

Rural Poverty and Poverty Alleviation in Mozambique: What's Missing from the Debate?

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Abstract

There has been a surge in data gathering and literature on rural poverty and poverty reduction in post-war Mozambique. Most of the literature is agreed on the need to prioritise the stabilisation of the rural population in smallholder family farming, on secure tenure terms. Underlying this agreement are both economic assumptions and political presumptions, and a common antipathy to large farms, be they colonial plantations, socialist state farms or large capitalist agricultural enterprises representing “external interests”. Drawing on a broader historical literature on rural Mozambique, and on the results of a small, illustrative case-study of female wage labourers on the cotton fields of the Lomaco joint venture in Gaza Province, this paper argues that the current mainstream literature on rural Mozambican poverty under-estimates the significance of dynamic forces within rural society, including social differentiation, class formation and the role of wage labour, and population movement on a grand and local scale. Wage labour in agriculture, especially involving women, and labour migration are more important to the survival of the poorest in Mozambique than the mainstream literature acknowledges. Both factors are shown to have important policy implications. On the basis of this discussion, there is a clear need for further research and more open policy debate around the issues raised in this paper.

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1. Introduction

The peace accord signed in October 1992 and multi-party elections held in October 1994 brought to Mozambique fresh hopes and opportunities. Post-war reconstruction has been underway for some years, through an array of projects ranging from hand-outs for demobilised soldiers to the World Bank-supported Roads and Coastal Shipping (ROCS) rehabilitation project running from 1994-2000. Although there is political tension between the two main parties and former contestants in the civil war, Frelimo and Renamo, and a combination of rising urban crime and sporadic banditry on roads in rural areas, generally there has been a strong improvement in political stability and physical security for the majority of the population. Economic reforms, broadly typical of World Bank/IMF stabilisation and structural adjustment programmes, have accelerated during the 1990s, having begun in 1987 and have been accompanied by a substantial commitment of external financial support from bilateral donors as well as the two major multilateral Washington-based agencies. The end of war together with deregulating policy reforms and a sweeping privatisation programme have provoked a surge in foreign investor interest in the country. In aggregate terms and in spite of data caveats, the evidence suggests that Mozambique has become one of the fastest growing economies in Sub-Saharan Africa during the 1990s.²

Yet the country continues to be troubled by widespread extreme poverty, a particularly acute problem in rural areas. Of the estimated 80% of the population that is rurally based “two thirds are deemed to be absolutely poor” (GOM, 1996a, 6). The challenge of rural poverty reduction as a policy priority has provoked an increase in research-related literature on the characteristics of the rural poor and on policy

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implications. The literature has attempted to conceptualise an appropriate rural development strategy and has also sought to fill in some of the gaps left by the extremely unreliable data on virtually every aspect of the Mozambican economy (Tarp and Lau, 1996, 11; GOM, 1996a, 18; EIU, 1997, 13). The urgency of poverty reducing policies is recognised explicitly by the government (PAU, 1996). The Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) has set up a Food Security Project (FSP) and has conducted research on the smallholder sector in association with Michigan State University (MSU) since 1992. The Poverty Alleviation Unit (PAU), set up within the Ministry of Planning and Finance, has also produced reports on poverty and poverty reduction strategies. Among the other sources of interest in poverty related issues in Mozambique is the Land Tenure Centre (LTC), based in the University of Madison-Wisconsin.

Official policy statements, that also reflect the view of the Washington based international financial institutions, lay down the medium and long-term economic goal of creating conditions for poverty-reducing economic growth (GOM, 1996a, 4). This appears rather less ambitious, given that one may presume lags between creating conditions for poverty-reducing growth and growth itself, and lags between growth and poverty reduction; though clearly the length of lags depends on the precise growth policies adopted. The official position is that commitment to smallholder farmers, in the form of market integration measures and secure tenure conditions, will provide both economic growth and the mechanism whereby this growth will be poverty reducing.

This paper highlights the main propositions put forward in the recent literature and argues that there are significant dimensions of rural poverty in Mozambique that have been neglected, with important policy implications. There are differences within the literature, for example in terms of attitudes to the role of large-scale commercial agricultural enterprises. However, it will be argued that the main strands of the literature share some common assumptions regarding the characteristics of the rural poor and the policies required to eradicate poverty. Fundamentally, the majority of contributors to the debate agree on the policy primacy of the smallholder farmer with secure access to his or her own plot of land. The World Bank, and those reports to which the Bank has contributed in various ways its influence, tends to be fairly sanguine

² For a measured assessment of the effectiveness of reforms in Mozambique see Tarp and Lau (1996).

concerning the ease of finding a solution to the problem of contested conditions of land access and concerning the ease of generating substantial income and nutritional improvements among smallholders and the rural poor. Others consider land access to be more a site of political competition and point to the incoherence of the outcomes of Frelimo's ad hoc disintegration of its rural state farm strategies (Myers and West, O'Laughlin). Nevertheless, for most contributors to the literature, the access of rural households to cultivable land is considered the critical factor in the survival of the rural poor.

Responding to data suggesting that land holdings are positively associated with caloric intake and income, researchers have built on the significance of land access to rural survival (MOA/MSU 1994; Tschirley and Weber, 1994, 159). According to the PAU the most effective way to end poverty is to stabilise the population in the countryside and improve conditions there within a framework of prioritising smallholder agriculture, supporting this sector for example with input provision packages (PAU, 1996). LTC researchers have stressed the need to promote so-called indigenous capitalist development as a defence against "external" interests: the emphasis is on control of the land by smallholders, who are defined chiefly in opposition to larger private commercial enterprises and joint ventures between these and the government. These researchers, together with other commentators (Hanlon, 1996), call for a thoroughgoing revision of existing land laws, arguing that the ongoing consultative process of constructing new land legislation does not go far enough to firm up land access for smallholders. Most of this literature is informed by an archetype of the African peasant smallholder, conceived as a stable family that produces on a small scale, virtually entirely on the basis of the labour inputs of family members, and that consumes a significant proportion of own farm output, having no access to other sources of consumption (see, for example, GOM, 1996b, 7).

This paper has two principal objectives. First, we shall criticise what we argue to be an over-emphasis on the prioritisation of smallholder agricultural development. In particular, we take issue with the characterisation of the rural poor in Mozambique in terms of the isolation and lack of differentiation of the peasantry. We also argue that, partly on the basis of this neglect of change and differentiation, there is in much of the existing literature a gross oversimplification of the relations between the peasantry and large

commercial and “outside” agricultural interests. For most recent literature ignores the fact that differentiation processes were well underway at independence and that “proletarianisation was a deeply rooted process” (O’Laughlin, 1996,6). Furthermore, there is reason to suggest that these processes were not halted or reversed during wartime. Nor is it obvious that large farms owned fully or in part by overseas capital necessarily undermine the interests of poverty reduction.

Secondly, we shall underline the potential significance of two factors whose role and implications are neglected in the literature: i.e. the importance of farm wage labour income for the survival of the poorest Mozambicans (especially female-headed or female-dominated households) and the extent to which rural-rural labour migration may be stimulated by the availability of wage employment opportunities on farms. These issues have received little or no attention in the studies surveyed here. However, recent developments in the agrarian sector in Mozambique suggest that there could be a substantial increase in wage labour opportunities, both permanent and seasonal. Some 40 million hectares have been allocated by the government to joint venture companies and large private commercial enterprises (Myers and West, 1994). It will be argued that a failure to pay sufficient analytical and policy attention to rural wage employment and rural-rural migration could have severe consequences for the most vulnerable segments of Mozambican society, especially those with least chance of reproducing their families without access to off-farm labour income. A failure to focus on this issue, moreover, diverts attention away from determinants of the living standards of poor rural people such as the wage level in commercialised agriculture and working conditions on farms using hired labour.

Evidence points to a high degree of population mobility within rural areas in Mozambique. The end of the civil war has opened up the potential for refugees in neighbouring countries and the internally displaced (*deslocados*) to return to their homes and fields, and for those forcefully shunted into Frelimo’s communal villages also to return to original small farms and cashew orchards. It also eases the potential to move away from small farms in search of wage opportunities. To the extent that the current literature on rural Mozambique acknowledges the existence and potential for rural migration at all, its emphasis is wholly on the negative effects this might have. But we argue that there may also be positive or “spread” effects on the

well-being of rural people. In short, the combination of rural social differentiation, existing and potential wage labour opportunities in agriculture, and a history and potential for labour migration within rural areas points to a conception of the possibilities contained in the prevailing reality of the rural Mozambican economy that is rather different to the standard view.

For illustrative purposes, this paper makes use of a small case study conducted at low cost for exploratory purposes in the district of Chokwe in December 1996/January 1997. The aim of the case study was to gather data chiefly on female seasonal labourers on the cotton fields of the Lonrho Mozambique Agricultural Company (Lomaco), a joint venture between Lonrho and the Mozambican government. Specifically, we sought to make a preliminary assessment of the significance of wage labour income for the survival of female headed households. Such households supply a considerable proportion of the seasonal labour employed by Lomaco in Chokwe.

