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UNHCR warns of invisible crisis in northern Mozambique

The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) on 10 May warned that it is gravely concerned about ongoing violence and insecurity in northern Mozambique. Speaking at a press conference in Geneva, Grainne Ohara, director of UNHCR's Division of International Protection, lamented that conflict and displacement, compounded by extreme weather events, have led to surging protection needs for hundreds of thousands of affected refugees, internally displaced people, and host communities.

Ohara noted that since the start of this year, Mozambique has been battered by five tropical storms and cyclones along its northern coastal areas. Among those affected by the storms were people displaced by the islamist terrorism which has affected Cabo Delgado province since 2017. According to Ohara, this illustrates how the effects of climate change interact with the root causes of displacement.

UNHCR pointed out that on 11 March Tropical Cyclone Gombe hit more than 736,000 people, including those in the Corrane site for internally displaced people and the Maratane refugee centre. Eighty per cent of shelters were damaged and more than 27,000 refugees, asylum-seekers, and host community members remain in urgent need of assistance.

The UN agency sent a mission to the country at the end of April to assess how it can scale up its work for the people affected by the conflict and climate shocks. However, it admits that "humanitarian operations are restricted by chronic underfunding". Despite this, UNHCR has responded in areas hit by Gombe and other storms, including providing shelter and household kits to affected communities and conducting repairs to schools, health clinics, and other key infrastructure.

Along with the Mozambican government and its partners, UNHCR has provided legal assistance to 21,500 people from both displaced and host communities in Cabo Delgado and reached 55,000 people with gender-based violence prevention and response awareness campaigns.

According to Ohara, UNHCR is committed to supporting Mozambique's government, local authorities, and communities in protecting and finding solutions for refugees, assisting Mozambique in addressing the impact of internal displacement, and reinforcing the need for emergency preparedness and responding to extreme weather events.

However, she lamented that the needs in Mozambique, already significant, continue to grow but the resources are not enough. Specifically, to continue and scale up UNCHR's operations in Mozambique will require US\$36.7 million in 2022.

Ohara warned that every region of the world is experiencing climate hazards and that cyclones and other storms are becoming more frequent and severe, floods are stronger, droughts are intensifying, and wildfires are becoming more devastating. She highlighted the fact that over eighty per cent of the world's refugees and internally displaced people come from the most climate-vulnerable countries.

Met Office warns of temporary breaching of Paris Agreement target in next five years

The United Kingdom Meteorological Office has warned that global warming could temporarily hit 1.5 degrees centigrade above pre-industrial levels for the first time, with a fifty-fifty chance that this will happen over the next five years.

In a new study, the Met Office also warns that there is a 93 per cent chance that the five-year average global temperature for 2022 - 2026 will be higher than the average for the last five years (2017-2021). As a result, the annual mean global near-surface temperature for any year over the next five years is predicted to be between 1.1 degrees centigrade and 1.7 degrees centigrade higher than pre-industrial levels.

The warmest year ever recorded was in 2016 and new data suggests that there is a more than ninety per cent chance of this being beaten during at least one of the next five years.

In 2015, countries adopted a legally binding international treaty on climate change, the Paris Agreement, which commits to limiting global warming to below 2 degrees centigrade, with 1.5 degrees centigrade being the preferred maximum increase in temperatures compared to pre-industrial levels.

The Met Office report points out that last year the global average temperature was 1.1 degrees centigrade above the pre-industrial baseline. However, global temperatures were held down by back-to-back La Niña events at the start and end of the year and the Met Office warns that an El Niño event would immediately fuel temperatures, as it did in 2016.

IMF approves US\$456 million credit

The Executive Board of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on 9 May approved a three-year agreement with Mozambique that will make available US\$456 million for the country, of which US\$91 million will be available immediately.

According to the IMF, the Extended Credit Facility will “support the economic recovery and policies to reduce public debt and financing vulnerabilities, creating space for priority investments in human capital, climate adaptation and infrastructure”.

In particular, the funds will support the Mozambican government’s “ambitious reform agenda”. Key policies include the establishment of a sovereign wealth fund to manage revenue from the Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) projects that will begin to come onstream later this year, mobilising additional tax revenue, and strengthening public financial management and governance.

The IMF notes that a moderate economic recovery is taking place in Mozambique following a real contraction of GDP of -1.2 per cent in 2020, the first contraction in thirty years. It points out that the country returned to economic growth in 2021 and that this is now becoming more broad-based.

It notes that deaths from Covid-19 have been below the regional average but points out that three large waves of infections in 2021 and 2022 moderated the strength of the recovery.

As a result of the economic crisis, poverty increased from 61.9 per cent of the population in 2019 to an estimated 63.3 per cent in 2020. However, the IMF recognises that this was “mitigated by welfare and social protection measures undertaken with international support”.

The IMF notes that the Russian invasion of Ukraine is pushing up fuel and food prices. Even before the crisis in Ukraine, prices were increasing, with inflation rising to 6.7 per cent year-on-year in March 2022, which the IMF puts down to rising global prices and the impact of tropical storms on local food prices.

