

Mozambique forces 'unproductive' into rural work

From Joseph Hanlon
in Maputo

Thousands of unemployed have been sent out of Maputo and other cities as part of a campaign to send the "unproductive" to rural areas to grow food. Hundreds more are detained in "evacuation centres."

Frelimo recently ruled that no one could remain in a city unless they had a job, or other recognised means of support. The unemployed were given until the end of June to register "voluntarily." They could choose to return to the rural area they came from, or select some other place, but only 200 registered voluntarily in Maputo

"The "coercive phase" began two weeks ago. House-to-house searches and checks of people on the street continue. Most people are expected to carry four cards: identity, work, residence, and national service. Those whose documents are not in order are taken to "verification posts," where they eventually go before a panel headed by a judge.

No statistics have been released, but probably tens of thousands of people have spent hours or days in verification posts. Most are eventually released, but thousands have been declared unemployed and sent to evacuation centres. They are shipped out of the city in a few days with only a few personal possessions.

They have no choice where they go. Some have been sent to work on plantations that are short of labour. Many have been sent to the remote Niassa province, which is one of the few areas unaffected by the present drought and which has surplus food. It appears that people are not being sent to drought areas, or to zones where they might join the anti-government Mozambique National Resistance.

The campaign was introduced hastily and with inadequate preparation. Regular internal air services have ground to a halt, leaving many people stranded as planes are diverted to carry the unemployed. The initial four evacuation centres soon became

overcrowded and more were opened.

Insufficient plans were made to inform families of those detained. Even the Government daily, *Noticias*, talked of "some people having to run from post to post in search of their relatives."

The campaign is intended to reverse the migration to the cities. Some people have found jobs or earn a legitimate living as artisans and can stay. But tens of thousands live off relatives or as professional queuers, black-marketeters, petty thieves, or prostitutes.

The position of women in this clean-up is particularly complex. Unemployed single women are being forced to leave, taking any children they have with them. But housewives are considered employed, even if the husbands is away. De facto marriages are recognised.

The long tradition of migrant labour in the region leads to shifting relationships. Some women have husbands in the South African mines and a boyfriend in Maputo. Some men have a city wife and a country wife. Depending on an official's view of necessity, such women can be labelled prostitutes and deported.

The Interior Minister, Mr Armando Guebuza, who heads the campaign, has visited evacuation centres and ordered the immediate release of pregnant women.

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