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## **African Tragedy**

### **Mozambicans Suffer From War, Drought And Economic Decay**

**Dislocation Breeds Problems Of Housing and Health; 'We Are Always Moving'**

**Long Wait of the Amputees**

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NE, Mozambique—As the noonday sun bears down mercilessly, the schoolchildren of the makeshift settlement called Village Seventh of September do what comes instinctively in Mozambique: They move.

They leave their sweltering brick and mud classroom, bringing the blackboard with them, and resettle under a tree providing a little shade. Later in the day, as the sun crosses the sky, they will move again, to another tree providing better shade.

"It is a lesson about life in this country," says Abrao Tenbe, the principal. "We are always moving."

The adults of the village have learned this lesson well. They moved here—178 families in all—nine months ago, running from the guerrilla war in the surrounding countryside. The bamboo huts were erected in less than a week, and they can be taken down even quicker. This is important, for if the drought choking the Boane district and the rest of the area doesn't let up soon, the villagers will be moving again.

**'No Place to Go'**

"We have no place to go," says the village leader, Salvador Cossa, "but if we must, we move."

For many in Mozambique, it is a must. The country's roads are thick with people on the move: children carrying sacks, women balancing bundles on their heads and babies on their backs, men pushing carts. More than 1.5 million people have abandoned their homes in the face of war and drought and economic decay. And the government fears that three million more may soon be forced to do likewise.

It is this large-scale dislocation, along with all the health and economic problems it brings, that has put Mozambique on top of the Human Suffering Index, compiled by the Washington-based Population Crisis Committee. In a comparison of the living conditions in 130 countries, the 14 million Mozambicans have it the worst.

The tragedy of Mozambique, as told by the village elders here, is that there are few places to go but many reasons to move. There are the anti-government rebels, who terrorize small villages with nighttime raids. There is the drought, which has turned much of the tropical green countryside to a desert brown. There are the failed Marxist experiments and the interference of neighboring South Africa, which have made a shambles of the economy. And there is the legacy of the Portuguese colonists who pulled out of the country in 1975 and left it in the incapable hands of unskilled and illiterate peasants.

#### **An Open Book**

"The situation here is very serious," says Abdul Magid Osman, Mozambique's finance minister. "We don't have to hide it."

The misery of Mozambique is an open book that can be read in many ways. For the white South African government, Mozambique is Exhibit A in its argument that blacks, left to rule on their own, will embrace Marxism and proceed to run the country into the ground. For much of the rest of the world, Mozambique's plight is evidence of South Africa's efforts to keep its neighbors pinned under its thumb. For the Soviets, Mozambique is an embarrassment. For the West, it is a grand opportunity for economic and ideological rehabilitation that, if successful, could win over a number of other hostile African countries.

For all of Africa, Mozambique is a severe disappointment. With its fertile soil, rich mineral resources and long coastline, Mozambique was to have been the best example of what black-ruled sub-Saharan Africa could be. Instead, it is the worst example of what the region has become—a vast zone of human suffering.

#### **High Infant Mortality**

Mozambique's infant-mortality rate of about 200 per 1,000 is the highest in the world (along with Angola's), as is the number of deaths under the age of five: more than 325 per 1,000. Life expectancy is only 45 years. The illiteracy rate is 75%. This year's harvest is expected to be the poorest in three decades. The foreign debt of \$3.2 billion can't possibly be serviced by an economy that exports only \$80 million worth of goods each year.

The statistics tell a sorry story, but an even sadder one is told by the wandering refugees, the overcrowded hospitals, the empty shops, the farmers without seed, the ports without ships and the administrators without experience.

#### **The Wanderers**

Village Seventh of September is named after the day in 1974 when the Portuguese rulers agreed to work toward giving Mozambique independence. It was a joyous day, culminating a 10-year bush war to topple the colonialists. For the people in the bamboo huts here, it remains a symbol that all struggles will someday end.

