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President Guebuza launches agriculture campaign

A key priority for Mozambican agriculture must be to improve the marketing system for agricultural produce, declared President Armando Guebuza on 16 October. The President emphasised that farmers' certainty that they can sell their crops was one of the main conditions for increasing production and productivity. Without a guarantee that someone would come and collect their surplus produce, peasants had no incentive to increase their cultivated area.

President Guebuza was speaking in the village of Ngomane at the official ceremony to launch the 2010/2011 agricultural campaign. He urged all those involved in agriculture to do their utmost to ensure that marketing ceases to be a problem. "We know how to produce", said the President. "We also know how to increase productivity, but our main problem is marketing. To increase production, the people must be certain that their production will be purchased".

The President listed a series of achievements in the 2009/2010 agricultural campaign, which helped produce encouraging results. There are many challenges still to meet, including raising productivity, he added. Furthermore, society should accept that the "Green Revolution" advocated by the government is a task for everybody.

"We shall thus continue to promote finance for agriculture, involving credit and micro-finance agents, throughout the value chain", the President pledged. "We shall continue to undertake research, training, the construction and rehabilitation of electricity and telecommunications facilities, as well as roads, bridges and other infrastructure that supports production, marketing and the distribution of inputs. We shall also continue to promote national wealth through exports".

The launch of the agricultural campaign coincided with World Food Day, celebrated this year under the slogan "United Against Hunger". This theme was chosen in the hope of persuading governments to unite their efforts to fight against hunger since, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), more than a billion people on the planet are living in chronic hunger. 350,000 of them are in Mozambique.

In Mozambique's case, natural disasters, such as drought and floods, have contributed to lack of food security. During the last campaign 55 districts in the south

and centre of the country suffered from irregular rainfall, which reduced overall production by about 13 per cent.

According to the Ministry of Agriculture other priorities for the 2010/2011 campaign include making improved seeds available for key crops, such as short cycle maize, beans and wheat. To raise livestock production there will be compulsory vaccination of cattle, pigs and goats.

President Guebuza calls for "tangible results" from new ministers

President Guebuza on 12 October called for "tangible results" from the new ministers he appointed the previous day. The President was speaking after swearing into office the new ministers of Agriculture, Jose Pacheco, of Health, Alexandre Manguela, of the Interior, Antonio Mondlane, and of Industry and Trade, Armando Inroga.

Of the four, only Pacheco has previous government experience – he was Minister of the Interior from 2005 until his new appointment, and under former President Joaquim Chissano he served as Deputy Agriculture Minister and governor of Cabo Delgado province.

The President said there are many expectations of the new ministers, who should achieve results in the fight against red tape, the spirit of apathy and drift, corruption and crime.

What stands out about this reshuffle is that President Guebuza seems to have appointed his new ministers because of their professional expertise in the areas they will now head: Pacheco is an agronomist by training, Mondlane is a senior police officer whose last post was Vice-Chancellor of the Mozambican Police Academy (ACIPOL), Inroga is an economist, and Manguela is a medical doctor with a master's degree in public health.

Despite improvements, hunger still “alarming”

Despite considerable improvements in food security over the past two decades, the Washington-based International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) regards the hunger situation in Mozambique as “alarming”.

The Institute’s Global Hunger Index for 2010 ranks Mozambique at 66 out of 84 developing countries and former Soviet republics. But this is considerable progress when compared with the Index for 1990, when Mozambique was ranked as the fourth hungriest country in the world. At that time the only countries in a worse food situation than Mozambique were Angola, Chad, and Ethiopia. (although Somalia and Afghanistan, were not included for lack of data.)

1990 is taken as a benchmark because it is the reference year for the Millennium Development Goals. The first of the goals is halving between 1990 and 2015 the percentage of people suffering from hunger, and the percentage of people living on less than a dollar a day.

The Global Hunger Index (GHI) is composed from three indicators – the proportion of undernourished people in the population, the percentage of children under five years of age who are under weight, and the under-five mortality rate. The data on which the 2010 index are based are drawn from the period 2003-2008, and rely heavily on UN agencies such as the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF).

The index ranks countries on a scale of zero to 100. Zero would mean no hunger at all. Figures of less than five show a low level of hunger, of five to 9.9 moderate levels, and of 10 to 19.9 “serious” hunger. When scores are above 20, hunger levels are “alarming, while countries that have a score of above 30 are said to have an “extremely alarming” hunger situation.

