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Assembly approves economic and social plan

The Mozambican parliament, the Assembly of the Republic, on 9 December approved the government's Economic and Social Plan for 2017, with all opposition deputies voting against. The plan passed with 138 deputies of the ruling Frelimo Party voting in favour, against the opposing votes of 91 members of Renamo and of the Mozambique Democratic Movement (MDM).

The plan sets a target of 5.5 per cent economic growth for 2017. This would be a significant increase on the 3.9 per cent growth expected for this year, but lower than the seven per cent initial target for 2016.

The government expects to bring inflation under control, and sets a target that the average 12 monthly inflation rate over the year should not exceed 15.5 per cent.

Exports are expected to grow by 7.7 per cent to reach about \$3.5 billion. The government expects to cut the deficit on the current account from 42 to 34 per cent. The country's net international reserves should remain at a level throughout the year capable of financing three months' imports of goods and services.

In education, the government plans to attain a primary school attendance rate of 86.5 per cent, and to hire 8,300 new teachers for general and technical education. The ratio of pupils to teachers in primary education should drop from 62 to 60.

As for health care, the government plans to expand complete vaccination coverage to 90 per cent of children under one year of age, and to increase the proportion of births that take place in health units to 76 per cent.

The number of health units offering specialist care to women and children who are victims of domestic violence should rise by 89 to reach 310.

The government also plans to rehabilitate 300 kilometres of roads, and to build or rehabilitate 42 bridges. 100 new buses will be acquired for urban passenger transport, and 306 railway wagons will be rehabilitated.

The electrification of all district capitals is now reaching its end. Four capitals will be electrified in 2017 – Luabo, Dere and Mulavala in the central province of Zabezia, and Doa in the western province of Tete. 1,129 kilometres of electricity line will be built and strengthened, and there should be 100,000 new connections to the national electricity grid.

After the vote on the first reading of the resolution approving the plan, the Assembly moved to a second reading in which the resolution was passed and amended article by article.

Renamo attacks coal train

Renamo gunmen on 7 December attacked a train belonging to the Indian coal mining company Jindal at Inhamitanga in the central province of Sofala.

The attack occurred on the Sena rail line as the train, loaded with coal for export, was heading from the Moatize coal basin in Tete province to the port of Beira.

The gunmen concentrated their fire against the locomotive and hit the driver in the back, arm and buttocks. The injured driver was taken by helicopter to a private clinic in Beira.

The spokesperson for the Sofala provincial police command, Daniel Macuacua, neither confirmed nor denied the attack, but said he would investigate.

Earlier this year there were Renamo attacks on the Sena line against coal trains operated by the Brazilian company Vale, leading Vale to suspend its use of this railway twice.

Cahora Bassa reduces output

The Cahora Bassa dam on the Zambezi River, in the western province of Tete, has suffered a break down in one of its five generator groups, which is reducing the generation of electricity by 18 per cent.

According to Hidroelectrica de Cahora Bassa (HCB), the company that operates the dam, the break down happened on 3 December, caused by a rupture of insulating material in generator group number three.

HCB technicians are working to repair the breakdown, but the company estimates that it will take 70 days before the dam's generating capacity is back to normal.

The spokesperson for the public electricity company, EDM, Luis Amado, said the reduced power from Cahora Bassa will not affect EDM's ability to supply its clients.

But it does affect EDM's costs. Cahora Bassa is by far the cheapest source of power available to EDM, and Amado said EDM must now seek a reasonably cheap alternative. The obvious alternatives are to increase EDM's purchases from gas-fired power stations in the south of the county, or to import more power from South Africa.

President hails success of cashew export surtax

The imposition of a surtax on the export of raw, unprocessed cashew nuts has been a success in stimulating the growth of the cashew processing industry, declared President Filipe Nyusi on 9 December.

The President was speaking in the northern city of Nampula, shortly after inaugurating a cashew processing factory owned by Korosho Mocambique Lda., which is part of the Export Trade Group (ETG), a company formed by Mauritian and Indian capital.

This, President Nyusi said, was an example of a policy to protect industry bearing fruit. The surtax, of between 18 and 22 per cent, on raw cashew exports is imposed to ensure that, instead of all being exported (mostly to India), the nuts stay in Mozambique to feed the processing factories.

“This factory has a processing capacity of up to 10,000 tonnes a year”, said President Nyusi. “It is a contribution towards meeting the government’s goals in this area, and also meets one of the objectives of the Cashew Master Plan which envisages a greater volume of national processing of cashew nuts”.

