

Mozambicans Turn to Rebuilding Nation

By CYNTHIA STEVENS

MAPUTO, Mozambique—This former Portuguese African colony has launched a crash campaign to repair its war-damaged bridges and rail lines, expand its neglected Indian Ocean ports and root out corruption, inefficiency, illiteracy and disease.

For the first time in 15 years, Mozambique is enjoying a spell of peace to get on with the task of national development that languished during the first five years of independence.

First there was the 10-year guerrilla war that led to independence from Portugal on June 25, 1975, under President Samora Machel, a Marxist. Then Machel got heavily involved in the war in neighboring Rhodesia—now Zimbabwe—by allowing guerrilla leader Robert Mugabe to use Mozambique as a base.

With Zimbabwe independent since April 18 and Mugabe installed as its prime minister, Machel is now cranking into action an ambitious plan to transform a basically agrarian society into a developed socialist state by the year 2000.

The burden falls on a relative handful of skilled Mozambicans who were left in the country when the Portuguese withdrew abruptly after nearly 500 years of colonial occupation. Most of them are under 40 and inexperienced.

"We can't rest," said Oscar Carvalho, 30, chief maintenance engineer of Maputo's harbor. "We have to work hard every day because the future depends on us."

Reputation for Honesty

Machel's government has earned a reputation among Western diplomats for honesty, hard work, enthusiasm and perseverance.

But foreign observers are reluctant to predict whether he will be able to overcome such national problems as chronic food shortages, lack of transport vehicles, bad communications and inadequate water supply.

In the capital of Maputo, women dressed in brightly colored cloths called *capulanas* gather outside shops every day at dawn to buy such basic commodities as bread, meat and fish. Consumer goods like soap, glue, beer and even the *capulanas* are usually out of stock.

"I used shampoo to wash myself for two weeks because of the soap shortage," a Maputo resident said. "My wife's parents up north were using shaving cream on their clothes."

Maputo's water distribution system, strained by overcrowding in the capital and by inadequate maintenance, is shut off on weekends in certain neighborhoods to conserve precious supplies.

Mozambicans—unlike residents of some states that profess socialism—are frank about their problems.

"Our state apparatus is corrupted. It is sick, full of parasites," Machel declared in a speech earlier this year.

But Mozambicans are quick to point out that five centuries of Portuguese colonialism left them ill-prepared to run a country with 97% of the people illiterate.

The Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (Frelimo), led by Machel, came to power in 1975, a year after the former right-wing regime in Portugal was toppled by a military coup that effectively ended its African empire.

But unlike other European colonial powers, which educated and trained blacks for important tasks, the Portuguese left little to the native Africans.

Even maids in hotels and taxi drivers were Portuguese. The most menial jobs were given to blacks, who had few educational opportunities under the colonial administration.

When the Portuguese troops left, so did 250,000 Portuguese settlers, from government officials to blue-collar workers. Factory equipment was sabotaged, and about 25,000 vehicles were driven across the border into South Africa.

Economy in Collapse

The newly independent country's 12 million blacks had to pick up the pieces of a collapsed economy.

The number of skilled workers on the railways, for example, slumped from 7,500 to 600. After the exodus, the country had just 36 physicians, two engineers, three agronomists and five veterinarians.

Faced with a shortage of skilled labor and no merchants, the government stepped in at independence to run the economy—from cashew plantations to 1,000 small businesses that ranged from beauty parlors to funeral homes.

Machel's decision to harbor Mugabe's guerrillas further aggravated Mozambique's economic problems.

It cost his fledgling nation at least \$50 million in roads, bridges and railroad tracks destroyed by Rhodesian forces and \$300 million worth of lost trade because the war closed the borders between the two countries.

While sticking to the basic goal of socialism, the Machel government is backing away from total control of every economic level and encouraging small-scale capitalism and foreign investment.

"The state shouldn't have shops that sell one needle and 50 cents

worth of sugar," Valeriano Ferrao, general secretary for foreign affairs, said in an interview.

Machel, 46, a grade-school dropout and former male nurse, is himself leading the drive against underdevelopment.

"We will be ruthless with the undisciplined, the incompetent, the lazy, the negligent, the careless, the corrupt," he has told the nation.

His remark followed a series of impromptu visits to factories, warehouses and ports where he found tons of undistributed goods rotting. Three Cabinet ministers were fired.

The national airline was restructured in May and its top officials dismissed. Economy Minister Marcelino dos Santos said employees were using the state-owned airline's planes to smuggle ivory, animal skins and foreign currency. He said employees were discourteous and that the company's aircraft were "flying dustbins."

Despite some grumblings among his people about shortages of consumer goods and breakdowns in essential services, Machel is still popular.

His government has introduced free health care, and 96% of the people have been inoculated against cholera, smallpox, tuberculosis and measles. Primary school enrollment stands at 1.6 million, three times the number of pupils at independence. And half a million adults are being taught to read and write.

Multi-Racial Cabinet

The government also claims credit for creating an anti-racist society, reflected in the Cabinet which includes eight blacks, seven whites, two mulattoes and one Indian.

But the Machel regime has been accused of violations of human rights.

Amnesty International, the London-based human rights watchdog, said in its annual report last December that it was concerned about the government's use of detention without trial. Political detainees, including some Jehovah's Witnesses, are held at Machava Prison in Maputo and at "re-education camps" scattered throughout the country.

Amnesty International also protested last year when Mozambique introduced the death penalty following isolated acts of sabotage in Maputo and other cities against the Machel government. At least 20 people were executed by firing squads after being convicted of espionage and treason by military tribunals.