



Renamo in retreat

Since Zimbabwean and Tanzanian forces have entered the war, Renamo is being forced to fight mainly in the south. But the struggle is far from ended and the toll of human misery continues. *Coleen Lowe Morna* sends this on-the-spot report from Caia.

ONCE upon a time, there was to have been a third bridge across the mighty Zambezi river where it cuts through Mozambique. Ceta, the parastatal construction company, had gone so far as to put in the concrete pillars at the sugar plantation town of Caia when South African-backed "Renamo (MNR) rebels, operating from Malawi, seized the town in December 1986, driving out its 85,000 inhabitants.

The tide turned in February, 1987 when a combined Zimbabwe-Frelimo force, determined to root the MNR out of northern Mozambique, retook the town, which is situated at the strategic intersection of the railway line to Malawi and the Zambezi river in the northern Sofala province. But cut off from the rest of the country by floods, and still at the centre of a tug of war between government

Frelimo and Renamo, the bridge project in Caia has been indefinitely put off.

Instead, its vast iron coils and steel rods rust away in what used to be a sugar warehouse. In amongst the rubble, bright rays of sunlight that pierce through cracks in the roof reveal small parties of men, women and children, boiling tin pots of leaves and other greenery. The shed, explains the local administrator, Abel Alfonso Sande, is the first stopping point for the 9,000 returnees and "displaced" persons fleeing Renamo's reign of terror in the countryside, who have taken refuge in the town, earlier this year. A group of these grew some beans, which never bore any seeds. Not to be deterred, they cook the leaves and stalks anyway, in a final bid to survive.

It is this combination of determination and desperation that characterises Mozambique, as it enters its seventh year of war, with close to one million of its people

Mozambique – horrors of war



Mozambican refugees on the weary trek to safety, after their life is disrupted by Renamo

taking refuge in neighbouring countries, another one million "displaced" within the country and close to one third of its fourteen million people in need of food aid.

As witnessed at Caia, some important military gains have been made in the north, particularly since Zimbabwean and Tanzanian forces joined the offensive. The most visible Renamo attacks over the last year have been in the south, with support apparently coming directly from South Africa, as opposed to it being filtered through Malawi.

"It's not the all out warfare that it

used to be in the north and centre," says one aid worker in Beira, the provincial capital of Sofala. Countrywide, Frelimo's morale is reported to be up, while in-fighting in the top hierarchy of the MNR – epitomised by the murder of one of its chief spokespersons, Evo Fernandes in Lisbon recently – has cast serious doubts on the ability of the organisation to hold together.

Yet a map of "conditions of accessibility" put together by the UN for relief work purposes this year shows virtually the entire country, save for the northernmost Cabo Delgado province and strips

along the heavily patrolled Zimbabwe border, to be affected in some way by MNR activity.

Despite the heavy military presence at Caia, security is only said to be guaranteed within a 15km radius. On the day that I visited the town, with its roofless colonial-style mansions and potholed roads, two soldiers had been brought into the hospital, their legs blasted off by landmines. Military forays out of these central, re-occupied towns appear to consist largely of rescuing peasants from MNR-infested areas, rather than a permanent rooting out of the rebels.

Take the case of 11-year-old Alberto Manuel. He, and his nine-year-old brother, Antonio, were brought in from an MNR camp. Their father is dead. The two now live in an orphanage with 34 other children in Caia, with little hope of ever being reunited with their mother.

No clothes

"In the bush we had no food or clothes. We dressed in palm leaves," recalled the little boy, with wide, scared eyes. Without any prompting he added "There was no respect for women. The bandits raped women and venereal disease was common."

Local officials attribute the MNR's continued survival to the manner in which it has press-ganged the largely illiterate local population into submission. The view is widely supported by a damning US state department report on the MNR released in mid-April. After interviewing 200 Mozambican refugees in five countries, consultant Robert Gersony concluded that "there is almost no reported effort to explain the purpose of the insurgents efforts, the nature of its goals, or to enlist the loyalty – or even neutrality – of the population. The only reciprocity the captives appear to receive or to expect is the opportunity to remain alive."

Following the publication of this report, backed by the most strongly-worded anti-MNR statement ever made by the US at a donors' conference in Maputo in April, South Africa is under extreme diplomatic pressure from its Western allies to revise its policy toward Mozambique.

Against the backdrop of protracted negotiations over Angola and the future of Namibia, coupled with some of its economic interests in Mozambique – like the desire to get the Cahora Bassa help scheme working again – Pretoria has some

interest in improving its diplomatic profile in the region. Moves toward a second Nkomati-style meeting between Presidents Joaquim Chissano and P.W. Botha are afloat but in light of South Africa's proven breaches of the first, 1984 agreement, such moves are viewed sceptically in Maputo.

Meanwhile, for the second year running, the government has secured donor pledges worth close to US\$300 million to assist in the emergency effort. But these numbers don't always mean much on the ground. Because of the lack of road access to Caia, food has to be airlifted from Beira, at the cost of 55 cents per kg. The town is served by one ageing DC 3 – reputed to have been used by General Franco during the Spanish civil war. The plane can only carry 3.2 tonnes of food at a time, compared with the smallest, seven tonne trucks used in other emergency relief work.

Harlan Hale, a logistics coordinator for the relief organisation Care, in Sofala, estimates that on average, only 25 per cent of the 400 grammes per person per day ration, considered as "reasonable" in donor circles, reaches the town. Often this does not include a balance between the three main foodstuffs – maize, beans and oil. At the time of visiting Caia, for example, the town had been receiving dried beans only for a period of 60 days.

Lasting problem

While the government is appreciative of emergency assistance, it is increasingly aware that unlike emergencies caused by nature, Mozambique's problems are long term. Thus the main message put out at the Maputo donor conference – a follow up to the first UN sponsored emergency conference for Mozambique in Geneva last year – was the need for complimentary, non-food emergency aid to stimulate agricultural production.

58-year-old Philip Manuel is among those who received a hoe and panga through a donor programme at the start of the last rainy season. Once a proud farmer who came home after two years of living under the MNR, he is starting up his fields again. Normally, he explains, it is possible to grow two crops, with irrigation from the river. For the time being he has put in a crop of sweet potatoes and dares not project too far into the future. "I don't know what to say anymore," he says in a quiet voice. "When I sleep at night, I wake up the next day and say, it's one more day." ■