

## Easy money in Maputo

**T**eodoro Simao is a young Mozambican who returned home in 1988 after training as an auto-mechanic in Poland. But like many Mozambicans who have been abroad for training he couldn't get a well-paying job and has now turned to 'Chapa 100'. In other words he is running an illegal passenger service. (The name comes from 100 meticaïs – about 14 US cents – these operators charge regardless of the distance the passenger travels.) Every morning he drives his van to bus stops in Maputo to start a busy day ferrying passengers around town.

Unofficial statistics indicate that more than 100 illegal urban transporters operate in Maputo alone. They run a wide variety of vehicles and now offer the only real method of getting about, given the state of the city's public transport system. They don't bother much about safety, pay no tax and are subject to no controls. Many have become rich very quickly. The blind eye that the authorities turn on their operations may be due to the fact that they are providing an essential service – but has also provoked speculation that they are protected by people in high places with a stake in their profits.

'Chapa 100' started in earnest around 1982 when the city's public transport system fell apart and commuting by official methods became almost impossible, especially for those living on the city's outskirts. "The profit is easy so they carry on," says the deputy head of the department of road transport, adding: "It is very difficult to control them because they are always on the move."

Mr. Simao doesn't work to fix schedules. He will keep going late into the night if there are customers who still want his service. Legally he can only carry two passengers in the driver's cab, with the back of the van reserved for goods. In fact an average of 40 to 60 people, sometimes as many as 70, are squeezed into the back.

"I have been doing this work for four months now," he says, cheerfully admitting that he has no licence to carry passengers. "When the traffic police intercept me, I just bribe them with a 1,000-meticaïs note." He can afford to do so: his daily take can be as high as 60,000 meticaïs (US\$84).

'Chapa 100' operators don't go further than about 20 kilometres from the city centre. Anything beyond that would risk an MNR ambush. Again according to unofficial statistics, they cater for 90 per cent of Maputo's transport needs. The deputy director of road transport

acknowledges that the chaotic situation has grown up because public transport is not available.



**Hold on, this is the private sector!**

When he was still minister of foreign affairs in 1986, President Joaquim Chissano defended the 'Chapa 100' system in parliament; he said then that the state bus company had severe problems and this was the only alternative. But now the government is expressing disquiet about the proliferation of the illegal operators.

## COVER STORY

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Its own attempts to solve the city's transport problems have failed. In 1978 the ministry of transport and communications imported 100 taxis for a state company, Radio Taxi. But by 1985 only six were still on the road, although the company had retained all staff on full salary. That year the government dismantled the company, citing "lack of management capacity and the shortage of spare parts". But some officials in the transport ministry say the company went

bust because it was charging uneconomic fares.

Then between 1980 and 1985 the government imported 100 long "Ikarus" buses from Hungary for Maputo's Public Transport Company (TPU). Only one of them is still running. The authorities, while claiming that the project was "well conceived", admit that there was no provision for spare parts. A technician called out from the Hungarian firm which makes the buses said they could not be

rehabilitated because the government did not have the foreign exchange to buy the needed spares.

TPU now operates a fleet of 35 Leyland buses, which — in a city of over a million — leaves plenty of room for the Chapa 100s. In Beira, the country's second largest city, only eight buses are in service. In the rural areas bus services are virtually non-existent because of the war and the bad state of the roads. It may be some time before the position improves. □