The paper is organised as follows:

Section 2 will briefly survey the propositions contained in the main body of the recent literature on rural poverty in Mozambique concerning the incidence and characteristics of rural poverty and the issues of land access and use.

Section 3 will draw on a broader literature on social and economic relations in rural Mozambique to develop the argument for a reassessment of the characteristics and prospects of the rural poor. This section suggests that there are significant dynamic features of rural Mozambique that require greater attention than they are paid in recent literature.

Section 4 presents illustrative material from a case study carried out in Chokwe, discussing the questionnaire used, the sample frame and the results.

A concluding section will draw together the main points made and will suggest the most important research and policy implications.

2. Dominant themes in the literature on rural poverty in Mozambique

Assessing the extent and range of characteristics of poverty in rural Mozambique is very much an ongoing project. Thanks to the long war and the weakness of statistical services, data coverage is particularly poor in Mozambique, beyond the usual degree of unreliability of Sub-Saharan African statistics. However, during the mid-1990s there have been a number of attempts, official and independent, to improve the coverage in order to provide a basis for poverty assessments and policy recommendations. This section highlights the main themes of the literature, focusing particularly on works such as the PAU's Rural Poverty Profile and its Poverty Reduction Strategy, the papers of the MOA/MSU, and work by Myers and West and by Tshirley and Weber.

2.1 The Poverty Alleviation Unit (PAU)

The two key documents of the PAU, as of early 1997, are the *Poverty Reduction Strategy for Mozambique* (PRS), published in March 1995, and *Mozambique: Rural Poverty Profile* (RPP), published in April 1996. The RPP states that poverty is to be defined "in such a way that it can help the formulation of specific policies and programmes for population groups considered to be poor" (RPP, ii).³ The same document makes it clear that the work done provides a "snapshot", which may be taken to suggest that it does not fully take account of underlying processes of change.

The RPP acknowledges the paucity of poverty data. In particular, there is no reliable data on income and consumption. But the profile does draw on a number of surveys done before 1996, such as the 1995 Multiple Indicators Survey, the National Demographic Survey of 1991, and a 1995 Centre for Population

³ It is slightly disconcerting that this statement can be read another way, given that this document was written after the PRS, that had already set out the desired poverty reduction policies. Hence, it is possible to suspect that the definition and conceptualisation of poverty in the RPP were constructed to support a pre-determined set of policy priorities and that there are shortcomings in the approach taken to assessing poverty and its characteristics. Insofar as this is evidence of overly deductivist reasoning, one may note the

Studies (University of Eduardo Mondlane) participatory survey. It is anticipated that a stronger basis for poverty assessment is to be provided by the National Household Survey, due for completion during 1997. So, it is clearly stated that the RPP is preliminary and indicative.

Table 1: Basic social indicators for Mozambique

	Mozambique	Sub-Saharan Africa	Least Developed Countries
Life expectancy (years)	47	52	51
Mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	150	103	114
Under-five mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	273	165	-
Maternal mortality rate (per 100,000 live births)	1,100	690	740
Adult literacy rate (%)	33	47	45
Daily calorie supply (% of requirement)	77	93	90

Source: Poverty Alleviation Unit, The Poverty Reduction Strategy for Mozambique, Ministry of Planning and Finance, 1995.

The main features of rural Mozambican poverty as highlighted in this profile can be summarised as follows: the poor live in extremely isolated and self-contained households with little access to productive inputs and little incentive to increase production; most of the poor live on small land holdings with great insecurity of property rights; in spite of some evidence of differentiation and apart from regional differences it is possible to characterise the poor as members of a fairly homogeneous peasantry; the most disadvantaged Mozambicans are women, especially those in female headed households; and problems of poverty have been exacerbated by out-migration, typically of males, leaving high dependency ratios.

Thus, a “very high proportion of rural households in Mozambique are subsistence oriented in the organisation of their economic activities...and they can be described as relatively ‘economically, socially and physically isolated’”(RPP, ii). This isolation fosters self-sufficiency strategies as opposed to the trade related exploitation of comparative advantage based on differences in terrain and soil fertility (ibid., 5).

domination of mainstream economic thought by deductivist methodology and that “free rein has been given to deductivists to develop their theory according to an internal agenda” (Dow, 1997, 75).

Because this inward-turned reproductive strategy is biased towards low-return activities, it acts as a major constraint on the accumulation of productive assets. Hence, such households are exposed to extreme risk, for example from climatic fluctuations. Vulnerability is intensified by lack of education and high dependency rates. The ultimate reason for this predicament is the lack of penetration into rural Mozambique of market institutions, a problem seen to be exacerbated by the experience of warfare that disrupted transport networks and heightened exchange related insecurity and increased productive risk. The problem of isolation extends to those who cultivate cash crops, since it is estimated in the RPP that almost two thirds of those households that cultivate cash crops do not market their produce (RPP, 11).

Another reinforcing feature of poverty is the weak intensity of use of productive inputs. There is negligible use of fertilisers, mechanical tools or animal draught power and, while this makes labour power particularly critical to agricultural reproduction, household labour supply is limited by prevailing household structure. Household structure, on average, is dominated by a dependency ratio of 110 (i.e. for every 100 persons of working age there are 110 dependents). Moreover, hired labour is not much used: less than 20% of rural households use hired labour. To the extent that hired labour does feature, it is greater in the north, an estimation that may conflict with the portrayal of the north as less integrated into markets, more isolated. Hired labour is greater among those with more land. This last statement refers to absolute use of hired labour, not the relative intensity of labour use. Indeed, the RPP also asserts that there is a clear inverse relationship between size of land holding and intensity of labour use (page 12); it does not consider why this might be so or how it might be subject to change. While the implications of this are not explicitly drawn out, this allusion to the size-productivity debate in agriculture does seem to inform the policy preference in the official literature for support to small farmers rather than larger farmers.

Land holdings generally are small. Nationally, 29% of rural households cultivate less than one hectare: but in the centre and south the proportion cultivating less than one hectare is closer to 40% (RPP, iv). Security of land tenure is regarded as problematic, too. It is suggested that less than one third of rural households had legal title to the land they cultivated. Although the RPP states that the essential point at present is that there is great uncertainty over rights to land use, the document adopts a relatively optimistic attitude to the

problem, pointing to evidence from Nampula suggesting that where official concessions are made in areas already farmed by smallholders without appropriate “legal” entitlements then compensation is usually made. The significance of this issue is backed up by the PAU’s Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS), which opens with the statement that the “equitable growth of agriculture can not be achieved without secure land tenure” (PRS, ii).

Table 2: Land tenure: sources of acquisition of *machambas* (%)

Regions	Allocated by:			Purchased			Others	Total
	Traditional authority	Formal authority	Borrowed	Occupied	With title	Without title		
North	11.4	3.6	8.2	48.7	0.6	24.1	3.5	100.0
Central	28.9	6.2	7.6	21.9	2.2	30.7	2.5	100.0
South	32.0	18.5	11.0	13.9	1.9	21.1	1.6	100.0
Total	24.5	9.1	8.8	27.8	1.6	25.8	2.5	100.0

Source: Poverty Alleviation Unit, *Mozambique: Rural Poverty Profile*, Ministry of Agriculture, 1996.

Women are especially vulnerable in rural Mozambique. They are less likely than men to have off-farm employment. Some 25% of rural households are female headed, according to the 1991 National Demographic Survey (though an alternative survey estimates the proportion at 19%). The share of households headed by women increases from the north through the centre to the south, and those in the north appear to be more likely to be unmarried female household heads. The higher incidence of female (and married female) headship in the south is linked explicitly to the impact of migration, particularly to the mines in South Africa, on the rural economy of the south. Hence, in the representation of poverty as more acute among female headed households, the RPP also assumes, without further analysis, that out-migration from rural Mozambique is clearly a negative economic factor, chiefly because it increases the dependency ratio and reduces labour availability. While women are shown by the profile to be more readily exposed to extreme poverty, and while the RPP at one stage suggests that it is harder for Mozambican rural females to get access to off-farm employment, at other points a different emphasis is suggested. For it is estimated by one source on which the RPP draws that 37% of labour hired for land preparation is female labour (RPP, 26). This is put in the context of a reportedly typical gender division of

labour whereby men prepare land and women cultivate it. The potential link between female wage labour and survival strategies of the poorest people in Mozambique, however, is not drawn out.

Because of the emphasis on aggregation, it is characteristic of this document that it plays down the evidence of social and economic differentiation that its data nevertheless convey. Indeed, the only category of differentiation among the Mozambican peasantry that attracts any sustained attention in the report is that of geography. Again and again, distinctions are drawn between the features of rural poverty in the north, the centre and the south, most of them based on two factors: variations in agro-climatic conditions and differences in historical experience, for example in integration into regional Southern African labour markets via labour migration.

