

Morrumbala, Zambezia: War and Reconstruction - by Antonio Gumende

The town of Morrumbala, in the western part of the central Mozambican province of Zambezia was one of the areas buffeted by cyclone 'Filao' on 1 March. But it was no cyclone that was responsible for the disappearance of all the zinc and fibre-cement roofing from the town's houses. The bandits of the South African backed MNR carried the roofing into Malawi, as well as much else that they had looted, during the period that Morrumbala was in their hands, from July 1985 until April 1987, when the Mozambican armed forces liberated the town.

As people moved back into the shattered town they found houses without roofs. The provisional solution to this problem has created a strange combination - modern brick and concrete houses that are covered with thatched roofs. This is just one example of the search for local solutions undertaken by the 28,000 people now living in Morrumbala. Most of these people have been displaced by the MNR's war, and taking this into account, their efforts at reconstruction are remarkable.

The District Director for Agriculture, and interim local Administrator, Antonio Elias, told AIM that around Morrumbala there were now 4,095 hectares of cultivated land, where amongst other crops, peasant farmers were growing maize, rice, millet, peanuts, beans, cassava and vegetables. This is despite the late start to this year's rainy season, and cyclone damage to crops, particularly rice. When AIM visited Morrumbala, the residents established there the longest could add to the products of their fields some emergency food aid. This consisted exclusively of beans - the only product left in the local warehouse of Mozambique's relief body, the Disasters Control Office (DPCCN).

The efforts of Morrumbala's residents are not restricted to food production, but extend to social areas. The town now possesses two schools in each of the eight neighbourhoods into which it is divided. A total of 2,605 children are studying the first four years of primary education. The town also has four boreholes in the process of being opened, which will provide drinking water for the local people.

The determination of the inhabitants of Morrumbala to produce and to rebuild, plus the natural fertility of the land, are facts that indicate how the district, given greater security and a little more support, could cease to depend on food aid, and regain its former status as a food surplus area.

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