

## The JECHE gallery

### Water, tobacco, and global inequalities

These photographs are used to illustrate the public health impact of lack of water and global inequalities. Southern Africa experienced one of the worst droughts in history in the early 1990s. For Mozambique, one of the world's poorest countries and at the time devastated by the effects of a US and South African backed guerrilla war the impact was immense. The first photo shows the Cahora Bassa dam (fig 1). This picture was taken in 1992 and shows the dam to be nearly empty. The water level should have been at the top edge of the distant wall. During the drought of 1991–1992 hundreds of thousands of Mozambicans died as a consequence of lack of water. It is depressing to realise that similar numbers have lost their lives recently because of floods. Just two months ago the Cahora Bassa dam was over flowing; two gates were opened resulting in the flooding of villages down stream with the consequent loss of homes and livelihood. During the drought obtaining water from whatever means was the most important daily preoccupation for everyone living in Mozambique (fig 2).



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4

Throughout the two years that I lived and worked in central Mozambique I saw trees collapse because of the drought (fig 3) and I never saw maize grow successfully. I did however see fields full of healthy growing tobacco on a multinational owned tobacco farm. Figure 4 shows tobacco drying in one of the barns of the tobacco farm.

The most appalling image I have in my mind is of poor Mozambicans grappling on hands and knees in the dust and dirt trying to pick up individual kernels of corn that had fallen from the backs of aid lorries with slogans such as "Jesus Alive" on their sides. Behind them were the green fields of growing tobacco and passing them also on the track the tankers of water being imported to grow the deadly weed.

DEBBIE LAWLOR

Department of Social Medicine, University of Bristol, Canynge Hall,  
Whiteladies Road, Bristol BS8 2PR, UK

Correspondence to: Dr Lawlor (D.A.Lawlor@bristol.ac.uk)