The priorities of the PAU are suggested by the RPP - the chief one being to eliminate the isolation of the poor since this is regarded as the dominant characteristic of rural poverty in Mozambique - but are given greater emphasis, though still inadequate elaboration, in the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS). The PRS focuses, above all, on the interlinked priorities of incentives, information and infrastructure. This involves standard "market friendly" policies. Improving rural livelihoods is to be achieved by means of maximising competition in agricultural markets and hence further market liberalisation (PRS, 16); by publicising market prices; and by investing in rural infrastructure, especially roads, to raise the supply response of smallholders to improved market incentives. This core strategy is to be supported by improvements in the provision of and access to primary education and healthcare, safe water and sanitation, and by the establishment of a comprehensive poverty database at the national level.

In short, poverty in rural Mozambique is associated with market isolation and the lack of off-farm income sources, with a young population and dependency ratios that are especially high where out-migration is a frequent option for working-age males, with female headed households, and with insecurity of land rights. Where there is social and economic differentiation, it is not a factor of dynamic significance, but rather a less than emphatic factor resulting from geographical and, implicitly, conjunctural factors (not even the latter are explored). On the basis of a "snapshot" that stresses these features a set of clear strategic

measures are outlined. The ultimate aim of these measures appears to be the stabilisation of population and livelihoods on the basis of smallholder farming. Alternatives that consider more assertive measures for combining incentives with risk reduction in order more rapidly to promote engagement in the production of higher return crops are not considered. Nor are alternative emphases that pick up on the significance of differentiation and wage labour supply and demand constraints. Finally, given the aggregate emphasis and the tendency towards defining the Mozambican peasantry as homogeneous, there is no basis whatsoever in this document on which to decide priorities within the stated strategic objectives. For example, rural infrastructure investment is one such objective; yet clearly the cost of investing in rehabilitation of infrastructure and commitment to maintenance, not to mention the need for an expansion of the infrastructural coverage, is likely to be a slowly unfolding and highly costly aspect of rural economic change. This would seem to suggest the need for a clear policy towards infrastructural prioritisation, but the PAU has paid no attention to this problem. There is also no conception of priorities within the implementation of a pro-small farmer programme. Yet the truth is surely that any benefits would be concentrated rather than equally spread across the rural population: hence, at least, a coherent strategy ought to discuss the basis for priorities in terms of who gets the benefits and where (Sender, 1995).

2.2 The Ministry of Agriculture

The work of the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA), in collaboration with Michigan State University (MSU) researchers, shares the same analytical framework adopted by the Poverty Alleviation Unit in the Ministry of Planning, stressing the fundamental importance of smallholder agriculture to the well-being of rural inhabitants. Its emphasis is somewhat different, however, in that it concentrates more closely on the question of land distribution and it suggests more strongly a connection between a stable and homogeneous rural population of smallholder farmers and the political stability of the country as a whole. Here we focus on the document “Models of Distribution in the Familiar Sector in Mozambique: A Similarity Between Two Separate Case Studies and the Implications for the Definition of Policies” (MOA/MSU, 1994).

The centrepiece of the argument is the suggestion that land holdings are positively associated with income, caloric intake and food security. Hence, inequalities between different households within the family sector

will have serious implications for the food security of most rural inhabitants. The authorities ought, therefore, to acknowledge this and implement better-defined land distribution policies (MOA/MSU, 1994, 21). Since the context of rural life is defined in terms of auto-consumption, low employment opportunities outside agriculture and fragmented markets, the chief objective, therefore, is to underline the importance of land available to smallholders as the key to food security.

The document also challenges the “conventional wisdom” that Mozambique is a land abundant country. Hence it is claimed that more attention needs to be paid to the quality of land for agricultural output. It is argued that some areas of the country (particularly some coastal regions and the province of Nampula) are experiencing population pressure, though little evidence is presented to support this statement. Also, data on land distribution collected in 1991 in the districts of Monapo, Angoche and Ribue (Nampula Province) is used to undermine the idea of Mozambican land abundance. If land was abundant, then we might expect land holding to be correlated with family size; yet this appears not to be the case in these surveyed districts. By measuring the share of land held per household adult equivalent and per household labourer, as opposed to per household, the data suggest a greater variability of land holdings across quartiles than might be expected in a land abundant country (MOA/MSU, 1994, 6-9; Tschirley and Weber, 1994, 161-62). So, the evidence suggests unequal land distribution in this region. The MOA/MSU analysis takes a couple of very clear steps to a policy conclusion: land is distributed unevenly; so a large percentage of households do not have enough land to satisfy their basic needs; hence land should be distributed more equally among the rural population.

Lest it be thought that the concentration of land ownership might contain some germ of economic advance and poverty reduction potential, the MOA/MSU analysis goes further, to state very clearly that the emergence and growth of a rural proletariat is something to be avoided. If such a class of people were to emerge, “these proletarians, who have nearly zero opportunity cost, dispossessed of the land and in a situation of food insecurity, could well rebel against their living conditions and give rise to political instability in the rural areas” (MOA/MSU, 1996, 21). The assumption, clearly, is that the larger farms, whose existence is won at the expense of the emergence of a class of landless wage labourers, are not just

sometimes inefficient and prone to low levels of labour intensity but are inherently inefficient and politically destabilising (see below for discussion of the political content of the argument).

2.3 Other leading contributions

Similar arguments are to be found in the work of Myers and West, but these authors, particularly worried by the penetration of rural Mozambican society by “outside” interests, both foreign and domestic, are even more explicit on the political implications of foregoing a stable and equal distribution of land. Effective penetration by these outside interests “throws into question the very control of rural residents over resources that are fundamental to their survival” (Myers and West, 1996, 28).

This case for prioritising smallholder agriculture and rolling back the frontiers of the state/multi-national company joint venture is pursued by questioning the very stability of newly won peace and democracy in Mozambique. Thus, the argument is more directly political than those discussed above. Again, however, Myers and West warn us of the potential danger to political stability (which is unquestioningly assumed, as so often, to be a “Good Thing”) posed by the destabilising potential of a dispossessed peasantry.

Furthermore, the authors argue that land transactions in Mozambique have been carried out in the absence of an appropriate legal framework. Land alienation has been chaotic rather than orderly or rational, and it has frequently been characterised by land grabbing and speculation (Myers and West, 1996, 47-51). It is also argued that there is such confusion in the distribution of land rights that the potential for further unruly dispossession of small local landholders by larger urban and overseas interests remains.

Myers and West are especially critical of the land concessions made by the Mozambican government to large companies, following the restructuring of the state farm sector. They claim that the most valuable land has been distributed to joint venture companies while the majority of Mozambicans “have been left out of the logic that has determined these transactions” (Myers and West, 1996, 29). In particular, the authors discuss the process of state farm divestiture by looking at a number of cases, including that of the Complexo Agro-Industrial do Vale do Limpopo (CAIL) in Chokwe (Gaza Province). The argument is that the best land around Chokwe has been allocated to the private sector, notably via the Lomaco and Semoc

joint venture companies and directly to the private commercial enterprise João Ferreira dos Santos, as well as to former state farm officials and to government officials; meanwhile, smallholders have been relegated to the land farthest from irrigation facilities (Myers and West, 1994, 624-26). Lomaco, it is reported, has displaced smallholders from their land and expropriated land and houses; the peasants living in communal villages around Chokwe are thus living in fear of losing their land to big capitalist enterprises (ibid., 623). Myers and West argue that Lomaco's establishment in the district has resulted in greater land insecurity and has led to extreme tension between smallholders, government officials and larger agricultural enterprises.

Yet, it is maintained, smallholders have "tremendous potential" to contribute to the long-term growth of the economy (Myers and West, 1994, 632). However, sadly, the apparently haphazard and politically charged way that the state has divested itself of its farms has left local communities unable to confront national institutions and powerful non-state agents that have, between them, rejected the interests of smallholders. Rural Mozambicans thus do not have a "voice" mechanism through which to defend their own interests and to assert their rights to those resources they need in order to survive (Myers and West, 1996).

2.4 Summary

While there are differences of emphasis, sometimes revealed by omission rather than direct expression (for example, the complete failure of most official documents to mention or discuss the implications for the rural poor of the growth of large capitalist agricultural enterprises), we have seen that the majority of the literature on rural poverty in Mozambique shares certain preoccupations. The poor tend to be characterised as living an isolated and static existence. Some contributions to the literature appear to play down the degree of differentiation within the rural population; others point to evidence of uneven land distribution and decry its consequences. All those surveyed above, however, assume that broad equality of land holding and homogeneity of the rural population are objectives worth pursuing. This goal is based, sometimes more explicitly than at others, on an assumption that small is workable and beautiful in Mozambique.

