

# CONFLICT COAST:

MOZAMBIQUE'S PRIMEIRAS E SEGUNDAS ARCHIPELAGO



*Empty-handed, fisherman Fome Ali Buri gestures out to sea with the words “It’s over. The ocean is finished. When we fish, all we catch is sand.”*

Outwardly, Mozambique is a booming and prosperous country, one of the world’s fastest growing economies with Scandinavia, Brazil, China and the U.S. among its foreign investors, thanks to enormous untapped oil and gas reserves in the north of the country. Yet over half its population remains in absolute poverty, surviving on less than a dollar a day. To feed and clothe their families, coastal Mozambicans are finding that they must combine livelihoods, with the majority both fishing and working the land to eke out a living.



**COVER:** Ussene Ahmadi Amore, 26, dreams of becoming a teacher or journalist through night school. Currently he makes his living as a fisherman in the Primeiras e Segundas archipelago.

**ABOVE:** Foragers in Nuarro. Around 60% of Mozambique’s 21 million people live within 60 miles of the coast—and the population is growing. Nearly everyone near the coast relies on both farming and fishing to survive.



**ABOVE:** *Ishmael Saïd, a fisherman, supplements his living by growing crops. He grew up in Nuarro but made his way south to Angoche looking for work. Now his livelihood is like that of most people in the area: "I am a fisherman and a farmer."*

Fisherman and farmer Ishmael Saïd remembers more fruitful years:

"A long time ago, when I was young, one part of the population had jobs in companies, another group were only farmers, and yet another were only fishermen."

Now large numbers of people are heading out to sea when they are unable otherwise to place food on the table, and as a result the numbers of fish are declining rapidly. The more pressure on the marine environment, the more pressed the fishermen are to find fish.

"Before, the situation was more balanced, because people could survive just by farming or working at a job."



**ABOVE:** *An artisanal fishing crew makes for Mafamede island. Many young men learn fishing from their fathers or grandfathers, and join the crews of boats as soon as they are large enough to man the oars and nets.*

In 1975, at the time of its independence, Mozambique was the world's leading producer of cashew nuts. Cashew processing was a major industry and employed a large proportion of the population.

However, sixteen years of violent civil war followed, in which over one million lives were lost. Profits declined as a result of disruptive tax policies urged by the World Bank (a condition for over \$400 million in loans). Finally, rampant disease ravaged the national orchard of its trees.

The cashew industry collapsed, leaving thousands destitute.



**ABOVE:** *Ishmael Saïd comes up empty handed after spearfishing for octopus in Baixa de Santa Antonio. The Primieras e Segundas Archipelago was declared an “Environmental Protection Area” by the Mozambican government in 2012, in the hope that fish stocks would regenerate throughout the coastal marine reserve, which covers more than 4,020 square miles of coast and inland territory.*



In the twenty years since the civil war ended Mozambique has worked hard to rebuild itself, but recent economic successes have yet to filter down to poorer individuals, and the resources available to them remain under increasingly severe pressure. The fate of the cashew industry is a lesson for development going forward- calling attention to the pressing need for social stability (recent kidnappings by Renimo insurgents have prompted fears of a return to civil war), a diversity of livelihoods, and sound environmental management to keep resources healthy and available.

**ABOVE LEFT:** A freshly caught sting ray shows that the waters around Angoche are not yet empty. The pressures on local fishermen and the marine environment are increasing however as more people turn to fishing to supplement their incomes. A few years ago there were only 10,000 fishers in this area; now there are 12,500.

**RIGHT:** Malabar groupers for sale at Angoche fish market. An underlying problem is the prevalence of illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing in the Mozambique Channel and all along Africa's coast. Conservation groups hope for new laws which would give locals exclusive access to their traditional fishing grounds and secure a rights-based approach to managing the area's fisheries.



**ABOVE:** Members of the Sicubir community native to the Potone sacred forest area. Conservation groups are working with local communities here to increase the yield of crops such as cassava and pigeon peas, which would potentially reduce the number of farmers forced to turn to fishing for sustenance, and thereby alleviate pressure on already stressed fish stocks.



**ABOVE:** Seine net fishing in the Angoche estuary. A weighted dragnet is loosed across a stretch of water, and then pulled ashore over several hours.



**ABOVE:** The use of mosquito nets is illegal in Mozambique as the smaller holes do not allow young fish to escape and reach maturity. However, not all fishermen honour the national fisheries laws about proper nets and mosquito nets continue to deliver large, but damaging, catches.

Without a diversity of alternative livelihoods, for now the reality remains that coastal Mozambicans in the Primieras E Segundas are presented with the hardest and most essential conflict: eating today, -or not eating today, in the hope of eating tomorrow. And if there is nothing to catch, they don't eat at all.

In the global context, this is a question that in time will likely affect us all. It is worth keeping an eye on Mozambique then, as a pioneer for development and conservation amid an increasing scarcity of resources.

Local communities understand the environmental principles behind conservation efforts, but experience first hand the complications of implementing management plans.

“Rangers tell us not to use mosquito nets, and we know they catch too many fish,” says Jordao Aputal, captain of an artisanal fishing crew, “but if we use nets with bigger holes, we don't catch many fish, and our families don't have enough to eat”.

**BELOW:** Making fish 'caril' (curry) with Inshima on Mafamede island at the end of the day. All along Mozambique's coast, fishermen stress the need to feed, clothe and educate their families as their most important goal.

