

Julian Ozanne looks at the rehabilitation of the cashew sector

Project to combat neglect

THE cashew sector, like the rest of agriculture, has suffered badly as a result of mis-conceived policies and the war. However, a large effort is under way to rehabilitate the crop.

Mozambique was once the world's king of cashew, producing 216,000 tonnes from 60m trees in 1972. In that year, the country exported 69,500 tonnes of raw nuts and 25,400 tonnes of processed kernels.

By 1983, a nadir was reached when marketed production slumped to 18,000 tonnes. Since then, cashew nut production has increased slowly and reached about 50,000 tonnes in 1989, as a result of better producer prices and availability of consumer goods. Cashew contributed \$18.9m in 1989 to total export earnings of \$101.1m.

However, production slumped again in 1990 to 22,200 tonnes as a result of very poor weather conditions, according to Mr Julian Saranga, the secretary of state for cashew.

The World Bank recently agreed funding for a Special Drawing Right of \$16.8m for a cashew project for Gaza and Inhambane provinces which, it says, is the first phase of a long-term programme to rehabilitate the sector.

The project will complement rehabilitation work under way in Nampula province funded by Denmark and the



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Cashew traditionally has been a smallholder crop providing a cash income to a half of Mozambique farmers who produced 90 per cent of total production intercropping cashew with staples such as maize, cassava and cow peas.

State controlled prices and an absence of consumer goods in rural stores encouraged

small cashew farmers to eat their nuts or barter them for goods rather than sell them to the factories. The war destroyed the transport and marketing infrastructure and forced farmers to abandon their trees. Disease and pests moved in when the farmers quit their trees and many nuts have been left uncollected because of the war.

Cashew production remains constrained by the war and the long-term effect of sustained neglect - ageing trees, poor husbandry, lack of new plantings, extension services and research, and incessant bushfires. Yields are estimated to be as low as between 1 kg and 1.5 kg a tree. Annual average yields should be between 6 kg and 10 kg per tree with proper agrotechniques.

The World Bank project will concentrate on renovation of orchards, upgrading of agricultural services, provision of investment credit to commercial farmers and traders, improving the institutional capacity of government bodies in the cashew sector, training and rehabilitation of the processing industry. The projects are expected to lift export earnings by \$12m.

Of Mozambique's 14 factories, which have an installed capacity of 150,000 tonnes, only eight are operating, two of which are in private hands. Present capacity is about 80,000 tonnes.

The government is committed to commercialisation of the cashew sector. State owned factories are to become autonomous entities and joint ventures are being encouraged. According to Mr Saranga, Anglo-American is negotiating a deal for two of the six state owned factories. "Management in the state sector is the major problem," he admits.