



INTEGRATED PLANS, ARTIFICIAL LAKES AND TROPICAL MEDICINE - THE CASE OF CAHORA BASSA

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Abstract

The construction of the Cahora Bassa dam was part of the integrated development plan of the Zambezi River covering 137 000 km². The plan targeted the exploitation of the natural resources of the region, the social and economic progress of the people and the densification of human occupation of large areas considered sparsely populated. Developing over 250 km, with an area of 2700 km², the Cahora Bassa dam raised important ecological issues. To address those issues it was created, in the Junta de Investigação do Ultramar, the “Comissão Orientadora da Investigação Científica” in the dam’s area. In its work, the Commission adopted as a framework the publication of FAO (1969), “Man-made lakes, planning and development” and aimed at: [1] the acquisition of knowledge which cannot be obtained after the area flooding; and [2] to forecast ecological changes as a result of the reservoir creation, which included the “Health and Nutrition” among the research fields, since

- the displacement of mammals (...) can lead to the simultaneous displacement of the tsetse fly and the consequent expansion of bovine trypanosomiasis;
- the transfer of rodents may constitute a transmitting vehicle of bubonic plague;
- the proliferation of various species of mosquitoes, such as vectors of various forms of encephalitis and filariasis, can be favored under shelter conditions provided to the respective larvae by floating masses of certain plants of “*Pistia stratiotis*” type; (in “Bases para o Estabelecimento do Programa Geral da Comissão Orientadora da Investigação Científica na Área a Inundar pela Albufeira de Cahora Bassa”, p.10)

Thus, under the item “Health and Nutrition”, the Commission focused on “public health (...) in the field of the prevailing endemic diseases and nutrition (...) with the aim of

being able to provide for measures to be taken prior to, during and after the resettlement of the populations".

It is intended, therefore, to examine the Commission's work on public health and inscribe it in the tradition of Portuguese tropical medicine, identifying continuities and ruptures, while mapping external factors, in particular those pertaining to the adoption of an ecological perspective in addressing the researched issues.