

The tragic effects of banditry

day Mail Reporter
BANDIT activities in the eastern border area of Rushinga have had an adverse effect on the development of this district which stretches for about 300 km from Mukosa to Mukumbura.

The district, which lies alongside Mozambique, has not known any real peace since the long years of the bitter liberation struggle as it was a zone of war between the freedom fighters and the then Rhodesian army.

In some of the areas close to the border, the roads are still mined and people cannot use these roads as they fear to detonate the mines.

The district, with its sparsely located villages, has never had time to recover from the war, hence the lack of development in food production, health and education services and other infrastructure. A brick house is a rare sight in remote areas of this district.

As the MP for Rushinga, C. Maddington Zvorwadza: "Some of our people are frightened to go and work in their fields because they may be abducted or even killed by the bandits. This has happened to those with

homes or fields along the border."

The added strain on the area's food production capacity is the distance between the fields and where the people now sleep in security-designated places for their protection.

"By the time these people arrive from their designated sleeping places, a lot of time would have been wasted and they reach the fields probably tired to do much work," said Cde Zvorwadza. School attendance by children is said to be very low.

Cde Zvorwadza said: "If there is gunfire today in the general direction of where the school is, attendance on the next day will be quite low."

He added that atrocities by South African-backed bandits had not only affected attendance at schools, but had also discouraged teachers from joining schools in the border areas, resulting in their being understaffed.

Banditry had had adverse effects on the transport situation in the affected areas. Although the transport network was good, certain bus operators were not going into other areas.

At the moment buses which used to travel as far as Mukosa were turning back at Marymount Mission and some of the passengers had to walk the extra 30 km.

Movement of buses usually depended on information on the whereabouts of bandits at a particular time.

Cde Zvorwadza said that potential business developers were now reluctant to go to the border areas and those who were already there did not seem to be expanding their businesses.

Although the security forces were doing a good job in trying to contain the situation to the extent that the confidence of the local population was being restored, business speculators still felt that the atmosphere was not conducive for investment.

"If ever there is a situation of peace and tranquillity, the business speculators are not satisfied this state of affairs is going to last. Total security cannot be guaranteed," he said.

Cde Zvorwadza said there was a scarcity of commodities in the existing shops not only because of the war, but also because of the long distance from the nearest

wholesalers.

Another serious issue in this war-ravaged district was a lack of health services. Although the present position of medical supplies was not known, in the past medicines were always running out.

This was also due to some Mozambicans who used to come to the clinics in the district for medical treatment until the local people had to complain.

The district has never had adequate doctors and nurses since the days of the liberation struggle. In the whole district, there were only two missionary doctors and not a single Government doctor.

Since independence, with the provision of more clinics and schools, said Cde Zvorwadza, professionals like doctors, teachers, nurses and physical planners were not interested in working in the area. This resulted in a situation where there were more facilities than staff.

Lack of good accommodation, water and electricity, compounded by banditry, has added to the disinterest.

Although the Rushinga picture might look gloomy, there were some develop-

ment projects taking place. Work on the eradication of the tsetse fly was almost complete with a 100 percent success rate.

People who did not have any cattle due to the tsetse fly were now being encouraged to buy cattle and also to breed other livestock.

Cde Zvorwadza said that besides the isolated incident when MNR bandits blew up a borehole and poisoned the water, the water situation in the district was not bad. Boreholes were being drilled and dams were also being constructed.

The telephone system had been improved thereby helping communication especially in times of bandit attacks. There was, however, a serious need to upgrade the roads which were bad during the rainy season.

A piece of land had been provided for the building of a police station which was expected to be put up soon. Some co-operatives, which included some that make bread, were doing well.