

## **Chapter V. Conclusion**

The migrant labour system in Southern Africa began before the discovery of the diamonds in Kimberley and gold on the Rand. Workers from different parts of this region walked hundreds of kilometres to work in farms of the Cape colony and Natal even in the first half of the nineteenth century. Mozambican workers also participated in this migrant labour movement. It was reported that a few thousand of them worked in Natal estates, as well as in the plantations of the Cape, at least from the middle of the nineteenth century. A whole series of climatic and socio-economic pressures led workers from southern Mozambique (including those from Chibuto) into the migrant labour system. The ecological changes that contributed to the decline of the local economy, the internal wars, the need to accumulate hoes, cattle and sterling to invest in bridewealth and agriculture, and the need to accumulate income to invest in other commodities can be seen as the main reasons for the initial participation of Mozambican workers in this system.

The development of the diamond mines of Kimberley and especially gold mines on the Rand attracted growing numbers of Mozambicans from a few thousands at the outset to some 60,000 by the end of the nineteenth century. At the same time the Portuguese colonialists conquered southern Mozambique and gained control of the migration of workers to South Africa. The Portuguese government established a whole series of accords with the South African government and the Chamber of Mines in the late nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century in an attempt to control and to benefit from the recruitment of Mozambicans in the South African mines. The system benefited the colonial state of Mozambique in various ways, including income from the

administrative procedures of recruitment, revenue from customs duties from goods that workers brought home from South Africa, revenue from railway freights and transit duties on commodities passing through Lourenço Marques to and from Transvaal and income and benefits from the deferred payment system. Therefore, this migrant labour system significantly contributed to the national income.

The number of Mozambicans recruited in the mines dropped dramatically from 1976, the year following the independence of Mozambique. The mines' policy of internalisation, the implementation of mechanisation and the political changes in the region are seen as the main reasons for this reduction. From the second half of the 1970s, South African mines employed only half the number of Mozambicans that were employed until the middle of this decade. These changes had significant consequences for the national economy as well as for society in general. In the context of the increase of wages on the mines, this reduction prevented the Mozambican state from earning higher foreign exchange income from deferred payment that could have been important in managing the economic crisis in the period of analysis of this study (1975-1992).

The rural areas of southern Mozambique were one of the main sources of workers to South African mines until the middle 1970s. Remittances from the mines allowed rural households to invest in agriculture, strengthened the purchasing power and the local market in these areas and were extremely useful for several economic and social relationships at the level of households, including bridewealth. But one key disadvantage

of the system was the dependence on one source of income which left households very vulnerable to any changes in the system.

The example of Chibuto shows that the rural areas of southern Mozambique were extremely dependent on wages from the mines. Almost all the households of Chibuto included these wages in their livelihood strategies until the middle of the 1970s. Young males were released from agricultural tasks to allow them to participate in the migrant labour system. They brought home income that was important to acquire agricultural implements (ploughs, hoes, cattle, etc) as well as other commodities. They also had income to invest in bridewealth.

This vulnerability was demonstrated when the reduction of the number of Mozambicans recruited in the mines made it difficult for several thousands of men from Chibuto to find employment in the South African mines. It led to a whole series of economic and social consequences for the district such as the increase in unemployment, the reduction of the local market, the decrease of productivity and production in agriculture and so on. It also made the effects of the natural disasters (the floods of 1977 and the drought of 1982 and 1983) and the civil war that affected the district from 1983 extremely severe. This resulted from the fact that many households had no alternative income, apart from agriculture. As a result of these natural disasters and the civil war, most of the households lost their cattle and ploughs. The lack of alternative incomes made the purchase of replacement agricultural implements impossible for many. Because of this lack of alternative sources of income, a significant number of men left the district in an attempt

to get a job and a considerable part of them established themselves permanently in Swaziland and South Africa. Some of them abandoned their households and these developments led to erosion in the structure and stability of many of these households.

Households tried to employ several strategies in dealing with the reduction of income from the mines in the context of the civil war (until 1992). The most common strategies included extending the role of previous practices. These included cutting and selling of firewood, hunting and fishing (in the Limpopo River, local lakes and in Indian Ocean), traditional liquor brewing and the commercialisation of cashew nuts. Other households worked on the farms of a limited group of prosperous households.

The main argument in this research has to be seen in two dimensions – the causes and the consequences. Concerning the causes of the reduction of Mozambican workers on the South African mines there were three processes which, when seen as a whole, played a key role in this reduction. These processes were: the internalisation of labour, the mechanisation of the mining industry and the threat posed by FRELIMO's economic policies.

Concerning the consequences the research argued that the high degree of dependence of the rural economy of southern Mozambique on the migrant labour system during the colonial period made the effects of the reduction of Mozambican workers in the South African mines significantly negative for Chibuto households between 1975 and 1992. Firstly, the fact that local economic entrepreneurs and traders had not developed (because

of the deep dependence on mining capital, as well as the class-race restrictions of colonial social structure) led to difficulties for households in engaging in alternative sources of local income. Thus, a significant number of men, excluded from mining migrant labour, opted for individual, 'illegal' and mostly permanent migration in sectors different from the mines. In some cases, men abandoned their households entirely. Secondly, because the majority of local households were unable to get income from the mines (and were extremely dependent on agriculture), they were particularly vulnerable to the civil war and the natural disasters that took place in the period under analysis.