“This factory has solved some problems”, he added, “but new challenges have arisen for the producers who are under pressure from demands to increase their production”.

The ETG factory employs 700 workers, but 80 per cent of these are casual workers. Currently it operates with 25 machines capable of processing 2,500 tonnes of nuts a year. But the company plans to increase the number of machines to 75 by the end of 2020, and lift annual processing capacity to 10,000 tonnes of raw nuts.

The factory produces around 500 tonnes of cashew kernels a year, most of which is exported (to South Africa, the United States, Canada and various Asian and European countries). The raw nuts are purchased from producers in the Nampula countryside.

This is the second cashew processing plant set up by ETG in Mozambique. The first has been operating for over ten years in Chiure district, in the neighbouring province of Cabo Delgado.

The current export surtax was imposed after attempts in the 1990s by the World Bank to force the government to remove all protection from the cashew processing plant came close to destroying the industry. At the time the World Bank claimed that the peasant farmers would get a better deal if they exported all their cashews raw to India – a claim that researchers found lacked any substantial evidence.

The Bank even made liberalization of cashew exports a condition for hundreds of millions of dollars of loans. One by one, the cashew factories closed until, by the year 2000, there were virtually none left, and thousands of cashew workers had been thrown out of their jobs.

The Mozambican parliament eventually rebelled against this policy, and passed the law imposing the export surtax. Since then the processing industry has revived and the World Bank has kept quiet.

Katembe Bridge 70 per cent complete

The suspension bridge over the bay of Maputo, linking the centre of the city to the outlying municipal district of Katembe is now 70 per cent complete, according to Mozambique’s Minister of Public Works, Carlos Bonete.

The pillars of the bridge now rise high above the bay, and Bonete, speaking to reporters during a visit to the bridge on 11 December, said that the suspension pillars are 90 per cent complete.

Resettling households and companies who are in the path of the bridge is not complete, and could delay completion of the bridge and its access roads. Bonete said that some people have been resettled in the Mahubo and Tenga localities in Maputo province. But surveys are still being undertaken of households living along the northern approaches to the bridge.

The bridge itself will be 680 metres long. The northern access viaduct will be 1,097 metres long and the southern approach road 1,234 metres long.

In related news, the road between the towns of Boane and Bela Vista, in Maputo province, has been rebuilt and tarred, as part of the same project that includes the suspension bridge. Bonete, opened the newly tarred road to traffic on 12 December.

When the project is concluded, it will be possible to drive from Katembe to Ponta de Ouro, on the border with the South African province of Kwazulu-Natal, on tarred roads. So far 28 kilometres have been tarred on the stretch from Bela Vista to Katembe, and 13 kilometres on the stretch from Bela Vista to Ponta de Ouro.

“We will be able to have everything done next year”, said Bonete. “We are making good progress, and, even though some of the work is complex, we will be able to complete it within the time envisaged”.

The Maputo-Katembe-Ponta de Ouro road is 185 kilometres long, and 109 kilometres will be rebuilt or rehabilitated. On the road to Ponta de Ouro, bridges over five rivers (including the Maputo and Tembe rivers) are being erected. Bonete said these bridges are now almost completed.

Over five million SIM cards blocked

The three mobile phone operators in Mozambique, M-Cel, Vodacom and Movitel, have blocked 5.7 million unregistered SIM cards, whose owners missed the 1 December deadline for registration.

The deadline was set by the regulatory body, the Mozambique National Communications Institute (INCM), which warned of heavy fines for companies that failed to block unregistered SIM cards.

At a Maputo press conference on 7 December, the director of postal and telecommunications services in the INCM, Massingue Apala, said that in the weeks preceding the deadline about two million SIM cards were registered out of more than seven million that were in an “irregular situation”.

The clients whose cards have been blocked will only be able to use them again, once they have registered them with the operators, said Apala. He revealed that the number of registered SIM cards is 12,439,070 and the total number yet to be registered is 5,727,292.

Corruption a threat to needed reform - PM

Prime Minister Carlos Agostinho do Rosario on 9 December declared that corruption is a threat to the reform of the public administration, with a negative impact on the business environment and on improving the provision of public services.

Speaking in Maputo at a meeting to mark International Anti-Corruption Day, Rosario warned of the damaging consequences of corruption because it reduces the state's ability to satisfy the basic needs of citizens.

