

The weeds of abandoned cotton fields in Mozambique

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ABSTRACT

Based on a botanical survey of Chibuto, Chemba, Namapa, Nampula and Mutuali, a table of 120 of the most common weeds of cotton and fallow fields in Mozambique is presented. After considering the factors which affect the flora of these zones, the successional weed vegetation is described and the principal species are enumerated. Finally, the dangers of infestation (shrubby weeds in alluvial zones) and the utilization of the weed flora in other zones of the country are described.

RÉSUMÉ

LES MAUVAISES HERBES DES CHAMPS DE COTON ABANDONNÉS AU MOZAMBIQUE

Basé sur une prospection botanique des zones de Chibuto, Chemba, Namapa, Nampula et Mutuali, un tableau de 120 mauvaises herbes parmi les plus communes trouvées dans les champs de coton et les jachères au Mozambique, est présenté. Après quelques considérations sur les facteurs qui conditionnent la flore de ces zones, les aspects de la succession de la végétation des mauvaises herbes sont décrit et les principales espèces sont énumérées. Il est fait mention des dangers d'infestation (mauvaises herbes arbustives dans les zones d'alluvions) et de l'utilisation de la flore des mauvaises herbes dans d'autres zones du pays.

PLANTAS INFESTANTES DOS CAMPOS DE ALGODAO DE MOCAMBIQUE

Baseado em reconhecimentos botânicos a zonas do Chibuto, Chemba, Namapa, Nampula e Mutuali, o autor apresenta um quadro com 120 das más comuns infestantes de pousios e campos de algodão de Mocambique. Faz depois considerações acerca dos factores que condicionam a flora dessas zonas, descreve aspectos da sua sucessão e enumera os seus principais componentes; nas conclusões refere-se aos perigos que podem advir da infestação arbustiva nas zonas aluvionares e á utilidade da flora infestante em outras zonas do país.

OBSERVATIONS

The cultivation of cotton has had an important influence on economic development in the central and northern regions of Mozambique. The control of weeds in cotton fields in these regions has been a major problem for many years. Enforcement of control measures was responsible for socio/political trouble during the late 1940's and early 1950's.

In 1960 a survey was made of the weed vegetation of cotton and fallow fields (Lemos, 1961; Balsinhas, 1962). In this survey a large number of herbarium specimens was collected, and duplicates were sent to the herbaria COI, LISC, KEW, SRGH and PRE. Field notes including common and local names were recorded.

The present author then published the first check list of plants growing in cotton and fallow fields in Mozambique (Balsinhas, 1963). Research work and experimentation on herbicides was initiated in the same year (Almeida, 1970).

However, this is a vast subject and as Mozambique is traditionally an agricultural country it is essential that knowledge of the weed flora is improved. This is the motive for a further contribution to the subject using the existing information in the National Herbarium, Pretoria.

The notes on geographical distribution in Table 1 were compiled from the Flora Zambesiaca, Flora

Tropical East Africa and Flora West Tropical Africa.

Analysis of the distribution of the species in the study areas (see Table 1) shows a difference in botanical composition indicating two distinct weed floras on distinct ecological sites. Weeds marked with an asterisk are abundant.

1. In the Chibuto and Chemba study areas on the flood plains of the Limpopo and Zambezi Rivers, there is a pantropical weed flora. Its distribution is influenced by edaphic factors as well as by the intensive cultivation of diverse food crops to supply the considerable human population. Here the major weeds are: *Abutilon grandiflorum*, *Acalypha segetalis**, *Amaranthus spinosus*, *Boerhavia diffusa**, *Brachiaria eruciformis**, *Cardiospermum halicacabum* var. *halicacabum*, *Chenopodium album*, *Cyperus rotundus**, *Hybanthus enneaspermus* var. *enneaspermus*, *Ipomoea sinensis* subsp. *blepharosepala**, *Leptochloa panicea**, *Portulaca oleracea*, *Zaleya pentandra**, etc. They are commonest in open places, in woodland, riversides, irrigated land, waste places and cultivated ground.