Mozambique’s score on the 2010 index is 23.7, an improvement on its score of 25.3 in 2009, but still in the “alarming” bracket. Mozambique’s score in the 1990 Index was a horrific 37.4. The hunger crisis of this period was partly due to a series of droughts, but mostly to the war of destabilisation waged by the apartheid-backed rebels, which wrecked agricultural production and the trade and transport networks.

The IFPRI report notes that Mozambique is one of the largest improvers. Between 1990 and 2010 its score fell by over 13 points, as did the scores of Angola and Ethiopia.

The “extremely alarming” bracket is currently occupied by only four countries – Chad, Eritrea, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The wars that have raged in the DRC have led to a catastrophic rise in its score from 24.7 in 1990 to 41 in 2010.

Turning to the three indicators used to construct the index, the report says that the number of undernourished people in the Mozambican population fell from 59 per cent in 1990-1992 to 37 per cent in 2004-06. The prevalence of underweight children (aged under five) fell from an estimated 28.4 per cent for the entire 1988-1992 period to 21.3 per cent in 2003-2008. The under-five mortality rate fell from 249 to 130 per 1,000 live births between 1990 and 2008.

Improvement in gender gap index

The Swiss-based World Economic Forum has ranked Mozambique 22nd out of 134 countries in its latest Gender Gap Index. Out of a possible top score of 1, Mozambique scored 0.7329. Last year, the country’s score was 0.7195, which placed it in 26th position.

Amongst low income countries, Mozambique comes top, while among African countries it is in third position, beaten only by Lesotho and South Africa.

The index is an attempt to measure the gap between men and women, taking four main categories – economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival and political empowerment.

The variables used include the ratio between wages paid to men and women for similar work, the ratio between male and female illiteracy, the number of girls compared to boys enrolled in primary, secondary and tertiary education, the life expectancy of women and men, the proportion of parliamentary seats held by women, and the percentage of government ministers who are women.

A country with no gender gap would score 1 on the index. No country in the world even reaches 90 per cent. The highest scores come from four Nordic countries – Iceland (0.8496), Norway (0.8404), Finland (0.8260) and Sweden (0.8024).

At the opposite end of the scale are countries where women are steeped in misery – Mali (0.5680), Pakistan (0.5465), Chad (0.5330) and, in 134th position, Yemen (0.4603). But the worst places in the world for women, such as Somalia and Afghanistan, are not on the index at all for lack of adequate statistics.

The gender gap in Mozambique is lower than in several developed countries – including Australia (at number 23), Luxembourg (26), Portugal (32), Austria (37) and France (46). France’s relatively poor showing is due to wage differences between men and women and persistent gender disparities in French politics.

In the sub-indexes, Mozambique’s best scores are in economic participation and opportunity (where it is in 5th position), and political empowerment (11th). Economic participation, it should be added, is not a measure of poverty but simply of women’s participation in the labour market, which is crucial in such areas as agriculture and the informal sector. The high score in political empowerment is certainly due to the large number of women in the Mozambican parliament.

In the educational sub-index, Mozambique is in 123rd position – an indication of the wide gap between male and female illiteracy, and of the declining percentage of girls the higher one rises in the education system. There are 22 countries (including Botswana and Lesotho) where there is deemed to be gender parity in education.

In the political empowerment sub-index, no country scores very highly. Even at the top, Iceland only scores 0.6748, and Mozambique’s score is 0.3455. At the bottom several countries score zero – meaning the gender gap is absolute and women have no political power at all. These four countries are Belize, Brunei, Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

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

Statistics suggest increase in poverty

Contrary to government expectations, the level of poverty in Mozambique increased slightly between 2003 and 2009, according to the latest figures from the National Statistics Institute (INE). The INE used a sample of 10,832 households, asking them detailed questions about their income and expenditure, as well as social indicators such as walking distance to the nearest health post or school.

Figures on expenditure show that, at 2009 prices, the average household spent 3,300 meticaïsa a month – which was about \$118 at late 2009 exchange rates. But the average hides large regional differences. First, the average urban household spent 5,333 meticaïsa a month, while the average rural household spent less than half that amount – 2,466 meticaïsa a month.

Urban households are over-represented in the survey – 48.2 per cent of the sample was urban and 51.8 per cent rural, whereas the 2007 population census showed that only 30.4 per cent of households are urban. So the real figures for national average expenditure are likely to be worse than those in the survey.

The survey found that Maputo city is far and away the richest place in the country – the average Maputo household spent 10,497 meticaïsa a month. This is more than five times as much as households in the poorest province, Zambezia, where the average spend was only 2,084 meticaïsa a month.

