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MOZAMBIQUE 158

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Maputo, 11 Mar (AIM) – As flooding worsens in the Zambezi valley, three districts – Mutarara in Tete Province, Tambara in Manica, and Chemba in Sofala - have been cut off, and can no longer be reached overland.

At the mouth of the Zambezi, in Chinde district, the locality of Nhamatanga has been inundated and a group of 744 people are surrounded by the rising waters, and in need of rescue, reports Thursday's issue of the Maputo daily "Noticias".

It is feared that the situation will worsen with the opening of flood gates on the Kariba dam in Zambia. This will greatly increase the amount of water entering the Cahora Bassa lake in Tete, forcing the administration of the Cahora Bassa dam to increase its discharges.

As of Wednesday morning, the dam was discharging 4,736 cubic metres a second. This compares with just 2,486 cubic metres a second a week earlier.

A note from the Mozambique Red Cross (CVM) calls on the authorities to make "precautionary measures" to save lives in the Zambezi valley. The CVM has mobilized volunteers to assist in rescue operations in the Zambezi valley, and further south in the Pungue valley.

On Wednesday, the chief of staff of the Mozambican Armed Forces (FADM), Paulino Macaringue, and a government team flew to the flood affected areas to coordinate the rescue work. They overflowed the Zambezi, Pungue, Buzi and Lucite valleys.

The Pungue river is no longer rising, but its flood waters still cover a ten kilometre stretch of the Beira-Zimbabwe road, between Mutua and Tica. Only trucks and four wheel drive vehicles with high suspension are allowed to use this stretch of the road – and only by day, and under police escort.

Large amounts of agricultural land have been flooded, particularly along the banks of the Zambezi, causing serious losses to peasant farmers. Luis Pacheco, the Sofala delegate of the country's relief agency, the National Disasters Management Institute (INGC), told the independent daily "O Pais" that up until the last couple of weeks the main problem farmers in Sofala had faced was drought.

"Because of the drought that has assailed Sofala, many households returned to areas of risk – to the banks of the rivers in search of fertile areas for food production", he said. "These areas are now completely inundated".

41310E RED ALERT IN CENTRAL RIVER BASINS

Maputo, 10 Mar (AIM) – Worsening floods in central Mozambique led the Mozambican government to declare a red alert on Tuesday in the basins of the Zambezi, Pungue, Buzi, and Licungo rivers.

The red alert, proposed by the Disasters Management Coordinating Council, comes as a response to sharp worsening of the situation in the central provinces, where there are currently 130,000 people living in flooded areas, or areas at risk of flooding.

The heavy rainfall has caused at least two deaths. One of the victims was drowned while trying to cross the Pungue river, and the other was found with signs of having been attacked by crocodiles, but it is not clear whether he died before or after the attack.

Addressing reporters shortly after the end of the Tuesday Cabinet meeting, the government spokesperson, Deputy Justice Minister Alberto Nkutumula, said that evacuation of those people has already started, and rescue and relief material, such as boats, tents and mosquito nets are already available.

He admitted that, despite large scale resettlement after the Zambezi floods of 2007 and 2008, some people had still returned to dangerous areas (doubtless because the places closest to the rivers are also the most fertile area). Nkutumula warned that if people did not leave dangerous areas voluntarily, they would be coercively resettled.

The flood on the Pungue river, which inundated part of the Beira-Zimbabwe road, seems to have peaked. The river, measured at the Mafambisse sugar plantation, is still above flood alert level but is now dropping.

Attentions have now switched to the Zambezi. Torrential rains have led to a rapid rise in the level of Cahora Bassa lake. The maximum elevation of the lake is 329 metres above sea level, and the current elevation is 324.42 metres, according to information released on Wednesday by the country's relief agency, the National Disasters Management Institute (INGC).

This has forced the management of the Cahora Bassa dam to release more water through the floodgates. As of Wednesday morning, the dam was discharging 4,736 cubic metres a second. This compares with just 2,486 cubic metres a second a week ago.

This is bound to worsen flooding on the lower Zambezi, in Chemba, Caia and Marromeu districts. On Tuesday, the Zambezia was 6.31 metres high at Caia, and 6.02 metres high at Marromeu. Flood alert level is five metres at Caia and 4.5 metres at Marromeu.

Despite all the warnings given in 2008, some people have even returning to live on islands in the Zambezi. There are, however, only a few people in this situation – the INGC has found 12 families on three islands and Chemba, and six families on two islands in Caia. By now, with the help of traditional authorities in the area, they should all have been evacuated.

Further upstream, in Mutarara district, in Tete province, the INGC says that 2,800 people at risk in areas close to the Zambezi are being evacuated to resettlement areas.

In Mopeia district, in Zambezia province, 1,200 people have been moved by local risk management committees to resettlement areas, and will be followed by a further 2,800 people still in dangerous areas.

Further south, the flood on the Buzi has cut Buzi district off from the rest of the country. Buzi town can only be reached by boats from Beira.

Maputo, 3 Mar (AIM) – The Mozambican government hopes that over 1.5 million tonnes of foodstuffs can be produced from the second sowings of the 2009/2010 agricultural campaign which begins in April.