According to the Bretton Woods Institution, the country’s medium-term prospects are positive with growth, excluding extractive industries, expected to rise to about 4.0 per cent per year. When including the extractive industries, the growth rates will be higher as the LNG projects begin production.

The IMF deputy managing director, Bo Li, commented that “Mozambique has managed the Covid pandemic relatively well, maintaining macroeconomic stability and reform momentum even as the country has weathered a series of shocks, culminating with the effects of the war in Ukraine”. He added, “maintaining space for social protection spending on the most vulnerable households is an important objective of the authorities’ programme”.

The IMF Board approved the credit facility after considering the report of an IMF staff team visit to Mozambique. This consisted of a series of virtual meetings in January and February followed by an in-person visit to Maputo between 14 and 22 March. The

mission held meetings with, amongst others, Prime Minister Adriano Maleiane, Finance Minister Max Tonela, the Governor of the Bank of Mozambique, Rogerio Zandamela, the Minister of Natural Resources and Energy, Carlos Zacarias, and the Minister for Gender, Children and Social Action, Nyeleti Mondlane.

At a Maputo press conference, Tonela said the new IMF programme “also provides for the improvement of budgetary space for financing social protection programmes, covering an additional 30,000 households per year, impacting on the lives of 150,000 people”.

The interest rate on the IMF loan will be zero. Repayment of the debt will begin in five and a half years and the full amount should be paid off in 10 years.

Former PM warns of “painful measures”

Former Prime Minister, Luisa Diogo, warned on 12 May that the country must be prepared for a bout of austerity, in order to take advantage of the resumption of normal relations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Speaking at a Maputo press conference, Diogo noted that the resumption of an IMF programme with Mozambique coincided with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which was likely to cause painful measures such as increased fuel prices.

The new IMF programme sends a signal of confidence in Mozambique, but it is not cost-free. Diogo said one of the conditions for the IMF programme would be tighter management of the Mozambican economy.

She believed that the Mozambican government will now introduce reforms “that could be painful. We had better see that there are measures that are painful, but which bring results that are worthwhile”.

The immediate problem Diogo foresaw was the supply of fuel. In Mozambique, fuel companies are demanding that the government increase the price of liquid fuels, otherwise they might stop importing fuel.

The country could not afford to run such a risk, she warned. “That would be the worst situation we could go through”, she exclaimed.

“Often the government has to find ways of balancing things between consumers, distributors, and importers of this product that is so fundamental for the economy”, said Diogo. Although another increase in fuel prices was inevitable, it must be explained to the public: “we must not tire of explaining”, she said. “We must explain in parliament and explain through the mass media”.

The country needed to find other sources of finance, and that meant debt – but this must be “responsible indebtedness”, stressed Diogo. The first step would be to define a debt strategy, in which “we must forget commercial debt because we are not in any position to repay”. Currently, “we are strangled by a terrible commercial debt, for which there is no debt forgiveness”, she said. “If we wanted to go after commercial debt, then we wouldn’t need the IMF”, said the former Prime Minister. “Now we have to take on debt in accordance with our capacity to repay”. The advantages of loans from the IMF and the World Bank are long repayment times and low interest rates”.

World Bank to provide US\$300 million for budget support

The World Bank is to disburse US\$300 million in support for the Mozambican state budget. The World Bank country director for Mozambique, Idah Pswarayi-Riddihough, announced the figure at a Maputo press conference on 11 May, immediately after a meeting with the Minister of Economy and Finance, Max Tonela.

Idah Pswarayi-Riddihough said the priority areas for World Bank investment would be health, education, energy, and agriculture. She pointed out that “we are talking about a first instalment of US\$300 million, which we hope to take to our administration for approval by 30 June this year. Then we can consider other windows of financing for 2023 and 2024”.

The priority areas for those years, she added, would depend on the reforms undertaken by the government.

Unlike many of Mozambique’s partners, the World Bank did not cut off financial assistance entirely after the scandal of Mozambique’s “hidden debts” became public knowledge in 2016. World Bank aid continued, but in relatively small amounts, project by project. Now the Bank will return to providing direct budget support. Pswarayi-Riddihough said that the improvement in good governance recorded in recent years contributed to the resumption of World Bank support. Major work had been undertaken around questions of transparency and good governance, she noted – but noted that civil society is continuing to demand greater advances in these areas.

Mozambique’s new programme with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), she added, could give “a strong signal to the market. Indeed, it will send a strong signal to all of Mozambique’s partners”.

MRG Metals applies for rare earth elements and uranium exploration licences

The Australian based mining company MRG Metals announced on 11 May that it has applied for three exploration licences for Rare Earth Elements and Uranium deposits about 150 kilometres west of the central Mozambican coastal city of Quelimane.

In its note to the Australian Securities Exchange, MRG Metals explained that the proposed project will explore a number of hard-rock and sedimentary targets following positive signs from radiometric spectrometer data collected from an airborne geophysical survey. Shares in MRG Metals on the Australian Securities Exchange jumped by 13 per cent following the announcement.