It is interesting to note that there is a range of analytical positions, sometimes combined, that contribute to this common stance among contributors who might not always consider themselves natural bedfellows. The antipathy to larger scale farming in Mozambique is informed, for some, by the orthodoxy of the inverse relationship between farm-size and productivity; for others, the acceptance of the disastrous experience of large-scale state socialist farming in post-independence Mozambique is a contributing factor, especially combined with a historical perspective that notes the moral reprehensibility associated with colonial era large plantation farming and the forced labour system and, in particular, the unpopularity of cotton growing; another strand in the case for smallholders is a straightforward distrust of multinationals and their domestic allies, taking the form of a critique of the exploitative (and/or unprofitable operations of joint venture capitalist agricultural concerns. These historical and analytical perspectives combine to produce a determined faith in the viability, desirability and inherent superiority of smallholder farming.

As we have seen, the case for smallholder farming as the key priority for poverty reduction in Mozambique is built not just on statistical observations combined with some commonly held economic assumptions. It is also built, more explicitly in the case of the MOA/MSU analysis and that of Myers and West, on a political argument. This is the argument that if policies supporting the creation of a stable and relatively equal rural society are not adopted, political instability will ensue that, in turn, will up-end the prospects for economic growth (which, according to the assumptions of the size-productivity orthodoxy, are themselves best secured on the basis of smallholder farming). This argument has gained in currency in recent years, and it has found proponents among those trying to explore the “interface” between endogenous growth theory and the New Political Economy, where a case has been made linking inequality to political instability, and, via the investment disincentive, linking political instability to poor economic growth (Alesina and Perotti, 1994).

Below, we draw on a broader literature on Mozambique’s history and question the basis of the case for smallholder farming as an anti-poverty panacea; then we present the results of a small case-study to illustrate some of the alternative arguments put in this paper.

3. Questioning the social isolation, stagnation and homogeneity of rural Mozambique

This section discusses rural poverty in Mozambique, in the light of an analytical and Mozambican historical literature that do not feature in most of the mainstream work recently. In particular, it highlights the importance of wage labour income for the survival of the poorest strata of the population. Wage labour and labour markets barely feature in the standard literature at all. In some contributions wage labour in rural areas is deemed too negligible a factor to be taken seriously.⁴ In others wage labour appears to be an implicit and implicitly worrying function of regressive land distribution. In others wage labour is a feature of the big farms set up by “external interests”, but these farming enterprises are regarded as probably unviable, and if wage labour plays a role in keeping rural people alive then this is only grudgingly acknowledged. There is nothing particular to the literature on Mozambique in this, it should be said. For much of the mainstream literature on rural poverty of late adopts the same approach. Indeed, wage labour in rural areas is ignored in the World Bank’s *Poverty Reduction and the World Bank: Progress and Challenges* in the 1990s (1996). This has the effect of squeezing out of the policy debate the role of wage labour; wage levels and conditions of labour; constraints on the conditions for increasing wage labour demand; and questions concerning the scope for labour migration within rural areas of Mozambique.

3.1 Poverty and historical change in Mozambique

What the mainstream poverty literature does do is project an analytically ungrounded ideal (the stable, efficient and homogeneous peasantry) onto a mis-represented reality.⁵ The proposition common to these studies, and reflecting the assumed characteristics of the rural poor in general, is: land holdings are the key determinants of household income and consumption and the best way to reduce the incidence of poverty in rural areas is to stabilise and improve conditions within a framework that prioritises smallholder agriculture. Specifically, the argument is based on the assumption that smaller farms in all poor economies are characterised by higher productivity and intensity of labour and other input use than larger holdings.

⁴ This is the line adopted, for example, by USAID (1996, 23-24).

⁵ In so doing the current literature tends to reproduce in different form Frelimo’s own projection of an ideal onto a reality that was inadequately understood and, indeed, expressly treated by party ideologues as a *tabula rasa* (see de Brito, 1988). The current literature also sustains a tradition of outright dualism that Frelimo began: for Frelimo this was a rigid peasant/worker dualism (see O’Laughlin, 1995), while for the

Given that land ownership distribution and the land sales market are dominated by “distortions” and unequal power relations, land tends not to be optimally allocated to the poor. Hence, land reform becomes the policy priority. As well as securing economic efficiency such a strategy is often stated to secure political stability (Binswanger, 1995). However, this set of arguments has been criticised frequently and the farm size/productivity debate is ongoing: the critical literature agrees that to the extent that there are circumstances in which smaller farms are more efficient these circumstances tend to be those of indigence and low technology; once technological change and economic dynamism and integration are introduced the productivity “advantages” of smaller farms can be expected to and have been observed to evaporate (Patnaik, 1979; Ghose, 1979; Dyer, 1991).

In the context of Mozambique these arguments are backed by an incorrect assumption that the peasantry is a fairly homogeneous entity and that where there is significant differentiation this is chiefly a clear-cut dualistic division between the peasantry and a handful of large “external interests”, or there is some, slight differentiation within rural classes. But historical evidence from Mozambique shows that this assumption is unjustified. Portuguese colonialism may well have been more backward than French or British colonial capitalism. Yet there was still widespread involvement of Mozambicans in the colonial economy and this gave rise to processes of social differentiation in rural areas that were anything but insignificant. Hundreds of thousands of rural Mozambicans worked as migrant labourers on the mines in South Africa and many others migrated to work on large farms in Southern Rhodesia. The influx to rural Mozambique of wage income that resulted from this migrant labour system, especially but not exclusively in southern provinces such as Gaza⁶, resulted in some development of the productive forces and propelled the spread of exchange relationships and social differentiation within rural areas. In the north the use of forced labour was central to sustaining the plantation economy: here differentiation took different forms but was not less pronounced. Rural households therefore were put under tremendous pressure by the colonial regime and they were increasingly integrated into the monetary economy. This integration sparked off progressive

more recent contributions it is a dualism of peasants versus “external interests”; on the limitations of dualist analysis in development economics see Breman (1996).

proletarianization and commoditization that contained the seeds of further differentiation (Wuyts, 1989). While much commercial land was appropriated during the colonial period from the peasantry, and was subsequently allocated to state farm enterprises and, more recently, to joint venture enterprises such as Lomaco, there were still substantial areas of commercial land under peasant control; and in these areas “there has been increasing differentiation in control of land” (O’Laughlin, 1995, 101).

Mozambique at independence was, therefore, a differentiated society, “in which capitalist class relations cut across divisions between towns and country, between peasant and workers, between settlers and Mozambican farmers” (O’Laughlin, 1996, 3). It is frequently assumed that Frelimo, once in power, halted all processes of differentiation in the countryside, partly as a result of the party’s antipathy to the development of a rural bourgeoisie and its rejection of some of the elements that had formed the broad alliance that gave Frelimo its initial anti-colonial legitimacy (Hermele, 1992).⁷ However, social and economic differentiation were not wholly erased and the image of a rural society divided only between an undifferentiated peasantry and a handful of state farms (transformed later, through ad hoc divestiture, into joint ventures with multinationals) is a false one. Although this is a rather under-researched area, there is evidence of a class of *privados*, commercial farmers between those smallholders with one to three hectares of land and the large agricultural enterprises. Private farmers managed to occupy land during the war in certain areas (and to take over land allowed them in the wake of the dismantling of state farms such as the Complexo Agro-Industrial do Limpopo - CAIL - in Chokwe district, Gaza Province⁸), in particular in fertile regions, where they had access to water pumps and to vehicles, often supplied to them through World Bank and/or USAID programmes. These farmers often developed a mutually satisfactory relationship with local state administrators who themselves, along with higher government officials, during

⁶ The link from southern Mozambique to South Africa and Rhodesia is best known, but there were also migrant labourers from central and northern Mozambique working in Malawi, Tanzania and even Kenya (O’Laughlin, 1995, 100).

⁷ Even the policy of villagisation, pursued in the name of equality, created opportunities for social differentiation that were eagerly taken up by those with privileged access to resources; see Cahen (1987) and Geffray and Pedersen (1988).

⁸ Bowen (1993,334)cites a 1986 survey of private farmers in Chokwe: there were 436 with a total of 4,600 ha of land, in holdings of between 4 ha and 200 ha; after the failure of CAIL had been recognised there was a strong increase in the number of private farmers in irrigated areas of Chokwe, and of the 435 recorded in 1986 90 per cent were Mozambican.

the early 1990s began to lay claim to sizeable landholdings (Hermele, 1992, 169, 183). There were also entrepreneurial farmers working in the *zonas verdes* (green zones) near the outskirts of major cities and marketing up to 85 per cent of their output (USAID, 1996, 22); many of these farmers were women. USAID estimates (1996, 22) that by the mid-1990s there were some 3,000 *privados*, with an average 35 hectares and “characterised by the use of some hired labor and a greater degree of purchased inputs”. About a fifth of these were Portuguese settlers who were among the few that did not flee the country at independence. Others include former smallholders that have expanded their farming area and increased their technological inputs. Many of these *privados*, though not all, are thought to benefit from contractual arrangements with the bigger commercial agricultural enterprises (ibid.).

