

# Mozambique feels the pain of war

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AN HOUR'S drive out of Maputo, past citrus orchards, a model state dairy farm, a trim military base, and many miles of empty pink grasslands, lies a large, almost finished, dam which next year will secure the capital's water supply and irrigate 17,000 acres of new farmland. The \$160 million Pequenos Libombos site, where 100 heavily guarded Italians work and play with the aid of badminton, tennis, swimming, and a restaurant they say is the best in Mozambique, is part of a three dam scheme of electricity and irrigation in Southern Mozambique. At the same time, in the north, the country's most ambitious hydro-electric plant at Cahora Bassa teeters, like much else in the country, on the verge of complete collapse under the pressure of South African-backed sabotage. Meanwhile, Mozambique is paying \$6m a year to South Africa for imported electricity although the scheme was designed to export to South Africa.

The contrast illustrates the gap between Mozambique's hopes and its achievements. The great turbines of the new dams, like the crowds of laughing children in any neighbourhood creche, the vaccination cards which virtually every child in the country has, or the general elections for the People's Assembly being held this month, are some of the country's extraordinary triumphs over the impossible.

Nationhood have been built up in an economic and social desert bequeathed by the Portuguese and further laid waste by South Africa's undeclared war and economic sanctions. Portugal's colonial rule was Africa's most grotesque experience of exploitation — human and material resources were sucked out to Portugal and South Africa, leaving a country which South Africa determined to make a bantustan after Portuguese colonial society rotted away. The brutalising legacy of Portuguese colonialism plus the terrible economic deprivation and dislocation of recent years explains why South Africa can fund tens of thousands of Mozambicans to fight their fellows, agents of a terror they do not even try to understand.

Captured MNR guerrillas usually say they were fighting against Russians, but "they have no concepts of nationhood or patriotism," according to one province governor who has talked to many former bandits now being re-integrated into Frelimo villages and organisational structures. "Education — to combat fatalism, so our citizens are no longer circumscribed by their village, but understand its place in our nation and Mozambique's place in the wider world — is a fundamental part of our huge battle," explains Mario de Graça Machungo, Planning Minister and a member of the 11-man Political Bureau.

Top officials readily concede that the creation of a

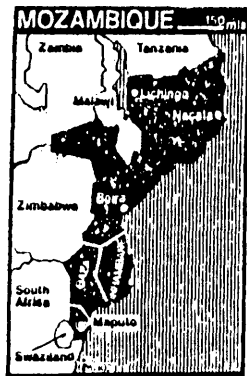
Mozambique which is non-racial, non-aligned, socialist, and economically viable has faltered against even greater obstacles than were expected. Only the end of apartheid will allow development to be put back on the agenda, they say. The Nkomati peace pact, signed with South Africa two years ago and now acknowledged only to have bought a modest breathing space, is over.

"Only 10 years ago 90 per cent of us were illiterate — we had no middle managers, or indeed managers on any level, no organisers," said Machungo, explaining the recent welcome by Mozambique of some foreign multinationals such as Lonhro.

"The capital they are putting in is management which means know-how and the beginnings of a transfer of technology." Western observers refer triumphantly to Lonhro's successful farms as "the garden of Eden."

But the investments from the West, hoped for as part of the Nkomati peace pact, are still barely perceptible. A few peevish South African businessmen stay at the beautiful old Polana Hotel overlooking Maputo's bay and talk about "getting in here at the start." Certainly Mozambique's economy has never been so deeply vulnerable.

In the early years of independence UN sanctions against Ian Smith's Rhodesia cost Mozambique \$510m over four years. Drought, floods, famine, and war followed without a breathing space. The fragile Mozambican economy suffered Africa's



continent-wide collapse of the terms of trade after the world oil price rise and went into "sharp decline" from 1982, according to the minister.

To illustrate the seriousness of the current situation he cited export figures of 18 million tons per annum from 1980-82, now down to 2 million tons for last year, and international rail freight down from 11 million tons to 2 million in the last decade. South Africa attracts freight from the landlocked hinterland by slashing prices. South Africa has spent millions on sabotaging the railways. Today repair teams are at work constantly — one train carrying soldiers, sleepers, and rails creeps in front of the goods trains still penetrating Mozambique's vast under-populated interior.

South Africa has reduced

the number of migrant mineworkers, once an important cushion for the economy, to 50,000 men — less than half the number at independence. It is now threatening to send even these home — which would increase the already serious unemployment in urban areas.

Last year President Samora Machel declared a war economy. Sabotage has slashed production figures in key industries. Coal was down from 240,000 tons in 1975 to less than half that figure in 1982, and this year is "insignificant," according to Machungo. Cement dropped similarly from 120,000 tons at independence to half by 1982, "and today we are importing." The pattern in almost every other industry is similar. (There are exceptions such as the cashew nut factories in Inhambane which this year are working double shifts and commandeering extra storage space after a bumper crop following a sustained government effort.)

The country is dependent on food aid. Agriculture has been destroyed much more by the bandits' terrorising of villagers and semi-paralysing transport than by Frelimo's openly acknowledged early errors in agricultural policy. In some rural areas people are literally naked, shops are empty, and communication with state structures completely broken down. Estimates of 1.8 million people in need of food and other essentials for displaced people are approximations. There is neither the administration nor the transport to care for

them beyond the coast and the province capitals.

Since the famine crises of 1983/4 aid agencies have mushroomed in Maputo and thousands of lives were saved by emergency food distribution programmes. But today the impact of high-spending international bodies on a weak administration is less positive. Donors now frequently use their aid to try to enforce policy changes, say officials. The US, for instance, has put a small amount of high profile aid behind successful large private farmers — a symbolic contradiction of Frelimo's commitment to poor peasants. And, with a 170 per cent debt service ratio, Mozambique is unlikely to be able to resist the usual IMF package of privatisation and social welfare cuts which have recently been imposed in other African countries with similar economic crises such as in Tanzania and Ghana.

Mozambique's primary health programme, which independent health experts describe as the most impressive in Africa, may be the first noticeable casualty. If so it will be a serious political blow to Frelimo which uses preventive health care as a key plank in community organising in both urban and rural areas.

Today, in spite of the war, vaccinations are still being done even in areas where a kerosene shortage means no refrigerators work and a 12-day cool bag is the only possible recourse. This week, in a typical gesture towards the

future all final year student doctors are going into rural areas for a month's practical work.

Aid donors, particularly the EEC and the Scandinavians, are also deeply involved in long-term economic development schemes across the country. Most important is the SADC network of communications and other projects aimed at reducing the nine Southern African countries' economic dependence on South Africa. These aid officials say that "the best counter to MNR is economic development," but senior Mozambican officials such as Machungo see the opposite. "Economic initiatives, large, medium, or small are precisely the targets for destruction."

To visit a factory at random in Maputo and talk to workers who have become managers, or the children of peasants from remote villages who are doing advanced courses in high quality art-work, or formerly illiterate women who are organised through Frelimo structures into access to a wider world than husbands and homes, is to see the real threat from Mozambique to South Africa and its allies. A mythical base for a few ANC guerrillas was never as dangerous as the example of an organised black workers' and peasants' state. As the Chief of Staff, Colonel-General Sebastião Mabote, put it for the region, "the class struggle is bound to continue... not everyone might like our constitution..."