The applications for exploration licences are currently being assessed by the Mozambican authorities and the company stated that it is ready to commence field exploration as soon as the applications are granted.

Amongst the minerals that the company hopes to find in economically viable quantities is Monazite which could contain Rare Earth Elements such as Thorium.

According to the company’s chairperson, Andrew Van Der Zwan “the successful submission of the exploration licence applications that cover Rare Earths

and Uranium is a very important step for MRG Metals in our forward-looking strategy”. He noted that the new licences will diversify the company’s portfolio and give it access to the growing Rare Earth and Uranium markets.

Van Der Zwan pointed out that “Mozambique as an investment destination is a fantastic country” and added that the company has an excellent local team. The company is also developing a heavy mineral sands project in the southern Mozambican province of Gaza.

Rare Earth Elements are a group of 17 metals, described as “light” or “heavy” depending on their position in the periodic table of elements. They have many high technology applications in, for example, aerospace components, lasers, superconductors, and magnets.

Ncondezi sees potential for solar and battery project

The London-based company Ncondezi Energy announced on 9 May that an internal review of its integrated 300 megawatt power project in the western Mozambican province of Tete has found that there is potential for a grid-scale solar power project along with battery storage.

In a statement through the London Stock Exchange, the company reveals that preliminary studies have confirmed that the site has favourable solar conditions and access to Mozambique’s electricity grid.

Ncondezi argues that a solar project is feasible without compromising the delivery of the company’s main project, which is a 300 megawatt power station using coal from its open cast mine.

Ncondezi’s Chief Executive Officer, Hanno Pengilly, explains that the company is continuing to work with its strategic partner, China Machinery Engineering Corporation, on financing the main project. However, he adds that “preliminary study work has confirmed that the project site area has strong potential for a solar project plus battery storage with good solar conditions and multiple access points to the Mozambique grid. Given the large project concession area, the solar project would be deliverable without compromising the main project”.

According to the company, the main project will “provide 300 megawatts of reliable and available power, helping to close the infrastructure gap of the region and serving as a catalyst for economic development”. It adds that the electricity will provide baseload energy to mitigate drought and other phenomena that cause renewable energy output to be intermittent.

Ncondezi highlights the company’s role in meeting the Mozambican government’s energy strategy of providing universal electricity access by 2030. It stresses that the coal-fired power plant “will be designed to be equipped with state-of-the-art emissions control technologies that will reduce local air pollutants, minimising the plant’s impact on the environment and ensuring its compliance with the most stringent emission standards”.

Quelimane mayor wants another term of office

The Mayor of the central city of Quelimane, Manuel de Araujo, announced on 14 May that he intends to run for a further term of office in the municipal elections scheduled for 11 October 2023.

Speaking at a ceremony where ten new Quelimane city councillors took office, Araujo said "I am willing to continue leading the Quelimane municipality. The date fixed for the election coincides with my birthday, which means we will have a double party, the first for our victory at the polls, and the second for my birthday".

Araujo was confident that he will be the Quelimane mayoral candidate for the main opposition party, Renamo. This may prove to be optimistic, as relations between Araujo and the rest of the Renamo leadership hit a new low in the previous week, when the Renamo national spokesperson, Jose Manteigas, publicly called Araujo a liar.

This followed an interview Araujo granted to Mozambican Television (TVM) in which he claimed that Renamo obliges mayors elected on the Renamo ticket to steal money from the municipal coffers and deliver it to the party. He also denounced the lack of democracy inside Renamo.

Manteigas retorted "It is not, and never has been, the practice or culture of Renamo to abuse its position, much less to instruct or oblige or in way force members of the party to commit illicit acts". That would be "completely opposed to our ideology and philosophy of governance". He pointed out that Araujo had benefitted from Renamo's internal democratic procedure. He passed through an internal election to become the Renamo candidate for mayor in 2018, and at the Renamo congress held in January 2019, he was elected to the party's national council.

Araujo has made a habit of changing his party. He was elected to the Mozambican parliament, the Assembly of the Republic, in the 2004 elections, on the Renamo list. But he then deserted Renamo and joined the newly formed Mozambique Democratic Movement (MDM) in order to run as the MDM candidate in the mayoral by-election in Quelimane in 2011. He won that election, and two years later, in 2013, he was the MDM candidate for mayor of Quelimane in nationwide municipal elections.

The MDM wanted to run him again at the next local elections, in 2018, but Araujo abandoned the party on whose back he had prospered and rejoined Renamo. He was head of the Renamo list for Quelimane in the 2018 elections, and again he won. He has thus been mayor of Quelimane for over a decade but representing two different parties.

Manteigas said that Araujo's own trajectory proved that there is genuine democracy in Renamo. He urged Araujo "to concentrate on solving the problems of the Quelimane municipality", and not to run to the mass media to express his disagreements with the rest of the party leadership.

Manteigas did not suggest that Renamo might take any disciplinary measures against Araujo, but this clash must reduce Araujo's chances of being the Renamo

candidate for Mayor of Quelimane in the municipal elections scheduled for 2023.