Another source of the common impression that there has been little differentiation or social change in rural Mozambique is the literature on the war. For it is often implicitly accepted that the war had only negative consequences, it was something that damaged the rural economy, that at least it interrupted processes of change; not that it might also have created or accelerated more complex changes.⁹ Yet this is an inadequate representation of the interaction between civil war and rural Mozambican livelihoods and society. The war provoked a massive movement of people: some 1.5 million people left the country and took up as refugees in neighbouring countries, while another four million people or so upped and left for destinations within Mozambique, the so-called internal refugees or *deslocados*. In the south, while many of these moved to the outskirts of cities, many also moved into the relatively secure areas of the major irrigated valleys, where they “worked for a pittance as casual agricultural workers, resolving the labour bottlenecks that had once hindered the development of small capitalist farmers” (O’Laughlin, 1995, 105). There is evidence, also, that the poorer rural inhabitants, living on the more marginal outlying land further from village hubs were more likely to flee to towns, cities, refugee camps or protected agricultural zones: while this may have hastened their proletarianization, it also made it possible in some cases for those relatively well-off villagers who stayed behind to extend their land claims, one of many factors contributing to the recent multiplicity of competing claims to land since the end of the war (Abrahamsson and Nilsson, 1995). Furthermore, in Mozambique as elsewhere war created opportunities for profit and accumulation out of the

combination of heightened risk and desperate goods shortage. One feature of the war economy was the exploitation of these opportunities by a number of people, some of them wartime *parvenus*, some of them closely tied to the structures of the very state that was itself contributing to the shortages by its policy management. Chingono has characterised this rural war economy in terms of a “vicious market fundamentalism” (1996). Thus, it is highly misleading to assume that the war had the effect of stifling differentiation, all stimulus to wage labour demand. Furthermore, it is naive to assume that every refugee from the war has a bright and simple future returning to their place of origin. Many refugees have indeed returned, but the picture is, again, more complex: there is evidence that many (illegal) refugees working on exporting farms in Mpumalanga (South Africa) have opted not to return to high risk smallholder farming in southern Mozambique but to remain as wage workers, albeit in poor conditions and at appallingly low wage rates, in South Africa (Sender, 1996; Sender, Standing and Weeks, 1996). Also, there is evidence that people who were shunted unwillingly into Frelimo’s communal villages are extremely cautious now about returning home to their plots of land and cashew orchards, again because of their acute awareness of the difficulty and uncertainty of smallholder farming.¹⁰

Given this historical context, the analysis of social and productive relationships among different actors in rural areas cannot be based on the superficial dualistic distinction between a family based, output maximising “traditional” sector and a private, profit maximising big capitalist sector. Relationships among households cannot be explained by reference either to simple dichotomies (landed/landless, wage labour/family labour) that are not identifiable in reality. For instance, there are households that survive mainly on agricultural wage income, while others have the means to survive through cultivating their own land and hiring in some labour. There are also households that both hire in and hire out labour. Moreover, households may face different terms of entry to the land market (O’Laughlin, 1996).

Introducing a poverty reduction policy package based on the image of the archetypal smallholder rests on a failure to recognise crucial differences between people living in rural areas. Such policies may indeed

⁹ These presumptions are typical of the political economy of war in LDCs; see Cramer (1997).

¹⁰ Harrison, informal discussion of research presented in an unpublished Ph.D.

benefit one segment of the rural population, while leaving other segments unaffected or indeed harming their livelihoods by undermining wage labour demand. If significant numbers of the poor depend on wage income derived from seasonal or casual activities, normally unrecorded or statistically obscure, then policies targeting smallholders may leave such wage earners worse off if, say, land redistribution diverts land from labour-hiring enterprises towards small scale farmers.

3.2 Wage labour and rural poverty

None of the documents referred to in Section 2 discuss in any detail the potentially positive effects of promoting wage employment on rural farms and focusing policies on protecting wages and working conditions of such employment. This is especially disheartening given that some 40 million hectares of high potential land have been conceded by the government to joint venture companies and other large commercial agricultural enterprises in the early and mid-1990s (Myers and West, 1994). It is reasonable to assume that these concessions will result in a significant increase in farm wage employment opportunities with respect to both permanent and seasonal/casual work. Moreover, the mainstream work on poverty in rural Mozambique fails to pay any attention to the predicament and policy implications of those already employed on farms, among them the workers from whom the sample was selected for the case study discussed in Section 3. For it is clear that this neglect is prompted partly by an assumed identity between poverty and unemployment, backed up by two assertions: poverty varies with size of own landholding and there are really virtually no significant wage labour opportunities in rural Mozambique. But as we have seen, in Mozambican history, in our case study and from an awareness of change underway currently in Mozambique, this is far from true. Indeed, one main argument of this paper is that significant numbers of very poor people in Mozambique, particularly women carrying the whole burden of family support, are not unemployed but are working as wage labourers.

Casual and seasonal farm labour in rural Africa is normally carried out by women. Evidence from elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa, including South Africa, confirms the fact that households that contain waged women are frequently more disadvantaged than average African rural households in terms of access to sanitation, housing conditions, ownership of productive assets and levels of education (Sender and

Johnston, 1996, 2). We have seen, in Section 2, that the PAU document expresses similar concerns for female headed households in Mozambique. However, it does not even mention female wage employment in rural farms. If it can be demonstrated that a significant proportion of such households critically depend on wage income for their survival, then failure to consider their prospects may have serious repercussions for these women. Sender and Johnstone, for example, argue that the common assumption about rural females of working age in South Africa, who do not succeed in finding employment in the formal sector, is that they are either self-employed “subsistence workers”, “informal sector” workers or “housewives”. A high proportion of these women are routinely thought to depend on male remittances. Sender and Johnstone present counter-evidence from Mpumalanga, where two thirds of rural women over the age of forty never received any financial support by a male member of the household, but depended on rural wage income (Sender and Johnstone, 1996).

On the Lomaco farm around Chokwe, discussed in Section 4 below, the majority of seasonal are women (making up 75 per cent of the seasonal labour force). The majority of the women interviewed claimed that they depended exclusively on their wage income. Older women, generally, were not supported by any male member of the household. The wage is clearly crucial to their survival, and to that of their children. This has to be set against a background in which wage labour has long been critical to the survival strategies of rural households in non-irrigated areas of Chokwe.¹¹

Clearly, on the basis of the arguments presented here, further research is needed in order to gain a better understanding of the characteristics of the rural poor in Mozambique. For the appropriate design of effective poverty reducing policies cannot be carried out unless attention is paid to all the relevant categories of people in rural areas. In this respect, grouping all rural dwellers under the blanket heading of smallholders is unsatisfactory.

¹¹ Bowen (1993,332 & 341), for example, argues that, on the basis of evidence from 1977-83, few such households relied solely on family farming in rain-fed areas; and that in the village of Lionde in Chokwe district much wage labour was effectively masked as family labour since it drew on extended family

3.3 Population movement and rural-rural labour migration

There is one last issue that is virtually absent, but for brief asides offered on the basis of assumptions that have not been thought through, from the mainstream current literature on Mozambican rural poverty: this is the question of population movements within rural areas and the role of rural labour migration in the strategies and livelihoods of the rural poor. Here again, the reality is more dynamic than the image depicted in mainstream work on rural poverty in Mozambique.

For patterns of migration are among the most significant features of Mozambican political economy from the late nineteenth century onwards and indeed of the current situation. Migration has taken place both within the country and between Mozambique and its neighbouring countries, most notably South Africa and the former Rhodesia. The colonial state regulated labour movements: the state depended considerably on tax revenue in foreign exchange from labour migration out of Mozambique, principally to the mines of South Africa; and within Mozambique the state mobilised labour for the construction of ports and railways and for the plantation labour force demanded by the large private concessions operating especially in the central and northern provinces. While the migrant labour relationship with South Africa declined sharply after independence (though it was not eradicated), there was still substantial population movement: on the one hand, millions of people fled from the war in rural areas, moving either to more secure sites inside the country or crossing borders to refugee camps in neighbouring countries; on the other hand, the independent state mobilised labour for its state farms and shifted many people into strategic communal villages (Cahen, 1987; Geffray, 1991). Since the end of the war a new variant on the population movement theme has been unfolding. More than a million refugees have returned to Mozambique and a further two million or so *deslocados* are attempting to re-establish themselves within the countryside, many seeking rural employment. Hence the rural labour force is expanding dramatically. Typically this phenomenon, commonly known as *O Regresso* (the return), tends to be interpreted as one with a clear-cut, fixed and almost instant end in the stabilisation of the bulk of the population on viable small family farms. But relocating *deslocados* and repatriating refugees, along with a significant proportion of smallholder families

labour; Bowen also suggests that much of this wage labour involved fairly short-distance labour migration from even more precarious areas.

especially in southern Mozambique that have for decades relied on wage income remitted by male out-migrants, also constitute not only an expanded supply of wage labour but also a major potential source of future labour migration within rural Mozambique, drawn to the rapidly expanding private sector in rural agriculture.

