Augustinian Sr. Ediltrudis Clemente Chinchay works with female farmers in Nampula, Mozamb

Augustinian Sr. Ediltrudis Clemente Chinchay works with female farmers on sustainable farming method projects in Nampula, Mozambique. She and Augustinian Sr. Aurora Jacinto run the Biodiversity and Agricultural Program, founded in 2022 to support and educate female farmers. (Tawanda Karombo)



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Augustinian Srs. Aurora Jacinto and Ediltrudis Clemente Chinchay, both from Peru, are on a mission to inspire hope and improve livelihoods amid climate change disasters and terrorism in Mozambique's Nampula Province.

Nampula, Cabo Delgado and other northern provinces in Mozambique have been experiencing a humanitarian crisis due to natural hazards and armed insurgency.

Cyclones occur at least five times a year in the country, with Nampula among the worst affected. Climate change-linked cyclones have led to food insecurity, displacement, and the loss of lives and livelihoods, placing Mozambique among the most affected countries in Africa.

Jacinto and Chinchay have seen and braved it all in Nampula. Islamist insurgency worsened a few months after Pope Francis' visit to Mozambique in 2019 after ruling and opposition parties signed an agreement to end decades of conflict.

Sister works in field.

The Biodiversity and Agricultural Program was founded in Nampula in 2022 to support and educate female farmers. (Tawanda Karombo)

ISIS-Mozambique (ISIS-M) were responsible for attacks in northern Mozambique in 2023, according to a 2024 U.S. State Department report. As of August 2023, at least 670,000 people were displaced by violence and insecurity, the report said.

Despite violence in the region, the Augustinian sisters heave a sigh of relief when the cyclone season passes. They brace for the worst when the rainy season comes, as it brings disruption and destruction.

Arriving at the St. Netia Mission in Nampula in 2003 and 2022, respectively, Jacinto and Chinchay were deeply affected by the extreme poverty within the communities. The difficulties women faced were worsened by poor yields from their agricultural activities, leaving many of them vulnerable.

"We live on the border with Cabo Delgado, and I believe that this province, like Nampula, is in dire need of support not only due to hunger but because of the terrorism that has been prevalent since 2017," Jacinto told Global Sisters Report.

She blamed "extreme poverty and the neglect by authorities" for festering a breeding ground for the "terrible evil of terrorism" that is causing "deaths and displacement of thousands" of innocent families.

Biodiversity-friendly farming by women

Public opposition to Mozambique's ruling FRELIMO party sparked post-election protests that turned deadly starting last year until the beginning of 2025. This was after Daniel Chapo, FRELIMO's candidate, was declared winner of the election ahead of opposition leader Venancio Mondlane, who had the backing of the economically struggling youthful populace. The two are now discussing a pathway to end the violence that has gripped Mozambique since the Oct. 9 election.

Against this backdrop, Jacinto and Chinchay run the Biodiversity and Agricultural Program, founded in Nampula in 2022.

This program supports female farmers in purchasing equipment and seeds, and helping with crop diversification and soil enrichment. The program also teaches female farmers about community farming models and the planting or regeneration of fast-growing nitrogen-fixing trees or woody shrubs that produce high-quality biomass.

In addition to serving as fertilizer trees, the nitrogen-fixing varieties grown in Nampula help prevent fertilizer erosion, soil degradation and related desertification.



Augustinian Sr. Aurora Jacinto stands with children outside a classroom made of plastic bottles. The sisters encourage the community to collect plastic bottles to use as materials to build classrooms that withstands extreme weather events, including cyclones. (Tawanda Karombo)

"This program is aimed at women in rural communities," Jacinto said. They help cultivate family gardens for tomatoes, onions, peppers and cabbage, and plant fruit trees, native plants and native seeds.

She said the program initially had 45 women divided into groups. Now, 470 women and 24 groups have been trained and more communities are asking to participate.

Jacinto said there are always disruptions to the program, especially during cyclone season when the winds are so strong that they destroy fruit plantations and crops grown for consumption, such as corn and beans. Low-lying land fills with water and the rivers rise, which is also a challenge.

"Raising awareness about the importance of environmental protection is a big challenge," she said. "There is always the enormous impact of climate change, but how do we overcome this? With faith and hope, fighting day by day together with the households."

One plastic bottle at a time

Jacinto and Chinchay encourage community members to collect plastic bottles to use in building classrooms. The sisters have observed that plastic is highly weather-resistant during extreme weather events and that classrooms built with this material withstand the shocks of cyclones.

"The community now likes it a lot and is increasingly realizing it's a good building material," Chinchay said.

Nonetheless, Chinchay and Jacinto worry that climate change disasters will continue affecting the region.

They plan to continue planting trees and raising awareness to prevent uncontrolled burning and reuse recyclable resources.

A long-term commitment to Nampula

Chinchay said the challenges the sisters are facing in running the biodiversity and environmental program in Mozambique are worsening due to increasingly stretched funding flows into aid and development programs.

Augustinian sisters guide female farmers in Nampula, Mozambique, at a training session on s

Augustinian sisters guide female farmers in Nampula, Mozambique, at a training session on sustainable farming methods. (Tawanda Karombo)

Climate change-affected African countries such as Mozambique often rely on international charities and Catholic organizations for help.

With President Donald Trump cutting funding for USAID, many aid and development agencies must also cut their programs.

"I think not all of us are yet aware of the enormous challenge we face and the extreme suffering of so many people," Chinchay said. "It hasn't been easy to find the financial means to meet this challenge. In recent years, we've noticed that this attitude is taking on a different form, a slightly more spirit of solidarity."

Executives with Catholic charities, such as the faith-based Irish aid group Misean Cara, have noted the widespread concerns about funding sparked by the United States cutting off aid.

Misean Cara chose the Augustinian sisters of Mozambique for their commitment to working with women farmers in the north of the country, which suffers climate change impacts and terrorist attacks, said CEO John Moffett.

"In Mozambique, the Augustinian sisters identified a need to work, particularly with women farmers who had been economically marginalized, where there were high levels of malnutrition, and where there was the highest dependency on farming, both for food and income," he said.

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Moffett said that Misean Cara was moved by the opportunity to help "improve their crops in the light of the changing climate and the impacts on soil quality that has been decreasing over time and to introduce new skills and new agricultural techniques."

Moffett said he enjoys working with missionary congregations that tend to stay in places for a long time. "The sisters will continue there, and they'll continue to interact with the communities and identify the next steps that are needed or the

next kind of interventions that are needed," he said.

Despite this, the unrest in Mozambique was a constant worry for Misean Cara when considering the project for funding, Moffett said.

"We were reassured by the sisters of their commitment to remain within the project area and continue to work with the community," Moffett said. "So, we took the risk with the sisters because of their long-term commitment to working with that community and to support them [in] improving the agricultural productivity for the women living in that area."