Araujo admitted that Renamo may no longer look on him favourably. But, with or without Renamo's backing, he intended to run for mayor in 2023. "It's up to Renamo", he said. "Whether Renamo accepts me or drops me, I shall run in the election. If it doesn't want me, too bad".

The Renamo provincial delegate in Zambezia, Elisa Cipriano, told reporters it was "premature" to comment on Araujo's remarks. Nonetheless, she said that if he does submit nomination papers, Renamo will support him.

Araujo said he wants a further term of office to recover the time lost because of the Covid-19 pandemic. The programme on which he was elected in 2018 was unfinished: the Quelimane Council had been unable to pave roads, install more cycle paths, or expand the city's drainage system. "All of this was compromised by the coronavirus pandemic", he claimed, "which means that the last two years were lost".

War against terrorism almost at an end

The General Commander of the Mozambican police force, Bernadino Rafael, on 13 May said that the war against terrorism (in the northern province of Cabo Delgado) is almost at its end but warned that the final military operations will be tougher.

Rafael was speaking to a contingent of troops from Rwanda, in the Chai administrative post, in Macomia district.

"We aren't saying that we've come to the end, but we're almost there", said Rafael.

He stated that 70 per cent of the military operations planned against the terrorist groups have been carried out, leaving 30 per cent to be undertaken. However, he warned that "the war is tougher, more difficult, when it is nearing its end".

To illustrate the successes in the fight against terrorism, Rafael said that 54 jihadists had been killed in the last two months, in clashes that pitted the terrorists against the forces of Mozambique, Rwanda and the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

He stated that, in these operations, four terrorists were captured and 195 people escaped from terrorist control. The results on the ground showed that the government forces "are hitting the enemy hard", declared Rafael.

"We shall continue to fight the terrorists, without respite, until their final hideout", he pledged. Rafael urged the jihadists to lay down their weapons and go home.

The terrorists, who claim affiliation to the self-styled "Islamic State", have been carrying out raids in Cabo Delgado since October 2017. According to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) the conflict has displaced about 784,000 people from their homes.

Since July 2021, an offensive by the Mozambican forces and their Rwandan and SADC allies has driven the terrorists out of much of the area they had occupied.

CNDS calls for reintegration of displaced people

The National Defence and Security Council (CNDS) on 11 May urged political and administrative authorities in the northern province of Cabo Delgado to speed up the integration into normal life of people displaced from their homes by terrorist raids who are now returning in several Cabo Delgado districts.

According to a statement from President Filipe Nyusi's office, this was one of the recommendations from the CNDS meeting, which President Nyusi chaired.

The CNDS is a body that advises the President on matters concerning national sovereignty, territorial integrity, security, and the defence of the democratically established power.

The meeting called on authorities in Cabo Delgado to guarantee the restoration of public services and to provide humanitarian assistance to the population. It analysed public order and security, particularly in the Northern and Central Operational Theatres.

The participants encouraged the defence and security forces to step up their combat actions, in order to eradicate the threat posed by the terrorist groups that have been active in Cabo Delgado since October 2017.

In recent months there has been a decline in the number of terrorist attacks, due to the offensives waged by the Mozambican forces and their allies from Rwanda and the SADC Military Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM). The eradication of terrorism, the CNDS declared, will be a determinant factor for the development of the areas affected and of the country in general.

As for the Central Operational Theatre (basically Manica and Sofala provinces), the CNDS noted with satisfaction the definitive end to military hostilities and the consolidation of peace here, due to the collapse of the self-proclaimed Renamo Military Junta.

The Junta was set up in 2019 to oppose Renamo leader Ossufo Momade, elected to head the party at a congress in January of that year. Junta leader Mariano Nhongo denounced Momade as "a traitor" and refused to recognise the peace agreement signed in August 2019 between Nhongo and President Nyusi.

Nhongo's men ran a low-level campaign in Manica and Sofala, mostly against traffic using the main roads. Several dozen people died in this campaign, but eventually it ran out of steam as Junta supporters drifted away to accept the demobilisation offered by the government. Nhongo died in a clash with the defence and security forces in October 2021, and since then there has been no sign of further activity by the Junta.

Nonetheless, the CNDS called on the public "to step up vigilance in your communities to avoid situations that might endanger order and security".

The CNDS urged the government to continue the "Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration" process (DDR) which should cover all members of the Renamo militia, including former members of the Junta.

Government issues ID cards to internally displaced persons

The Mozambican government, in cooperation with the European Union (EU), Germany, and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), has started to register internally displaced citizens in the northern province of Cabo Delgado.

Since October 2017, raids by jihadist terrorists in Cabo Delgado have left over 800,000 people displaced from their homes. While fleeing from insecurity or natural disasters, thousands of people lost their documentation. This poses a risk to already vulnerable migrants and internally displaced populations, exposing them to other challenges such as restricted freedom of movement, harassment, family separation, discrimination, gender-based violence, or risk of statelessness, and hinders access to basic services.

The Head of the Governance and Microeconomics Team of the EU delegation, Alicia Martin-Diaz, stated that "registration and birth certificates are a fundamental human right". According to Martin-Diaz, "initiating this process for internally displaced persons is an essential step in enabling them to access other official documents, such as identity cards, which open doors to their rights as citizens, and basic services such as education, employment, health, and access to land."