Preventing and fighting against corruption, he said, requires all sectors of society "to strengthen integrity and transparency in our behaviour through changes in mentality and attitude".

Rosario added that the fight against corruption occupies a prominent place in the government's Plan of Action to implement its public administration reform strategy "which seeks to promote transparency in the management of local state bodies and municipalities, guarantee that all leaders and managers make the legally required declarations of their assets, and undertake civic education on preventing corruption".

The director of the Central Office for the Fight against Corruption, Ana Maria Gemo, revealed that in 2015 prosecutors brought charges in 437 cases of corruption. Between January and October of this year, the figure was 382. She regarded this as a significant increase on the previous three years – charges were brought in 256 cases in 2012, 296 in 2013 and 239 in 2014.

The number of people detained for crimes of corruption and embezzlement between January and October was 147, she said – much larger than the figure of 61 detentions in 2014 and 59 in 2015.

"But while the numbers show there is an improvement in our performance", Gemo added, "the truth is that you just have to walk around Maputo and many other parts of Mozambique to see that corruption is a problem and guides the lives of many citizens".

"Although citizens protest against corruption, the fact is that they accept it in their day-to-day lives", she said, "which shows the need to involve all of us to change mentalities, since that is the starting point for any institutional action to prevent and fight against this evil".

The examples of corruption, she continued, range from the traffic cop who accepts a bribe of a few meticaís from a motorist not to issue a fine, to a powerful public office-holder who benefits from illicit business deals to the detriment of the state. "The former subsists in this way, while the latter accumulates wealth expressed in cars and luxury houses, in Mozambique and abroad, bulging bank accounts, and companies which perpetuate that wealth at the expense of the Mozambican people".

Gemo pointed out that the criminal investigation of corruption cases, and trafficking in influence, "follows a paradigm that is quite different from traditional cases of criminal investigation", and the current Penal Procedural Code, in force for over 40 years, "is no longer adequate for investigating corruption and all forms of economic and financial crime, and does not respond to current needs".

The current rules do not establish the special regime for collecting evidence that prosecutors investigating corruption cases need, and so pertinent legislation should be passed bringing law up to date, she urged.

Maputo Council and UN cooperate against violence

UN Women (the United Nations body for gender equality) and Maputo City Municipal Council on 13 December agreed to cooperate on activities to eradicate violence against women and girls in the public spaces of the city.

To this end, the Mayor of Maputo, David Simango, and the representative in Mozambique of UN Women, Florence Raes, signed a memorandum of understanding to implement the recommendations contained in a study on gender-based violence in the city.

The report urged the municipal authorities to improve the structural and organizational conditions in Maputo neighbourhoods, to guarantee police patrols in places prone to violence, and to train and raise the awareness of police, community leaderships and civil society so that they know how to deal with questions of violence against women and girls.

The results of the study showed an alarming level of violence against women in public places. 376 women and girls were questioned in the Maputo neighbourhoods of Chamanculo and Maxaquene, and 60.4 per cent of them said they had suffered some type of violence in the 12 months prior to the study.

Teenagers are more at risk than mature women. 65.7 per cent of the girls aged between 12 and 18 reported that they had suffered violence. The figure was 54.4 per cent among women aged over 18.

Maputo Port sets new record

The largest ship ever to use Maputo port, the "MV Mineral Belgium", sailed out of the port on 1 December, laden with 90,000 tonnes of ferro-chrome and chrome, according to the Maputo Port Development Company (MPDC), the company that operates the port.

The ship was able to use the port due to dredging of the access channel. The dredging is nearing its conclusion – it began in May and should be concluded in January, deepening the access channel from 11 metres to 14.2 metres at high tide.

This enormous ship is 289 metres long and 45 metres wide. It has nine holds, and so is the vessel with the largest number of holds ever to dock in Maputo.

"This is an important landmark for Maputo port", said Osorio Lucas, the Executive Director of MPDC. "It's the first ship to load more than 80,000 tonnes, something which six months ago we could only dream of doing. Today we are sure that we can have more ambitious dreams, and our next target is to load 100,000 tonnes".

The loading operation used mobile cranes, recently acquired by MPDC. The new cranes have increased productivity, and also improve the competitiveness of the port, since shipping companies can use cheaper ships without their own on-board cranes.

