

OPINION

Mozambique under siege

How Maputo is fighting back

By August Richard Norton

ONE doesn't have to venture far from Maputo's drab airport to see evidence of the poverty and economic disorder that are strangling Mozambique. The route to downtown Maputo is flanked by ramshackle dwellings that hint at the awesome deprivation to be found throughout the country.

Maputo, abutting the Indian Ocean, could be a most pleasant city. It offers some lovely vistas, but the post-card views are no compensation for the capital's residents whose money has little buying power and who depend on daily food rations to subsist.

Shop windows that appear to announce merchandise within are usually little more than displays of yellowed posters promoting merchandise that was sold years ago. Most shop shelves are bare. The prices on available merchandise are high; Mozambique's currency was devalued by 90 percent against the dollar earlier this year.

The problems are much worse outside the capital. Mozambique is a country besieged by hunger, poverty, drought, and violence. Its declining per capita income, \$140 a year, is one of the lowest in the world. During the drought of 1983-84 some 100,000 people died of starvation. Food, such as grain and cooking oil, and other basic items including soap are being rationed throughout the country.

The government estimates that 4.5 million of Mozambique's 14.4 million people face food shortages. About 2 million of the total have been displaced, either by hunger or by the armed attacks of marauders who enjoy South African support.

People are literally without clothes in some areas. Grain sacks or rags, where available, are converted into crude clothing.

The government lacks resources to deal with the emergency. The national treasury is broke, and Mozambique's meager projected export earnings are not even adequate to pay the interest due on loans.

The situation is likely to get worse as Mozambicans working in the gold mines of South Africa are repatriated in next year; an estimated \$30 million in vital foreign exchange will be lost.

About 30 aid organizations are working with admirable efficiency to stem the misery. Despite their work and the impressive sums—close to \$1 billion—pledged so far, massive food shortages are still expected.

Securing food is only one aspect of the emergency effort. Transportation remains a major problem. Poor or nonexistent roads and the risk of attack impede food distribution. The United Nations Development Program has had to fly food supplies to areas particularly hard hit by drought and fighting. As a result, the

cost of delivered food is sometimes increased tenfold.

Many of Mozambique's problems stem from its failed experiment with socialism. State farms and communal villages simply didn't work. In fact, they lowered production.

Since 1983, Mozambique's ardor for Marxism has cooled. Officials are disarmingly candid in admitting their mistakes, and recent moves have been made to allow a free market to operate. Farm goods may now be sold directly by the farmer; prices, however, are high. In one roadside rural market less than a pound of tomatoes cost about \$1.25. Even in areas where security is good, lingering drought and the lack



of seed and tools keep productivity very low.

The country was left poorly prepared for independence in 1975. The Portuguese departed almost en masse. At the time, more than 90 percent of the native population was illiterate.

Yet, the new government might have muddled through if it were not for 12 years of insurgency. Indeed, the ruling Mozambique Liberation Front (Frelimo), which led the struggle against Portugal, did make significant progress in health care and education. But these advances are now in shambles. About 2,000 schools and 25 percent of all health clinics in the country have been destroyed, largely by rebel forces backed by South Africa.

The Mozambique National Resistance Movement (Renamo), which is supplied, trained, and, at times, directed by South Africa, has seriously complicated Mozambique's already severe difficulties.

A 1984 agreement obliged Pretoria to stop supporting Renamo, in exchange for an end of support by Maputo of the anti-apartheid African National Congress. Yet South Africa has continued to provide support. In 1985, South Africa conceded that it had "technically violated" the agreement and that elements within its borders continued to help Renamo.

Renamo is widely viewed as part of South Africa's campaign to destabilize its black African neighbors, keep them economically dependent, and deter support for South Africa's opponents. Mozambique's three ma-

ior rail lines are important outlets to the Indian Ocean and potential alternatives to the South African rail network. If Mozambique were stable and its rail system in full operation, South Africa's dominant economic role would be undermined.

South Africa's involvement in Renamo has included resupply, intelligence, and training.

Although Renamo spokesmen depict the organization as a political foe of the "Marxist" government of Mozambique, Renamo has not won popular support; its attacks intimidate and terrify the population. Besides attacking bridges, rail lines, electrical pylons, schools, and dispensaries, Renamo attacks people. The most serious Renamo massacre occurred in July, when as many as 424 people were killed in Homoine.

Mozambique's Army has been ill equipped to deal with the threat. Frelimo officials describe the Army as inefficient, underpaid, underfed, poorly trained, and even undisciplined. Some Army elements and free-lance criminals have looted and killed, just as Renamo has. But Mozambique lawmakers have discussed a possible tribunal system to deal with military crimes, and President Joaquim Chissano has publicly focused on the Army's defects.

The key factor in turning back Renamo has been the strength of the Zimbabwean Army deployed along the strategically important Beira rail corridor. Contingents from Tanzania and Malawi guard sections of the northernmost rail line and can stave off disaster, but they are inadequate to defeat Renamo. Mozambique must eventually shoulder the bulk of the struggle.

Mozambique has won the support of a number of European governments. The British give more aid to Mozambique than to any other country and provide crucial military training. The United States provided \$85 million in aid in 1987. Italy, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, and Portugal are all heavily involved, and Canada is stepping up its assistance. It seems likely, too, that several other Commonwealth countries will provide vital self-defense aid, which should help redress the inability of villagers to defend themselves from attack.

The moral stake in Mozambique is as obvious as it is basic—the future of people who deserve a chance to live. But there are geopolitical stakes as well. If South Africa's campaign to destabilize Mozambique can be thwarted, real and significant reform within South Africa may occur.

The author is an associate professor at the US Military Academy in West Point, N.Y. He was one of three members of a fact-finding mission that visited Mozambique earlier this fall. The visit was organized by the International Peace Academy, which will soon release an extensive report on the group's findings.