

Country profile: Mozambique



HDI ranking: ranked 170 out of 173 countries

The UNDP Human Development Index (HDI) measures a country's achievements in terms of life expectancy, educational attainment and adjusted real income.

Country background

In 1992, the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO), which has ruled the country since independence in 1975, and the Mozambique National Resistance (RENAMO), a rebel movement, signed a peace accord ending ten years of brutal civil war and paving the way for peaceful transition to democracy. Since 1992 FRELIMO has won two elections for both party and president and is implementing an ambitious liberalisation and privatisation programme to bring macroeconomic stability.

Two million Mozambicans returned home after the civil war in which a million others died from fighting and famine. Homes, schools and health centres are being rebuilt. In the 1990s, good rains produced successful harvests and food prices fell. Public defence spending decreased, making way for increased spending on health. Inflation remains relatively low and foreign exchange rates stable, regional trade and transport routes improved and foreign investment strengthened, making Mozambique one of the world's fastest growing economies.

While international debt has been a constraining factor in development, in 1999 Mozambique received formal cancellation of a large proportion of external debt through an IMF initiative. In 2001, the IMF and World Bank agreed to US\$600 million in special relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries programme.

However, early 2000 saw the worst floods ever recorded in Mozambique. Floods hit again in 2001, adding to the death toll, washing away houses, crops and drowning livestock, as well as causing extensive damage to infrastructure. Around a quarter of the 18 million population were affected. Growth slowed and inflation rose sharply amid the destruction. In 2002, severe drought hit many central and southern parts of the country, including previously flood-stricken areas. Heavy rains have again been causing devastation in central and northern areas in early 2003. The government estimates hundreds of thousands of people are in need of emergency food aid and health care as malaria and cholera strike at communities already enfeebled by HIV and AIDS. In June 2002, the IMF approved a US\$11 million loan to combat the effects of the floods.

Political calm was also shattered in 2000, as demonstrations by RENAMO supporters disputing the 1999 elections were followed by violent government suppression. RENAMO dropped its demand for a vote recount in 2002, but the ruling party continues to reject calls for power-sharing with the opposition. In addition, while liberalisation has presented new opportunities to make money, it has also led to rampant corruption among the financial and political elite. Mozambique is still in shock from the murder in 2000 of Carlos Cardoso, the country's celebrated investigative journalist who got too close to a major banking scandal, and the murder of a high-ranking banking official who had initiated a programme to recover bad loans given to political cronies. The police and the legal systems are weak and are not independent, but the government is introducing reform of the legal system and the civil service.

Agriculture and fishing still form the base of Mozambique's economy, providing livelihoods for the vast majority of people, raw materials for agro-industry, and the bulk of export products. The sector performed badly in 2001/02 due to climatic disasters but new growth continues in aluminium, telecommunications and energy, registering at 9% GDP. Rapid urbanisation is however fomenting unemployment and pressure on social services in the towns, aggravated by a

low skills base, a young population and a rise in crime. Labour conflicts mainly over pay and redundancies characterised most of 2002.

So in spite of much progress, Mozambique remains one of the very poorest countries in the world, with 70% of the population living below the poverty line. Unequal economic growth has excluded poor people, who struggle with rising living costs. Poverty is increasingly prevalent in rural and central areas, with services and economic benefits seldom reaching the 80% of the population who live there. Mozambique still has to overcome a war-torn infrastructure further damaged by floods, dependence on foreign finance to balance the budget and a shortage of skilled people in all professional areas.

The government prioritises poverty reduction through sustained economic expansion, price stability and improved social services. But capacity continues to be hampered by low education and skill levels, low wages and morale, and a drain of the few qualified staff from the government to the private sector. Local non-government organisations (NGOs), which only appeared in Mozambique in the 1990s, remain ineffective due to a lack of experience, management skills and resources. NGOs and government rarely share information, leading to ineffective services and duplication.

HIV and AIDS is a national emergency in Mozambique, infecting 12% of the population and placing added pressure on already overstretched resources. Some 500 new daily infections were reported in 2002. The belated national response has been limited due to a weak social safety net: only 40% of Mozambicans have access to basic health services. However, the government has now passed legislation introducing antiretroviral drugs for HIV-positive people, prioritising pregnant women and children. The human toll of the AIDS pandemic is nonetheless placing unbearable pressure on families and communities, as well as depriving the nation of its productive work force.

The VSO programme

Number of volunteers in-country: 49

VSO Mozambique helps to improve basic services in education, social welfare, HIV and AIDS and secure livelihoods and to offer disadvantaged Mozambicans the opportunity to gain control of their own economic and social development. Volunteers work in the more disadvantaged provinces and with vulnerable groups, including women and children, poor, older, unemployed and disabled people. Where possible, volunteers are placed in regional or skill clusters to maximise the impact of their work, and all volunteers address gender inequality, HIV and AIDS and build capacity at individual and organisational levels.