Transport Minister Carlos Mesquita said "this operation is of great importance for the sector and for the economy of our country. That ships of this size can now dock at Maputo port means that we will become more competitive". Large mineral cargoes from Maputo would no longer have to be shipped first to the South African ports of Durban or Richards Bay in order to be loaded onto modern ocean-going vessels

Gorongosa National Park to expand

Gorongosa National Park, in the central province of Sofala is about to expand with the likely conversion of an adjacent game park into an area of total protection.

The management of the Gorongosa Park has signed an agreement with the Portuguese Entrepasto group which runs the game park, known as "Coutada 12". This former hunting area covers 200,000 hectares. Under the agreement, the Gorongosa Park and Entrepasto will undertake joint work of ecological assessment, surveys with the local population and an analysis of the tourism potential of Coutada 12. This will culminate with a proposal to the government for the incorporation of Coutada 12 into the Gorongosa National Park.

Over 1,300 containers with illegal logs seized

The number of containers seized in the northern port of Nacala holding logs about to be illegally exported to China is over 1,300.

This seizure of logs, the largest in Mozambican history, was ordered by the Ministry of Land, Environment and Rural Development.

Olivia Amosse, director of the National Environmental Quality Control Agency, which is part of the Ministry, did not rule out the possibility forestry wardens were involved in the illegal logging and attempted export.

Under the current legislation, all the seized logs are now state property, and will later be sold at a public auction. The companies involved will have to pay fines of around 70 million meticaís (\$966,000).

A report published by Maputo's Eduardo Mondlane University in 2015 concluded that the illegal export of timber between 2003 and 2013 had cost the country \$540 million. That report said "the amount of illegal timber exploited in the country and exported illegally to China is 5.7 times greater than the amount declared officially by the National Directorate of Land and Forests".

Niassa water project making progress

The Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) on 9 December expressed satisfaction at the implementation of the water, hygiene and rural sanitation project it is undertaking, in partnership with the Mozambican government, in the northern province of Niassa. The project is known as PROSUAS (Project to Promote Sustainable Water Supply, Hygiene and Rural Sanitation), and JICA representatives met with the Mozambican authorities in Maputo to assess the impact and efficiency of the project.

PROSUAS began in 2013, and its aim was to improve water supply and rural sanitation in the Niassa districts of Mavago, Muembe, Majune, Mandimba, Metarica and

Cuamba. This was to be achieved by building new water sources and rehabilitating existing ones, installing sanitation facilities in schools in the target districts, and raising the awareness of the public about adequate hygiene and sanitation practices.

"We have felt a very positive reaction from the beneficiaries, from society at large, and from the other organizations which have accompanied the implementation of PROSUAS", stressed Katsuyoshi Sudo, the representative of JICA in Mozambique.

He believed that the project will make a significant contribution to improving water supply and sanitation in Niassa, and that PROSUAS "could serve as a reference point for several African countries".

According to the Niassa Provincial Directorate of Public Works, under PROSUAS fifty new water sources have been built, and 65 have been repaired. Twenty sanitation blocks, with hand washing facilities, have been installed in schools. Staff can use eight motor-cycles acquired by PROSUAS to visit the water sources, and have been issued with equipment to measure the water level in the wells and boreholes and test quality.

The Provincial Director, Americo Chivale, said that 110 local water committees have been set up, and twenty technical staff trained in water supply and sanitation. 37 artisans have been trained in building latrines. Seven local traders have been trained in how to install spare parts for the pumps. Chivale was optimistic that this will cut the time for repairs from several months to a few days.

Not enough water for Maputo irrigation

Despite recent rain in Maputo, the level of water in the Pequenos Libombos dam on the Umbeluzi River is so low that authorities are cutting water supplies from the reservoir to the irrigation schemes in Maputo province.

Visiting the dam on 12 December, Minister of Public Works, Carlos Bonete, told reporters that no more water from Pequenos Libombos will be used for irrigation.

The priority, he said, is to ensure drinking water for the Greater Maputo conurbation (the cities of Maputo and Matola and Boane district), which is dependent on the Umbeluzi water pumping and treatment station.

"This is a situation we have been managing since last year", said Bonete. First, the use of water to generate electricity at Pequenos Libombos was stopped. Then gradually the use of water for agriculture was cut.

The ideal scenario, the Minister added, would be for heavy rainfall filling up the reservoir and allowing the dam to increase its discharges from the current three cubic metres a second to 4.2 cubic metres a second.

For the time being, drinking water for Maputo is guaranteed, said Bonete, but he urged citizens to use water sparingly. In the current situation, they should not water their gardens or use hoses to wash their cars.

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