

Battling against the ravages of banditry in Mozambique

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THE human misery caused by drought and the war against MNR armed bandits is widespread in Mozambique.

Disaster workers, doctors, teachers and party cadres have begun an emergency programme with meagre resources for the thousands of helpless, war displaced and refugee peasants facing a deadly drought.

Some fled west from Chitua to Moatize in Tete province after an attack by MNR armed bandits because the security situation in their home villages was becoming serious.

A local representative of Frelimo displaced by the war, Cde Iaido Spiria, said that anyone could see from the state of his villagers' sack clothes and the bloated bellies of the children why they fled from their homes.

Rural people were still coming in from Chitua and Macanga, west of Moatize. New arrivals, who had been displaced from their homes by the war, were being registered at the Moatize open air and railway reception centres. They were given food and water, but there was no shelter.

War displaced in the open air centre totalled 1504. There were 7981 living in 70 abandoned coaches at Moatize siding. At a village settlement 25 km away there were 1063. But the numbers were increasing daily.

The provincial director of the Department for the Prevention and Combat of Natural Calamities in Tete, Cde Rocha Nunguive, said people displaced by the war and refugees were pouring in every day.

"We are unable to give them shelter. There are no tents," he said. These people were not only fleeing from the war in the entire northern Tete province, but were abandoning winter crops.

While registration continued at the open air centre, some of the displaced cooked and collected water from the Zambezi river that flows through the provincial city, Tete, while others settled in the shade of trees to protect themselves from temperatures reading nearly 40 deg C.

There were chronic cases of malnourished, pot-bellied children and others suffering from scabies. Food was provided by the Department for the Prevention and Combat of Natural Calamities.

Frelimo party and government officials, who managed to escape the brutality of the armed bandits when their home districts came under attack, were helping to organise the camp inhabitants and seeing to their needs.

Cde Spiria, who was the Frelimo secretary for the village of Kanguia in Malanga, near the Malawian border, said the armed bandits had attacked on January 22 at about 4 am.

"There was fighting from 4 am until 5 pm the same day. The people fled into the bush. There was

THE first of a two-part series by MIKE OVERMEYER of Ziana, reporting from Tete on the plight of Mozambican peasants who are being killed, maimed and made homeless by South African-backed MNR bandits.

a battle of more than 12 hours between the banditos armados and the FPLM," Cde Spiria said.

Armed bandits burnt down the houses before Cde Spiria also fled into the bush. He spent about 10 days in the bush with his family of seven who were all living in the settlement camp for the war displaced.

The family had walked nearly 100 km in search of security. "Now we are trying to make sure that there is enough food for everybody and to dig a well nearby," said Cde Spiria.

The camp did not have enough housing and most of the displaced were sleeping in the open.

At the abandoned Moatize railway yard maize was distributed to the 7981 displaced victims according to the size of the families.

Most lived in the 70 unused coaches. Others improvised by making tents out of plastic. Piles of tyres used as latrines were extremely unsanitary. Disease was rampant.

Health auxiliary Cde Americo Toao Antonio complained of the lack of medicines to cope with the many cases of diarrhoea and conjunctivitis.

Malnourished children were given a mixture of sugar, oil and milk. Three children died of malnutrition in the camp. The makeshift clinic continued to give children vaccinations against polio, tuberculosis, diphtheria, whooping cough and tetanus as part of the national preventive health programme.

"We can't deal with gynaecological cases," Cde Antonio said.

There were five bottles for syringe shots of penicillin, some oral rehydration salts, chloroquine for Malaria cases and some vitamins in the poorly stocked tent clinic. Serious cases were sent to Tete provincial hospital.

At the hospital there was a woman who was shot in the chest with a bazooka. Hospital director, Dr Ines Boaventura said the woman's life was out of danger after emergency treatment.

An 18-month-old child with a machete wound across the head lost his mother in a bandit attack.

An official of the DPCCN said when the railways take away some of the carriages the housing situation would deteriorate.

One coach was being used to store emergency supplies of maize, flour and dried fish.

The centre has been running since September last year for war displaced and some of the 70 000 refugees in Malawi returning at the rate of about 50 a day.

Now Frelimo activists have started a school for children doing their grade one to four classes held in the open. The government has provided exercise books and pens.



ABOVE: A child, orphaned when his mother was hacked to death by armed bandits, is suffering from a head wound inflicted by a machete.

RIGHT: Village Frelimo representative who fled from the war Cde Iaido Spiria spoke of sack clothes and bloated bellies among his villagers.

BELOW: A health assistant treats a child at the open-air health station at the former railway yard at Moatize.

