their lives over cases that landed on their desks. Some judges refused to set dates for cases that were ready for trial, in the hope that the passage of time would dispose of them. Others delayed in handing cases back to the Public Prosecutor’s Office to complete the investigation – even though they have the legal prerogative to order the final phases of investigation themselves.

There were also case files “which disappear with the connivance of judges, prosecutors, lawyers, and court officials. This obliges us to reconstruct systematically particular cases, with the resulting loss of time, since inquiries must be held to ascertain the causes and circumstances of the disappearance of the original case file”. While this was going on, suspects were released from custody since the evidence to indict them had disappeared.

Magistrates were manipulated by criminals, Paulino accused, “in order to delay decisions or so that cases remain for months on end in the offices of judges or prosecutors without any dispatch”.

Through such manoeuvres, he added, organised criminal syndicates gained time to move funds, to flee the country, and to dispose of evidence.

Paulino made a thinly veiled reference to January’s release on parole of Vicente Ramaya, one of the men convicted of the murder, in 2000, of the country’s foremost investigative journalist, Carlos Cardoso.

Ramaya was serving a prison sentence of 23 years and six months for his part in the murder, but a judge in the tenth section of the Maputo City Court, Aderito Malhope, signed the papers granting Ramaya conditional release after serving half his sentence.

The justification for this early release is Ramaya’s supposedly good behaviour in prison. The court contacted the prison authorities for confirmation of this.

Paulino found it incomprehensible that certificates of good behaviour could be issued “in favour of prisoners suspected of commanding criminal networks by mobile phone from their prison cells”.

In defiance of all prison norms, Cardoso’s killers have repeatedly gained access to mobile phones, through which they can issue instructions to accomplices, and intimidate opponents.

Paulino warned that organised crime is a serious threat to the Mozambican state. “With organised crime there can be no half-measures”, he said. “Either organised crime does away with the social model of state that we are building, or the state does away with organised crime”.

He told the attorneys “we want you to make a difference in the fight against this swamp of organised crime”.

As for “infiltrated agents of crime” in the prosecution services, Paulino warned “we shall be implacable, intolerant and absolutely resolute, cost what it may”. Those who did not

accept his warnings would find themselves facing court cases, since, when it came to rooting out corrupt prosecutors, “we shall not leave a single clue uninvestigated”.

He urged his audience “to continue the titanic battle we are waging against crime. You must pay attention, not only to your own conduct as attorneys, but also to that of others, of judges, of lawyers and of the police”.

Successes claimed for Millennium Villages

Minister of Science and Technology, Louis Pelembe, said in Maputo on 31 January that scientific knowledge, combined with local knowledge, is generating new wisdom in the country’s Millennium Villages which is contributing to sustainable social and economic development.

Speaking at a meeting drawing up a balance sheet of the achievements of the Millennium Villages, Pelembe said that these community organisations have proved to be spaces where scientists, national and foreign students and members of the public undertake experiments which, if successful, can be reproduced to the benefit of local communities.

Mozambique has been implementing the Millennium Villages programme since 2006. There are now six such villages – at Lionde and Chibuto, in Gaza province, Lumbo and Itoculo, in Nampula, Malua in Zambezia, and Chitima in Tete.

The villages have allowed communities to be organised in community development associations or committees that facilitate the appropriation of scientific knowledge in order to mobilise citizens to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

Henrique Cau, director of the Research and Technology Transfer Centre (CITT), presenting a report on the first cycle (2009-2012) of the three most recent villages (Malua, Itoculo and Lionde), said that based on this programme 8,800 peasant farmers are receiving direct assistance.

These beneficiaries have increased the area under cultivation and have introduced new crops. Household barns and community warehouses have been built, and a chain of agricultural production has been established.

Cau said that the new warehouses allow the community committees to preserve crops so that they can be sold at times of shortage, which should provide income and ensure the sustainability of the villages.

He said this was how the villages are managing to build or rehabilitate irrigation schemes or schools, and to purchase school materials.

In the area of health, he added, 3,487 mosquito nets have been distributed in the three villages, 17 community midwives have been trained, and meetings have been organised on HIV/AIDS, attended by about 8,000 people. Two health units have been equipped, and one “waiting house” has been built where pregnant women can stay before they give birth.

In the older villages (Chibuto, Lumbo and Chitima) where management has passed into the hands of the communities, Cau said that activities are continuing at a good pace. In Chitima, for example, an irrigation system has been installed, and pavilions have been built to train poultry farmers. A Rural Development Centre covering four hectares has been set up, and 100 farmers have been trained in various agricultural techniques.

