

10 March 2009:

6 KILLED BY MOBS FEARING CHOLERA & DROUGHT

The rage of the poor continues. In Nampula province, angry mobs have killed three people falsely accused of spreading cholera. In Zambezia three people have been killed for stealing or locking up the rain. In urban areas, lynchings continue.

As noted earlier (see newsletter 145), a study by Carlos Serra and a team from Universidade Eduardo Mondlane found that in northern Mozambique poor people strongly believe that the rich and powerful want to kill them, and thus feel they were fighting for their lives. (The study was published in 2003 in an excellent small book *Cólera e catarse*. The full book, in Portuguese, and my preface, in English, are posted on my website: <http://www.tinyurl.com/mozamb>)

Mogincual district in coastal Nampula remains one of Mozambique's poorest districts. Half of the population are facing food shortages due to damage done by cyclone Jokwe in 2008. There a continued outbreaks of konzo, paralysis caused by eating too much cassava without first treating it to remove the cyanide, which only happens were people are really hungry. On 25 February two Red Cross volunteers who were part of a brigade publicising anti-cholera messages, which include putting chlorine in wells, were beaten to death, accused of poisoning the wells with cholera. The mob also burned houses and destroyed bicycles and motorcycles, which are seen as only being owned by the better off. Three people were arrested but the crowd blocked the road to prevent them being taken out of the village.

Then three days later, in Angoche district (just south of Mogincual) protestors attacked health workers accused of spreading cholera. They were already being protected by the police so the mob attacked the police with knives and spears, disembowelling and killing a police sergent and seriously injuring two other policemen. On the same day in Moma district (south of Angoche) a mob attacked a community leader accused of putting cholera in the wells; two policemen protecting him were hospitalised.

Meanwhile, in Nicoadala district in Zambezia province, local people are accusing the state of locking up the rain and only giving it to better off farmers. In mid-February three people were killed and six injured, accused of diverting the rain. Nineteen people have been arrested. One farmer was quoted by the Sunday newspaper Domingo as saying "In the farm over there, something is growing, but on mine, nothing. How is it that my neighbour can eat and I can't?" (see <http://www.oficinadesociologia.blogspot.com> for more)

Meanwhile, lynching in poor urban areas continue, with at least one death a week reported. It has become so serious that on 3 March President Armando Guebuza actually spoke out against mobs taking the law into their own hands. And, contrary to the view that it is poor uneducated people, Guebuza claimed that lynch mobs include educated people who know about legality and justice.

The word "linchar" has entered into Portuguese for executions by mobs, based on "lynch" in US English, used for mob killings, particularly of Black people in the US south in the 19th and 20th century. The word is said to come from the name of an 18th century American terrorist, Charles Lynch, who during the Revolutionary War headed an irregular court in Virginia to punish Loyalist supporters of the British.

=====

19 January 2009

Cholera hits 15,000 with 170 dead

Cholera is now present in most of Mozambique, and there have been 15,000 cases notified since the outbreak began in October 2007, the spokesperson of the Health Ministry, Martinho Djedje, said on 17 January 2009. So far, 170 people have died. This is a mortality rate of 1.1%, which is considered low.

“We are not in a catastrophic epidemic, but new cases are registered every day in almost all provinces”, Djedje said. The number of cases is increasing, almost surely due to the heavy rains, which cause local flooding, mud, and sanitation problems. The Ministry of Health is working with UNICEF, WHO, Oxfam, Doctors Without Borders (MSF) and the Mozambican Red Cross Society to combat the outbreak.

The UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) says there are no major problems “because the cholera outbreak is consistent with previous years and agencies had pre-positioned supplies”. The text of OCHA Regional Update No 3, 9 Jan, is attached. The full report with maps is available on:

<http://ochaonline.un.org/OchaLinkClick.aspx?link=ocha&docId=110>

Cholera is present throughout southern Africa but OCHA sees no evidence of spread from Zimbabwe to Mozambique. OCHA estimates that in Zimbabwe there have been more than 35,000 cases since 15 August 2008 and more than 1700 deaths, a 5% mortality rate, which is quite high.

Attacks on cholera centres in Cabo Delgado

Protestors attacked a cholera treatment centre and a prevention team in Cabo Delgado province in the north last weekend, according to the daily *Notícias*. In the provincial capital Pemba, local people burned down three tents which had been set as a treatment centre. And in Mecúfi, south of Pemba, an anti-cholera team was attacked; a nurse, a driver, and six others were beaten and accused of spreading the disease rather than treating it. (Clippings attached.)

This is a repeat of incidents in coastal Nampula seven years ago, in which brigades putting chlorine in wells were instead accused of putting cholera in the wells, and were attacked. Those protests were studied by Carlos Serra and a team from Universidade Eduardo Mondlane, and published in 2003 in an excellent small book *Cólera e catarse*. (The full book, in Portuguese, is posted on my website: <http://www.tinyurl.com/mozamb>. My preface, in English and Portuguese, is attached to this report.)

The shocking finding of the study was that poor people strongly believed that the rich and powerful wanted to kill them. In a climate of distrust and disempowerment, the poor responded violently against outsiders who they assumed were putting cholera in their water to eliminate them.

The study also found that the campaign against chlorine in the water was not a campaign against the state or against modernising, but rather just the opposite. It was a protest against a state which had become distanced from the people, which only appeared before elections, and which increasingly failed to provide services and a better standard of living. It was not against modernity, but against the failure to provide the fruits of development.

And it is notable that the *Notícias* article on a meeting in Pemba after the tents were burned, there were strong criticisms of the city authorities.