Banditry hits schools

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UP to a third of the children in the outlying communal lands of Chiredzi have dropped out of school following an increase in banditry by South African-sponsored MNR bandits.

According to minutes of a recent emergency meeting of the district development committee the worst affected was Machindu Primary School which lost 200 pupils. The school had an enrolment of 600.

Others were Chipinda Primary School where 100 of its 450 pupils left, Chibwedziva lost 120 of its 802, Muhlanguleni lost 120 of its 822, Maslvamele had 95 of its 455 pupils leaving and 32 of the 375 pupils of Chibwedziva Secondary School also left.

"It is true that a lot of children have left school," the Masvingo provincial Governor, Senator Dzikamayi Mavhaire, said.

The local MP, Cde Titus Maluleke, said it was possible that the repatriation of displaced Mozambicans could have contributed to the "high and unacceptable" number of school dropouts.

"When this exercise was introduced it affected the enrolments of both primary and secondary schools because the Mozambicans were living among the local people."

Also because of the banditry some parents were taking their children out of the area.

"The drought has also tended to affect attendance because when the children are hungry they find it difficult to attend classes," Cde Maluleke said.

Following appeals from local authorities, the Red Cross had introduced feeding schemes in both primary and secondary schools.

Similar schemes sponsored by Non-Governmental Organisations are normally restricted to primary schoolchildren in the first four grades.