In Lumbo, which is on the coast, a second fishing boat has been built, as well as three classrooms at the local school. 56 people have been trained in information technologies, and seven projects financed with micro-credit are being monitored.

Beacon Hill discovers more coking coal

The London-based mining company Beacon Hill Resources has increased by almost a third the estimated reserves of coking coal at its Minas de Moatize mine in the western Mozambican province of Tete.

According to the company, test drilling last year resulted in the estimated reserves rising to 86.8 million tonnes, which is up from the previous estimate of 66.4 million tonnes.

The managing director of Beacon Hill, Rowan Karstel, said that he believes that more coal could be found at the site, with an official statement with further details due to be published at the end of the first quarter of this year.

The company is planning to increase production to 2.8 million tonnes per annum by the end of this year, and will focus on mining the high value coking coal that is used in steel production.

To carry out this strategy, Beacon Hill is upgrading the wash plant where the coking coal is cleaned.

Beacon Hill is gearing up to begin commercial exports. On Christmas Eve its second trial shipment of 18,576 tonnes of thermal coal left Beira Port.

However, in a statement to the London Stock Exchange the company accepted that not everything has been positive. The Beacon Hill chairperson, Justin Farr-Jones, pointed out that “in recognition of poor operating performance, no bonuses were paid to the Executive Committee Management in 2012 and the restructured Board also waived their 2012 option incentives”.

To bring the coal to market, the company has entered into a preliminary agreement with the Sena Rail Line to allow it to transport half a million tonnes per annum to the port of Beira.

Like all the coal companies in the Moatize Basin, the expansion at Beacon Hill is dependent upon a phenomenal increase in the capacity to transport the coal. The Sena Rail Line is close to full capacity and even upgrading the line will not bring it close to meeting the demand.

The Brazilian mining giant Vale is planning to invest heavily in building a new line from its mine in Tete to the port of Nacala, through Malawi.

Meanwhile, the London-based mining company Rio Tinto has had to admit to shareholders that it vastly overvalued its coal mine in the Moatize Basin, by around \$3 billion, because the company has found less coking coal than expected and has no way of getting the coal to market in sufficient quantities after the Mozambican government refused, on environmental grounds, to let the company take coal on barges down the Zambezi River.

Independent experts believe that over the next decade coal exports from the Zambezi coal basin could reach 100 million tonnes per year, making Mozambique one of the world's largest coal exporters.

Nacala oil refinery plan revived

The plan to build an oil refinery in the northern port of Nacala, which was never implemented because of the international financial crisis of 2008, has been revived due to interest shown by the Radyolla Group of Saudi Arabia.

The Radyolla Group has also pledged to build a new pipeline to carry fuel from the central Mozambican port of Beira to landlocked countries such as Zambia, Malawi and even parts of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

To carry out these projects, the Radyolla Chairman and Managing Director, Abdul Aziz, on 30 January signed in Maputo a memorandum of understanding with the Mozambican government's Institute for the Management of State Holdings (IGEPE).

According to IGEPE Chairperson Apolinario Panguene, the memorandum expresses the desire of the two institutions to work together. In addition to the refinery and the pipeline, Radyolla could become a partner of IGEPE in six other projects that are still on the drawing board.

“IGEPE has identified a range of projects to be implemented jointly with other partners, and Radyolla enjoys the advantage of having sufficient financial muscle to help us carry these projects through”, said Panguene. “We have a list of eight projects but not all are at the same level of development. We are thinking of starting with the Beira pipeline, which will carry fuel and make it cheaper for the countries of the hinterland, and the Nacala refinery project”.

“We are working on implementing these two projects, while we finalise the design of the other projects in the portfolio”, he added.

The refinery should reduce Mozambique's fuel bill, which currently stands at about \$700 million a year, perhaps by as much as 50 per cent. Currently every drop of refined fuel used in the country is imported. A refinery could help reduce price fluctuations, meet the country's full domestic demand, and also export fuel to neighbouring countries.

Studies are under way to establish exactly how much the pipeline and the refinery will cost.

Under the original plan, dating back to 2007, the Texas-based company Ayr Logistics was to have invested \$5 billion in a Nacala refinery, producing 300,000 barrels of refined fuels a day. But the “Ayr-Petro Project”, as it was known, was a casualty of the recession of 2008.

This is a condensed version of the AIM daily news service – for details contact aim@aim.org.mz

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