

# How to survive on R45 a month

S Times [Jb] 23/1/94

**MOZAMBIQUE** has vast tracts of arable land, great tourism potential, diamonds, gold, bauxite, uranium and the world's largest gas field. Yet it is officially classified as the poorest country in the world with the average citizen earning R250 a year.

The inescapable conclusion is that Mozambique's abject poverty is man-made rather than a curse cast by the gods on its hapless people.

Officially, there is little economic activity in Mozambique. As a UN military observer put it: "People here seem to wander aimlessly. You do not see them farming or engaging in any productive activity. This is in stark contrast to what I saw in Zimbabwe and South Africa."

Mozambique is bankrupt. Over half of its budget is funded by outside donors. Despite signs of donor fatigue, there is a realisation that the country will simply collapse without international support to finance imports and upgrade the infrastructure.

Thirty years of war meant that agricultural activity was virtually impossible. For many years, gripped by revolutionary fervour and a missionary zeal to crush Renamo, President Samora Machel's government opted to barter prawns for AK-47s from the then Soviet Union, denying the country much-needed foreign currency.

Many people wonder how the people of Mozambique survive. According to official figures, Mozam-

Reports: TENDAI DUMBUTSHENA

bique's export earnings in 1993 were a paltry R200-million, mainly from textiles, cashew nuts and fisheries.

But according to South Africa's charge d'affaires in Maputo, Mr John Sunde, statistics from Pretoria show that R400-million worth of goods from Mozambique found their way to South Africa in the first six months of last year.

Such major discrepancies can be attributed not only to the inefficiency of the Mozambican bureaucracy, but also to the role of the informal sector, which has become increasingly criminalised.

The informal sector somehow allows many inhabitants of this impoverished land to survive. The stipulated minimum wage is about R45 a month,



CONTRABAND . . . young street-sellers show off their wares in downtown Maputo

Pictures: JON HRUSA

not enough to buy a 50kg bag of rice which costs about R55.

Virtually all consumer goods in Mozambican shops are of South African origin. Many are smuggled into the country and sold in the streets for half the price.

This applies particularly to soft drinks and cigarettes, some of which are smuggled from Zimbabwe.

According to Mr Sunde, a lot of beer exported to Mozambique from South Africa finds its way to other countries through illegal

channels. Even more serious is the smuggling of guns, mandrax and cars. Guns and mandrax find their way to South Africa in exchange for luxury cars, money, food and soft goods.

Mozambican criminals also smuggle four wheel-

drive Land Cruisers, not assembled in South Africa, across the border.

South African police recently handed over a stolen UN vehicle recovered in Piet Retief to the United Nations Operation in Mozambique.

But it is the danger

posed to the ordinary motorist driving across the border to Mozambique which causes the greatest concern.

Undisciplined elements of Frelimo and Renamo either extort money from motorists under the threat of impounding their cars or they simply seize the cars.

Zambian UN troops patrolling the Moamba area near the border with Swaziland and South Africa said an elderly white South African couple miraculously escaped unharmed when five shots were fired at their car.

In response to widespread theft and smuggling, the South African embassy has a crime unit manned by three senior police officers. South African citizens involved in the smuggling of mandrax have been arrested.

In terms of economic activity, Mozambique is virgin land ready to be exploited. Mr Sunde believes it has the potential to overtake Zimbabwe as South Africa's biggest trading partner outside the customs union.

But a lot has to be done for Mozambique to realise that potential and to stop its budding Mafia from extending its tentacles to the formal sector of the economy.