

Outlook for Mozambique: A Drought and a Civil War

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KARUNGA, Mozambique — The rusty ferryboat, loaded with Red Cross supplies and too many passengers, made a serpentine course on what they call the River of Good Signs, chugging past flamingoes and pelicans and lone men in dugout canoes. The boat pulled up to a flat, muddy bank lined by a crowd of people suddenly gathered under the coconut palms.

There were young mothers so thin they could scarcely nurse their infants, men whose thin legs stuck out from tattered shorts, children with hollow eyes and distended bellies. They are the displaced persons of Mozambique's ongoing civil war. They are here amidst the stucco ruins of a Portuguese settler's farm to be sustained by gifts of Western grain, clothing, soap and medicine.

By any standard, Mozambique, torn by the decade-old civil war, is in desperate shape, badly in need of sustenance from the outside.

Contrary to dire forecasts made here some months ago, when Mozambique's Marxist Government asked for emergency food supplies, famine does not seem to have been widespread — at least not in the areas where information can be collected.

Since the Government's appeal to the United Nations early this year, thousands of tons of donated food and supplies have reached people who might not have survived otherwise.

But if large-scale starvation has been averted so far, Mozambican officials and aid workers emphasize that the war, combined with unusually dry conditions of the last several months, still threatens millions of people. They expect many, especially children, to suffer hardships including severe malnutrition, and they see the possibility of many deaths.

No Sign That War Is Near End

At the same time, the war, which pits a little known anti-Communist guerrilla force called Renamo against the Government headed by President Joaquim A. Chissano, shows little sign of diminishing in intensity, much less ending anytime soon.

Neither side seems able to decisively defeat the other. Most diplomats, aid workers and some officials here say that leaves Mozambique, as a stricken country, perpetually insecure, close to bankrupt, full of suffering and dependent on outside help for the survival of many of its citizens.

"The country is practically destroyed," an adviser to President Chissano said.

"When we got independence in 1975, we believed that Mozambique was a rich place where we could create a peaceful, prosperous country. The opposite has turned out to be the case."

Maputo Turns to West But Old Ties Continue

To try to deal with the crisis, and to correct what officials now freely admit were the mistakes of a rigid adherence to Marxist policies, the Mozambican Government has made a basic change in its foreign policy orientation. Officials now try to balance continuing close ties with the Soviet Union, East Germany and Cuba with greater cooperation with the West.

This has produced one of the few bright spots in the situation. The Government, helped by Western donors and a host of voluntary agencies, has shown it can put into place a huge relief operation reaching a large number of the areas affected by drought and war.

"We don't know about the populations that are inaccessible, and there are areas that are unreachable in this country," said one relief worker. "But if anybody in the accessible areas is starving, it is not because of a lack of food."

"It would be because they were moving from one place to another and died of exhaustion while on the way," the worker, Kim Balduc, a representative of the United Nations Disaster Relief Organization, said in her office in Maputo, the capital.

A United Nations report compiled in February says that as many as 3.5 million people, roughly one-quarter of Mozambique's entire population, are "severely affected" by the civil war or drought, meaning that they are unable to produce or buy enough food for themselves.

The report says one million people have been displaced from their homes by the war, many of them resettled in camps such as Karunga, where relief food can reach them by truck or riverboat convoys, most often guarded from guerrilla attack by the Mozambican Army.

"This is not like Ethiopia, where there were mass camps with people starving," said Vincent Nicod, the head of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Zambezia Province, where Karunga is situated. The reference was to the catastrophic Ethiopian famine of 1984-85.

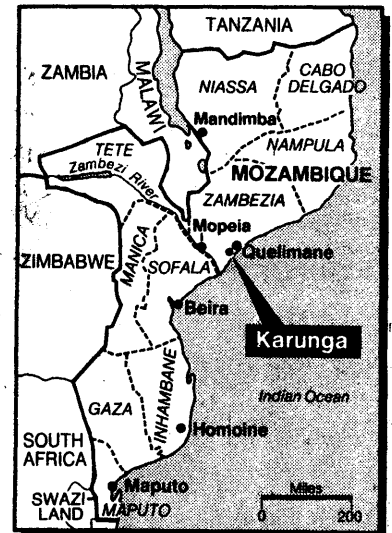
"Here it is all on a small scale and very spread out," he said. "You don't have huge numbers in one place, but maybe 25 people here or 100 there. They are small groups who are forced to move from one place to another, and these people are often in very bad shape."

Mr. Nicod said 20 to 25 percent of the children newly arriving in resettlement camps were suffering from severe malnutrition. He compared that with a "normal" African rate of 5 to 7 percent. In the village of Maganjadacosta, not far from here, some 18 children in a newly arrived group of 300 died of measles this month. Aid workers said the high death rate from the disease might be linked to their hunger-weakened state.

Thousands Are Brought By the Army to a Camp

This flat, arid area of cashew trees and elephant grass along the River of Good Signs has for several months been receiving refugees from farther west and north, particularly from towns along the Zambezi River, which cuts Mozambique into northern and southern halves.

More than 13,000 people have been brought to this sprawling camp, where entire villages of straw huts and straggly vegetable fields have been created under rows of coconut trees. The people here have fled what many call "bandit" attacks, referring to the rebels. Many have been brought here



Refugees have flooded into the sprawling camp at Karunga.

by the army in an apparent effort to deny Renamo recruits from the local population.

Some people say they lived in the bush with little to eat but roots for several weeks after attacks on their villages. A group of 400 new arrivals in Karunga, waiting for some old clothing, blankets and bars of soap to be distributed to them by the Red Cross, clearly showed signs of hardship. Children were commonly infected by scabies. Many of them were obviously malnourished. Young mothers sat listlessly on the ground holding onto skinny babies.

