

IN FOCUS

Mozambican floods and resettlement processes

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In early January 2013, Mozambique suffered from the most catastrophic floods the country had seen since 2000. The floods affected 300,000, killing 117 and displacing approximately 200,000 people (INGC, 12/03/13). The disaster affected the provinces of Zambezia and Gaza. If the government does not effectively respond, the migration will cause overcrowded cities, like Maputo.

Case Study: The resettlement site in Chiaquelane

Chiaquelane, the largest long-term resettlement site, consists of 1,123 families divided into 5 “Bairros”.¹ The site lacked adequate security and electrical, health and WASH provisions. In contrast, most of “Bairros” from Lionde – the affected town from which most of people come to Chiaquelane – have adequate facilities, though not all of them are close to the resettlement site. This could represent a problem in convincing people to resettle. In some cases, the site of origin is more than 20 km away, and the population does not have access to farming land close by. They must therefore go back to their site of origin in order to cultivate. Populations indicated that they return on a weekly basis to their site of origin. There is a high rate of return. In fact, Chokwè is historically marked by migration flows. Chiaquelane’s population increased rapidly during the 2000 floods that struck Chokwè which is historically marked by migration flows. But once the floods ended, the temporary settlements were disassembled and families returned to their old residencies in the lowlands.

A general reluctance among affected populations to relocate after a natural disaster has been recognized in the literature. More recently,

Patt and Schroter (2008)² related this phenomenon in Mozambique to differing perceptions of climate risk among resettlers, policymakers, and program managers. This study suggests that many farmers were aware of the risks that flooding posed but returned to the floodplains mainly because they were unable to establish a viable livelihood in their new locations. This finding underlines the importance of ensuring that resettlement communities in Mozambique are socially and economically viable as well as physically robust in an infrastructural sense, echoing the limitations of state-led relocation programs in earlier periods. Displaced people have a connection with the land and are reluctant to move because they also do not want to become dependent on public projects.

The government’s goal is to identify and give away 4,830 plots, the majority of them on the higher ground of Chiaquelane (IRIN 13/02/13). Kaisa Nugin an expert from OCHA stated that “*Chiaquelane was used for resettlement during earlier flood events (2000/2001). By combining the old village with the prior resettlement, Chiaquelane will ultimately develop into a larger urban area*”³. We might ask ourselves if there could be a possibility that Chiaquelane become a city of environmental migrants. As people are returning, there are also people considering staying at the resettlement site.

At any rate, if the Government intends to make Chiaquelane a resettlement site, it has to make the space “a good place to live”, with basic infrastructure and public services, as well as proper livelihood support. NGOs and development actors should accompany this action by raising awareness about environmental disaster risks, living in community and political and historical influences in developing attachments to a particular territory.

1 « Report matrix origin- Resettlement site » by IOM Mozambique, April 2013.

2 Patt, A. and D. Schroter (2008) ‘Perceptions of climate risk in Mozambique: implications for the success of adaptation strategies’. *Global Environmental Change*. 18(3). pp. 458– 467.

3 UNEP/OCHA JEU / Kaisa Nugin, MSB, ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT Flooding in the Gaza Province, Limpopo River Basin, Mozambique, April 22, 2013.