

INTERVIEW MINISTER CARLOS BONETE MARTINHO

Mozambique Ministry of public works, housing and water resources

“MOZAMBIQUE NEEDS NEW STRATEGY TO COUNTER FLOODS AND DROUGHTS”

Jac van Tuijn*

■ Mozambique lies at the downstream end of 13 major international river basins. The East African country that borders the Indian Ocean is regularly hit by powerful storms. Every three years a severe flood occurs. In between Mozambique suffers from severe droughts. Minister Carlos Bonete Martinho of public works, housing and water resources visited the Amsterdam International Water Week in November 2015 to talk to the Dutch counterparts about a new water management strategy. In this interview he elaborates on the evolving water governance in his country.

■ When it rains, it pours in Mozambique, but when it doesn't, it's dry to the extreme. The East African country borders the Indian Ocean and is affected by the El Niño, a naturally occurring global phenomenon in which the tropical Pacific Ocean warms up more than usual. A strong El Niño spells drought for Southern Africa. The opposite of El Niño, El Niña, triggers many cyclones and brings extreme rainfall to Mozambique, causing rivers and its deltas to flood. Mozambique is one of the countries in the world that experience the largest drag on Gross domestic product (GDP) as a result of floods and droughts.

Minister Carlos Bonete Martinho of public works, housing and water resources visited the Netherlands early November 2015 leading a Mozambique water delegation. Martinho was installed as minister in January 2015 and one of his top priorities is to implement a water governance process to counter the increasing floods and droughts in his country. As minister for water resources he asked his national water directorate for an outline of a national flood prevention strategy.

During his stay at the Amsterdam International Water Week he had many meetings with Dutch experts and he signed two water related agreements with the Dutch government. He also made a field visit to the Room for the river project Noordwaard near Werkendam. On the occasion of his visit to the Netherlands,

minister Martinho gave an exclusive interview to Water Governance in which he explained that in his view flood prevention is more than a technical matter and needs to be embedded in a cooperation involving all the other ministers in his country. He claimed a paradigm shift, a new strategy for flood protection.

What is the purpose of your visit to the Netherlands?

My visit to the Netherlands is the third in a series of five meetings in Mozambique and the Netherlands to intensify our cooperation on water affairs, such as water supply, sanitation, droughts and floods. This third meeting here in Amsterdam focusses on flood risk management.

My first week as minister was actually dominated by the occurrence of a large flood in the Licungo basin in the central region of Mozambique in January 2015. This flood caused loss of lives, serious damages and significant loss of GDP. Transport and electric power were interrupted affecting many other sectors.

To me, this flood brought home the message that a paradigm shift, a new strategy, is necessary to protect our country from the increasing occurrence and damage of floods. Although Mozambique has become quite proficient in providing emergency relief through the institution established to deal with disaster

* **Jac van Tuijn**, publisher and freelance writer on water management.

**Carlos Bonete
Martinho,
Mozambique
Ministry of public
works, housing and
water resources**



management, this does not reduce the continuous economic loss and damage of infrastructure caused by floods. Neither does it tackle the root causes underlying the occurrence of these floods.

I gladly accepted the invitation from the Dutch government to attend the Amsterdam International Water Week with a Mozambique delegation, not only to talk about our flood and drought issues, but also to celebrate the forty years of water cooperation between our countries.

What have you achieved as a minister so far?

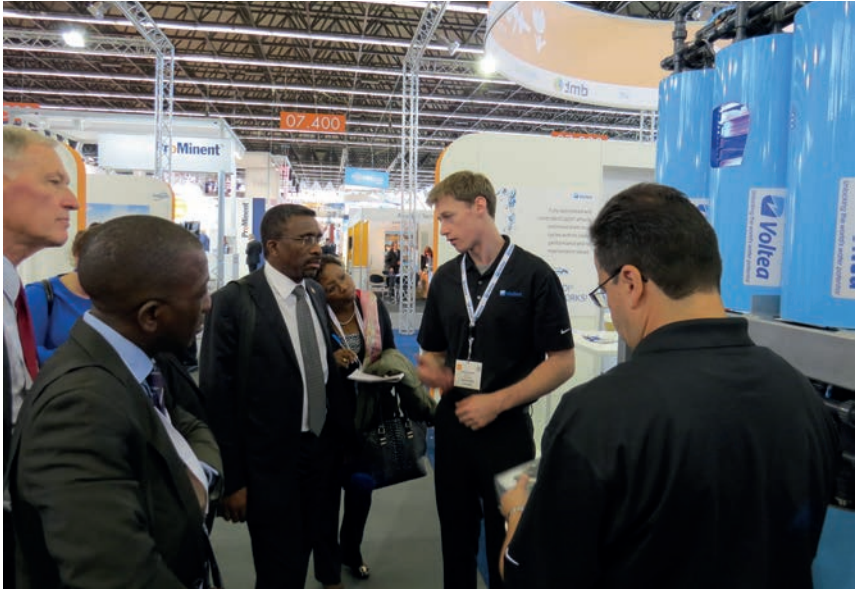
The new government that was installed in January 2015, is fully committed to water security. This includes both the provision of sufficient water of good quality for social and economic development, and also the protection of life, property and infrastructure against floods and droughts. This commitment reflects also the new *Sustainable Development Goals* that have recently been adopted by the United Nations in New York.