2. In the Nyassan sub-littoral and subplanaltic study areas, at Namapa and Mampula, and the south-central study area at Mutuali there is an abundant indigenous ruderal weed flora. Its composition and distribution is largely influenced by climatic factors and the cotton monoculture. The principal weeds are as follows: *Aspilia kotschyi* var. *kotschyi*, *Aspilia schimperi*, *Chrysanthellum americanum*, *Digitaria milanjensis*, *Digitaria setivalva**, *Eragrostis cylindriflora**, *Indigofera colutea* var.

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colutea, *Indigofera demissa*, *Mucuna coriacea**, *Oldenlandia caespitosa* var. *subpedunculata*, *Pennisetum polystachion*, *Rhynchelytrum repens**, *Sonchus bipontinii*, *Tricliceras longepedunculata* var. *eratense*, *Tridax procumbens**, *Vernonia ambigua*, etc. They occur in open woodland, grasslands, often in fallow fields or on old cultivation sites.

The weed flora of fields consists mainly of annual or herbaceous perennial plants. Manual weed control before the cotton is picked, eliminates most shrubby weeds. These become a problem in fallow fields only three or four years after cultivation has ceased. The more important shrubby species are: *Acacia polyacantha* subsp. *campylacantha**, *Cassia petersiana*, *Commiphora edulis*, *Cryptolepis obtusa**, *Markhamia obtusifolia**, *Monotes africanus** and *Tabernaemontana elegans*.

The succession of the weed vegetation in fields left fallow or when cultivation has ceased for about three years or more, is as follows:

1. Chibuto. Grasslands of *Brachiaria eruciformis*, *Hyparrhenia rufa* var. *rufa*, *Hyperthelis dissoluta*, *Leptochloa panicea*, *Sorghum verticilliflorum*, etc., with *Abutilon grandiflorum*, *Cardiospermum halicacabum* var. *halicacabum*, *Hibiscus vitifolius* subsp. *vulgaris*, *Ipomoea sinensis* subsp. *blepharosepala*, *Oxalis semiloba* subsp. *semiloba*, etc., Thorny shrub invasion of *Acacia nilotica* subsp. *kraussiana*, and sometimes *Acacia tortilis* subsp. *heteracantha*, etc.

2. Chemba. Grasslands of *Dactyloctenium giganteum*, *Digitaria milanijana*, *Hyparrhenia rufa* var. *rufa*, *Panicum maximum*, *Pseudobrachiaria deflexa*, *Urochloa mosambicensis*, etc., with *Abutilon grandiflorum*, *Aerva tomentosa*, *Hermannia kirkii*, *Hibiscus caesius*. Cucurbitaceae include: *Ctenolepis cerasiformis*, *Cucumis anguria* and *Momordica kirkii*; *Sesbania mosambicensis* var. *mosambicensis*, *Vernonia kirkii*, etc. There is not much shrubby infestation except colonies of *Commiphora edulis*.

3. Namapa. Grasslands of *Aristida adscensionis*, *Eragrostis cylindrica*, *Hyparrhenia dichroa*, *Hyparrhenia filipendula* var. *filipendula*, *Panicum maximum*, *Pennisetum polystachion*, *Rottboellia exaltata*. In poorly drained soils, *Urochloa mosambicensis*, occurs, with *Aspilia kotschyi* var. *kotschyi*, *Sonchus bipontinii*, *Crotalaria virgulata*, *Mucuna coriacea*, *Tricliceras longepedunculata* var. *eratense*, etc. Shrubby invaders are *Acacia polyacantha* subsp. *campylacantha*, *Markhamia obtusifolia*, *Cassia petersiana*, etc.

4. Nampula. Grasslands of *Digitaria perrottetii*, *Digitaria setivalva*, *Eragrostis aethiopica*, *Eragrostis cylindrica*, *Hyparrhenia filipendula* var. *filipendula*, *Hyperthelis dissoluta*, *Panicum maximum*, *Pennisetum polystachion*, *Rhynchelytrum repens*, etc., with *Acalypha ciliata*, *Aspilia kotschyi* var. *kotschyi*, *Crotalaria virgulata*, *Indigofera colutea* var. *colutea*, *Mucuna coriacea*, *Sonchus bipontinii*. Shrubby invaders are *Markhamia obtusifolia* and *Tabernaemontana elegans*.

