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Agriculture (news received from Joe Hanlon)

Land and job conflicts

Agricultural development projects are bumping into land and labour conflicts. The Bela Vista Rice Project in Matutuine, Maputo province, is currently growing seed on 400 hectares (ha). It hoped to expand to 6,000 ha and produce 40,000 tonnes of rice per year, and then expand further to 20,000 ha. But in late June it was reported that much of the land is already occupied and many people already have titles to the land (DUATs) that the project hoped to use. The project is co-owned by the Libyan state's Libyan African Investment Portfolio (LAP) and the Mozambican company Ubuntu (part owned by Environment Minister Alcinda Abreu, who was Foreign Minister 2005-2008).

Eight associations of farmers who supply sugar cane to the Xinavane sugar mill in Maputo province on 16 April accused the company of underpaying for sugar and making deductions for fertiliser that was never supplied, as well as failing to sign a formal contract with producers. Infanio Cossa, representing the associations, said "the company not only expropriates our land, it also pays us practically nothing for the sugar cane we produce".

A strike in June of cashew processing workers at Olam in Nampula province has raised the fraught issue of the relationship between paying for production and the minimum wage. Cashew nuts are shelled and peeled by hand, and workers have traditionally been paid per kg of kernels produced. Shellers, for example, are paid more for whole kernels than for broken kernels. The rate was set so that experienced workers earned a minimum wage, although it sometimes required a long day. Workers at Olam (mainly women) struck because they said they were not being paid the minimum wage and also that Olam premises have no toilets, meaning workers relieve themselves on the nearby railway tracks in the open air. Olam has the largest cashew processing factory in Mozambique and is the only one owned by a foreign company.

Production up

Agriculture Minister Jose Pacheco told parliament on 11 May that government expects an 8.6% growth in agricultural production and a 6.7% growth in livestock this year. Food crops:

- + root crops (mostly cassava) up 9% to 10.8 million tonnes (mn t).
- + grain up 4% to 2.9 mn t,
- + pulses up 4% to 436,430 t, and
- + vegetables, up 14% to 975,000 t

For cash crops:

- + cashew up 15% to 112,000 t, of which 38,000 t will be processed by Mozambican factories employing 8,000 workers.
- + cotton up 70% to 70,000 t reflecting record world market prices, and government and producers agreed a minimum price of 15 Mt (\$.50) per kg, the highest in two decades
- + tobacco up 5% to 70,000 t,
- + sunflower up 29% to 119,000 t, and
- + sesame up 66% to 105,000 t.

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