In this context, my ministry has adopted a new name reflecting the increased attention to water resources. We have also created a new national directorate specifically focusing on the management of water resources, the *Direcção Nacional de Gestão de Recursos Hídricos* (DNGRH). This new directorate has several divisions, specially dedicated to water resources management, hydraulic works, river basin planning and international rivers.

A water management crisis caused by floods or droughts is often also a water governance crisis. The new strategy I mentioned earlier requires much more communication and cooperation between the water sector and other water relevant development sectors such as hydropower, energy, mineral sector, agriculture, transport and health. Floods and droughts are continuous risk factors for the Mozambican economy. The solution is not just a matter of technical expertise but also demands for integrated solutions and the participation of stakeholders. We need to address and facilitate water governance processes.

FORTY YEARS NETHERLANDS-MOZAMBIQUE WATER COOPERATION

When the Portuguese water experts left Mozambique after the country gained independence in 1975, the new government called upon the assistance of Dutch hydrologists. This assistance led to a strong bilateral diplomatic water cooperation and on 3 November 2015 the forty year anniversary of this cooperation was commemorated in Amsterdam in the attendance of minister Martinho. On this occasion, the Mozambique and Dutch governments signed a grant agreement and a letter of intent on integrated water management and flood protection.



FLOOD MANAGEMENT IN LICUNGO BASIN

Following the large floods in the Licungo river basin in January 2015, a Dutch risk reduction team visited the basin in April 2015. They inspected the dikes and talked to regional and national authorities.

The team concluded that during the Licungo flood the casualties were dominant in the upper reaches of the basin and they were not related to dike failures. The team assessed the occurrence of heavy flash floods. In its mission report the team also noted that bridge openings were too small in relation to peak discharges that can be expected during extreme rainfall.

The team advised the national water directorate, the Direcção Nacional de Águas (DNA), and the regional water boards, the Administração Regional de Águas (ARA) to take the lead in strengthening the water governance and streamline the planning processes between water relevant sectors, such as agriculture, energy, transport corridors. The development plans of these sectors should better be cross-examined on their effects on the hydraulic regime in the river basin and flood plains.





We have installed the *National council of water* for all ministers to meet several times a year and discuss all water-related issues. I chair this council and it gives me an opportunity to jointly share views with my colleagues ministers of for instance health care, environment and agriculture.

Following the big flood in January 2015 our prime minister is supervising the establishment of a national coordinated flood prevention plan. Our National Institute for Disaster Management (INGC) is in charge but my ministry is closely involved. One of our priorities at this moment is the mapping of the flood zones.

What specific measures do you have in mind?

Mozambique lies at the downstream end of 13 major international river basins. Whatever happens upstream, Mozambique will bear the consequences of the resulting floods, droughts or possible changes in water quality. We must strengthen our transboundary cooperation in water management and flood control. Additionally, Mozambique needs to improve forecasting and warning capabilities for protecting lives and infrastructure essential to social and economic development.

The new strategy must respect the force of water during floods, by giving more space to the river to discharge flood waters, by evaluating the physical occupation of the flood plains, and by ensuring sectoral development in order to protect people's lives and crucial infrastructure. It means a combination of hard and soft measures to reduce the impact of floods.

There is also the issue of the physical occupation of flood plains. The development sectors that build in these corridors may have an adverse effects on flood discharge capacity. They not only increase the risk of loss of lives, but with every flood our infrastructure gets also destroyed and that effects our GDP.

For me it is a big challenge to change the behaviour of the people living in the flood plains. It is not difficult to convince them to evacuate for a pending flood. The problem is that they come back after the flood while we want them to settle in less flood prone areas. I reckon this will not be easy as we need to facilitate this by constructing of new houses and schools.

How do you envision water governance in your country?

A water management crisis caused by floods or droughts is often also a water governance crisis. The new strategy mentioned earlier requires much more communication and cooperation between the water sector and other water-relevant development sectors such as hydropower, energy, mineral sector, agriculture, transport and health.

Floods and droughts are continuous risk factors for the Mozambican economy. As the solution lies not only in technical expertise but also in integral solutions and the participation of stakeholders, we need to address and facilitate water governance processes. Assisting the other sector ministries in managing flood-related risks associated with their particular sectoral development, will be a key focal point in short and long term development and will show the added value of the ministry in sustainable development. ■