

# MNR war takes its toll on Mozambique's development

YEARNINGLY, a small black boy in the gutter of a street in Maputo, stares at the huge and nearly overloaded shopping bag of a foreigner passing by. Other youngsters press their noses against the iron-bar protected windows of the LOGIA FRANCA supermarket, and are delighted that they can at least visualize the wide variety of fruits, vegetables, tins, and milk products, although they will probably never be able to buy them.

This is a typical scene in front of the new shopping centres in the capital of Mozambique where everything is available, but for foreign currency only.

The supply situation for the 13 million Mozambicans, who do not have access to foreign currency, is still very poor. However, experts say that the situation is far better than it was six months ago when people suddenly collapsed in the middle of a street and died of malnutrition.

The many cooperatives, especially in the zonas verdes, or green belts around the cities are improving. But, women with babies on their backs in colourful clothes, must still wait for hours in front of the cooperative shops, where only half a litre of cooking oil is delivered. Looking for the next day's meal is a major preoccupation of the Mozambicans. Only a few people can afford to work a full workday, therefore production has almost ceased.

A few goods like cashews and cotton clothes, which are still produced go straight into the export market in order to purchase needed petrol and diesel.

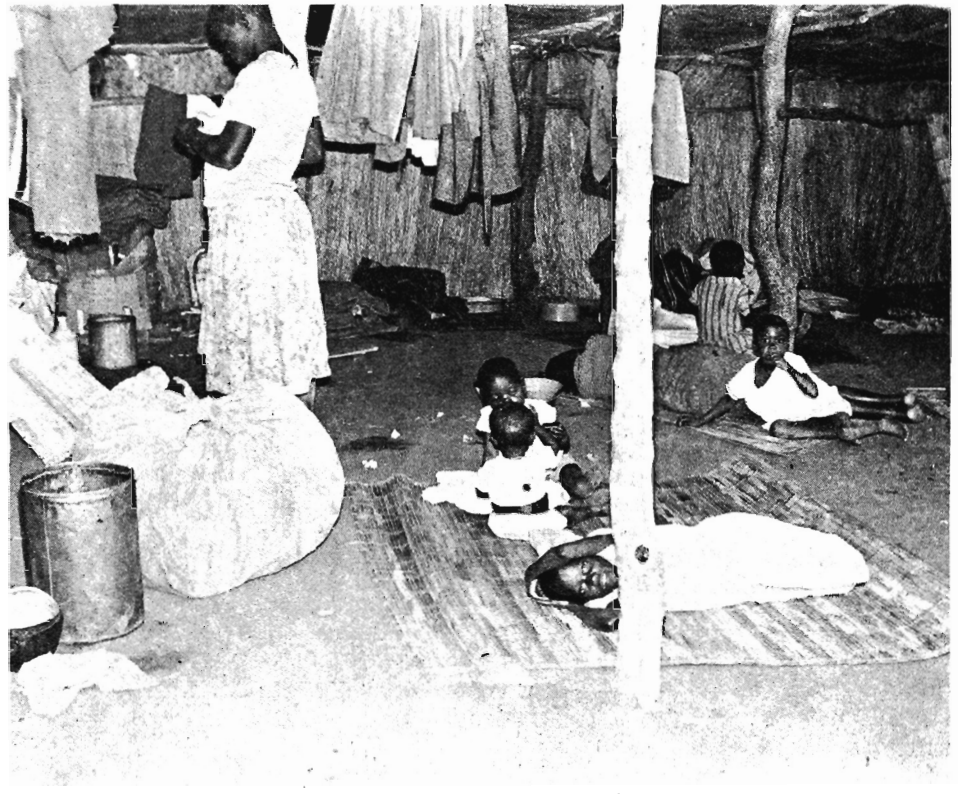
At present, Mozambique is not far from social and economic collapse. The non-declared civil war between Frelimo and the national resistance army (MNR), now in its 8th year, continues more vehemently than before.

The Nkomati Accord, signed between Mozambique and South Africa seven months ago, has not brought peace to the country. On the 3rd of October, another agreement was launched in Pretoria where for the first time discussions were held between Frelimo, South Africa and the MNR. Four topics were highlighted:

- \* All fighting in Mozambique should stop at once;
- \* Cde Samora Machel is and will be the President of the People's Republic of Mozambique;
- \* South Africa has been officially asked by the Mozambican government to take an active part in security measures; and
- \* A commission is being established, with members from the three groups, to work out "technical details".

