

## Machaze: the everyday story of just another little town

# Where surviving is the name of the game

ECONOMIC REFORM does not mean much in a place like Machaze, a small country town in the southern part of Manica Province.

By Mozambican standards Machaze, recaptured from the rebels seven years ago, has been doing quite well this year after a period of drought. Although there is insufficient food in the area, no-one appears to be starving. A few villagers have been killed or had their ears chopped off by the rebels, but most of the incidents date back several years ago. The inhabitants

could probably walk 50km from the town these days without being attacked.

Here in Machaze there are signs of normal life which are completely absent from many other Mozambican settlements — a maize crop in the fields, wandering goats and chickens, a functioning water well, even a group of carpenters working in the shade of a tree.

But the idea that Machaze is in any way integrated into the rest of the Mozambican economy is an illusion. Vehicles and agricultural marketing all belong to the

past. The inhabitants of Machaze are simply surviving, with a little help from the food airlifts of foreign donors.

Access is by aeroplane only. Throughout Mozambique roads are mined and bridges destroyed. Mr Virgilio Joao Nhansuo, the district administrator, says there has been no traffic between Machaze and the provincial capital Chimio since 1984. That was the year the orphanage was set up for the children whose parents were killed in the conflict — 18 of them have yet to find homes.

"Despite the good rains there really isn't food for all the people because there has been a problem of lack of seeds," says Mr Nhanguo. "Some have food, others don't."

According to Mr Fungal Simbi Chinhacata, the local medical officer, about 40 per cent of the children in Machaze are malnourished. "We have a very serious problem with children with anaemia," he says outside his rudimentary clinic. "We're not sure whether it's parasites or malnutrition. Two died this month."

Medicines, inevitably, are in short supply.

Mr Chinhacata's own story is typical. His monthly salary is worth about \$25. When he worked in Zambezia Province he suffered four ambushes (driving in an ambulance was no guarantee of safety); his wife, a nurse, was injured in the arm by a bullet; he himself lost all his belongings, burnt to ashes in one of the attacks, and his brother-in-law was killed.

The Mozambican countryside is dotted with government-held islands like Machaze. A few are better;

some are much worse. In many of the town centres the once-pretty Portuguese architecture is pockmarked with bullets or close to collapse from lack of maintenance.

Factories, clinics and schools have been destroyed by the rebels. Amenities such as electricity, transport and telephones have long since disappeared. To reunite Mozambique into a network of viable farming communities will need a lot of money, and a lot of determination.

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