Mozambique has a low rate of civil registration. Only 55 per cent of people have a birth certificate and only 38 per cent have an identity card.

In the areas of origin of these displaced people, most of the physical archives of legal identity documents were destroyed during attacks by the jihadists. To reconstitute these files and enable the displaced population and host communities to obtain civil documentation, the Ministry of Justice, in collaboration with IOM, plans to register 10,000 people in Balama district over a three-month period.

Fuel imports continue normally

The Mozambican fuel import company, Imopetro, has guaranteed that the importation of liquid fuels is continuing normally, and no interruption in stocks is forecast in the short term.

Speaking at a Maputo press conference on 13 May, Imopetro's Director of Operations, Abiba Amade, stated that the current level of stocks of petroleum products puts Mozambique in a comfortable situation, despite the oscillation in fuel prices on the world market.

According to Amade, "imports are continuing at normal levels. We have the order for June confirmed. We placed the order for June at the end of April. The supplier has confirmed that we have two windows for supply, one from 12 to 16 June, and the other from 26 to 30 June".

Imopetro is owned by all of the fuel distributors authorised to operate in Mozambique and is the exclusive agent for the import of liquid and gaseous fuels.

Uptick in Covid-19 no reason for alarm

Health Minister Armindo Tiago on 13 May said that the recent rise in the number of new cases of the Covid-19 respiratory disease is no cause for alarm.

Speaking in the southern municipality of Boane where he was launching an initiative to improve medical care for military veterans, Tiago said the number of daily new cases recorded “is still minimal”.

For the past few weeks, new cases have been running at fewer than ten a day, but on 12 May 19 new cases were reported, and on 13 May this rose to 15.

Tiago said the average positivity rate (the percentage of people tested found to be carrying the coronavirus that causes Covid-19) is about two per cent, and so the country is in a situation which could be regarded as stable. The alert level, he added would be a positivity rate of five per cent “and the level for action is when we reach ten per cent. When we reach these numbers, we shall take adequate measures”.

Meanwhile, Mozambique’s National Health Institute (INS) believes it would be premature to adjust the restrictive measures against the Covid-19 respiratory disease merely because of an increasing number of cases in neighbouring South Africa.

Speaking to AIM, INS Director of Surveys, Sergio Chicumbe, said that three factors determine the Mozambican measures to control the pandemic – the positivity rate, the rate of hospitalisation, and the cumulative occurrence of cases. All these indicators have been very low in recent weeks.

Restrictive measures, said Chicumbe, are to protect the National Health Service from an avalanche of hospitalisations, as seriously ill people seek medical help. Most of the restrictive measures have now been lifted, although citizens are urged to continue wearing masks in public places. “When there are a large number of people hospitalised and at risk of death, the adoption of more restrictive measures is justified”, he said. “But right now, prospects are very favourable, both in Mozambique and in the region”.

Chicumbe added that Mozambique has now accumulated experience in dealing with Covid-19. The health institutions are better prepared and can be quickly mobilised to cope with any fifth wave of the disease.

An increase in the number of cases in South Africa is likely to be reflected in Mozambique, Chicumbe admitted, “but the border surveillance has been established and strengthened, and this is a guarantee that we are following the situation”.

A further factor is the success of Mozambique’s mass vaccination campaign against Covid-19. So far, over 92 per cent of all citizens aged 18 and above have been vaccinated.

“There is a lot of uncertainty about what could happen”, Chicumbe said, “but with good vaccination coverage, and better preparation of the institutions, restrictive measures would not be imposed immediately”.

The total death toll in Mozambique from the disease remains at 2,201.

Post-harvest losses cost farmers 30 per cent of production

Mozambique loses about 30 per cent of its agricultural production every year in post-harvest losses caused by inadequate handling and ineffective household storage, according to the deputy director in Mozambique of the UN World Food Programme (WFP), Pierre Lucas.

The post-harvest losses, worst among the main grain crops (maize, rice, millet, and sorghum), beans, groundnuts, and cassava cause food insecurity. Farmers find themselves obliged to sell their crops at low prices after the harvest, only to buy them back later in times of shortage.

Lucas was speaking in Maputo at the launch of the second phase of the “Zero Post-Harvest Losses Initiative”, which seeks to reverse the current scenario.

“Often farmers lose much of their production, which they worked so hard to attain because they keep their produce in barns that are very vulnerable to losses”, he said. “To minimise the losses, they tend to sell their product immediately after the harvest. Later, in the dry season, they buy back the same products, when the prices are higher. This reduces agricultural returns and consequently investment”.

The high post-harvest losses have led the WFP to support those smallholder farmers who manage their harvests well, who use good practices at all stages in the value chain and use improved storage techniques.

“To continue facing these challenges, today we are launching the second phase of the “Zero Post-Harvest Losses Initiative” to capitalise on the positive results of the first phase, to increase the adoption of hermetic storage technologies, and improve access and sustainability in using this technology”, he said.

