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FEWS NET warns of worsening food insecurity

The US-funded Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) has warned that acute food insecurity exists across Mozambique driven by the impact of multiple natural disasters and the conflict in Cabo Delgado.

In its latest Food Security Update, it notes that the greatest shocks to the 2021/2022 agricultural season have been damage from winds and flooding from Tropical Storm Ana, Tropical Storm Dumako, and Tropical Cyclone Gombe. These storms affected over 200,000 hectares of agricultural land across Nampula, Zambezia, Tete, and parts of Niassa, Cabo Delgado, Manica, and Sofala provinces. It adds that heavy rains also caused flooding on the Maputo, Incomati, and Umbeluzi rivers leading to damage to 11,500 hectares of agricultural land in Maputo province.

Currently, parts of Cabo Delgado are facing a crisis in food insecurity because of the displacement of around 800,000 people due to islamist terrorism that has hit the province since 2017. Although the Mozambican defence and security forces, supported by the Rwandan military contingent and soldiers from SAMIM (SADC Military Mission in Mozambique), have had success in dislodging the terrorists, FEWS NET notes that a food crisis persists “due to the conflict where insurgents continue to carry out small-scale attacks and killings, primarily in Mueda, Nangade, and Meluco districts, with small insurgent cells seeking to loot food and supplies from unguarded places”.

FEWS NET expects food insecurity to grow across the country between June and September, with parts of Nampula province and much of the southern provinces of Inhambane and Gaza entering a crisis phase. It notes that “national crop production is expected to be lower than last year due to reduced crop yields and crop losses impacted by multiple shocks”. In particular, a significantly below-average to failed harvest is likely in Maputo, Gaza, and Inhambane provinces, and the southern areas of Manica, Sofala, and Tete provinces.

However, there is some hope that, for some, things could improve where “flood-affected and low-lying areas have the potential for good vegetable production during the second season, given that households have access to vegetable seeds”. It adds that “moderate rainfall in April is likely to provide much-needed additional residual moisture for the second agricultural season, particularly in drought-affected areas”.

FEWS NET warns of a knock-on effect of the conflict in Ukraine, with increased fuel prices leading to both

direct and indirect increases in the price of food and non-food items. In addition, it notes that the national bakery association is considering raising the price of bread due to the increase in global wheat prices. Inflation will “likely reduce the purchasing power of households, particularly very poor and poor households in urban and peri-urban areas”. Additionally, this inflation will “counter the recovery of poor households who have increased their access to income-earning opportunities following the significant relaxation of COVID-19 control measures”.

President Nyusi launches agricultural marketing campaign

President Filipe Nyusi on 20 April launched the 2022/2023 agricultural marketing campaign in the district of Marracuene, 30 kilometres north of Maputo.

The target for this year is slightly more than 17 million tonnes of assorted crops: 21 per cent of this figure should be grain, with root crops accounting for 45 per cent, vegetables 13 per cent, pulses 11 per cent, oilseeds four per cent, and miscellaneous other crops 20 per cent.

President Nyusi reaffirmed the government’s commitment to promoting industrialisation to stimulate the expansion of agricultural production. This would involve “continuing the reforms that are underway to attract investment, alongside building infrastructure in rural areas, particularly roads and electrification”.

President Nyusi also challenged farmers to boost the production of onions and potatoes to improve the country’s balance of trade. He said that Mozambique is continuing to import potatoes that have been rejected by other countries.

Statistics quoted by the President show that in 2020 Mozambique exported agricultural produce valued at US\$604.2 million. However, agricultural imports were over 50 per cent higher at US\$998.5 million. He lamented that “this means that we recorded a negative trade balance in agriculture of over US\$394 million”.

This is a condensed version of the AIM daily news service - for details contact pfauvet@live.com

WFP cuts food rations due to funding shortfall

The United Nations' World Food Programme (WFP) has cut its life-saving food assistance to over 900,000 people in northern Mozambique due to a lack of funds. As a result, only half rations will be provided until further funding is confirmed.

Islamist terrorism since 2017 has forced around 800,000 people to flee from their homes and livelihoods in parts of the northern province of Cabo Delgado. Although the Mozambican defence and security forces, supported by the Rwandan military contingent and soldiers from SAMIM (SADC Military Mission in Mozambique), have had success in dislodging the terrorists, many people are still waiting for more stability before returning home.

