



A militia escort was needed to deliver two lorryloads of relief maize to the village of Chicoma

MOZAMBIQUE: Rebel tactics wreak havoc on civilians X

**The MNR continues to aggravate the famine in Mozambique
— despoiling wells and attacking the population**

Choosing what to eat in Inhaminga is not a problem. Many people in this town in Mozambique's central Sofala province say they have eaten nothing but chopped-up mango kernels for the last two months and they have to be

boiled 12 times before they are edible.

Inhaminga is occupied by the FRELIMO government forces, who recaptured the town from the rebel MNR in 1985. But it is still only accessible by light aircraft as the MNR, known as *bandidos armados* or armed bandits, attack vehicles driving there, and have completely blocked the main Beira-Tete railway line which runs through the town.

The soldiers, from Sofala province's 15th Brigade, are attacking bandit bases, the latest only 20 kilometres away from the town centre, and liberating many people who had been held prisoner by the bandits.

Francisco Gente, his wife and four young children, were caught on June 25 1985 and ordered to go with the bandits to several bases. He said some of the women were taken as "wives" for the MNR and villagers had to farm and labour for them and received no medical treatment at all.

People who had escaped capture told me how they were repeatedly attacked in their fields and their crops were destroyed. But, as security improves, drought is emerging as a problem — wells are running dry and crops are failing.

Many people are suffering severe malnutrition and have only sacks to wear. The government emergency department DPCCN has succeeded in flying in a few days supplies, but the cost is high and no-one knows when the next flight will come.

In all of Mozambique's 10 provinces the story is the same — war and drought. Further south, in Inhambane province, I drove with a heavily-armed militia escort into Chicoma village bringing two lorries of relief maize from the Christian Council of Mozambique.

Now, back in the village the crops had failed and water was very scarce as the two main wells were unusable since the bandits had dropped eight dead bodies down each.

Across Mozambique, the total number seriously affected by the war is put at 4.3m people, of whom 1.5m have been driven away from their homes and farms. They are completely unable to farm this year, although the government tries



to make sure they are given land wherever they are and an important part of the relief supplies are agricultural tools and seeds.

Typical of the displacement is Tete province where most of the districts north of the Zambezia river are inaccessible since the MNR streamed out of Malawi last September. They aimed to destroy many of the industries in Tete and to drive down through Mozambique's former "breadbasket," the fertile Zambezi province, to establish a coast base.

A strong counterattack by FRELIMO and some of the 12,000 Zimbabwean troops in Mozambique has stopped that, but as safe areas are cleared around Tete, an estimated 70,000 refugees are returning from camps in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

At the reception centres many have no shelter, or sleep in railway waggons and under disused lorry trailers. Bandits have been able to attack the agricultural rehabilitation project only a few kilometres from the town centre, forcing some 5,000 newly settled refugees to flee again.

Government officials in the north are cautiously optimistic about the war. Malawi, reportedly threatened with a complete blockade by the front-line states that surround it, now seems more ready to try and hinder the MNR. The Joint Security Commission, set up last year, reportedly gives FRELIMO right of "hot pursuit" of bandits into their bases in Malawi, where evidence had emerged of co-operation between Malawian officials and security forces and the bandits.

Meanwhile, Tanzania has started lending troops to FRELIMO and offers of help are coming from a range of non-aligned countries as well as from the Soviet bloc. Even Britain is providing military training and some other forms of military assistance.

The United Nations has declared Mozambique an emergency area and the newly-appointed co-ordinator, Arturo Hein, is calling for over \$200m of aid. As the army told me in Inhaminga: "These people don't have anything to eat. They need immediate help."

But the MNR tactics of hit-and-run destruction and

terrorism, part of South Africa's regional destabilisation strategy, make them extremely mobile. The Mozambican news agency has reported the arrival on February 5 of 250 more MNR bandits in the southern provinces from training camps in South Africa.

Until external backing of the MNR ends or the Mozambican security forces are strong enough to completely block their activities, there can be no long-term respite for Mozambique and no chance to try and start recovery □

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