Most of the literature on labour migration in developing countries traditionally has concentrated on rural-urban migration or international migration; little serious analysis has been developed to understand rural-rural migration. Nor have there been studies focusing on rural female migration. Yet the phenomenon of rural-rural labour migration in developing countries is, worldwide, massive and highly significant, in Southern Africa within countries as well as across borders, as in other areas such as Brazil, China and India (Nolan, 1993; Breman, 1996).

The PAU's rural poverty profile does mention out-migration from rural villages, but this phenomenon is regarded as exclusively negative in its impact, since it increases the dependency ratio of rural households. Hence, the dominant contributions to policy debates on rural poverty focus by assumption only on the negative or "backwash" effects of migration. Generally, these may include:

- permanent or semi-permanent loss of adult labour, leading to a change in the dependency ratio and hence, other things being equal, tending to lower per capita incomes and to erode investible surplus;
- falling population densities that raise the per capita cost of infrastructure provision;
- loss of labour power not compensated for by remittance flows, so that the costs of the out-migrant's upbringing are written off to the local community;
- disruption of family structure and the viability of community relations.

On the basis of such assumptions, rarely spelt out in full in the Mozambican context, international donors and the government are favouring a strategy aiming to stabilise the rural population within a smallholder framework, by directing policies towards re-establishing remunerative agricultural self-employment and

off-farm income sources also derived from self-employment.¹² Attempts to stabilise the rural population in this way - fuelled by a commitment across virtually the whole ideological spectrum to reverse Frelimo's former "anti-peasant bias" (Hermele, 1992), are reflected in policies that favour the provision of services such as credit, extension, seeds and tools to smallholders. This package may at best only indirectly or partially benefit those who depend critically on wage labour, such as the poor female labourers that have been the focus of this paper.

By contrast with the backwash effects of out-migration, there are also potential positive or "spread" effects that need to be taken account of. These may include:

- even low levels of earnings from temporary female migration may continue to make a critical contribution to the consumption levels of precisely those households with lowest per capita consumption;
- male migration, by reducing the size of the local workforce, may lead to a tightening of localised labour markets and a consequent upward pressure on real wages for remaining, female, workers (Sen and Ghosh, 1993);
- the flow of remittances may well be larger for female migrants than for males;
- remittances may have multiple positive effects on the local economy ranging from a stimulus to local house building to the provision of funds for the education of children;
- returning migrants may come back with new ideas that contribute to the development of agricultural practice (Tiffen and Mortimore, 1994).

In the light of these considerations it is possible to argue that the social and economic returns to a strategy trying to stabilise people thinly scattered across large swathes of countryside, often characterised by poor infrastructure, may be low. On the contrary, the returns to investment in the promotion of (especially female) wage labour employment opportunities and conditions in particular rural areas with greater

¹² c.f. Zucula and Matlombe (1995) who state that "the family and artisanal sector merit total priority for the allocation of resources"; this paper was a product of the Ministry of Agriculture's Pre-Programme of

productive potential in the short and medium term may be far higher, and may represent a more appropriate and effective poverty reduction strategy. Moreover, this would provide a framework within which scarce investment resources could be directed with more discerning priorities to infrastructural improvement.

4. Female rural-rural migration and wage labour in Chokwe district (Gaza Province)

The survey discussed in this section is small and its results cannot lay claim to more than indicative, illustrative value. However, it is unusual in focusing on the role of wage labour in the livelihoods of some of the Mozambican rural poor and, in particular, on female wage labourers.¹³ As such, it raises some questions concerning the assumptions, observations and analysis of the mainstream current literature on poverty in rural Mozambique; and it suggests a need for larger-scale research along the lines adopted in the survey.

4.1 Chokwe district

The district of Chokwe is located in the southern province of Gaza and covers some 2,600 km². The total population of the district is estimated at 218,586 people, of which some 55,000 live in the town of Chokwe itself. The district contains the Sistema de Irrigação Eduardo Mondlane (Siremo), which was originally set up to irrigate 300,000 ha: at present the system works on only 26,000 ha (Ficader, 1996, 12).¹⁴

Agricultural production in other areas depends on rainfall. Gaza Province is not especially well-watered typically: average annual precipitation is 0-400 mm (Atlas de Moçambique, 1984). It is widely believed that in Gaza each “good” year of rains is followed by several “bad” years. The drought that dried up the irrigation canals of the Siremo in 1993 still, as of early 1997, looms large in the local memory. The main crops cultivated in the Chokwe district are maize, *nhemba* beans, *manteiga* beans, *mandioca*, sweet potato and peanuts: these are chiefly cultivated by smaller farmers. By contrast, cultivation of rice and cotton is carried out by large agricultural enterprises. Three large companies operate in the district: Lomaco, a joint

the National Programme for Developing Family Sector Agriculture.

¹³ “The situation of the labor market and household income is difficult to assess, given the lack of reliable and comprehensive (and in some cases nonexistent) data on wages, employment, labor force and productivity)” (USAID, 1996, 23).

¹⁴ Reviews of the history of this scheme - the largest irrigation scheme in Mozambique - and the political economy of its role can be found in Hermele (1988) and in Bowen (1993).

venture between the government and the UK based multinational firm Lonrho; João Ferreira dos Santos, a large private enterprise with Portuguese capital; and Semoc, a Swedish/Mozambican joint venture.

4.2 Lomaco in Chokwe

Lomaco was formed in 1990. Lonrho and the Mozambican government each hold a 50 per cent stake in the company, which has extensive concerns in Gaza and in the northern province of Cabo Delgado. In Gaza the Lomaco headquarters are in the town of Chokwe. The main Lomaco activity in Chokwe is cotton growing. In the past this was exclusively managed through direct production by the firm: recently, however, the company has begun a programme of co-operation with 39 private farmers (often referred to as out-growers). In 1995/96 Lomaco planted 1,027 ha of cotton, 200 of which were lost in floods. Total production of raw cotton amounted to 2,903 tons. There are five cotton growing Lomaco locations in Chokwe district: Matuba I-IV and Macarretane. Together these locations make up the 1,023 ha planted in 1995/96. Lomaco employs permanent labour and also hires a substantial number of seasonal/casual workers during peak seasons, notably to harvest the cotton fields.

4.3 The permanent labour force

There are 480 permanent staff employed by Lomaco in Chokwe (378 men and 102 women). 119 of the permanent workers are based in the district headquarters. The other 361 are divided among various activities, including: drivers, tractors drivers, petrol station workers, irrigation workers (men and women), weeders (men and women), gardeners and loaders. Table 3 presents information on these workers.

Table 3: Permanent labour force on Lomaco cotton farms, Chokwe district

	Matuba I	Matuba II	Matuba III	Matuba IV	Macarretane	Salary (MT)
Supervisors	1	1	1	1	1	1,400,000
Technicians	16	12	13	13	17	360,000
Drivers	2	2	1	1	5	400,000
Tractor drivers	2	7	1	1	12	400,000
Overseers	3	8	2	1	4	303,000
Petrol attendants	6	8	4	6	6	303,000
Irrigation: women	13	5	84	9		265,000
Irrigation: men	5	7	7	4	30	278,000
Weeding: women	7	10	5	11	23	265,000

Weeding: men	-	-	-	-	16	278,000
Gardeners	-	-	-	-	10	303,000
Loaders	5	-	-	-	-	303,000
Sub-total	60	60	48	43	150	

Source: Lomaco.

While casual and seasonal labourers do not receive any assistance from the company once their wage is paid, permanent workers benefit from insurance, medical assistance (medicines are bought by the company when necessary), burial expenses, pension benefits and invalidity benefits. Trade unions are present in the district: rural workers are affiliated to the Organização dos Trabalhadores de Moçambique (OTM) confederation. Despite the low minimum wage (MT265,000, roughly equivalent to \$25, per month in December 1996), it was reported that strikes were very rare. Rural workers feel that they have no bargaining power. They also criticise OTM for being corrupt.

4.4 Private farmers linked to Lomaco

In 1995 Lomaco began to collaborate with private farmers (*privados*) in Chokwe district; there were 39 involved in the scheme by the 1996/97 agricultural season. These private farmers cultivate between 20 and 30 ha on average: two of them farm as much as 50 ha each. They receive from Lomaco the means of production at the start of the season, on credit terms. At the end of the season they have to repay Lomaco for the inputs originally purchased.

Private farmers have to employ their own seasonal and casual workers. Lomaco does not usually help them secure labour. Labour shortages appear to coincide with abundant rains. Permanent labour is employed by *privados* only if they have a tractor for ploughing or a small truck. One Lomaco field supervisor asserted that as soon as a private farmer succeeds in saving some money, he spends it on a small truck or pick-up, since access to a vehicle is important in securing a stable supply of seasonal labour for the cotton fields.