The reports of western news agencies, however, were strongly criticized by the official Mozambican press which denied that in direct talks the delegations had come to a ceasefire agreement. On the contrary, the daily newspaper *Noticias* urges the population not to give up efforts to fight the rebels.

It appears as if the three parties have put



Mozambican refugees at Marymount Mission in Zimbabwe. Thousands of Mozambican men, women and children crossed the border to escape MNR attacks in Tete.

Picture by Birgitta Lagerstrom

## Christopher Fleischer reports from Mozambique on the suffering caused to the Mozambican people by the eight year undeclared war with the MNR and what steps Frelimo is taking to contain the threat.

all their hope in the joint commission which has met several times, but in vain. The decisive point in the negotiations is obviously the political ramifications of South Africa's role in security guarantees.

The first official Mozambican statement said that it was a positive sign that South Africa now controlled the MNR instead of continuing to support them.

However, it has become quite obvious that South Africa has no direct influence over MNR. South Africa has now started to deliver arms to Frelimo, but it seems unlikely that Samora Machel's government will allow independent operations of South African troops within the country, as well as acknowledging MNR as a political factor and consequently sharing power with them. But, political observers believe limited South African military support, controlled by the Frelimo supreme command, will be possible.

The Mozambican troops lack the appropriate equipment and training to fight the rebels successfully. Apart from South Africa it is said that the MNR is also supported by exile Portuguese in South Africa and Europe, as well as by Israel.

It is ironic that Pretoria is now regarded as the important mediator in a dispute which was caused by South Africa's own massive support for the MNR, and an economic boycott, which devastated the former Portuguese colony.

Frelimo had no alternative but to sign the recent agreement, because the country has been so ravaged, especially in the rural areas. The rural population favours an end to war because they suffer most from the guerilla fights.

There is a lack of essential foodstuffs such as oil, sugar, and salt. And, a major problem has been the interruption and destruction of nearly all roads and railway lines by MNR attacks. The three years of drought would not have been so harmful to the country and the population, if there was an efficient supply system.

The production of food in some rich provinces, especially northern and central Mozambique could be sufficient to feed the whole nation. Well-informed sources say that a third of the drought relief food, which is brought into Mozambique from Malawi by international aid organisations, was grown originally in Mozambique.

The black market is flourishing in Mozambique, but the poor are adversely affected.

Five fish cost as much as half of a worker's monthly salary. One goat is worth one pound of salt; a pair of second hand trousers for a child is worth a week's salary; and a ticket from Tete to Maputo, 1 200 kilometres costs 4500 Medikaisch, as much as a skilled worker earns in a month, or \$4,00 (US) on the black market.

The essential supplies in some inaccessible provinces are only guaranteed by airplanes organized by international organisations like the League of the Red Cross and the American aid organisation, CARE. In Beira, the second largest harbour in the country, there are about 30 000 tonnes of goods for the northern provinces of Tete and Nam-pula. But the transport system has broken down because many lorries are blown up in bandit attacks. Once a month, Frelimo soldiers must guard a convoy which carries supplies via the inner roads to Tete. It takes approximately 10 days for the 600 km journey, and an average of four people are killed in clashes with bandits.

People in the provinces suffer not only from the lack of food, but many civilians have been killed by MNR. About 30 percent of all the patients in the surgery department at the Province hospital in Tete, are victims of MNR attacks, which now take place between Tete and the Malawian border.

In the northern province, Mipanse in Angonia, eye-witnesses reported that in September, 32 persons were stabbed with daggers and axes; consequently about 10 000 people, in mortal fear, crossed over the nearby border to Malawi.

Maputo is prepared for a long lasting emergency situation. The arterial roads are only used on urgent missions, fuel can only be bought with foreign currency, and the electricity network and water supply is disrupted for about four to seven hours a day.

The public transport system almost does not exist any more, which means that most people have to walk. Where the administration does work, it is not functioning well. A person who wants to pay a telephone bill has

to queue at least half a day. But if one misses the deadline, the phone is disconnected promptly the next day.

Mozambican people seem to have adapted to the conditions, and are still able to enjoy even the smallest pleasures they are offered. If music emerges from an open window, youngsters nearby begin to swing with the rhythm. The youth share an ambivalent feeling of life that balances between doomsday and vibrant vitality.

This willpower will be needed by Mozambican politicians during the coming months. The politicians are faced not only with the drought and talks to end the civil war, but a complete change of economic goals and policy is being discussed.

Negotiations have begun with the IMF, the World Bank and USAID. Private companies are assured of tax exemptions and unchecked profit repatriation.

For the Mozambican who fought for independence these new changes are hard to understand. But it seems as if the country has no other choice. □