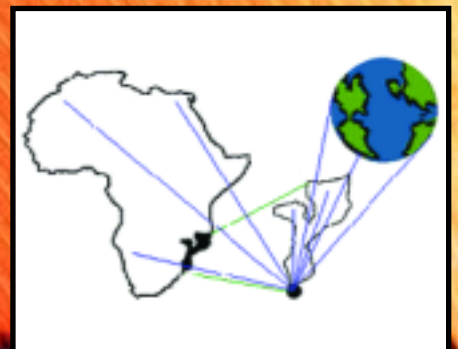


Country Focus:

Mozambique

Almost five centuries of Portuguese colonial rule, large-scale emigration of whites following independence, a severe drought and a prolonged civil war have combined to make Mozambique one of the World's poorest nations. In this article we review the current status of information and communications technology, and its role in Mozambique's economic recovery.



Historical background

In 1498 the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama landed in Mozambique en route to India. Mozambique was by then trading with Arabs, Persians, Chinese and Indonesians in such commodities as gold, ivory, amber, valuable skins and rhinoceros horn. During the 16th Century Portuguese trading posts sprang up and became regular ports of call on the new route to the east. In the following century Portugal gradually established a military presence and a feudal system of ownership, and began to collect taxes from the African population.

Portugal declared Mozambique a colony in 1752. A flourishing slave trade soon grew up, and by the 1820s slavery had become Mozambique's major export, with slaves being shipped to the sugar plantations of Cuba and Brazil. Sadly, this trade continued into the 20th Century. The British also developed strong commercial interests in Mozambique, building rail links with neighbouring countries and exploiting the cheap African labour force in their mines and plantations.

Mozambique's Informatics Policy encourages all state, public and private sector institutions to regard the exploitation of ICT as an indispensable part of their strategic plans

Portugal's colonial policies were designed to benefit white settlers and the homeland, particularly during the Salazar



regime, and little effort was made to develop Mozambique's economic infrastructure or its people's skills. Strong Portuguese economic interests in the country made it unlikely that Mozambique would have an easy transition to independence, and so it was to be. In 1962 a Marxist liberation movement, the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (Frelimo) was founded in an effort to persuade the Portuguese to relinquish colonial control.

Much violence followed in the years leading up to independence, but when independence eventually came in 1975 it did not bring peace. Internal conflict broke out between Frelimo and the political opposition, Renamo, which by the end of the 1980s had reduced much of the country to a state of famine and chaos. Eventually peace talks between the warring factions led to the General Peace Accord in 1992. A UN Peacekeeping Force successfully oversaw the cease-fire and the two-year transition to the first multiparty elections in 1994.

Meanwhile Frelimo had abandoned Marxism-Leninism. A new constitution adopted in 1990 introduced among other reforms:

- direct, equal, secret, free and regular elections for the President of the Republic and for the deputies to the Parliament (Assembly of the Republic);
- freedom to create political parties;
- pluralism of opinion and the freedoms of expression and the press; and....
- the right to meet, associate and demonstrate.

Mozambique thus moved from being a one-party state to a multiparty democracy. The first presidential and legislative elections were held in October 1994, and the new deputies were sworn

in for a five-year term. The second presidential and legislative elections were held in December 1999, and the 250 deputies elected were sworn in on 14 January 2000.

Information & Communications Technology: The Development Forefront

Despite its return to peace, Mozambique remains one of the World's poorest countries, with around 60% of its population living below the poverty line. The Government Programme gives pride of place to eradicating poverty and consolidating national unity, but achieving these aims depends on balanced and sustainable economic development. The Programme's priorities therefore include developing education and health services, rehabilitating infrastructure and basic

The Canadian International Development Research Centre (<http://www.idrc.ca>) included Mozambique in its Acacia Programme. This programme seeks to demonstrate that access to ICT can contribute to resolving development problems at local level. It aims to research and identify the most appropriate technologies and methodologies for local use, and to promote access to ICT in rural areas via telecentres.

The programme will:

- examine a range of telecentre feasibility criteria in the context of Mozambique, including technical, infrastructural, economic and institutional aspects;
- develop a methodology on how best to select sites, plan and set up telecentres;
- use the feasibility criteria and methodology developed under the first two objectives to identify potential pilot telecentre sites;
- prepare a detailed proposal for establishing two pilot telecentres.

Mozambique's Informatics Policy aims to:

- raise national awareness of ICT's role and potential in Mozambique's economic development;
- contribute towards the eradication of absolute poverty (which affects more than 60% of the population);
- provide all citizens with wider access to information in order for them to raise their development level and performance in education, health, science and technology;
- expand and develop computer skills in the National Education System;
- encourage and support computer training for leaders, community leaders, women, youth and children;
- contribute towards improving the efficiency of public and private sectors;
- contribute to transforming the country into a producer as well as a consumer of information and communications technologies;
- create an environment to enable industry and business, to invest in ICT;
- ensure that development plans and projects in all sectors include an ICT component;
- contribute to ironing out inequalities between the cities and other social strata, and promote access to development opportunities for all citizens;
- create a proper enabling environment between public and private sectors for co-operation and partnership in ICT;
- foster and facilitate the country's integration into the World economy and the Global Information Society.

services (particularly in the rural areas), decentralising administration, and promoting economic growth in which an important role is allotted to the private sector. Given that Mozambique is essentially a rural country with a high illiteracy rate, a key challenge is to develop its human resources as the means to haul the country out of external economic dependency, and to consolidate its long-term development.