But when? they ask. After independence, those opposed to the new Marxist government went into the bush and started their own guerrilla war, which has been

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# African Tragedy: Promise Unfulfilled, Mozambique Suffers From Civil War, Economic Rot and Drought

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dragging on for 13 years now. Supported in various ways at various times by the South African government, the rebels have laid waste to large parts of the countryside, forcing peasants to abandon their land and seek refuge in the bigger cities or more secure rural areas.

The story of Village Seventh of September began in June last year when farmers who were scattered over a 15-mile area west of the capital of Maputo came together as protection against the rebels, or, as the locals call them, the bandits. The farmers' strength, they figured, was in their numbers.

Since then, the ambushes from the bandits have indeed stopped, but so has the farming. Instead of tilling small individual subsistence plots as before, the villagers now are in need of larger communal property; farming individually far away from the village is too dangerous. But the drought isn't giving them a chance. "We can't make anything grow," Mr. Cossa, the village leader, complains.

Every morning the villagers fan out over the countryside, looking for a piece of land that might grow something. Every afternoon they return no better off than they were the day before. So, with nothing to do, the men sit under a circle of shade trees and drink a type of beer brewed from local plants. The women shuttle back and forth to the nearest source of drinkable water two miles away.

"The government is looking for a place for us to farm," says Mr. Cossa, "but all the good areas are already taken. We have no food."

The last relief delivery of grain from the local government office came in February, and that was only about four pounds per family. Some families include a dozen people. Mr. Cossa has no idea when the next delivery will come.

## *Failing Health*

Early in the morning the rehabilitation section of Maputo's central hospital is already crowded with amputees. After months of waiting, their chance has finally come to get an artificial limb. Nearly all of them are victims of the war.

Artur Cruel, 23 years old, walks back and forth in a therapy room, getting used to his new leg. He was injured in Zambezia province, in central Mozambique, when a bus in which he was traveling was attacked and destroyed by the rebels. That was in August 1985. For 18 months he lay in a hospital in Quelimane, the capital of Zambezia, before being sent to Maputo, the only place where he could get an artificial leg.

Lucia Manuel Panoi, seven years old, walks next to him, trying to keep up. She was shot in the leg early this year and was hurried to Maputo following the amputation. "Children get a top priority," says Thierry Le Borgne, a rehabilitation specialist with the International Red Cross.

He and his seven fellow technicians are able to make and fit 30 artificial legs each month, which meet only about half the nationwide demand. "There's a limit to how much we can do," says Mr. Le Borgne. "We've asked for more people to work here, but they aren't coming."

In his Maputo office, Jose Maria Igrejas Campo, the deputy minister of health, folds his hands on his chest and sighs. "As you can understand, our budget isn't big enough to handle all of this," he explains with great discomfort. More than 40% of the government budget goes to fighting the war, which doesn't leave much for dealing with its consequences.

## *On the Farm*

Matias Michaque points in the distance, to a row of mango trees, by way of indicating how far his property extends. It could all be potatoes, he says, if only he had some seed.

"Last year I received only half the seeds I needed," he says. "I grew one ton of potatoes, but I could have grown two."

If anybody had seeds in Mozambique, it would be Mr. Michaque, for he is one of the few private farmers receiving special assistance from the socialist government, which is trying to reverse the disaster of its collectivized farms. Mr. Michaque's farm north of Maputo is equipped with a crude irrigation system, which helps him beat the drought, and with a few machines.

The fact that even he goes begging for seed indicates how desperate Mozambique's agriculture is.

While he talks, he instructs a worker walking behind a motorized plow—donated by Americans—to steer it to the other side of the field and leave it idle. It is making too much noise for the conversation. "Once I turn it off, it's too hard to start again," says Mr. Michaque. "A part is broken, and we have no spares in this country."

Not far from his farm, a group of workers clears some land about the size of a football field. This is a Green Belt experiment station, where peasants will come to learn how to plant rice, corn, lettuce, tomatoes and coffee and how to raise livestock.

A man in charge of the project says it represents the future of Mozambican agriculture. Outside his office, a worker sits on the stoop, whittling a wooden rake.

