

MOZAMBIQUE

Mozambique Island

Mozambique Island is presently the only World Heritage city in Mozambique, declared by UNESCO in 1991. The island is located in the Indian Ocean, in the northern region of the country. Mozambique Island is a melting pot, where different civilisations have mixed together since the time of the Chinese, Arab and Indian traders of the 7th century, and later of the 15th-century Portuguese traders 'discovering' the maritime spice route to India. The representatives of different cultures mixed with local African Bantu people who lived on the Island, to form part of the distinct *kiswahili* culture, typical of East African coastal people. Mozambique Island, a unique place in Mozambique, combined the peculiar cultural features of the lime and stone city, with the *macuti* (straw) city. The former is mostly made-up of Indo-Portuguese style buildings, most of them in ruins. The macuti city is found on the main (and livelier) side of the Island and shows the characteristic cultural diversity of that insular territory.

Mozambique Island was the first capital of colonial Mozambique, set-up in the 19th century, before the Portuguese settlement was established in the south, where the present capital Maputo is now located (the former colonial Lourenço Marques). The status of the first capital was lost due to the strategic need for Portugal to control the former De Lagoa Bay (now Maputo Bay) in the south, where maritime trade was being threatened by Dutch interests. This would have led to a reduction or even loss of the Portuguese influence on British interests in De Lagoa Bay as a preferential port.

Due to this Portuguese option, the administrative apparatus was transferred from Mozambique Island to Lourenço Marques and the majority of lime and stone buildings were abandoned and started to collapse. This is the reason why most of these buildings are in ruins, although some of them are now being rehabilitated, particularly through private-sector interests, which give them a functional purpose.

Government Action

Since Mozambique Island was declared a World Heritage site, the government has undertaken some steps. Responsibility is assigned to the Ministry of Culture through the National Directorate for Cultural Heritage. The Mozambican Government is committed to doing its best to honour the status of World Heritage site given to Mozambique Island. This is why, in 1998, an international conference of donors for the Island was organised, and in co-ordination with UNESCO, UNDP and Habitat, the Programme of Human Sustainable Development and Integral Rehabilitation of Mozambique Island was set-up with a cost estimated at US \$7million.

This was followed by a number of other actions by the Government, although not taken at the desirable speed, due to a number of unavoidable factors. In this context:

- The Ministry of Culture is preparing Specific Legislation for Mozambique Island, which will be submitted to the Council of Ministers for approval during the current year. This document aims to bring an added value to the Island, due to its status as a World Heritage city.
- With the assistance of Habitat, the Government has set-up the Projects Committee of Mozambique Island, in order to periodically revisit the Rehabilitation Programme of the Island. This Committee, chaired by representatives of Mozambique Island Council and Cupertino partners for the Programme, will pro-

vide the Government and bilateral and multilateral co-operation partners with a clear and real appraisal of the rehabilitation scope of Mozambique Island.

- With UNESCO's support, the Government is going to develop the Management Plan for Mozambique Island, the research for which will start in January 2002. The Plan will provide the Rehabilitation Programme with special guidelines, including a strategy for sustainable tourism on the Island.
- The Government is cherishing and supporting the twinning plan of action between the City of Bergen and Mozambique Island City, as it provides some strong leading principles for the council's building capacity, based in an urban vision of rehabilitation and development.

The Future

The main disaster that presently affects Mozambique Island is not of natural origin. The principal threat that endangers our national World Heritage site in Mozambique is the notorious shortage of funds to rehabilitate monuments, buildings and streets in Mozambique Island.

The Mozambican Government is under IMF and World Bank structural adjustment programmes and recently, in 2000 and 2001, faced the significant impact of floods in the southern and central regions of the country, the consequences of which can still be seen. The country's annual budget is the result of international contributions, which are not enough to solve the social and economic problems of the population and, of course, do not include the rehabilitation and preservation of monuments. For this reason, Mozambique Island's rehabilitation cannot be only a government task, as there are no specific funds in the budget assigned to the government by the international financial system.

We are confronted with the following dilemma: how to fulfil the government's task of rehabilitation, preservation and conservation of Mozambique Island and other national monuments, taking into account that there is no special budget for that? Should the government, due to lack of appropriate means, take part in the collapse of its cultural heritage?

It is urgent that a suitable answer to this question is found, because among many situations that threaten Mozambican cultural heritage is one that arises from the situation of extreme poverty of the country: some foreign citizens living in Mozambique want to buy – not rent for cultural purposes – some of our monuments, with the excuse that they would otherwise fall into ruins, because the government has no funds to take care of them. These foreign citizens are even forcing us to change our cultural heritage legislation in order to fit their interests.

It is our hope that a regional and international network concerning rehabilitation and preservation of endangered monuments will help the Mozambican Government to seek solutions against situations like this, as a means for preserving and protecting our common cultural heritage.

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