

Government Halts Controversial Labor Program
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[Text] In Mozambique, the Frelimo government's controversial program of shipping unemployed people out of cities such as Maputo and taking them far afield to the rural areas to work on the land is now officially over. It was launched as Operation Production in 1983. It was always unpopular and virtually unworkable. During his tour of Mozambique's northernmost province of Niassa, President Chissano formally pronounced that it was over. On a policy that was almost doomed from the outset, Dan Moine reports from Maputo:

[Moine] The campaign, which went under the name, Operation Production, was surrounded by controversy despite its good intentions as soon as it was launched. The government had planned to put to good use idle labor in the cities. Unemployed people in the urban areas were to be shifted to places like Niassa Province where they would be involved in farming activity. However, the way the operation was run left many people speechless, and caused a lot of suffering to hundreds of Mozambique. It also apparently cost a minister his job.

Indiscriminate house-to-house searches and identity checks in the streets and public places resulted in the arrest of thousands of people, by the people. Those found to be illegally in the towns or unemployed were shipped out, but there were many cases where properly documented people were also sent to Niassa and other areas in the north of Mozambique.

Many people spent days in special accommodation centers without knowing what their fate would be. This arbitrary treatment of thousands of people put the then-interior minister, Armando Guebuza, under the spotlight.

Even more damaging was that by the end of 1984, the government's Operation Production exercise in Niassa suffered at the hands of the MNR rebels, who Maputo says are backed by South Africa. State farms, foreign-backed farming projects, and communal villages, to where thousands of people had been deployed, began to come under direct rebel attack. Some of the people have now been killed, many have crossed into neighboring Malawi, and, ironically, others are said to have been recruited into the ranks of the rebels.