The coordinator of the initiative, Adilson Manguze, said the solution to avoiding losses is the introduction of an innovative approach to the value chain, focused on the expansion of proven technologies, in close coordination with the local government, NGOs, and private businesses”. “The model has been tested in six districts in the central province of Tete”, Manguze continued. “It supported 32,270 farmers and cut their post-harvest losses from 50 per cent to nine per cent, while their income increased by up to 35 per cent, through identifying and implementing market-based response strategies for reducing post-harvest losses”.

The economic advisor to the Chamber of Commerce, Hipolito Hamela, told the ceremony that in 2020 alone small producers lost about US\$175 million in post-harvest losses. He believed that, by eliminating post-harvest losses, the income of small farmers could be doubled.

The second phase of the Zero Post-Harvest losses initiative will last for three years, covering more than 80,000 farmers in Tete, Manica, Zambezia and Nampula provinces.

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

STEMA to increase grain handling capacity

The Matola Grain Silos and Terminal Company (STEMA), in Maputo province, plans to invest US\$14 million in rehabilitating its equipment to increase its grain handling capacity.

“To achieve this goal, we shall resort to the banks and to our partners”, said the STEMA chairperson, Arlindo Chilundo, at a press conference on 9 May, shortly after a visit to the company’s premises by the Plan and Budget Commission (CPO) of the Mozambican parliament, the Assembly of the Republic.

According to Chilundo, “right now, we are operating 27 silos with a total capacity of 45,000 tonnes”. He added that STEMA still has enough space to meet the demand for grain imports for all milling companies in southern Mozambique. He explained that “STEMA does not buy the products directly. It just manages the bulk grain unloaded from the ships”.

He warned that the price of wheat will continue to rise on the international market due to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine (the two countries used to account for about 40 per cent of all wheat exports).

The wheat arriving in Mozambique in May was harvested before the Russian intervention in Ukraine, but Chilundo said the price was already oscillating since the demand for wheat was outstripping the supply.

The full impact of the war would not be felt until next year. Chilundo said that because of the war, which has led to the closure of Ukraine’s Black Sea ports, wheat exports will decline, while international sanctions will limit how much Russia can put on the world market.

The chairperson of the CPO, Antonio Niquice, urged STEMA to modernise its facilities to meet the challenges of the logistics of the grain market, and ensure that its business plan meets regional needs.

Because of its strategic location in the port of Maputo, STEMA not only serves the Mozambican market but supports the transit of grain imported by neighbouring countries such as South Africa, Zimbabwe and Eswatini.

Bus Rapid Transit scheme for Maputo revived

The Maputo transport authorities have revived plans to establish a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system, which should greatly improve conditions for bus passengers in the Mozambican capital.

According to a report in the daily newspaper “O Pais” on 16 May, citing the Maputo Metropolitan Transport Agency, work on the BRT could begin in 2023, and the project could be operational in 2024.

A BRT scheme involves establishing bus lanes that cannot be used by any other traffic. The idea was first proposed in 2014 when a viability study was drawn up and the bus routes were presented. 198 articulated buses, each able to hold 160 passengers, would travel along the routes. There were to be four bus terminals, 29 stations, a maintenance area, and an electronic ticketing system.

The Brazilian government was to finance the project, which would be in the hands of the Brazilian engineering company Odebrecht. But Odebrecht was

deeply involved in corruption, and in October 2016 the Brazilian government announced the suspension of US\$4.7 billion worth of financing for 25 public works projects in Africa and Latin America. The investigation found that Odebrecht had paid bribes of US\$900,000 in Mozambique. It was suspected that Odebrecht paid this money in connection with the construction of the international airport in the northern city of Nacala, an airport that has almost no flights and no passengers.

Without Brazilian funding, the project languished but has now been taken up again by the Maputo Metropolitan Transport Agency, working with the Maputo and Matola municipalities. This time the proposed source of funding is the World Bank, which, could make US\$250 million available.

The new BRT scheme is more ambitious than the 2014 project, and the routes will continue into Matola. The technical administrator of the Metropolitan Transport Agency, Armando Bembele, told “O Pais” that, at peak times, the BRT should be able to move 10,000 passengers an hour. “For all those living in the area covered by the BRT, the problem of transport will cease to exist”, said Bembele.

Parliament passes bill on money laundering

The Mozambican parliament, the Assembly of the Republic, on 12 May unanimously approved a government bill to strengthen legislation against money laundering and the financing of terrorism.

Introducing the bill, Justice Minister Helena Kida said the preventive measures being introduced are intended to make it difficult to use the financial system and other sectors of economic activity for criminal purposes. The bill, she said, also brings Mozambican legislation into line with United Nations conventions and resolutions.

Kida stressed that Mozambique is suffering from terrorist attacks in the northern province of Cabo Delgado, which made it critical “to strengthen the legal framework for combatting the financing of terrorism”.

