

INTRODUCTION:

The crisis in Mozambique

EARLY IN 1987 television news teams once again brought into millions of homes pictures of another human disaster in Africa. But the story behind this drama was somewhat different to those in the better known famine areas of the Horn of Africa. In Mozambique, one of the world's poorest countries, the effects of natural catastrophes have been tragically reinforced by years of guerilla warfare.

Nearly 100,000 people died in the famine of 1983-84 which followed years of drought. Serious drought is again threatening large areas of the country. Meanwhile, South African-backed rebel forces have devastated economic life and food production, forcing hundreds of thousands from their homes.

Nearly 2 million people now live in relief camps or crowd into isolated rural towns for refuge, their survival dependent on a fragile transport network subject to constant attacks. Almost half a million more people have fled to neighbouring states seeking food and safety, and many more live in daily fear of attack and harassment. Traditional methods of coping with drought have been disrupted by guerilla activity. With relief efforts in many areas largely blocked by war, hunger and crushing poverty are almost universal.

Yet Mozambique has great potential. It has vast reserves of fertile land capable of feeding both towns and country, as well as producing abundant crops for export. It has magnificent hardwood forests, large reserves of coal and marble and a beautiful coastline, ideally suited to tourism. Its geographic position makes it a natural trade route to the interior of southern Africa. At independence the health and education services were dramatically transformed to cater for the whole population, and a democratic system of local popular assemblies guarantees the people a voice in political life.

But Mozambique's aspirations have been shattered by a grim catalogue of destruction; war and widespread banditry, drought, flooding, early policy mistakes and international recession. South Africa has supported a rebel movement which has bombed factories, railways and ports, and terrorised rural communities in a calculated campaign of maximum destruction.

Since 1984 Mozambique has been massively dependent on international aid. Food shortages have become chronic, and food is almost unobtainable on the market except at prices far above the spending power of ordinary people. Simple household goods, tools and clothes are so rare that trade is often dominated by a handful of black-marketeers.

Why are the people of Mozambique suffering so much? What hopes remain for peace, stability and an end of hunger?

The Colonial Legacy

PORTUGAL, itself a poorly developed power, raided Mozambique's interior for slaves and ivory for over three hundred years, but failed to establish full control over large areas. Colonial rule relied on the recruitment of British and South African investment.

In the late 19th century a third of Mozambican territory was handed over to British chartered companies, who established large plantations and forced peasants to cultivate export crops: cotton, sugar, cashews, sisal and tea.

Imposition of taxes and a harsh forced-labour system drove men to migrate in search of paid work, leaving women in charge of family farms. Laws requiring women to grow cash crops further undermined rural industries and food production.

Many families in southern Mozambique came to depend on having a man working in South Africa's gold mines.

Portugal stifled industrial development in order to guarantee markets for its own domestic manufacture, bleeding Mozambique of raw materials and importing basic goods. By 1974 the trade deficit was US\$200 million.

After independence in 1975, most Portuguese fled in fear of retribution, abandoning land and property; some destroyed or sabotaged what they could not take. The network of rural shops collapsed and despite appeals to the Portuguese to stay, the government had to take over farms and businesses of all sizes. But Portugal's failure to provide education for most Mozambicans left an acute shortage of skilled workers and professionals to run public and commercial life. The country FRELIMO inherited was hardly a going concern, bankrupt but for its port earnings and exports of labour.

FACTS & FIGURES



In 1975 the Portuguese poured concrete down the lift shafts and stole the plans of the partially completed Four Seasons Hotel on the Costa do Sol in Maputo. Today it remains a concrete shell.

Area:	802,000km² (3 × UK)
Population:	14 million, of which: ½ million refugees outside Mozambique; 2 million displaced within the country; 4 million dependent on aid
Life Expectancy:	44 (1980)
Child Death Rate: (0-5 years)	350/375 per 1000
1 doctor for every:	39,000 (UK-1 to 680)
Literacy:	41% male, 15% female
Principal trade partners:	EEC countries, USSR, USA, South Africa, Japan
Principal aid donors:	Sweden, Netherlands, EEC, USA, Norway, UK
Principal Exports:	Cashew nuts, prawns, sugar, tea, cotton, timber and coal. All have fallen drastically in recent years, though cashew, cotton and prawn exports are beginning to recover

Sources: Mozambique Information Office, Unicef

FAMINE AS A WEAPON OF WAR

TENS OF THOUSANDS OF REFUGEES from attacks by South African-backed rebels, the Mozambique National Resistance, are crowded into Mocuba, Quelimane and the remaining secure towns of Zambezia province. Many live out in the open, without clothes, work or adequate food; still more have fled to neighbouring Malawi, hungry and destitute, often suffering war wounds.