WFP provides food assistance to these people and host communities. However, in its latest country brief, WFP points out that it needs US\$17.3 million per month to sustain its operations in the north and laments that if additional funds are not received in a timely manner, a complete pipeline break is expected in June.

In response to the funding crisis, WFP is moving away from providing assistance focusing on those that have been displaced towards assisting those that it assesses as being the most vulnerable. In a related move, it is helping people to rebuild their lives by providing 44,000 people in five districts in the province with agricultural kits for the main planting season.

WFP notes that "following two decades of relative peace and stability, the intensification of violence in Cabo Delgado province since 2017 threatens lives and socio-economic development". It adds that "Mozambique is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world, with drought and pests regularly affecting staple crops, while extreme weather events, particularly cyclones and tropical storms, lead to agricultural losses, destroyed infrastructure, assets and livelihood, and internal displacement".

In March, WFP assisted 1.37 million people nationwide with food assistance, cash-based transfers, and agricultural kits. However, it warns that keeping these operations going until September will cost US\$157 million.

Health Minister warns of Covid-19 fifth wave

Health Minister Armindo Tiago has warned of the possibility that a fifth wave of Covid-19 may hit the country, with the main concern being the current increase in Covid-19 cases in South Africa. Tiago pointed out this could be reflected in Mozambique if the public let its guard down and abandoned preventive measures. "Our experience with the previous waves is that, whenever a wave begins in South Africa, the increase in the number of cases also happens in Mozambique", said the Minister.

Nonetheless, because of the success of Mozambique's mass vaccination campaign, Tiago expected new cases to be mild.

According to the Health Ministry's daily bulletins on Covid-19, new cases are being diagnosed at the rate of just a handful a day. Thus, the latest Ministry press release said that on 2 May only one case was identified.

Since the start of the pandemic, 1,313,728 people have been tested in Mozambique for the coronavirus that causes Covid-19. The total number of Covid-19 cases diagnosed in Mozambique to 225,387.

Muslim leaders reject terrorism

The Muslim community in Mozambique on 2 May celebrated the end of the fasting month of Ramadan with appeals to peace and harmony, particularly in the northern province of Cabo Delgado which has been ravaged by terrorist attacks perpetrated by jihadist groups since October 2017.

In Nampula province, Sheik Abdul Latifo stressed that Muslims repudiate armed violence and will cooperate with the government to identify those who are using Islam to manipulate and murder. "We are facing the problem of terrorism in Cabo Delgado", he said. "They are killing our fellow countrymen, burning down houses, destroying public and private buildings, and looting property. These bandits are trying, without success, to use the name of Islam, they have tried to use the name of Allah in their raids".

"They are trying to besmirch the good name of Islam", said Latifo. "They have forgotten that, in Islam, human blood is sacred and must not be shed".

Addressing the terrorists, he said, "We shall show society what Islam is. We shall warn our young people not to fall into your poisonous traps. We shall block any attempts to turn our youths into your instruments".

Nampula provincial governor Manuel Rodrigues added, "We would urge our Muslim brothers to multiply their efforts to make our society a space for peaceful and harmonious co-existence between citizens of different religious beliefs".

In Cabo Delgado, provincial governor Valige Tauabo, visiting Palma, one of the districts worst hit by terrorism, stressed the role of the Muslim community in resilience against armed violence. He urged the public to remain vigilant against people trying to disturb the province in the name of religion.

In Maputo, Muslims spoke up against the renewed wave of kidnappings in the city, and the inability of the police to deal with them. Recently, two young men were kidnapped in the city and nothing has been heard of them since. The kidnappers' main targets are businesspeople, many of whom are Muslims.

Khalid Cassam, said, "the police should improve their work. We know it is not easy with the existing resources, but something must be done. We should not be living constantly in fear. The stability of a country depends essentially on the security of its people".

This was the first time in three years that Mozambican Muslims celebrated the end of Ramadan in large public gatherings. In 2020 and 2021, such gatherings were cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Mozambique will not abandon coal mining

The Mozambican government has ruled out abandoning the mining of coal as part of the energy transition advocated by the United Nations in order to meet the target of reducing carbon emissions by 2030.