"You can always tell the new arrivals," Mr. Nicod of the Red Cross said. "They have nothing to eat, almost nothing to wear, no tools, cooking utensils, household goods. But they recover quickly and seem to be doing pretty well after a few months."

One of those new arrivals was Luis Santos Mpicha, a 26-year-old man in ragged clothing. He said the guerrillas attacked his village in the Micaenda district in July. Mr. Mpicha, who spoke to a reporter in the presence of Government representatives, described the "bandits" as young men without uniforms. He said they had long hair, tied up in small braids, beads around their necks and earrings. He said they attacked the village one day at dawn, stole food and supplies, and forced some villagers to carry bags apparently to a base camp some distance from the village. They set fire to some homes and shops and beat some villagers, he said.

When the village was retaken by

Government soldiers in mid-August, Mr. Mpicha said, they picked up villagers, many of whom had fled into the surrounding bush, and brought them to Karunga.

As Mr. Mpicha talked, a group of soldiers, singing and banging machetes against the side of their truck, arrived in the camp. With them were about a dozen people who had apparently taken refuge in the bush after a guerrilla attack. A few sparse items of furniture and a tattered bag or two were unloaded from the truck and the new arrivals marched off to be registered by the camp's officials.

The soldiers' commander called himself Jaguar, and he appeared to be drunk. He stayed in the camp for about half an hour, from time to time standing in the front of the 400 bedraggled new arrivals and leading them in chants of "the struggle continues," the major Government slogan in its fight against the guerrillas.

Travel in Countryside Is Considered Precarious

Residents of Maputo, Mozambique's Portuguese-built capital city, which shows few overt signs of the war, give a common example of the insecurity prevailing in the surrounding countryside, as guerrilla activities have increased during the last two years.

From Maputo's port, which is operating at one-third of its capacity, distant purple hills on the horizon mark the borders of Swaziland and South Africa. But, though the hills are only about 40 miles away, few people attempt the trip by road. It is simply not considered safe to venture that far from Maputo.

Indeed, the war, according to many accounts, has virtually sliced this long, coastal country into fragments, making most road travel outside of the major towns precarious.

Renamo, which is also known as the National Resistance Movement, or M.N.R., its Portuguese initials, has commonly attacked relief convoys taking donated grain to affected areas. The American aid organization CARE, which oversees the transport of relief food with a fleet of 348 donated trucks, has seen 12 of its vehicles put out of operation in such attacks.

International aid workers say one northern province, Niassa, has been virtually cut off from the rest of Mozambique, with the only access to the area for relief supplies being across the border with Malawi and back into this country near the border town of Mandimba.

But about three weeks ago, the sup-

ply route was interrupted when rebels attacked Mandimba. Recent Western visitors to the town say that it was virtually levelled.

The guerrillas have in the last two or so years managed to destroy all of the bridges across the Zambezi. Some river towns, such as Caia, Luabo and Mopeia, were recaptured by Government troops earlier this year after several months in rebel hands. But refugees from those areas say their towns suffered widespread damage and were largely uninhabited.

Renamo has, officials here say, managed to reduce rail transport from Africa's interior to Mozambique's Indian Ocean ports to a fraction of its normal level.

The Government, with the help of troops from Zimbabwe, has managed to open a corridor from the Zimbabwe border to the port of Beira, for three trains a day in each direction. Officials and aid workers say the line is more secure now than it has been in several years.

That achievement has been met by other moves toward restoring normal economic life. In Maputo, for example, Western businessmen are discussing deals with a Government newly receptive to foreign investments. The American company Edlow International has signed an agreement to mine titanium sands on the coast of Zambézia province, with protection provided by the army, diplomats here said.

However, the two other railroad lines in the south and north of the country have been entirely closed down, as Renamo has apparently sought to destroy one of this country's major traditional functions — to provide access to ports for the landlocked African countries to the west.

Early Days of Rebellion: Support From Rhodesia

The war dates back to early days of Mozambique's independence from Portugal in 1975, when the newly empowered Marxist government here provided support to black groups fighting the white minority government in what was then Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe.

In response, the Rhodesian white minority government provided arms to the newly formed Renamo, which has been in the field in this country ever since, and is estimated now to have as many as 25,000 armed followers scattered throughout the country, not enough to take power, but enough to wreak havoc.

In the war, taking place in a country without reliable transport or communications, each side has accused the other of massacres. In July, more than 380 people were reportedly killed in an attack on the village of Homoine. The Government blamed the deaths on the rebels.

It is an article of faith in Mozambique, and in such surrounding countries as Zimbabwe and Tanzania, who have sent troops to help in the war, that support for Renamo comes from South Africa, which would appear to be the only country in the region with an interest in undermining an unfriendly neighboring government. But the Mozambican authorities have been unable to provide conclusive proof of this.

The United States has chosen to distinguish between Renamo, which receives no direct American aid, and Unita, the major anti-Government resistance group in Angola, the other former Portuguese colony in Africa torn by civil war. Unita does receive military aid from the United States as well as South Africa.

In the resettlement camp of Ilova, a flat, dry stretch of reed homes, Mussa Alberto Bres, who is blind, sits by the banks of the River of Good Signs and sings African songs for some visitors.

Mr. Bres, whose village of Elalano was attacked by rebels last year, was led through the bush to safety by a friend.

He sang mostly love songs, such as one about the man whose mistress lived in the next village.

But there were also songs of war. In one, Mr. Bres sang, "If the army had no bazookas or rifles, I would be dead."