The bill will for the first time, oblige churches, NGOs, and foundations to publish annual accounts to prevent these bodies from being used for money laundering. Non-profit making bodies, stressed Kida, “must publish annual financial statements which include a detailed breakdown of their income and expenditure”. These bodies must keep, for at least eight years, “sufficiently detailed records of national and international operations to allow verification of whether the funds were used in accordance with the objectives of the organisation”.

There are doubts as to whether these articles will be enforced. Political parties are already legally obliged to publish annual accounts, but none of them does so. The 1991 law on political parties said that political party accounts must show where their funds come from, and how they were used. The annual accounts of each party must be published in the official gazette, the “Boletim da Republica”, and in a mass circulation newspaper. Thirty years have elapsed since the Assembly passed that law, and neither the ruling Frelimo Party nor any opposition party has ever published their accounts.

President Nyusi inaugurates rehabilitated quays

President Filipe Nyusi on 11 May inaugurated quays 6, 7, 8 and 9 at Maputo port, which have been rehabilitated and expanded to receive larger vessels. At the ceremony, President Nyusi called for an integrated vision of port, rail, and road structures to attract more cargo.

Much of the work on the four quays consisted of dredging. The depth at quays 6, 7 and 8 is now 16 metres compared to the previous 12 metres, while at quay 9 the dredging has taken the depth from nine metres to 15 metres. This will allow ships of up to 140,000 tonnes to dock at these quays. The cost of the rehabilitation was US\$80 million.

This is just the start, according to the body that operates the port, the Maputo Port Development Company (MPDC), which envisages investments of US\$1.1 billion which will increase the amount of cargo handled annually from the 2021 figure of 22.3 million tonnes to 54 million tonnes by 2043.

President Nyusi was optimistic that the expansion of the port will create more jobs and investment opportunities and bring in more tax revenue for the state. He called for digital modernisation of the Port with technological solutions to increase efficiency and reduce costs, resulting in the quicker processing of merchandise.

The President regarded the newly expanded quays as an opportunity to switch cargo from roads to rail. He wanted the Mozambican rail company, CFM, to work closely with the Port of Maputo to reduce pressure on the roads leading to the Port, and to attract more cargo to make the most of the MPDC investments. “You know very well that there is a long line of trucks from Ressano Garcia (on the South African border) to the port of Maputo, at the end of every year, he added. He wanted to see much of that cargo reach the port by rail.

Second phase of sustainable fishing programme launched

The Minister of the Sea, Inland Waters and Fisheries, Lidia Cardoso, on 6 May announced that the second phase of the “More Sustainable Fish” programme will expand to cover all the districts in the seven provinces in the north and centre of the country.

The Minister was launching the second phase at Namaita lake, in Rapale district, Nampula province, at a ceremony witnessed by Prime Minister Adriano Maleiane. Cardoso declared that fishing and aquaculture are crucial in the battle to achieve the government’s target of “Zero Hunger” and that “More Sustainable Fish” is part of the broader project for the Development of Small Scale Aquaculture (ProDAPE).

The first phase of the programme, launched in 2019, covered only 28 districts (two in Cabo Delgado, one in Niassa, nine in Nampula, seven in Zambezia, two in Tete, two in Manica, and five in Sofala).

The Nampula provincial governor, Manuel Rodrigues, told the ceremony that the programme is

important for Nampula because it is the most populous province in Mozambique, with the potential to provide more fish for its inhabitants, who suffer from high levels of chronic malnutrition.

Among the challenges Nampula faces, he said, was that most of the artisanal fishermen in the coastal districts lack the means and resources to catch large amounts of fish since they do not have boats that can go onto the high seas. Fishing should be of great importance for the province, making a major contribution to job creation and to generating income. He pointed out that the province has 80,295 artisanal fishermen and 700 fish farmers.

A representative of Nampula fishermen, Gregorio Mussa, said that breeding fish in artificial ponds helps reduce the pressure on fish stocks at sea. He urged investors to make good quality feed and fingerlings available in order to ensure the success of aquaculture.

Former Renamo fighters demobilised

A ceremony at Mepica, in Cuamba district, in the northern province of Niassa on 4 May witnessed the demobilisation of 290 former guerrillas belonging to the country’s main opposition party, Renamo.

The demobilised fighters came from several districts in Niassa where Renamo had allegedly set up military bases. Yet there had been no sign of any military action by the Renamo militia from these bases for many years, and it therefore came as a surprise that there were any Renamo fighters to be demobilised in Niassa at all.

Chairing the ceremony, the Secretary of State for Niassa, Dinis Vilanculo, said that with the demobilisation the government intends to take decisive steps along the road to effective and lasting peace. “There is no longer any pretext for men to remain clutching firearms in the bush and creating a climate of fear and concern among the public”, he said.

He urged the demobilised men to immediately contact the local community leaders and ask them for land on which they can build houses and start a new life. Niassa, he said, offers agro-ecological conditions which should stimulate the former guerrillas to become involved in agricultural and livestock production.

The 290 men were demobilised under the DDR (Demobilisation, Disarmament and Reintegration) programme agreed between the government and Renamo under the peace agreement signed in August 2019.