The government justifies this position on the grounds that coal remains a major Mozambican export and makes a crucial contribution to the balance of payments. The government argues that the energy transition must always take into account real conditions in the country.

The Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Mineral Resources and Energy, Teodoro Vales, argued this position on 28 April during a seminar on “the challenges and opportunities for promoting an inclusive energy transition in Mozambique”, organised by the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD).

“A lot is said about abandoning coal”, said Vales. “But right now, coal is the major contributor to the balance of payments and in second place we have heavy mineral sands. So, we cannot abandon these sources from one day to the next, because the necessary conditions must be in place for us to do this”.

Vales stressed that mitigation actions are underway to develop non-polluting energy generation. Among these systems are renewable energies including hydroelectric power but also less polluting fuels such as natural gas.

The government, he noted, has set an ambitious target of producing an extra 600 megawatts of power by 2024, of which 400 MW will be generated by gas-fired power stations with 200 MW from solar, wind, and hydro-electric power.

Vale sells coal assets to Vulcan Resources

The Brazilian mining giant Vale on 25 April concluded the sale of its Mozambican coal production assets (the Moatize coal mine and the Nacala Logistical Corridor) to Vulcan Resources.

Vulcan is part of the Indian group, Jindal, which also runs coal mines in Tete province.

A press release issued by Vale states that under the deal the two companies will maintain a strong collaboration to implement systems and procedures intended to ensure the continuity of operations.

According to Vale, in 2021 it decided to disinvest from coal and focus on its foremost ambition to become a low carbon mining leader.

Over the last 15 years, Vale worked in partnership with the governments of Mozambique and Malawi to develop the coal mine in Moatize and the 912-kilometre railway of the Nacala Logistical Corridor. This railway runs from Moatize, through southern Malawi, to a dedicated coal operations port at Nacala-a-Velha in the northern province of Nampula. Vale calculates that this required an investment of US\$13.1 billion.

It also states that it became one of the largest taxpayers to the Mozambican State, putting its total contribution at one billion dollars. Vale says it created about 50,000 direct and indirect jobs and built up over 5,000 local suppliers.

It also notes that the company disbursed over US\$82 million in social and environmental initiatives.

The statement from Vale does not mention the many disputes over resettlement. The mine displaced thousands of Moatize residents from their homes and there were bitter complaints that the alternative housing provided by Vale was sub-standard.

Botswana exporting coal through Maputo

Maputo port is now among the routes for the export of coal from Botswana, following the arrival on 26 April of the first train, drawing 40 wagons, loaded with 2,000 tonnes of coal.

This is the result of the agreements reached during the talks between President Filipe Nyusi and his Botswana counterpart, Mokgweetsi Masisi, during the State visit by President Nyusi to Botswana earlier in April.

The Executive Director of Mozambique’s publicly owned Ports and Railway Company (CFM), Augusto Abudo, said that the train arrived in Maputo after travelling for 14 hours along the rail lines of Botswana, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique. Within Mozambican territory, the train travelled 500 kilometres from the Chicualacuala border in Gaza province to the port.

In the first phase, Abudo said that Botswana will export 32,000 tonnes of coal through Maputo every month, amounting to an average of four trains every week.

Abudo added that, because of the recent increase in international coal prices, it is likely that other coal mining countries in the region may seek the Mozambican ports to export their minerals. Besides Botswana, Abudo said that Maputo has sporadically received commodities from both Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Ressano dry port will remove 7,500 trucks from EN4 toll road

The new customs terminal at Ressano Garcia, on Mozambique’s busiest border with South Africa, will remove about 7,500 heavy goods vehicles every month from the flow of traffic along the EN4 toll road connecting the two countries, improving road safety, and cutting pollution.

The dry port, which required an investment of US\$3.5 million, will halve the current daily number of 500 tipper trucks which move along the motorway and reduce the long queues and gridlock on the roads connecting the border with Maputo port.

The infrastructure will also increase the volumes of bulk cargo ferried to the ports, estimated at over five million tonnes every year. There will be six daily trains from the dry port to the harbour, each one drawing 50 wagons, in a bid to optimise the use of the terminal.

