

Uphill road to peace

How does the prospect of peace look from the viewpoint of the Mozambican countryside? Were it not for the garrison of soldiers billeted nearby, the rural scene in the village of Ndenguene would be little different from that in a dozen other African countries. The women were busy pounding maize. Many of the home granaries were full.

The harvest at Ndenguene near the "Beira Corridor" town of Chimoio proves that Mozambican peasants, given the opportunity, can feed themselves — with food to spare. Reports from around the country indicate that, where the Renamo rebels are not active, agricultural production is responding to the incentives offered by high prices — and there are now goods in the shops. This confirms the trend reported by Agricom, the agricultural marketing board, over the last two years.

Unfortunately, that is not the situation in most of the country. The population of Chimoio, capital of Manica province, has, according to local officials, trebled to 200 000 in eight years — mainly people fleeing from Renamo. "We are now the biggest refugee camp in the province," said one town official. Every day streams of men, women and children leave town to walk up to 15 km to their *machambas* (fields) — and walk back again before dark. Their daily long march is the direct result of the war, which continues unabated.

The main Beira-Zimbabwe road had been attacked and burnt one night despite the presence nearby of Zimbabwean soldiers guarding the road, railway and pipeline. Elsewhere in the country, new incidents have been reported on a wide scale, aimed, many believe, at achieving maximum publicity before Frelimo's Fifth Congress later this month.

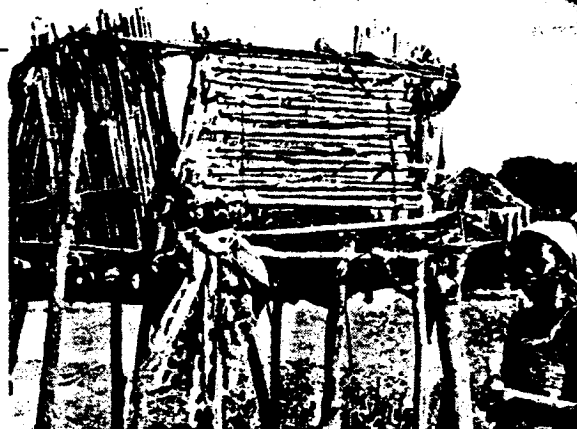
The prospects of peace are not just rumours of talks about talks. Ndenguene is an example of the process which is under way. GTZ, an official West German aid organisation, is spending US\$8m to rebuild the ravaged rural infrastructure in Manica. Just a few months ago, a West German parliamentary group was taken to the village. The parliamentarians told the somewhat bemused inhabitants that they opposed the Bonn government's decision to allow Ren-

amo to maintain an office in Frankfurt and they would lobby for its closure.

War-weary Mozambicans hope that the Frelimo Congress may take some decisions which could resolve the war. But Frelimo has few options left. There is general agreement that Renamo (which most Mozambicans and diplomats alike believe is still backed by SA) cannot be treated like Unita.

Renamo's brutality is increasingly well documented. The US State Department's Gersony Report estimated that at least 100 000 civilians had been massacred by the group. US academic William Minter concluded, on the basis of extensive interviews with Renamo members captured or given amnesty by Frelimo, that over 80% of Renamo's soldiers were forcibly press-ganged. So the movement has probably lost any chance it had of gaining popular support — too many families have suffered from their depredations.

Frelimo has, however, shown willing. President Joaquim Chissano has indicated that he will talk and make concessions — always assuming that anyone can find a credible group to put on the other side of the conference table. Western journalists describe Renamo's external operations as "shambolic" with little clarity as to exactly who calls the shots.



Feeding themselves

So Renamo's recent announcement that it, too, is now willing to negotiate should be seen in the context of Ndenguene. If peace comes to Mozambique, it will be because Western countries, who are paying heavily to keep Mozambique alive, have had enough. The combined cost of the emergency programme and development support could soon reach \$1bn.

Just as the peasants are reluctant to plant seed corn which they may never harvest, so the aid donors are growing restive about a war which wastes their aid. They are increasingly willing to bring pressure to bear on Renamo and its backers. When the West Germans and the World Bank join ranks with the Mozambican, Zimbabwean and Russian military, the writing is surely on the wall for Renamo's war. ■