



INSIDE AFRICA

MOZAMBIQUE: Combating the MNR

For a while it seemed that the MNR had embarked upon a campaign to counteract the publicity about their famine-inducing activities in Mozambique. They had allowed Western journalists into the areas they controlled, to produce newspaper and television reports which gave a very different picture from those showing the MNR to be marauding groups of bandits who attack and kidnap the civilian population and destroy factories and power stations.

One television report showed MNR-controlled villages in the long-suffering Zambezi province in which food was plentiful and the inhabitants looked well-fed and healthy. Still other reports argued that as well as showing no signs of being afflicted by famine, villagers openly declare their support for the MNR and that, in the frequent skirmishes that characterise the conflict, it is the MNR who have the upper hand and not FRELIMO.

But there is no denying the overwhelming evidence which supports the FRELIMO government's accusations that the MNR is waging a war of destruction against the Mozambican people. Theirs is not the only voice drawing world attention to the emergency situation in the country: numerous aid agencies are doing the same and even the

Having to contend with the vagaries of its climate and failed agricultural and economic policies, the government may seem impotent in preventing the MNR from causing an even greater catastrophe

apolitical United Nations organisation, UNICEF, has attributed the level of human suffering in Mozambique to the activities of the MNR.

More than 4m Mozambicans are threatened by famine during 1987, partly because of drought and the resultant crop failure but more significantly because of rebel activities. The Mozambican Trade Ministry's Food Security Department has reported that in Zambezia province some 847,000 people are at risk from starvation; 609,000 in Sofala; 443,000 in Niassa province; 198,000 in Manica; 620,000 in Tete; 315,000 in Maputo; 409,000 in Gaza and 430,000 in Inhambane.

As in earlier reports, the government blames the level of the crisis on the numbers of people displaced from their homes because of MNR attacks and their practice of destroying roads and railway lines, completely isolating whole communities and effectively hampering the delivery of emergency food aid. Over two-thirds of the population in Niassa province is at risk, yet

the region is almost completely isolated. All routes into the province are constantly under attack, says the government and the only remaining access is through Malawi — by air.

The government is also having problems resettling the over 70,000 returned refugees and people rescued from areas recaptured from the rebels; some have been settled in green zones — fertile regions in Zambezia — where assistance is given for people to go back to production. In these regions, especially, the government is hoping that the aid it is requesting from international organisations will come in the form of clothing, farm tools and seeds and that cereals will be bought from neighbouring countries with surpluses, rather than have grain imported from the West. In this way, further long-term disruption of the Mozambican economy may be avoided.

The government estimated that three months (to the end of April) supply of cereal was 81,711 tons short of the required 241,331 tons. Furthermore, with expectations of the lowest harvest in 30 years, severe food shortages are likely to continue well beyond the next 12 months. The crisis is already being compared to that of Ethiopia's in 1984-85 with many aid agencies stepping in to provide relief aid. British organisations like Christian Aid, which supports the Christian Council of Mozambique, has raised some £285,000; Oxfam and UNICEF in a joint appeal has raised £370,000; and the American charity, CARE, has sent 21 tractors to distribute grain in the more remote areas of the country. Help is also coming from the United Nations; in addition to the 35,000 tons of grain that were pledged early in March, a donors' conference



Leonardo Simao: "The important thing is to prevent them from rejoining the bandits"

held in Geneva recently pledged a further US \$207m.

As a result of his visit to Europe (May 5-7), President Chissano was promised a further £15m by the British Government — on condition that an agreement between the IMF and Mozambique is reached.

But no one knows better than the Mozambicans that this sort of emergency aid can only scratch the surface of the problem. Their own analysis places the current crisis in the historical context of the South African and the ex-Rhodesian regimes' determination to maintain White domination over Southern Africa. The MNR was created by the Rhodesian Government to carry the war against Zimbabwean freedom fighters into their bases in the recently independent Mozambique. Later the South African regime took over the support of the MNR with the object of ensuring that the government should not regain control of its crippled economy, and thus be seen to be making a success of the revolution.

Consequently, when Western journalism carelessly describes the conflict as a "civil war," officials are quick to reply, as did Prime Minister Mario Machungo, there is no civil war in Mozambique: the MNR have

More than 4m Mozambicans are threatened by famine, many have fled to Malawi and Zimbabwe



A. JOE

ANDES PRESS AGENCY

no support base and are simply a manifestation of a regional war being waged by the South Africans and in which economic sanctions also play a crucial role. At the dawn of independence in 1975, 120,000 of South Africa's migrant workers were drawn from Mozambique. Since then South Africa has reduced the number to 60,000 and promises to reduce it by half again. Apart from obstructing access to the ports, by means of the MNR, South Africa has drastically cut down on the amount of traffic it sends through Maputo; from 6m tons in 1975 to 1m tons in 1986.