The dry port results from a partnership between CFM and the company TLG Mozambique, which led to the construction of the local hub for the reception of minerals, rehabilitation of the premises for various services, and access to the terminal.

Syrah increases graphite production at Balama

The Australian mining company Syrah Resources on 27 April announced that in the first quarter of 2022 it increased both the production and sales of graphite from its mine in Balama district, in the northern Mozambican province of Cabo Delgado.

According to the company's quarterly report, it produced 46kt of natural graphite with 35kt sold and shipped. This was possible due to the opening up of a new shipping route through the port of Pemba, augmenting the route via Nacala. Syrah revealed that its first shipment from Pemba arrived in China in March with another two breakbulk shipments from Pemba scheduled in the third quarter of the year.

The company's operations are becoming even more profitable, with graphite being produced (free on board, FOB) at a cost of US\$464 per tonne, compared with average prices running at US\$573 per tonne.

During the first quarter of the year, 451 people were employed at Balama, not including contractors. The workforce is 96 per cent Mozambican, 37 per cent from the local community, and 18 per cent women.

Syrah also revealed that it has significant sales in its order book. It puts this down to strong growth in the Chinese and global electric vehicle market.

The Balama open cast mine covers 106 square kilometres and is reported to hold the largest graphite reserves ever discovered.

Graphite is a highly valued form of carbon due to its properties as a conductor of electricity. It is used in batteries and fuel cells and is the basis for the "miracle material" graphene.

Uganda to support fight against terrorism

Uganda has expressed its willingness to support Mozambique in fighting terrorism in the northern province of Cabo Delgado where, since October 2017, Islamist terrorists have murdered nearly 3,000 civilians and displaced over 800,000.

Speaking during a three-day visit to Uganda, Mozambican President Filipe Nyusi said that this assistance will be channelled to the veterans of the country's liberation war who are now part of local militias assisting the armed forces in Cabo Delgado.

President Nyusi added that "Uganda is already supporting Mozambique logistically and one of the purposes of this visit is to thank the sister country".

President Nyusi added that Uganda intends to support agro-industrial development projects in Montepuez district, in Cabo Delgado, for liberation war veterans.

Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni said that friendship ties between the two countries will be transmitted to future generations through sustainable development projects. He stated that "Mozambique has vast tracts of land for agriculture and the idea is to bring farming tools and tractors and create associations in partnership with the war veterans".

Panjane linked to electricity grid

The Panjane administrative post in Magude district, Maputo province, was linked to the national electricity grid on 27 April, as part of the government's efforts to electrify all administrative posts by 2024.

Construction work took a year and consisted of building 33 kilometres of medium voltage power lines and four kilometres of low voltage power network. There are also two 100 kVA transformer posts with the capacity for 100 new connections. The project cost 62 million meticaís (about US\$970,000).

Panjane administrative post is 45 kilometres from Magude town and consists of two localities, Chivongoenine and Chimbongoene, with a total population of 2,750. The immediate gains from the connection to the national grid are the electrification of Panjane Complete Primary School, the local health centre, the water supply system, and administrative residences as well as public lighting in the streets.

Implemented by the publicly-owned electricity company, EDM, the construction created 35 jobs, 25 of them for local people. Currently, work is underway to connect new consumers to the system, under the government's "Energy for All" programme.

During the inauguration ceremony, the Secretary of State for Maputo province, Vitoria Diogo, assured the population of Magude district that they will all have access to electricity by 2024 under the universal access to energy plans of the government.

She added that work has already begun to electrify before the end of the year the Mapulanguene administrative post, which is 110 kilometres from Magude town.

The programme to electrify all administrative posts was launched in 2020. So far, 33 administrative posts have been covered, 26 through the national grid and seven through isolated systems.

Zambezia grapples with cholera outbreak

At least 26 people have been admitted to Mopeia district hospital, in the central province of Zambezia, following an outbreak of cholera which began in March.

The health authorities in Mopeia are receiving between three and four patients every day, but they have managed to control the outbreak of acute diarrhoea and vomiting.