Workers on these private farms linked to Lomaco are paid similar rates to those working directly for Lomaco (i.e. the equivalent of roughly \$1 a day). But on these smaller private farms seasonal and casual

workers are paid by piece-work: workers are given a specific target (e.g. to clean five rows of cotton) and are paid on the spot when the task is done. Such jobs are paid at the equivalent of about \$1 a day during off-peak seasons. But this amount rises by as much as 50 per cent during the cotton harvest. During this period, competition for labour in the district increases. *Privados* are disadvantaged here, given that it is more profitable for casual/seasonal labourers to work for the large companies in the district. As will be shown below, workers on the Lomaco fields are paid according to how much cotton they pick. Hence they can earn more by hiring out their labour power to the large joint venture than the maximum \$1.5 a day equivalent that can be earned on the out-growers' fields.

4.5 Casual labour characteristics and recruitment

Lomaco employs a considerable amount of casual/seasonal labour. These workers are employed all year round, though obviously their number increases sharply in peak seasons, especially during the cotton harvest. Cotton takes some four months to be harvested. The number of seasonal workers on Lomaco fields in Chokwe in 1996 varied between a minimum of 140 in August 1996 to a maximum of 1,276 in February. Table 4 presents monthly totals for January-November 1996. An additional 500-800 unregistered casual workers (known as "ticket-holders") are employed on the cotton fields during harvest season.

Table 4: Number of seasonal workers on Lomaco Chokwe cotton farms

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov
Matuba I	150	149	142	126	123	103	39	38	37	35	98
Matuba II	196	199	201	130	133	119	36	37	10	16	35
Matuba III	214	207	178	102	103	103	23	23	59	58	120
Matuba IV	262	315	232	171	172	161	28	35	43	43	163
Macarretane	406	406	270	248	159	69	60	7	156	5	192
Total	1,228	1,276	1,023	777	690	555	196	140	305	157	608

Source: Lomaco.

In off-peak seasons the main tasks of casual workers are weeding rows of planted cotton and maintaining irrigation canals. In peak times almost all casual labour is engaged in harvesting. Three quarters of the seasonal labour force is made up by women, who by and large are engaged in weeding (these are known as *mulheres de sacha*). During the harvest a considerable number of children join their mothers in picking

cotton. High temperatures in Gaza mean that women employed to weed need to arrive at the fields around 4.30-5.00 a.m.. Each carries a hoe and in theory works up to 11.00 a.m., although groups of women may be observed still weeding up to 12.00 noon. After 11.00 a.m. the temperature rises too high to allow for effective work.

According to Lomaco managers, most seasonal workers come from nearby areas, within a range of 30 km of the cotton fields. Lomaco does not usually face labour shortages; but during years of exceptionally good rainfall, the company does find it hard to recruit labour from only within the 30 km range. Under these circumstances, Lomaco trucks travel up to 60-70 km to pick up labour from other districts such as those of Macia or Magude (Maputo Province). While in practice it may be difficult for employers to determine precisely the source of labour, it is plausible to assume that the average distance between the Lomaco fields and the villages providing labour on a daily basis is of the order of 20-30 km, increasing to 50-60 km when there are labour shortages.¹⁵

Lomaco has a field supervisor for every area of operation. He is responsible for recruitment of seasonal workers. One supervisor described the process of seasonal labour recruitment in the following terms. When Lomaco specifies how many workers are required, he goes to villages that normally provide the labour force and asks the local chief for permission to recruit a given number of people. Once this permission is granted the supervisor lets the chief know the exact number of workers needed. The following morning, very early, Lomaco trucks set off for the villages to pick up the workers. He maintains, and this is confirmed by Lomaco's head of operations in Chokwe, that travelling longer distances becomes quite costly especially in terms of fuel. Also, the longer the distance the greater the possibility of vehicle breakdowns. A further point is that if the company tries to get labour from as far as 60 or 80 km away the workers will expect to be provided with accommodation. However, this is ruled out as too costly by the management.

755 members of the seasonal labour force are women. Women are preferred to men for weeding (and some work also on the irrigation scheme) on the grounds that they have “better skills”.¹⁶ The process of selection of these women at village level is unclear. According to the supervisor, he specifies the number required and that number turns up the next morning at the meeting-points; where he exercises any selection at all himself, it is on the basis of apparent health and strength.

According to those involved in labour recruitment it is the poorest women, often those who are widowed, divorced, separated or never married, that gather in the morning to work in the cotton fields. Some women, especially those who receive remittances from a male migrant or are for whatever reason “better off”, never make themselves available.

Before proceeding to discuss a brief survey of twelve *mulheres de sacha*, it is worth outlining activities during harvest. Harvest time is the most labour intensive season. Some 1,200 seasonal labourers are on the field for nearly four months. An additional 500-800 workers a day join these in picking cotton. These are casual unregistered workers, mainly women and children: they are known as “ticket holders”, referring to the fact that for each kilo of cotton picked their ticket is marked. The average pick is around 20-25 kilos a day. In 1996 they received MT500 per kilo picked; so on average they could make about \$1 each day. However, given that more than one member of a single household is frequently engaged in the harvest, a particular household may be able to earn more. Casual workers are paid for every 200 kilos picked. Some accumulate several tickets and then cash them in one go.

4.6 Focus on mulheres de sacha

Twelve women working on the fields at Macarretane were interviewed in January 1997. Among these women six were registered as permanent labourers, while six were registered as seasonal labourers. Only five women out of the twelve were able to give their age. These were the younger women: three casual

¹⁵ From discussions with Lomaco senior staff it is clear that similar labour practices are followed in Cabo Delgado province, but involve larger numbers of wage labourers and greater distances of travel in the north.

labourers and two permanent. The Macarretane supervisor simply called over one woman at a time, choosing them apparently at random. Few of the women interviewed were confident in Portuguese (chiefly the younger ones). So the supervisor translated questions into Mashangane, they replied in Mashangane, and answers were translated back into Portuguese. A very short questionnaire was used, composed of 14 questions: the questions are by no means exhaustive but were designed to make an initial assessment of the extent of migration within rural areas and the importance of farm wage labour income to the survival of female headed households. Responses are summarised below.

In only three of the twelve cases were women not born in their villages of residence. Only two women live very close to the fields of Macarretane. The other women come from the villages of Chate, 25 de Setembro and Donga which are around 30 km from the Macarretane fields. They are fetched in the mornings by Lomaco trucks and brought back at night, as described above.

Four of the women interviewed were widows. One is divorced; four are not married, though two of these do have children and can be classified as single; and three are married. However, among the three married women only one receives financial support from her husband. In the other two cases the husbands had migrated to South Africa some three years previously and had basically vanished. Only three women out of the sample claimed not to have children: two of these are 17 while the third is older. Out of the nine women with children three had infants below school age. Among the other six, the following characteristics were noted: one can afford to send her only child to school; one has three sons, two of them in South Africa (and they do not send home any remittances), while the third goes to school. One has three children but claims that she cannot afford to send them to school. These three women are all seasonal workers. The other three are permanent workers: one has five children, two of whom do go to school; another has three children all below school age; and the third sends three of her children to school but claims she cannot afford for all six to attend. With the exception of one case, only the youngest women interviewed had been to school. The labour supervisor on the farm said that after independence schooling

¹⁶ For a good discussion of the language in which employers frequently “justify” employment practices that in reality may have a lot to do with control mechanisms, see Breman (1996).

costs had dropped dramatically while the access for poor people had greatly improved. Only one older woman among the twelve had been to school, up to Standard 3.¹⁷

Permanent workers are employed on average for eight months a year. When asked whether they would want to work more, all answered to the effect “yes, we do, but we cannot find wage employment elsewhere”. Casual workers are employed all year round, as shown in table 4, but their share in total wage labour falls sharply between July and October. It is difficult to determine how much a seasonal worker works precisely: some many turn up one day and not the next. It was virtually impossible to determine how many days a month or how many a year these seasonal female workers were actually working.

All permanent and seasonal female workers on the farm receive some MT265,000 per 26 days of work. All twelve women claimed that wages earned on the cotton fields were their only direct source of money income. This monthly earnings figure suggests annual earnings equivalent to \$200. But this may be an underestimate, given that during the cotton harvest earnings can rise sharply when other members of the household (children and younger women, mainly) are recruited as “ticket-holders”. It is clear that income earned by these women on Lomaco cotton fields constitutes a high percentage of total household income.

Only four out of the sample of twelve women acknowledged any support from another member of their family (and only one of these, a permanent worker, got support from her husband). Two of the seasonal labourers claimed to get support: one, aged 19, lives with her mother who sometimes helps her in the field, and her father remits some income occasionally from South Africa; another has two brothers working for wages, one working for Lomaco and the other working in Maputo, both helping the household with some of their income. The other four seasonal workers claimed to be wholly self-supporting. Among the permanent workers, one’s husband works and supports the household, and another claims to be supported by her family though she is the only one earning an income.

¹⁷ There are twelve standards before university entry in Mozambique.