Poverty affects the majority of Mozambicans and both government and non-government responses and structures are weak. VSO volunteers help provincial government departments increase access to social services for vulnerable groups. Current placements include building the capacity of provincial social action institutions, for example, a planning and management adviser and a finance and accounts manager. They provide professional and technical assistance to social service staff through on-the-job skill-sharing as well as through more formal training roles. All volunteers in management and advisory roles spend time working directly with disadvantaged groups. They also raise awareness of issues affecting the elderly, street children, orphans and disabled people, including improving the quality of care for visually impaired students at Mozambique's Institute for the Blind.

Volunteers work in rural development programmes to reduce the social, economic and physical isolation of the poorest people in rural areas. Many rely on subsistence agriculture and lack capital and skills for production and business. We support NGOs and community groups such as

farmers' associations to enable farmers (particularly women) to increase their income. VSO small business advisers are working with farmers' unions and agricultural teaching institutions to promote rural credit, accounting and management systems and marketing techniques. Another volunteer supervised the building of drainage systems to control floods and river waters. The drier land has led to the availability of extended and more productive farming land for the farmers.

VSO developed placements in 2002 to increase self-reliance among disadvantaged urban groups, given the deterioration of living standards in urban areas due to increasing unemployment, withdrawal of subsidies and poor education. The focus of our support is on building the organisational capacity of NGOs to develop, manage and deliver appropriate policies and services. Prospective placements include developing IT and accountancy skills in small business institutions through volunteers on VSO's Netcorps and Business Partnerships schemes.

Inadequate education and training is one of the main causes of disadvantage. VSO aims to increase education availability, quality and access in disadvantaged provinces, especially for girls, out-of-school youth and learners with disabilities. In Mozambique, English is seen as an important factor in economic growth and is compulsory in schools. VSO teachers combining English language teaching with pre- and in-service teacher training have been very successful in raising the standards of English teaching. Volunteer teacher trainers and methodology advisers are encouraging more participatory teaching methods and have been active in producing subject-based and HIV and AIDS learning materials, some of which have been adopted nationwide. Education management volunteers support the planning and management capacity of educational institutions by setting up libraries and weekly staff meetings, amongst other activities.

As HIV and AIDS has the potential to reverse most development efforts, VSO Mozambique is also part of VSO's Regional AIDS Initiative of Southern Africa, RAISA, where volunteers in all skill areas work with local organisations and institutions to fight AIDS.

RAISA volunteers work with HIV and AIDS organisations to support service delivery and build organisational capacity. Current volunteers include a doctor at a rural health post and a social worker in an NGO supporting people living with HIV. Volunteers help improve knowledge about sexually transmitted diseases and HIV and AIDS among the clinical personnel they work with and promote public discussion of AIDS-related issues. One volunteer was recently placed in an advocacy role with a civil society pressure group to lobby for legislation against discrimination of people with HIV and AIDS and for government introduction of antiretroviral drugs.

In addition, volunteers in all skill areas help to raise awareness of HIV and AIDS in their workplace and community. Initiatives have ranged from seminars with youth, women and community groups, leaflet and condom distribution campaigns and communicating HIV and AIDS prevention in the classroom.

In 2001/02, VSO Mozambique welcomed volunteers from the Philippines, Uganda and Kenya. South-to-South volunteers now correspond to approximately 25% of the total number of volunteers in-country. Many, especially Ugandan volunteers, work in HIV and AIDS placements, bringing extensive and relevant experience in the area and enhanced cultural understanding.

Volunteer perspectives

"In terms of personal gains, I believe that there have been many, many experiences over the last four years that have shaped (and will continue to shape) my attitudes and opinions. I have learnt so much about a different way of seeing and doing things. I have learnt to respect what I do not understand and not to judge simply because it is different. I have continued to develop my self-reliance skills and my interest in how others live. I have also had to learn to deal with problems and frustrations that are unexpected or simply beyond my experience. Working as a volunteer

has been one of the most positive and enjoyable learning experiences.” Neil Murray, English teacher/provincial English support officer, Ministry of Education, October 2001.

“My placement here has enabled me to get to know Mozambicans socially and professionally. The fact that I have received a Mozambican teacher’s wage means that I find it easier to fit in with my colleagues at school. The same is true socially as I live in a building where only Mozambicans live. This makes socialising with local people easier as I can become involved in areas of their everyday life. By living and working like this I have learned a lot about Mozambique and its people and feel that I have experienced, and not just observed, a lot.” Graham Chapman, provincial English support officer, Ministry of Education, November 2001.

Partner perspectives

“Jozef is a very resourceful and a very energetic individual. He used his technical knowledge and common sense to set up appropriate systems for a laboratory, the first one to give practical lessons to students for many years.” Colleagues of VSO electricity teacher Jozef Halma, at the Escola Industrial e Comercial Ngungunhane, Lichinga, November 2002.

“The VSO has given special attention to teachers, helped and encouraged them to work. Another aspect is continuous assistance to teachers in their schools through school visits and observation of classes. Without the support of the VSO, Manica province would have been a difficult place to reach for the provincial English adviser in Sofala.” Escola Commercial y Industrial Joaquim Mara, on VSO EFL teacher/inset trainer Jane Appleton, July 2002.