The Zambezia Head Doctor, Isaias Marcos, explained that "over the last two weeks, we recorded an outbreak of acute diarrhoea in Chimuara, the main town in Mopeia. But we managed to bring the situation under control. Now we are recording cases across the district with an average of three to four cases a day".

To prevent the spread of the disease, the health authorities have launched a wide range of measures such as awareness drives for the communities promoting good hygiene practices and treating water with chlorine.

National Health Institute launches drone project

Mozambique's National Health Institute (INS) on 22 April launched the second phase of a study on the use of drones to transport medical samples and equipment to and from remote areas.

Under the project, the drones will deliver tests, vaccines, and other emergency supplies to hard to reach health facilities with the return flights bringing back samples for testing for infectious diseases such as Covid-19, tuberculosis, and HIV.

The project will take place in the southern province of Inhambane in a partnership between the INS, logistics experts Swoop Aero, and the non-governmental organisation VillageReach.

According to the National Director of Public Health Laboratories in the INS, Sofia Viegas, "we hope to obtain pleasing results to improve the efficiency in the national health system, regarding the care of the population in areas that are difficult to access".

She added that the first phase of the study showed promising results regarding the safety and feasibility of using drones for transporting samples of Covid-19 and tuberculosis.

In the second phase, samples will be collected daily leading to a quicker diagnosis of infectious diseases and the faster treatment of patients. About 100,000 people are expected to benefit directly from the project.

VillageReach Country Director Rotafina Donco pointed out that "the drones offer progress in epidemiological disease surveillance and early detection of outbreaks. This becomes especially important for underreached communities at the last mile. It also creates more equitable access to rapid diagnosis and treatment for rural populations, fulfilling the promise of primary health care services for all".

The Drones for Health programme in Inhambane forms part of a multi-phase approach to establishing routine drone operations in Mozambique. The first phase took place in Maputo province between 2018 and 2020 during which 140 laboratory samples of Covid-19 were transported with a total airtime of ten hours. This confirmed that drone transport does not compromise the quality of laboratory samples compared to ground transport.

Set up in 1975, the year of Mozambican independence, the INS is the body which manages, regulates, and inspects all activities concerned with the production of scientific evidence in the health area.

Agreement with Millennium Challenge corporation signed

The Mozambican government and the US Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) on 20 April in Washington signed a revised agreement on the Compact Development Fund (CDF).

The packages of aid provided by the MCC are known as "compacts", and the agreement seeks to strengthen the capacity of the Compact II Development Office

(GDC-II) in identifying and designing the projects that will form part of the Compact.

With the signature of the revised CDF agreement, according to a release from the Mozambican Ministry of Economy and Finance, US\$10.75 million will be allocated for the preparation of Compact II, which is expected to benefit the entire country, but with a geographical emphasis on the central province of Zambezia.

The Minister of Economy and Finance, Max Tonela, who signed the agreement, said his signature represents an important commitment to the qualitative design of Compact II. He said the compact will contain projects in areas such as the promotion of investments in commercial agriculture, rural connectivity and transport, and the integrated management of climate and coastal development.

For her part, the MCC Deputy President for Compact Operations, Fatema Z. Sumar, said "with the funding that will be made available, the MCC and the Mozambican government will work to identify investment projects to reduce poverty and to speed up inclusive and sustainable economic growth".

It is expected that Compact II will be signed in 2023. The first MCC compact, valued at US\$509 million, ran from 2008 to 2013.

British company to support transport infrastructure development

The British company Mott MacDonald has announced that it will be supporting the Mozambican government's efforts to improve the country's road network and other infrastructure. The funding for this assistance will come from the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), which will provide US\$4.3 million over five years as part of its "Transportation and Vertical Structures Practice in Africa" project.

According to Mott MacDonald, economic growth in Mozambique has been restricted by limited infrastructure and high transport costs. The company will work with the Mozambican government and MCC to identify projects to improve roads and logistical infrastructure, support institutional, regulatory, and legal reform and enhance the technical planning processes.

The company points out that "improved transport links will make it easier for people living in remote communities to travel to urban centres for more employment opportunities, and access essential services such as health care and education".