When the sample is divided into wealth quintiles, further differences emerge. The average spend in the richest 20 per cent was 8,780 meticaïsa a month – but amongst the poorest fifth, it was only 771 meticaïsa, equivalent to just \$27.5.

Households headed by women are considerably poorer than those headed by men. The average household headed by a man spent 3,568 meticaïsa a month, but the average woman headed household only spent 2,660 meticaïsa.

Education makes a very significant difference. Where the head of the household had secondary or higher education, the average spend was 7,151 meticaïsa a month, which compares with just 2,251 meticaïsa in cases where the head of the household had no education at all.

When expenditure is broken into categories, it turns out that 51.4 per cent of average household expenditure goes on food. The amount of disposable income spent on food is a good marker of poverty – in general, the higher the percentage spent on food, the poorer the household is.

In Maputo city, only 21 per cent of average expenditure went on food – but this figure rose to 63.7 per cent in Zambezia and 70.9 per cent in Tete.

The Ministry of Planning and Development has compared the INE survey with its two predecessors (in 1997 and 2003), reaching the conclusion that poverty, when measured in terms of consumption, has increased from 54.1 per cent of the population in 2003 to 54.7 per cent in 2009.

The increase in poverty is almost entirely explained by developments in three central provinces – in Zambezia, poverty increased from 44.6 to 70.5 per cent, in Sofala from 36.1 to 58 per cent, and in Manica from 43.6 to 55.1 per cent. It is surely no coincidence that these three provinces were badly hit by the Zambezi floods of 2007 and 2008.

In one southern province, Gaza, there was a slight increase in poverty from 60.1 to 62.5 per cent. In all seven other provinces, the figures show a decline in poverty – quite spectacular in the cases of Cabo Delgado (a fall in the poverty rate from 63.2 to 37.4 per cent) and Inhambane (where the decline was from 80.7 to 57.9 per cent).

Decrease in non-monetary poverty

Although the latest figures from the National Statistics Institute (INE) point to an increase in “consumption poverty”, they also indicate a decline in “non-monetary poverty”, measured by such matters as school enrolment, and access to health care and clean water.

The household budget survey shows increases in primary and secondary school enrolment in almost all the country, when compared with the previous survey in 2002-03.

Net attendance rates among children of primary school age rose from 89.9 to 91.1 per cent in the urban areas of the south (overwhelmingly Maputo and the neighbouring city of Matola). In rural areas, the rise was from 52.2 to 67.5 per cent in the north, from 61.3 to 74.2 per cent in the centre, and from 77.8 to 85.9 per cent in the South.

Secondary school attendance jumped everywhere, so that the national enrolment rate almost tripled, from 8.2 to 22 per cent of children. In the rural north the enrolment rate in 2003 was just 0.2 per cent. By 2009, the figure had risen to 6.4 per cent. The rural centre had a similar rise from 0.8 to 11.1 per cent, and the rural south from 3.4 to 17.2 per cent.

The towns and cities have much higher enrolment rates. In the southern urban areas the secondary enrolment rate rose from 24.8 to 47.4 per cent, in the centre from 18.6 to 39.9 per cent, and in the north from 12.5 to 33.3 per cent.

Non-monetary poverty is also measured by the number of durable goods (ranging from radio sets to cars) owned by households. The number of goods has increased – though even in the urban south the number of durables per household (rising from 2.41 in 2003 to 2.99 in 2009) is very small. In the rural north and centre, the growth in ownership of durable goods has been significant – from 0.96 to 1.21 goods per household in the centre, and from 0.98 to 1.4 in the north.

Health and water supply give a more mixed picture. Access to health posts has improved in the countryside, but deteriorated in the cities. Thus the percentage of households living within a 45 minute walk of a health post has more than doubled in the rural north (from 31.5 per cent in 2003 to 69.7 per cent in 2009).

But in the urban north, the percentage declined, from 86.3 to 75.4 per cent. In the urban south, the fall was even sharper, from 92 to 78.7 per cent. Similarly in towns in the centre of the country, the fall was from 88.8 to 76.3 per cent.

This is not because there are fewer health posts in the cities than there were in 2003. The figures can be explained by urban population growth, particularly in the outlying neighbourhoods of the main cities.

Access to water sources improved in most of the country – but fell from 55 per cent of households to 49.1 per cent in the urban north. There was a slight fall, from 62.7 to 62.3 per cent, in the urban centre, reflecting urban population growth.