## *Empty Shelves*

At a department store in downtown Maputo, the shop manager nostalgically recalls the days when his shelves were full and the stockrooms were bulging. "This here was my crystal department, all of it from London," he says, walking past empty counters. "Over there was the perfume department. I had Palm Beach suits, Italian shoes, Portuguese dresses."

Today he has nothing, except for a

bunch of socks, some children's clothes and a few pieces of red furniture and green furniture. The store looks as though it closed 10 years ago. A few salesclerks stand behind empty counters, perhaps waiting for the dust to go on sale. The manager, who begs to have his name and that the store kept anonymous, is waiting for a shipment of some clothes expected to arrive any day now. The delivery is already a couple of days late.

At one end of the store, yellow shirt boxes fill up a couple of shelves. The store manager opens one. Empty. The contents were sold 10 years ago. "When you've been in a store all these years, you want to see something on the shelves," he says sheepishly.

He explains that the government doesn't have enough foreign currency to import consumer items and that many Mozambican factories have been hampered by the war. But he is reluctant to blame Marxism. Hanging on a wall above him are two posters. One says "Viva Socialism," the other "Down with Capitalism."

### No Ships

Pedro Junior cuts straight to the heart of Mozambique's debt problems. "No ships, no work," he says.

Mr. Junior is an inspector at the port of Beira, one of the most strategic points in Mozambique. Beira is the logical port for most southern Africa, and, when times are good, a major foreign-currency earner. But times aren't good. The rebels have succeeded in rendering the overland truck and rail routes through Mozambique so insecure that the port has become almost

worthless. Ships now are bypassing Mozambique and docking in South Africa.

This fact alone, he says, confirms the cooperation between the rebels and South Africa, even though Pretoria denies supplying any direct military aid. He outlines the strategy on a map of southern Africa. "We can conclude that the objectives of the bandits are to make the highway and railway so unstable that traffic goes through South Africa," he says. "This war is not meaningless. It has a purpose."

The meaning for Mozambique is clear: economic ruin. Before independence, Beira handled four million tons of cargo a year. Now it is lucky if it gets 1.5 million tons. Farther south along the coast, in Maputo, only half of the two dozen docking areas are busy. In 1976, nine million tons came through Maputo; now, less than two million do. And in the port's heyday, 90% of all traffic was to or from South Africa.

What is the South African traffic today? Joao Tembe, an inspector, shakes his head. "The figures are very low," he says.

### The Legacy

The joke around Maputo is that when the Portuguese left, even the shoeshine boys went. But no one is laughing, because it is too close to the truth.

Under colonialism, the Portuguese occupied every position that required a little skill. So, when independence came and the vast majority of the Portuguese left, control of the country fell into the hands of people who had never held anything more sophisticated than a hoe. The illiteracy rate was 93%. Depending on who it is that

you're talking to, the number of college graduates was somewhere between two and 11.

Eneas da Conceicao Comiche, the governor of the national bank, the Bank of Mozambique, remembers: "One Friday you go to the bank and everyone is there. On Monday you go to the bank and no one is there. Everyone went to Portugal on Saturday and didn't come back." For those remaining, he says, "it took us two years to understand what banking is."

Twelve years later, the understanding still isn't complete. In Beira, the country's second-largest city, a foreigner wants to pay for an airline ticket with an American Express credit card, accepted in countries around the world, allegedly even in Mozambique. He is sent across the street to the national bank. There, a clerk takes the card and begins passing it around to his colleagues as if it were some kind of moon rock. Finally, the bank manager grabs it. He puts on his glasses and holds the card close to his face. He turns it over and looks some more. He shakes his head. They want cash.

A Maputo businessman laughs at the tale. "In any business, if you don't know what you're doing you go bankrupt," he says. "Same with a country."

### Canada Price Index Increases

OTTAWA—Canada's consumer price index rose a seasonally adjusted 0.4% in March from February, Statistics Canada, a federal agency, said.

The March rise followed increases of 0.3% in February, 0.2% in January and 0.4% in December.