Acting as temporary government spokesperson, Deputy Foreign Minister Henrique Banze told reporters on Tuesday, after the weekly Cabinet meeting, that the forecasts for the second sowing are production of 92,818 tonnes of maize (sown on 84,380 hectares), 22,078 tonnes of wheat (17,460 hectares), 24,572 tonnes of beans (44,677 hectares), 178,426 tonnes of potatoes (15,957 hectares), and 1.2 million tonnes of vegetables (50,560 hectares).

The government is thus hoping to recover from the poor results of the first sowings. Poor rains, particularly in the southern and central provinces, led to the loss of as much as 39 per cent of planned production.

The government's strategy for the second sowings, said Banze, is to ensure that seeds are available for farmers, and to provide pumps for irrigation, "so as to make the maximum use of the available water to increase productivity".

Banze added that the government is also encouraging the production of drought resistant crops. "The population should adapt to the situation of poor rains, and bank on the production of drought resistant crops", he insisted.

According to the official data, the shortage of rain has affected 61 districts in the provinces of Maputo, Gaza, Inhambane, Sofala, Manica, Tete and Zambezia, putting 785,000 households at risk of food insecurity.

The government had hoped for a bumper 2010 harvest. The agricultural campaign had been carefully prepared, with the delivery and distribution on time of seeds and other agricultural inputs. 40 tractors were distributed, adding to the 50 that had been acquired in 2008.

The initial forecast was for a grain harvest of 2.9 million tonnes, an 11 per cent increase on the 2009 harvest, and a 9.9 million tonne cassava harvest (an eight per cent increase).

But these targets have been seriously compromised by the irregular rainfall, which has affected about a million hectares of farmland.

(AIM)

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Maputo, Sexta-Feira, 12 de Março de 2010:: Notícias

Áreas inundáveis devem ser evacuadas - reafirmam membros do Conselho de Ministros que estiveram ontem no baixo Zambeze para monitorar a situação das cheias

AS áreas inundáveis no baixo Zambeze devem ser abandonadas e a população deve retornar aos bairros de reassentamento como forma de minimizar o impacto das cheias sobre as pessoas e a economia local, segundo apelaram membros do Conselho Coordenador de Gestão das Calamidades que estiveram ontem no centro do país para inteirarem-se do impacto da subida dos níveis dos rios e auxiliarem as autoridades locais na tomada de medidas tendentes à mitigação de possíveis impactos.

Entretanto, a situação no baixo Zambeze tende a ganhar contornos preocupantes, porquanto o nível do rio continua a subir e mais áreas estão a ser inundadas. As forças da

Unidade de Protecção Civil (UNAPROC) estão a enfrentar algumas dificuldades na evacuação de pessoas que se mostram reticentes em abandonar os seus bens.

O Ministro da Saúde, Paulo Ivo Garrido, esteve em Mutarara, Esperança Bias, dos Recursos Minerais, em Chemba (Sofala) e o Ministro da Defesa, Filipe Nhussi, escalou Mopeia, na Zambézia. O Vice-Ministro da Administração Estatal, José Tsambe, visitou Marromeu na companhia do vice-ministro das Finanças, Pedro Couto. Grosso modo apelaram a população no sentido de abandonar as áreas de risco e fixar-se em áreas seguras atendendo a possibilidade de agravamento da situação actual.

Os governantes estiveram ainda em Caia onde funciona o Centro Nacional Operativo de Emergência onde encorajaram o pessoal envolvido nas operações de coordenação do resgate para que não desfaleça perante as adversidades. A missão do Conselho de Ministros que também escalou a bacia do Búzi, através do ministro do Comércio, António Fernando, foi mandatada após a sessão do Conselho de Ministros desta semana ter decretado o alerta vermelho para a região.

Aliás, foi a mesma tónica usada pelo Chefe do Estado-Maior General das Forças Armadas, Paulino Macaringue, que visitou as Unidades de Protecção Civil envolvida nas operações de resgate.

Maior preocupação está centrada neste momento sobre o baixo Zambeze onde se estima que haja muitas pessoas em áreas de risco numa altura em que os níveis tendem a subir cada vez mais. Com efeito, os distritos de Mutarara, em Tete, Chemba, em Sofala, e Tambara, em Manica, estão isolados do resto do país devido à subida dos níveis daquele curso de água.

Dados avançados pelo Director-Geral do INGC, João Ribeiro, dão conta que foram retiradas ontem 1194 pessoas das áreas de risco perfazendo um cumulativo de 4172 indivíduos desde que tiveram início as operações de resgate esta semana.

A recusa da população em abandonar as áreas de risco continua a marcar o dia-a-dia, desde que iniciaram as operações de resgate com recurso a barcos com motor fora de bordo. A título de exemplo, em Mopeia, a nossa Reportagem testemunhou casos de pessoas que se recusavam a sair mesmo estando cercadas de água. Alguns deles até se escondem no tecto das respectivas palhotas para não serem detectadas pelos homens da UNAPROC.

No âmbito do plano de contingência, aprovado pelo Governo no ano passado, o Instituto Nacional de Gestão das Calamidades tinha já pré-posicionado bens de socorro e perto de 60 barcos em áreas consideradas críticas.

Apesar de a situação ainda estar a evoluir, as autoridades consideram que o número da população em risco tende a reduzir, principalmente no que se refere à exposição às cheias nas bacias do Zambeze e Búzi onde desde 2007 decorre o processo de reassentamento da população.