

Mozambique hails Shire Valley irrigation project

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Top Mozambican official has praised the Shire Valley Transformation Programme (SVTP), describing it as an unparalleled irrigation project that other countries should emulate.

Mozambique's National Institute of Irrigation (INIR) director general Delfirm Vilissa said the SVTP was one of the best irrigation projects he has ever seen.

He said the project was one of the best not only in its infrastructure but also in terms of everything that was happening behind the scenes in its implementation.

"The programme is good and I think other countries should follow the example," said Vilissa.

He made the remarks when he was in the country recently leading a Mozambican delegation on a week-long study tour of the SVTP, one of the biggest irrigation projects in southern Africa.

The SVTP is a 14-year programme (2018-2031) that the Department of Irrigation (DoI) in the Ministry of Agriculture is implementing with support from the country's development partners.

The Malawi Government, World Bank, African Development Bank, Opec Fund for International Development, and Global Environment Facility (GEF) are currently financing SVTP.

The SVTP will irrigate 43 370 hectares of land by abstracting water from the Shire River at Kapichira and conveying it by gravity to the irrigable area in Chikwawa and Nsanje districts through canals.

The objective of this multi-billion kwacha irrigation project is to increase agricultural productivity and commercialisation for 48 400 targeted households.

The project is being implemented in three overlapping phases. It started with the



Khaila (L) and Vilissa bid farewell to each other

construction of the intake at Kapichira and first six kilometres of the 118-km canal, which will go up to Bangula in Nsanje.

Vilissa told reporters at the end of their week-long tour, that they had come to Mozambique to learn from SVTP because they had a similar project back home.

"In compliance with its mandate, INIR is implementing the Small-Scale Irrigated Agriculture and Market Access [Irriga] project in Mozambique," he said.

INIR is a public institution under Mozambique's Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (Mader), the equivalent of DoI.

The institution is responsible for coordinating all activities related to policy formulation, implementation and construction of irrigation infrastructure in Mozambique.

It aims at improving

agricultural productivity and market access in the irrigated agricultural areas developed by the project and to provide an immediate and efficient response in the event of a crisis.

The \$57 million, World Bank-funded Irriga Project is being implemented in Manica, Nampula, Sofala and Zambezia provinces.

"The project is basically working with smallholder farmers by supporting them to have access to water and markets as a means to improve their livelihoods," Vilissa said.

He said that under their irrigation project, 3 500 hectares had been earmarked for construction, and that 1 000 hectares had been done.

"The remaining 2 500 hectares under construction will be finalised by 2024," he said.

The implementation of the Irriga Project, according to the head of INIR, was in line with the government's

vision to increase productivity, thereby boosting food security and export of produce.

Vilissa said that in implementing the project, they had made some achievements in building irrigation infrastructure and working with farmers to improve their livelihoods.

"However, we noticed that we are still facing some challenges. One of the challenges is related to sustainability of irrigation schemes," he said.

Vilissa said in Mozambique, 50 per cent of the developed irrigated area was not being used due to extreme weather events such as cyclones, and the lack of technical and financial capacity.

"That is not good because we know that irrigation schemes are very expensive. Because of that there is a need for government including INIR to find good solutions to solve this issue," he said.



A section of the 118-kilometre irrigation canal under construction in Chikwawa

He said given the huge irrigation potential Mozambique had and

considering the initiatives Malawi was taking through the SVTP, INIR

asked Malawi's DoI for an exchange visit.

Mozambique, according

to Vilissa, has an irrigation potential of three million hectares, yet less than 10



Malawi's surveyor general Masida Mbanu (L) explains to the Mozambican delegation the process of land demarcation, adjudication and registration in GVH Mchacha, T/A Ngowe in Chikwawa



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Vilissa: Other countries should follow the SVTP example

percent is being irrigated. "We decided to come to Malawi to learn how the SVTP is being implemented in terms of management of irrigation schemes," Vilissa said.

During the visit, the 11-man delegation comprising technicians from all departments of INIR fulfilled a number of engagements, starting with a briefing on the SVTP at the project's offices in Blantyre.

The delegation interacted with various officials from the Malawi Government and DoI to build a better understanding of initiatives for irrigation development.

They visited and got acquainted with activities related to planning, construction, operation and management of irrigation schemes in Malawi, especially the SVTP.

The visitors interacted with some farm cooperatives to get an insight into the commercial

farm and commercialization pathways since farms under the SVTP will be run on a commercial basis.

The 223 000 farmers from Chikwawa and Nsanje districts who will benefit from SVTP will consolidate their parcels of land to form large farms that they will run as cooperatives, their preferred entity.

And the cooperatives will only grow crops for which markets will have been identified. Factories will be built in the Shire Valley to add value to whatever a cooperative will produce to maximise profits.

Farmers who will participate in the project will have a share of the commercial farm corresponding to the area of their land.

The Mozambicans also interacted with a customary land committee and were briefed on land tenure concerning beneficiaries of SVTP.

Vilissa said the SVTP

"They were asked what they thought about the project and what could be done for them to get involved. Even farmers having a simple plot of land are involved in the project," Vilissa said.

He said: "This project is not just looking at big farmers. Farmers with land measuring 0.8 hectares up to five hectares are coming to work together to become a cooperative. This is a unique case.

"So instead of working with farmers individually, the project is gathering everyone together. This is one of the things I will take home and discuss with policy makers."

Vilissa said another thing that his delegation found interesting about the SVTP was that it was multipurpose, addressing critical issues affecting local communities.

He said the SVTP simultaneously addressed issues of irrigation water supply, land tenure, education, environment, gender mainstreaming, food security and income generation, among others.

INIR, Vilissa said, would give decision makers technical information for implementing similar projects as SVTP to make good use of the country's good conditions for establishment of irrigation system.

The visitors were inquisitive wherever they went, never tiring of asking questions during briefings, eager to learn as much as they could about the SVTP. And their inquisitiveness amazed their hosts.

"The visit has been very beneficial to both of us," SVTP coordinator Stanley Khaila said when the hosts met the Mozambican delegation on the last day to exchange good-byes.

Khaila said: "We learnt a lot from some of the tough questions asked."

In his farewell speech, Vilissa thanked the DoI and SVTP for accepting to host his delegation before he asked them to make a reciprocal trip to Mozambique. ■