

Amid War, Maputo Tackles Health-Care Woes

By SHEILA RULE

MAPUTO, Mozambique — In a country of miseries where the odds are stacked against survival, people in this capital city are molding a fragile success story by knocking on doors.

Members of youth groups and women's organizations, joined by high school students, among others, fan out into neighborhoods of tin and cement shanties, asking parents if their children have been immunized against measles, tetanus, tuberculosis, polio and diphtheria. If the answer is no, families are sent to local health centers for counseling and vaccinations.

Largely as a result of the door-to-door program, which has its roots in a national vaccination campaign launched more than a decade ago, the percentage of immunized children in the 1-year-old to 2-year-old range has risen to 90 percent, from 34 percent six years ago, according to health statistics. About 200 children are vaccinated each day. In addition, the infant mortality rate has dropped to about 77 for each 1,000 babies, from an estimated 108 for each 1,000 babies in 1980.

The success of the vaccination program, which was helped by the United Nations Children's Fund and which has progressed despite chronic nationwide shortages of medical supplies, was similar to that of one involving prenatal care. Nearly all pregnant women here now receive such assistance, and 90 percent of all births in Maputo now take place in hospitals.

Officials of this city of more than one million people suggest that the statistics highlight a long-standing commitment by the nation's sole political party, the Mozambique Liberation Front, to improving the health of the people. After independence from Portugal in 1975, health care was nationalized and treatment was given virtually free of charge. The party, then led by President Samora M. Machel, a former nurse, adopted a policy that gave priority to preventive health care. Mr. Machel died in a plane crash last year.

"We are a poor country," said Dr. Oscar Monteiro, the director of Maputo's Center for Preventive Medicine. "There are few medicines, few supplies, few hospitals. So we have to diminish the number of patients. That's why we emphasize preventive care."

"What we are doing in Maputo is what we want to do in the whole country. Unfortunately, the bandits and South Africa won't let us."

Dr. Monteiro was referring to the Mozambique National Resistance, the rebel movement that is seen here as a surrogate of South Africa. The guerrillas have for 12 years been waging a war against the Mozambican Government. The conflict, being played out largely in the countryside, has created levels of malnutrition and infant mortality that are among the highest in the world. About 6.5 million of Mozam-

bique's 14 million people require some international food aid; 3.2 million of them are dependent on emergency food.

Hundreds of thousands of people are on the move, fleeing the conflict, and just as many are threatened by starvation because the war has disrupted their subsistence farming.

A report by the Mozambique Health Ministry said that the destruction of health facilities by the rebels, popularly known as Renamo or the M.N.R., and the displacement of rural Mozambicans had cut off more than two million people from health services. The rebels have used dynamite and mortars to destroy more than 30 percent of the country's health centers and have looted hundreds of others. They have ambushed ambulances and killed health workers. The report said at least 21 health workers had been killed, another 44 abducted and 431 robbed of their supplies in rebel attacks.

The United Nations Children's Fund said the conflict, one of Africa's grimmest and most prolonged, pushed the mortality rate among children under the age of 5 to as many as 375 per 1,000 in 1986. The rate was 182 for each 1,000 in 1980. The war resulted in the death of 320,000 children from 1981 to 1986, the agency reported. The view here is that many of the deaths were due to malnutrition and preventable diseases that could have been cured had health facilities been functioning.

The war has also disrupted parts of Maputo's health care system. Patients have been kidnapped and supplies

stolen, health officials say, resulting in two of the city's eight centers with maternity wards now being closed each night. The closings have caused a drop in the number of women giving birth in such facilities, according to these sources, which could foreshadow a rise in infant and maternal deaths.

Displaced people are streaming into the city from outlying areas in search of safety, stretching already limited resources. "The whole country is in crisis," Dr. Monteiro said. "That can't help but be reflected in Maputo."