

A War and Drought Extend The Famine in Mozambique

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WHEN the rain finally came last week, the first rain in 12 months, the people here began clearing the land for planting. Their efforts were born more of dogged hope than realism: The rain was meager, as all rains have been since 1978, and there were no seeds to plant.

The people of Dindiza have seen crop failures, and they have seen their once-numerous herds of cattle wiped out both by drought and by rebels who have South African support. Nowadays they wait for a monthly delivery of food that is never enough; often they survive on boiled tree roots and weeds.

"Mozambique has natural disasters such as drought, cyclones and floods," a Western aid worker said, "and man-made problems such as economic mismanagement and South Africa's aggression through its support for the rebels. All these things join forces to cause a cruel food crisis."

Relief officials say nearly four million people in this nation of 13 million face starvation or severe food shortages. Mozambique was one of the southern African states worst hit by drought in the first half of the decade. Although the drought has eased in much of the country, it

has persisted in the south, where Dindiza is situated.

In other provinces, the main cause of food shortages is the decadelong war waged by the Mozambique National Resistance against the country's Marxist Government. The war has nearly ruined an already crippled economy. The rebels disrupt agriculture and force villagers to flee their land. Those who are displaced — estimates of their number vary from one million to two million — no longer produce food for themselves or for the market. Instead they depend on aid.

Food donations often must be sent by military convoy because the rebels make the roads unsafe. Last year, when between 16,000 and 20,000 people were starving in Dindiza, relief workers told the town that food could be brought in only by air; the people built an airstrip. So far this year, according to Amos E. Mahanjane, Mozambique's director of relief programs, the rebels have destroyed 19 trucks carrying food. In the process they have sometimes killed local aid workers.

The new president of Mozambique, Joaquim A. Chissano, said last week when he took office to succeed Samora M. Machel, who was killed in a plane crash in South Africa, that ending the war was the country's main task. The response from the rebels was not encouraging; they said they had no plans to stop fighting. Mr. Chissano accused South Africa of violating a 1984 non-aggression pact between the two countries by continuing its support of the insurgents; South Africa, for its part, says Mozambique has reneged by renewing its backing of the African National Congress.

Many relief workers, meanwhile, blame not only the war and the drought for the continuing food shortages, but also the Government's Marxist economic policies. In 1983 the Government itself acknowledged the shortcomings of those policies, and since then it has moved closer to the West, joining the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

The benefits of that shift may be felt in the long run. But for now, according to both Mozambican and Western relief officials, the country needs major help from the international community. The officials say 550,000 tons of food are required to stave off hunger until April. Only 40 percent of that has been pledged.

"Two or three years ago, there started to be a movement to focus on the African famine," said Richard G. Morgan, an emergency program officer for the United Nations Children's Fund. "But late last year and early this year there was an impression that the problems had been solved because the rains in most of Africa were good, and the harvest picked up."

"Famine induced by war in Mozambique and Angola had not gained the awareness in people's minds that drought-related famine in Ethiopia and Sudan had gained. But from the point of view of the victims, famine is famine."



Reuters

Malnourished children in Dindiza, Mozambique, last week.