Five of the twelve asserted that they knew other women who had migrated to South Africa in search of employment. Three of these five were from Chate, and it is possible that the village of Chate has been characterised by patterns of out-migration to South Africa of women, forming a local “migration chain”.¹⁸ Female out-migrants to South Africa appeared to include married and unmarried women; and some of them apparently returned from time to time to their home villages, some coming back eventually for good. There was little information forthcoming that would give clear indications as to the success or failure of such migration strategies.

All the women interviewed claimed to retain a small holding, close to their homes, where they cultivated mainly maize, beans and *mandioca*. They work on their own *machambas* regardless of whether they are permanent or seasonal labourers for Lomaco. Three women claimed to hire in some casual labour on their own *machamba*, two of them seasonal workers and one of them a permanent worker: these three women all have no access to financial support from any family member. Assuming a very good year for rainfall, only one out of the women claimed that she ever grew a surplus to sell on local markets. The other eleven consumed all that they grew on their own holding.

Expenditure patterns are heavily influenced by the weather in Gaza Province. During a good year, on average, these women manage to feed their households with what they grow themselves (though they may well still purchase some food beyond what they grow). It is not easy to discern in this sample a clear pattern in the expenditure of supported versus unsupported women or of seasonal versus permanent workers. Beyond food purchases, which vary according to rainfall, clothes for themselves and their children are mentioned often, and soap is mentioned by some of the women also. Two of the women also claim to spend on hiring in casual labour when necessary.

Clearly, this sample of female wage labourers is very restricted and may be limited in its representative uses. But we may still extract some useful themes from the interviews. For it may be suggested that:

¹⁸ On the importance of chains in patterns of migration see, for example, Baines (1991).

- On average these women come from villages that are about 30 km away from the fields on which they work. When labour shortages are experienced this distance may increase. Therefore, these women are involved in some form of local, fairly short-range rural-rural migration; certainly, this is in a context where other women from their villages have migrated to South Africa, seeking wage employment. Thus, women working for Lomaco are surviving by travelling 60 km a day to get wages at the end of the month; and it must be stressed that the wage is very low and the work they do extremely arduous.
- These women are mostly widowed, divorced or single. Those that are married have lost track of their husbands, except in one case. They support themselves and their households with the wage they earn. The wage earned at Lomaco is likely to represent 90 per cent of total household income for both permanent and seasonal female workers, unless there are other sources of income, which was seldom the case among this sample.
- Wages are spent mainly on food and clothing, depending on rainfall variations. However, even if it does rain well they usually still have to buy in food to feed their children. It is likely that a small proportion of the wage may pay for school fees, but the wage is clearly not enough for them to secure what would be regarded as a decent standard of living.

In the light of these characteristics of the livelihoods of a small sample of rural female wage labourers in Gaza Province, it is possible to argue that more attention should be paid to the role of rural wage labour markets in poverty reduction in Mozambique. During harvest time there are about a thousand of these female wage labourers working for Lomaco alone. Policies that result in a decrease of rural wage labour opportunities may leave such women worse off, especially in an area of extremely unreliable rains. Moreover, diversion of policy attention away from the existence and conditions of such women may well mean that nothing is done to protect their working conditions or raise their paltry wages.

5. Conclusion

Much of the literature that dominates debates on poverty reduction in Mozambique at present is analytically narrow, empirically blinkered and suffused with rough and ready but questionable assumptions. This work nonetheless is very welcome in that it highlights the importance of debate on rural poverty and the urgency of effective policy formulation to reduce the incidence of that poverty. However, this paper has argued that it is necessary to extend work on poverty, to focus empirical research and policy analysis more acutely on historically generated and current reality in rural Mozambique and on forces of change within that reality. In particular, we have argued for a sharper focus on the role of wage labour employment in the survival of the poorest (especially women in female dominated households) and in poverty reduction, as well as suggesting that rural-rural labour migration (involving fairly short as well as relatively lengthy distances) may play a more complex and potentially positive role than the mainstream literature acknowledges.¹⁹

We have presented a small but suggestive case study on women travelling up to 60 km a day to work for very low wages on the cotton fields of the Lomaco joint venture in Chokwe district of Gaza Province. Our impression is that very few people indeed can survive solely on the land around the town of Chokwe. The highly irregular pattern of rainfall means that irrigation is a fundamental factor and a major constraint on the success of any potential cultivator. Also, the ability to secure the necessary labour force at peak seasons is critical to the outcome of agricultural strategy. We have seen that a large number of women hire their labour out to Lomaco, travelling often substantial daily distances (with more women travelling even further in peak harvest seasons) to secure wages that are fundamental to their households' survival. We may recall that there are two other large companies in the district, Semoc and João Ferreira dos Santos; and that there are a number of medium sized farmers, *privados*, whose development is tied in contractual arrangements with these large enterprises. The total number of seasonal and permanent wage workers may therefore be substantially higher than the figures suggested in this paper. And this is only in one district of Gaza Province. The evidence presented here confirms that it is inaccurate to portray rural society in Chokwe as

¹⁹ In making this argument we pick up on the allusion, in Tschirley and Weber (1994), to the potential role of wage labour in poverty reduction in rural Mozambique.

characterised by an homogeneous peasantry standing in analytical, economic and even political opposition to large commercial (“external”) interests.

On the basis of this case study - and of a broader and more historically minded analysis of rural Mozambique - we consider that further and larger scale empirical research along these lines should be a priority in the development of effective policies to reduce widespread and extreme poverty in Mozambique.

This paper has clear implications for policy debates in Mozambique. One of the clearest assumptions in the literature discussed in Section 2 is that of the superiority of small family farming over larger farms; and this assumption is founded on acceptance, as we have seen, of the proposition of an inverse relationship between farm size and productivity. Now, insofar as such an inverse relationship can be demonstrated, it is clear that the greater efficiency of smaller farms is a static efficiency, that tends to be undermined by dynamic changes (indeed, many of them precisely the changes the mainstream literature wishes for) including changing rural technology and improved infrastructure. In Mozambique there appears to be some evidence supporting the notion that smaller farms are more intensive in their application of labour than larger farms. But one may note three points about this evidence. Firstly, it is simply not the case that there is a widespread pool of efficient and economically, nutritionally, educationally viable small farms through Mozambique. Indeed, the literature surveyed in Section 2 acknowledges this, since it is the whole purpose of current policy direction to create such a network across the whole rural population. Second, what evidence there is has not been developed on the basis of a systematic analysis of smallholders, *privados*, and big commercial enterprises: i.e. to have greater effect, such a judgement about agriculture and its possibilities in Mozambique would have to be built on much firmer empirical ground than exists presently. Third, the evidence may have some descriptive value but explains virtually nothing, as it is presented in the literature, about why there are circumstances in which smaller farms are more labour intensive. These circumstances include the extraordinarily low level of development of non-labour productive forces, the effects of prolonged rural warfare in restraining incentives to invest in raising agricultural productivity, and the effects of years of policy that completely ignored the conditions of accumulation on private farms.

In shifting from this very partial empirical evidence to commitment to a policy package based on the prioritisation, exclusively, of smallholder farming, it appears that another significant assumption is made, i.e. that the strategy is a low-cost one, that the resources that need to be devoted to securing highly productive smallholder farming across the whole of the country can be cheaply allocated and will easily result in social and economic returns in the form of rising agricultural output and sharply reduced poverty. However, we suggest that it is actually a misallocation of resources to drive forward a policy package whose ultimate objective involves a set of static efficiency gains. For the cost of such a strategy is likely to be greater than is acknowledged in the current literature: in conditions of variable rainfall, poor infrastructure in many parts of the country, low levels of know-how, and substantial risk and uncertainty in small-scale agriculture, the provision of credit, infrastructure, tools and seeds, extension services, and support for effective legal action to confirm security of tenure will strain the resources of government and international donors alike. In fact, the likely reality is that such a strategy would have only partial rather than complete success in terms of implementation and returns, given the inescapable reality of institutional weaknesses, the high cost of sweeping and undifferentiated infrastructure expansion in a context of severe financial constraints, and intense political competition for control of land and resources.²⁰ Moreover, the current strategy ignores the dynamic changes historically entrenched in Mozambique and those already underway and likely to accelerate in current circumstances of policy reform and peacetime.

This paper has suggested that such changes, basically the expansion of private sector agriculture on a scale including those with perhaps only ten hectares and up, a broad group known as *privados*, with an average landholding in the mid-1990s of 35 ha, and the large and high profile commercial enterprises like Lomaco and João Ferreira dos Santos, are not a perverse aberration but may become a potentially progressive source of poverty reduction. Indeed, we have shown that wage labour on some of these farms already represents a fundamental means of survival for many among Mozambique's poorest people. Yet this momentum of change is not being supported by any coherent policy package. It is our argument that

²⁰ Extension services in reality rarely match the expectations loaded on them, even in countries with vastly better infrastructure and productive forces than Mozambique; see, for example, Heine (1996).

poverty reduction policy needs to address the conditions of this sector: by improving the conditions for accumulation of private sector capitalist farmers and by actively supporting the wages and conditions of labour of those that work on such farms.

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