

Mozambique Communes Aim to Spawn New Socialist Man

By David B. Ottaway

NAKURULA, Mozambique — Sixty-year-old Bakare Ahmadi stood proudly at attention beneath the cashew trees, spit between his teeth a good 10 feet into the underbrush, and told his visitors how the villagers had just slain a marauding lion.

As lion tales go in Africa, his was nothing exceptional. The villagers had banded together and held off the roaring intruder until someone had time to run and get a militiaman who shot it.

But Bakare was not just telling a lion's tale. He was explaining one of the first benefits of his new way of life in a communal village and why he decided to come to Nakurula.

"Before Frelimo came, we lived dispersed all around here," he said, pointing vaguely to a nearby lowland area leading to the ocean visible on the horizon. (Frelimo stands for the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique, the country's ruling party.) "They had this idea of living together to help each other and some of us decided to try it."

Besides the "communal" victory over the lion, Bakare told of hopes of new money coming from the village's collective plot where cotton is being grown.

"All of us feel that we can get more money from collective farming. With more money, we will build better houses and buy a tractor. Also I want to buy my wife some clothes," said Bakare, who was wearing a badly torn army jacket over the remains of a grimy pair of shorts.

A hamlet of 160 people, Nakurula does not even appear on local maps. But to the Marxist government of Mozambique, what is taking place here and in dozens of similar backcountry villages is extremely important.

It is from these communal villages that Frelimo intends to see a "new socialist man" arise from the ashes of nearly 500 years of Portuguese colonialism.

Other African countries, most notably neighboring Tanzania, have also gone in quest of this "new man" by establishing collectives. But his birth has often been a painful one, and the results of such villages have generally failed to impress economists and left dissatisfied even those African leaders with a burning socialist faith.

The most serious shortcoming of most African experiments in collectivization has been their failure to produce enough to feed the country. While social and political goals have often been furthered, economic ones have not.

Here in Mozambique, this already

acknowledged problem is being tackled by the simultaneous establishment of large-scale state farms on many of the more than 2,000 abandoned Portuguese farms. In fact, the government has given priority to this modern sector, earmarking \$25 million for 1,200 tractors and other farm implements in a crash campaign aimed at achieving 1973 crop production levels by 1981.

While economic priority is going to the burgeoning state farm sector, Frelimo's ideological commitment clearly lies with the communal villages, which eventually will probably be home for the vast majority of the peasant population. In fact, they are at the heart of Frelimo's effort to create "People's power," or direct democracy, throughout the long neglected rural areas.

The number of communal villages is still relatively small, less than 200, according to one estimate. But a new one springs up practically every week.

"It is a national movement involving thousands of people," said one Mozambican journalist who was full of praise for the project.

While the villages vary in size from the 34 families of Nakurula to the 11,000 people in one in southern Gaza Province, the government is reported to prefer basic units of no more than 250 families, grouped around common facilities such as a school, clinic or social center.

Where possible, four such villages may share a set of such facilities.

The basic approach to the process of collectivization seems to be one of persuasion combined with a heavy emphasis on self-reliance. A local Frelimo party executive explained how he got Nakurula and two other villages like it going in his area:

"I came and spoke about Frelimo's ideology and explained the advantages of living together in communal villages. Then I asked, 'Who will join the village?' Some said yes, and we began with a collective field with the houses coming later."

The idea, it seems, is that the communal field in each village should be used to produce a cash crop to generate money for the purchase of a tractor and items for a local consumers' cooperative. But each family keeps a separate private plot to grow its own food.

"We said frankly, 'You are on your own. The government will give no help at the beginning. But if it sees the will to work, then it will help.'"

In many villages, the government provides loans to help the peasants buy tractors or construction materials for houses, clinics and schools. But compared to the state farms, govern-

ment assistance seems minimal.

In each of the country's 10 provinces, there is already an "assistance office" to help the state farms, and the government provides tractors and foreign managerial personnel in addition to marketing the produce.

The state farms are getting \$50 million over a three-year period from the Scandinavian countries while Cuba, East Germany, Bulgaria and Sweden are sending agricultural experts to help run them.

One example of how the abandoned Portuguese farms are being managed today as state enterprises is in the rich farming highlands around Chimio (formerly Vila Pery), 100 miles west of Beira port in central Mozambique. There, 85 such farms, all of 2,500 acres or more, have been regrouped into four huge "production units" based on the East German model.

Which type of farm—state or communal—will ultimately prove the most successful remains to be seen. But it seems Frelimo has decided to rely mainly upon the state farms to solve the country's food and cash crop problems while counting on the communal villages to fulfill its ideological aspirations.