Mott MacDonald's Kevin Hardy declared "we are pleased to continue to support MCC and the government of Mozambique in promoting economic growth by improving rural transportation infrastructure and services in Zambezia province. We look forward to applying our technical, analytical, and managerial knowledge and experience to support MCC's work by promoting political and economic stability, strengthening the country's resilience to climate change, and reducing poverty".

USAID launches programmes for Gaza farmers

The US Government on 19 April announced the launch, through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), of two programmes to improve Mozambican farmers' ability to respond to and recover from climate shocks and stresses.

According to a press release from the US Embassy, the two-year programmes, in coordination with local and provincial government authorities, "will improve agricultural productivity, diversify economic opportunities, and strengthen early warning and action systems in disaster-affected, climate-stressed communities of Gaza Province".

The programmes, the release added, "emphasise women and young farmers, two groups who often have less access to agricultural resources and services".

One programme, the Farmer Resilience and Rebuilding Initiative will support 4,400 smallholder farmers in Gaza's Chokwe and Guija districts "by running field schools for farmers with a curriculum tailored to the local context and creating a network of rural entrepreneurs that advise farmers on topics ranging from business management to the use of water-smart technologies".

In addition, said the release, "the training stresses the importance of how shared responsibilities and decision-making between women and men can increase incomes".

The second programme, the Promoting Resilience through the Empowerment of Women Initiative, implemented by the NGO Save the Children, provides training to farmers in sustainable production practices that enrich the soil, protect crops, and improve the quality and yields. The program also supports village-based savings and loan groups to increase smallholder farmers' access to financing".

In addition, said the release, the programme works with district officials and community leaders to develop early action plans that protect crops, fields and livestock before disasters hit. These activities will benefit approximately 75 communities in Gaza province, reaching more than 54,000 Mozambicans.

USAID Mozambique Mission Director Helen Pataki said, "By helping build skills, diversify economic opportunities, and increase access to resources, these programmes allow farmers and their communities to not only recover from lean periods but also improve yields and prepare for the future."

USAID says it is investing US\$5.5 million in these two programmes over the next two years. It says support for disaster recovery and resilience programmes aimed at meeting the immediate needs of affected communities and building resilience for future emergencies are critical components of the broader US Government assistance in Mozambique.

President Nyusi and President Chakwera inaugurate electricity interconnection

President Filipe Nyusi on 21 April announced that laying the first stone for the regional electricity interconnection between Mozambique and Malawi is a historic landmark which will result in the two countries becoming key actors in the energy market of the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

President Nyusi was speaking in Matambo, in the western province of Tete where, together with his Malawian counterpart, Lazarus Chakwera, he laid the first stone for the construction of a 400 kilovolt transmission line through which Mozambique will supply Malawi with 50 megawatts of power.

The line is expected to cost US\$62 million, of which US\$35 million is for building the 142 kilometre long line in Mozambique with the remainder covering the 76 kilometre line in Malawi. In total, there will be 527 high voltage pylons.

A second component of the project is the expansion of the Matambo sub-station, budgeted at US\$21 million, which will guarantee the reliability of the power supply.

President Nyusi stressed that the implementation of this project is part of the SADC master plan for electricity infrastructure for the period 2018-2043 and will contribute significantly to the consolidation of the regional integration of Mozambique with neighbouring SADC countries.

The interconnection project, President Nyusi believed, "opens another window of opportunity for job creation, and will express the dream of the peoples of the two countries to have reliable, good quality electricity".

This power supply, he continued, will encourage new investments in industry and tourism, and will favour mechanisation which increases productivity. It will also improve access to health care and education.

President Chakwera said the new power line will ensure a safe and reliable electrical interconnection. With the initial supply of 50 megawatts to Malawi, it will also allow Malawi to play a full role in the Southern African Power Pool (SAPP). He added that Malawi is interested in increasing the amount of electricity it buys from Mozambique from 50 to 110 megawatts.

President Chakwera lamented that the recent passage of Cyclone Gombe had destroyed some of the Malawian electricity infrastructures, resulting in the loss of 129 megawatts. It would take some time, he added, for that 129 megawatts to be recovered for the Malawian grid. "You can imagine how urgent this interconnection between Mozambique and Malawi is," said President Chakwera.