Paulo Chachine, a government member of the Joint Military Affairs Commission, said there is little left to do to complete the DDR, pointing out that “about 600 men are left to be demobilised, disarmed and reintegrated”.

He urged the demobilised men to “make use of the time available to build or rebuild your lives in the company of your relatives and friends”.

Renamo General Secretary Andre Majibire expressed his satisfaction at the resumption of the DDR and congratulated the government on its efforts to raise more funds so that the DDR can be successfully concluded.

Sernic arrests police involved in kidnapping

The Mozambican Criminal Investigation Service (Sernic) on 5 May announced the arrest of three more members of a kidnap gang, two of them members of the police force, and one a Sernic agent.

All three are accused of participating in the abduction of businessman Bharat Kumar, who was kidnapped on 12 February in the bottle store he owns in downtown Maputo, within a stone's throw of the city's first police precinct.

Two of the men arrested are police officers stationed at the Maputo City Police Command, and the third is a Sernic agent who works at the Maputo Provincial Sernic Directorate. The three were not named.

The Sernic Maputo spokesperson, Hilario Lole, said the three personally took part in the abduction. But one of them was arrested because his image was caught on the bottle store's closed-circuit television.

On the security video footage, the suspect could be seen inside the shop wearing a blue shirt and talking on his phone, while the two others armed with a gun carried out the crime.

"The police launched a manhunt that led to the arrest of one of the gang members, tasked with the reconnaissance of the area, supplying every detail about the shopkeeper's routine to enable his kidnap," police spokesperson Leonel Muchina said, shortly after the crime.

Four days after this kidnapping, President Filipe Nyusi branded as completely unacceptable the transformation of police stations into breeding grounds for kidnapers. At the opening session of a meeting of the Consultative Council of the Ministry of the Interior, President Nyusi declared "I cannot accept that police stations become nests of kidnapers, and the commander of the station has top responsibility on the matter. If he does not know the life of his staff, he should resign from his post".

"How come a kidnapping occurs just a few metres away from a police station, with the victims shouting for help, but there was no rapid reaction by the police force?", President Nyusi asked.

Lole added that the three men are being charged with kidnapping and will now be presented to a magistrate to formalise their detention.

The three are protesting their innocence and claim to have been arrested unjustly. One of the policemen told reporters that Sernic had tortured him.

The latest arrests occur about a week after Attorney-General Beatriz Buchili had denounced police complicity in kidnapping.

Delivering her annual report on the State of Justice to the Mozambican parliament, the Assembly of the Republic, Buchili said that some of those who should be on the front line combatting the kidnapers are in league with them. "The involvement of some members of the police, lawyers, magistrates and other figures in the judiciary creates fragilities in investigating these cases", said Buchili, "and endangers the safety of those public servants who are committed to fighting against crime".

Vulcan to continue operating Moatize mine

The Indian company Vulcan Resources, which is part of the Jindal Group, on 5 May pledged to continue coal mining in Moatize, in the western Mozambican province of Tete, and to operate the Nacala Logistics Corridor, the railway which runs from Moatize, across southern Malawi, to the mineral port of Nacala-a-Velha, on the coast of Nampula province.

Vulcan Resources purchased the Moatize mine and the Nacala Logistics Corridor from the Brazilian mining giant Vale for US\$270 million.

At an audience granted by President Filipe Nyusi to the Vulcan Management, the company promised to keep the businesses running and to make new investments.

The Minister of Mineral Resources and Energy, Carlos Zacarias, told reporters that the audience was an opportunity for the Vulcan leadership to introduce themselves to the President and brief him on their plans.

He added that Vulcan's purchase of Vale's assets included commitments to keep the current workforce in their jobs and to make the investments necessary to improve the operations. Zacarias also confirmed that the sale will result in the payment of US\$20 million in capital gains tax to the Mozambican state.

Chronic malnutrition affects over 131,000 children in Manica

More than 131,000 children suffer from chronic malnutrition in the central province of Manica. This was announced on 13 May at a press conference in the provincial capital, Chimoio, by Firmino Jaquet, the spokesperson for a meeting of the Manica Provincial Executive Council.

Although the figure is alarming, it is a reduction on 2013 when the province had about 150,000 chronically malnourished children, corresponding to 42 per cent of all children. However, 131,000 still represents 37 per cent of children under the age of five in the province.

According to Jaquet, "lectures on disease, cooking demonstrations, deworming, education on young children and how to feed them have all contributed to the province recording this reduction". "Chronic malnutrition does not kill immediately", he continued, "but moves on to acute malnutrition which can be fatal".

Chronic malnutrition, according to Jaquet, is associated with a lack of certain vitamins and can be treated easily. However, "chronic malnutrition can kill when associated with other diseases".

"Chronic malnutrition does not depend only on a single factor. The province may have a lot of produce. But people don't always consume what they produce. If they consume, it may not be in the right way. Others produce and sell everything. There is also a lack of the right combination to have a healthy diet", Jaquet said.

He also noted that there are drought-stricken zones with many cases of chronic malnutrition. "We also have child marriages and poverty. So, these are several factors to take into account when we talk about chronic malnutrition", Jaquet added.