Chronic malnutrition (stunting) among under-fives has fallen from 49.1 per cent in 1997 to 47.1 per cent in 2003 to 46.4 per cent in 2008 (though it should be added that the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, or MICS, undertaken in 2008, gave a lower figure, of 43.5 per cent).

The rate of acute malnutrition (wasting) fell from 8.3 per cent of under-fives in 1997 to 5.1 per cent in 2003, but rose again to 6.6 per cent in 2009 – but the MICS survey gave a considerably lower figure of 4.1 per cent.

Access to the police is a problem, with only 46.7 per cent of the population able to reach a police station or post within half an hour. For 25.6 per cent the walk takes more than an hour, and in rural areas this figure rises to 39.6 per cent.

Improvement in governance index

The Mo Ibrahim Foundation has ranked Mozambique in 20th position out of 53 African countries in the 2010 edition of its annual index of African governance. Out of a possible maximum of 100, Mozambique scored 52.4 points. The countries with the highest governance ranking were Mauritius (81.8), Seychelles (74.5), Botswana (74.2), Cape Verde (73.8) and South Africa (70.2).

The worst governed countries are Somalia (7.9), Chad (30.6), Democratic Republic of Congo (31.7), Zimbabwe (31.9) and Eritrea (32.8).

In last year's edition, Mozambique was ranked number 24, with 51.9 points, and the year before that it held 21st position with 52.5 points. Over the last three years there has not been much change at the top of the table, while at the bottom Angola and Liberia have moved out of the ranks of the bottom five, while Zimbabwe and Eritrea have continued to sink.

The index looks at a wide variety of factors, divided into four broad categories – safety and the rule of law, participation and human rights, sustainable economic opportunity, and human development. These categories cover 100 separate indicators – ranging from the incidence of violent crime, to the accountability of public officials, to access to electricity, mobile phones and computers, to vaccination rates.

The Foundation states that the purpose of the index is to be “Africa’s leading assessment of governance that is a tool for citizens, public authorities and partners to assess progress”.

Commission of Inquiry into Moma accident

The Mozambican Ministry of Mineral Resources has announced the establishment of a commission of inquiry to ascertain the circumstances under which the wall of a settling pond at the dredge mine in the northern district of Moma collapsed, flooding the village of Topuito.

The mine is operated by the Irish company Kenmare, and extracts titanium and zirconium minerals (ilmenite, rutile and zircon) from the Moma heavy sands.

The accident occurred on 8 October. When the wall was breached, a wave of water carrying sand and clay demolished or damaged 388 houses, with 1,527 people affected by the accident. One four year old girl is missing, and six other people sustained injuries.

The commission of inquiry, in addition to looking into the causes of the accident, will look at the various activities being undertaken to support victims. It has been given until 7 November to complete its report.

200 tents have been provided by the Mozambican relief agency, the National Disasters Management Institute (INGC), to accommodate those made homeless, and Kenmare is providing them with two meals a day.

According to Kenmare repairs are already under way to the houses that only suffered slight damage. It claims that only 30 were severely damaged, and has promised to rebuild them. The company adds that its medical staff treated the injured.

Kenmare has pledged to cooperate with the investigation, and stated that “all tailings and clay management systems were constructed as designed by independent experts and, prior to the incident, operated safely according to accepted practice”.

Mining was halted after the accident. Kenmare says it is working with the authorities and with geotechnical experts to prevent any repetition of the accident.

President Guebuza calls for Afro-Arab partnership

African and Arab countries should work in partnership to solve the current problems hindering their economic development, declared President Armando Guebuza on 10 October. Speaking to reporters in the Libyan city of Sirte, at the end of the second Afro-Arab Heads of State Summit, President Guebuza said Arab and African countries need each other to produce mutual wealth.

He noted that, during the recent international financial crisis, those Arab countries that had put their savings into European and American banks had lost trillions of dollars, which they may never be able to recover. President Guebuza said they would have achieved much better returns on their money, if they had invested part of it in Africa.

President Guebuza said he was satisfied at the current atmosphere in relations between these two groups of countries – but the challenge was to create the mechanisms that would allow cooperation to flourish.

In the specific case of Mozambique, President Guebuza said the government hopes to use Arab expertise in the area of infrastructures and agriculture.

He stressed that, long before this summit, Mozambique had been working with Arab partners. The summit was a moment for continuing contacts, not initiating them.

At the opening of the summit, the host president, Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, proposed that Afro-Arab summits should be held every three years. He also apologised for what he described as the “shameful” way the Arab world had behaved during the European colonization of Africa.

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