

GOOD BUYS ACROSS *Africa Analysis* THE BORDER *22/7/88*

TETE CITY. Mozambique's Economic Rehabilitation Programme (PRE) and the security provided by Zimbabwean troops make this once moribund provincial capital a potential shopper's paradise for Zimbabwean consumers.

Shops which were completely empty this time last year are abundantly stocked with consumer goods, including simple toys. Most were brought in under Commodity Import Programmes designed to help Mozambique stimulate food production by giving peasants something they can buy with meticals earned when they sell their crops. But the colourful copolanas (wrap-around skirts) from the giant Textafrika fabric factory in Chimoi — virtually absent from the market for years when production slumped to less than 20% of capacity — are also readily available today.

For ordinary Mozambicans, who have seen most of their meticals officially devalued by more than 1500% over the past 18 months, all goods seem extraordinarily expensive. Still, 'it is better to have things in the shops and too little money, than a pocketful of money and nothing to buy', conceded a junior civil servant here.

While Mozambicans press their noses against shop windows wishing they could afford to buy, some Zimbabweans see a chance for quick profits in smuggling consumer goods to Zimbabwe, where clothing, household goods and electronic goods all sell for two to four times the Mozambique price.

Before devaluation, the main cross-border trade was carried out by Mozambican peasants going into Zimbabwe, selling their crops, and using the proceeds to buy clothing, soap and other basics unavailable here.

Today, in a major triumph for the PRE, the flow is reversing. A Mozambican peasant who sells his maize for meticals gets a better deal than he could hope to find across the border. As a result, Zimbabwe dollars no longer fetch a significant premium on the parallel market here.