5. Mutuali. Grasslands of *Aristida adscensionis*, *Digitaria ciliaris*, *Eragrostis aspera*, *Eragrostis cylindriflora*, *Hyparrhenia rufa* var. *rufa*, *Hyparrhe-*

nia filipendula var. *filipendula*, *Hyparrhenia variabilis*, *Leptocarydion vulpiastrum*, *Pennisetum polystachion*, *Rhynchelytrum repens*, etc., *Aspilia kotschyi* var. *kotschyi*, *Bidens schimperi*, *Chrysanthellum americanum*, *Indigofera demissa*, *Ocimum canum*, *Oldenlandia caespitosa* var. *subpedunculata*. The only shrubby invader seen was *Monotes africanus*.

CONCLUSIONS

As shown in Table 1, *Tribulus terrestris* and *Vernonia glabra* occur in all the study areas. The former species is largely disseminated, as a weed, in tropical and temperate regions throughout the world and the second is widespread only in tropical Africa. *Boerhavia diffusa*, *Corchorus tridens*, *Ocimum canum* and *Striga asiatica* are common tropical weeds and occur in four of the zones. The weeds that occur in one, two or three zones only, are more restricted to the environmental conditions described in the text.

If the fields in the alluvial zones are left fallow too long or without crop rotation, there is a danger that thorny thickets will develop which will rarely succeed to open grassy savanna. Once thickets develop the recurrent use of chemical products, to keep large areas of land clear, is both difficult and expensive.

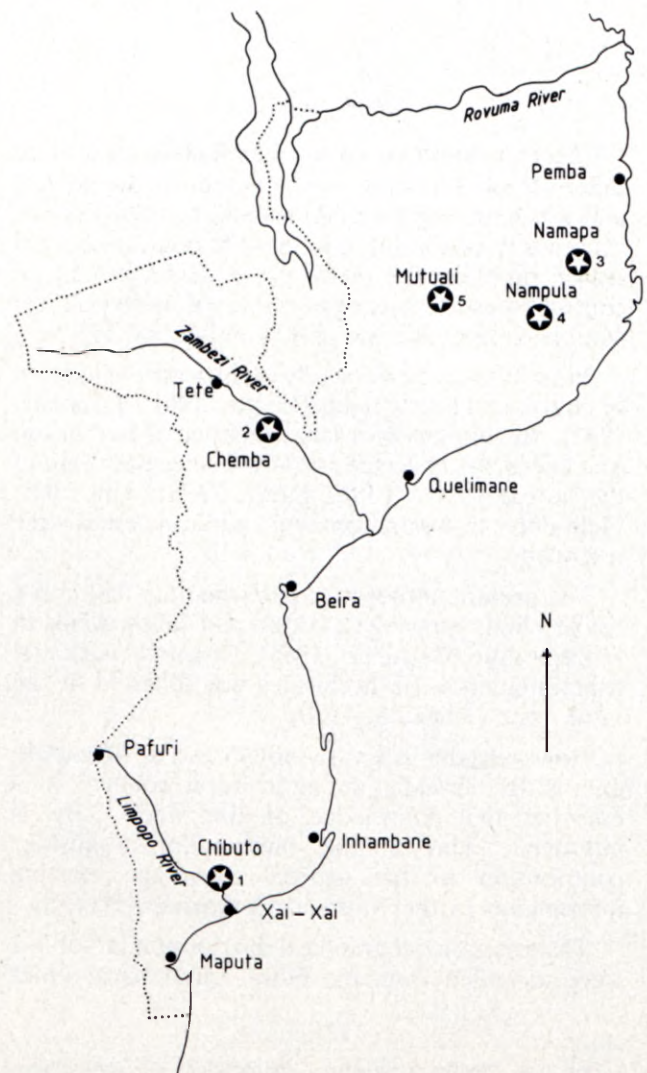


FIG. 1.—The positions of the areas studied in Mozambique.

In the sub-planaltic zones the succession on fallow and abandoned fields is towards a type of grassland with woody elements. In the first two years a thick, close sward is formed which, with correct management, can be useful for other agricultural activities such as grazing for cattle.

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