Equitable access to knowledge and information is a pre-condition to the Programme's success. The Government aims to use Information and Communications Technology (**ICT**) as a means of improving public service delivery, and of promoting government transparency and democracy. Its **Informatics Policy** encourages all state, public and private sector institutions to regard the exploitation of ICT as an indispensable part of their strategic plans.

Despite the many financial and infrastructure problems that currently beset Mozambique, there's sound logic in an underdeveloped country exploiting ICT to help them reap the benefits of globalisation. Much of the credit for recognising this must go to Mozambique's premier Eduardo Mondlane University (<http://www.uem.mz>). During the 1990s the University's Informatics Centre took up the challenge of introducing Mozambique to the Internet, and has since become one of the country's main Internet service providers. The Centre is also running a pilot project to extend Internet access to remote villages.

In Feb 1997, the Centre organised a national workshop with support from Canada and the World Bank. Entitled "Towards an Information Society", much of the current development programme was to stem from this seminal event. The workshop identified priority areas for the use of ICT and made a number of policy recommendations, the most important of which was to set up a high-level advisory committee to develop Government

policy on its use. The World Bank is currently assisting the Government develop a series of projects to assist national and provincial government exploit ICT to improve public service delivery. The ministries involved are those identified as priority areas by the national workshop and covered by the World Bank's existing national programmes in Agriculture, Health, Education, State Administration and Statistics. In the first stage of this project the Bank assisted the Informatics Centre to compile a national and provincial survey of existing infrastructure, and to develop a comprehensive funding proposal for the five areas (including Culture as part of Education).

Despite severe flooding in 2000, Mozambique has experienced strong economic growth in recent years. Although the country cannot yet be included in the global information society, it is nonetheless an example of how ICT is to help promote development in an emerging economy. Better governance together with the ripening of democracy and technology will eventually make Mozambique a net contributor to the world economy based on its information and "know-how".

The Informatics Policy

An Informatics Policy makes sense in a country where financial resources are scarce and much of the state budget is externally funded. It enables more rational use to be made of ICT and also helps to exercise control over expenditure and the resulting drain on scarce foreign currency reserves. So following their re-election in 1999, the Frelimo Government approved Mozambique's first national *Informatics Policy*.

The Policy sets out the principles and objectives for making ICT the enabler for several national development activities while giving priority to some social sectors, such as health and education. Its main stakeholders are the emerging national business community, and the international donor community.

The Canadian Government sponsored the development of both the Informatics Policy and an implementation strategy. For its part the Government undertook to:

- approve the relevant legislation quickly;
- approve the implementation strategy's targets and deadlines;
- devote all available resources to the development of information and communications technologies;
- encourage the use of information and communications technologies in services and public institutions;
- provide incentives for investment in the informatic and communications areas;
- promote access to the Internet.

The Informatics Strategy

The Government believes that the political and economic environment is now right for the implementation of its Informatic Policy. It refers to the prevailing environment of peace, political stability, democracy and freedom of thought and expression. Other important factors are the strong market economy, the development of the private sector and Free Zones, and the growth of foreign investment.

The Strategy is based on programmes of national scope and magnitude. These will be implemented by several state and private sector institutions as a number of short, medium and long-term projects, and shall be subject to a project control and monitoring mechanism. The short and medium term programmes comprise:

- the approval, in 2001, of the legislation on the reduction on import duties for computer software and other computer equipment and spares;

- conclusion of the privatisation of the national public telecommunications operator by 2004;
- a 3,000Kms north to south optical fibre link by 2004.
- legislation that eliminates or reduces import duties on computer products by 2003;
- approval of measures and incentives for investment in ICT by 2004;
- a school syllabus for the National Education System and its gradual implementation from 2003 onwards;
- setting up training centres in the southern central and northern regions that award internationally recognised qualifications in computer skills.

The long term training programmes comprise the introduction to computer learning for basic and medium levels, and the development of local informatic products. The Government is looking to the international community for help and co-operation, particularly in the areas of funding and technical assistance in managing the projects and programmes that will be necessary to achieve the Informatic Policy's objectives. It is also striving to mobilise new partners for the development of education, health, governance, scientific research, electronic commerce and infrastructure, and to strengthen liaison with foreign experts and institutions. And having improved the transfer of know-how, another problem to confront Mozambique is how to retain its national experts.

About the Author



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Basilio (e-mail: ta@tvcabo.gov.mz) is a journalist by profession. He graduated from the Faculty of Letters of

Mozambique's oldest public university, the Eduardo Mondlane University, and from the School of Journalism of Maputo.

Basilio has taught Portuguese, Mozambique's official language, and has worked as a senior journalist with the National Agency of News (AIM) on the oldest local weekly publication, "Domingo". He now works for the Administrative Tribunal where he is in charge of document and information management.

The Tribunal Administrativo

Mozambique's supreme audit institution is a court of accounts, the Tribunal Administrativo. The Tribunal has the status of a supreme court of justice with the competency to judge matters that fall within its ambit. Its status as a court makes the Tribunal absolutely independent of other state institutions - it complies only with the law (Mozambique's Constitution foresees a division of roles between executive, judiciary and legislature).

The President of the Tribunal is appointed by the President of the Republic, subject to the appointment being ratified by Parliament.

The Tribunal issues the *Rapport and Opinion on the State General Account*, which is published in Boletim da República, the official publication of the Republic.