So what is Mozambique's strategy for dealing with the MNR and, more importantly, South African destabilisation? According to Minister of Information Teodato Hanguana, the strategy is two-pronged: involving military action inside the country, and diplomatic action outside.

In terms of the latter, Mozambique signed a security agreement with Malawi on December 18, last year, about which few details have emerged. But, it seems, that under pressure from the other frontline states the Malawians have agreed to discourage the use of its territory as a base by the MNR, have given FRELIMO the right of "hot pursuit" into its country and have even declared its preparedness to commit its troops in battle in support of FRELIMO. In March, President Banda actually announced that he would be sending 300 Malawian troops into Mozambique.

It seems, also, that Mozambique was able to get Malawi's agreement by demonstrating that it was in its long-term economic interest: the other side of the arrangement was a guarantee to provide Malawi with an outlet to the sea via the Beira line. Landlocked as Malawi is, its only exit to the sea lies through Mozambique — that is if it wishes to avoid using the transport routes through South Africa.

Even so, the arrangement must be a very tenuous one. On the one hand, it is difficult to see how Malawi can so easily extricate itself from South Africa's grip (it has to be assumed that the MNR operates out of Malawi with the tacit agreement, at the very least, of the government) and, on the other, the MNR is still capable of putting the Beira line out of action. In fact, the touch and go aspect of the situation was borne out by a report from a journalist who travelled from Blantyre to the southern tip of Malawi to investigate claims of MNR bases. He found none. But he did discover that MNR bandits were able to move freely and easily between the Mozambican and Malawian borders.

Nevertheless, the Mozambicans are convinced that such agreements are worthwhile. Not least because the very existence of these paper commitments seem to confer a measure of control on the Mozambicans. Hanguana cited the case of the Nkomati Accord; the South Africans have breached that agreement



The Massey-Ferguson trucks purchased by CARE: ready to set sail for Mozambique

many times and the FRELIMO government has evidence to prove it but, he says, whatever action the apartheid regime takes against Mozambique it has to be covert. It has to be seen to be respecting the principles of Nkomati and, as long as this remains the case, the FRELIMO government can at least cope with whatever the South Africans throw at it.

On the military front, Mozambique launched a major offensive against the MNR towards the end of last year and co-opted the help of Zimbabwean and Tanzanian troops. They recaptured many of the towns in Zambezi province — Mucuba, Micaune, Mopeia, Luabo — and for the moment at least seem to have stemmed the tide of the MNR's push towards coastal areas in Quelimane and Pebane.

But while there is no doubt as to where the MNR gets its financial and strategic support, it has to be said that some of its numbers at least are drawn from the Mozambican population. Leonardo Simao is director of provincial medicine in Zambezi province and, as such, his work has brought him into close contact with the bandits as well as their victims. It is very easy for the South Africans to recruit Mozambicans to join the MNR, he says, "there are a lot of people who work in the mines." The other obvious source is inside the country; when the MNR attack a village, they usually kidnap the young men, train them and force them to

commit ritual mutilation of villagers as a means of proving their loyalty to the MNR and at the same time ostracise themselves from their community and FRELIMO.

"They are forced to kill, eat a person's liver or to cut off the nose, breasts, ears etc of their victim, says Dr Simao. Once such acts have been committed, it is less likely that they will try to desert the MNR for fear of being killed if they return to their village.

But, according to Simao, FRELIMO does not give up on its citizens so easily. "When they escape, they are received by FRELIMO. We understand under what circumstances they join the MNR, and we try to reintegrate them into society." There is a rehabilitation centre in Inhambane where, says Simao, the problem is what to do with such people who are suffering from the psychological traumas of killing and addiction to drugs.

"We have found that if you restore dignity to a person and help him recover his social values he can produce, he can have normal relationships with other people; he feels supported by the community." MNR escapees are given land to cultivate, they go to school and have discussions with political commissars about their role in the MNR. "It is better to discuss their problems frankly. The aim is not only social rehabilitation but to prevent them from rejoining the bandits," says Simao

Pauline Cohen

Inspecting a seed multiplication project in Inhambane province: the government hopes that relief aid will also come in the form of seeds and farm tools