At Mocuba, in December 1986, some of these displaced people told Oxfam workers of their plight: "We left our homes with nothing, we have no blankets to sleep on or cover ourselves. We want to work and produce food but we need help."

"We have reached the conclusion that the bandits (the MNR) don't have human hearts. They kill and steal everything. We prefer the long walk through the bush . . . the bandits are worse than wild animals . . . look at this little girl (a girl of 8 or 9, wrapped in a sack); they dragged her out, took all her clothes and molested her."

A small hut alongside the meeting place is packed with women anxious to participate in the meeting, but too ashamed to appear in public without clothes. "We cannot send our children to school naked." "They burned all our homes, we have to sleep in the bush."

"They destroy everything. When we fought for independence we were careful about what we destroyed, because we were fighting for control over resources so we could use them ourselves. But what are they fighting for if they destroy everything?"

The big MNR offensive in late 1986 coincided with the planting season. People fled their lands and villages, without food, and without the prospect of a harvest to look forward to in 1987.

The relief workers explained, "About 600,000 people in the districts around Mocuba are now without supplies since the MNR began attacks on the road from Quelimane. The situation is extremely precarious with only 25 sacks of maize to distribute to 20,000 people in the town alone. A high proportion of children showed signs of serious malnutrition . . . people are in a state of shock. Families are split up as people flee in all directions from MNR attacks. They don't know if their husbands, wives, children or parents have reached safety; whether they are dead or alive."

By the summer of 1987 aid was at last able to get through to Mocuba but the events there have become horribly familiar in many other parts of the country. This tragic suffering has spread through most of Mozambique, and it threatens to continue indefinitely if South Africa does not stop fuelling the war.

The human crisis in Mozambique is at its worst ever.

In Niassa, the country's most isolated province, Oxfam workers report a grave shortage of food amongst the poorest people; "One worker walked 60km one weekend but failed to find any maize, only a small bucket of potatoes in exchange for a shirt. The secondary school and the hospital have no food. There is a possibility of widespread starvation before the next harvest."

In the early '80s drought gripped much of central and southern Mozambique. Season after season of poor rains produced ever more meagre harvests. By 1983 hit and run MNR attacks on villages, shops and roads had also begun to take their toll, dragging the countryside into a downward spiral of deprivation and hunger. The poorest families, unable to produce or buy their daily grain, began to starve to death.

Systematic rebel action made the drought-hit areas almost inaccessible to emergency aid. Tete province suffered a hidden famine. The world was ignorant until people dropped dead in the city streets and tens of thousands trekked to neighbouring Zimbabwe in search of food. Many were too weak to survive the journey.

In Zimbabwe a refugee reflected, "Bombs and bullets haven't killed us, but hunger has". Yet bombs and bullets had stopped help from arriving in time to save thousands of lives.

In southern Mozambique, drought has persisted into the late 1980s; elsewhere flooding and waterlogging has destroyed crops. The wrecked economy ensures that marketed food production is pitifully low. But the principal enemy is a war in which the Mozambican people have become pawns in the wider crisis of southern Africa.

A History of Bloodshed

WAR IS NO STRANGER to Mozambique. After Portuguese troops massacred Mozambican nationalists at a peaceful rally in Mueda in 1964, FRELIMO opted for armed guerilla warfare as the only way to free the country from Portugal's colonial rule.

Ten years of bush war, followed by a coup in Portugal itself, finally achieved independence. FRELIMO had won the support of large numbers of ordinary Mozambicans, and the control of major 'liberated zones' in the north. The movement established cooperatively run villages with basic health and education services, denied to most people by the Portuguese.

Once in power, FRELIMO found itself the natural ally of Zimbabwean nationalist groups fighting to overthrow white minority rule in neighbouring Rhodesia. Even before Portugal formally conceded Mozambique's independence, Rhodesian and Portuguese agents plotted the creation of a mercenary force — later to become the MNR — to act against Zimbabwean guerillas within Mozambique.

Newly independent Mozambique sacrificed US\$556 million in income from transit charges by closing its ports and railways to Rhodesian traffic as part of an international sanctions campaign. Rhodesian forces retaliated with cross-border bombardments of Mozambican economic targets and air and commando raids. The 1980 Lancaster House settlement, in which the Mozambican president Samora Machel played a key role, gave Zimbabwe majority rule and Mozambique a brief respite.

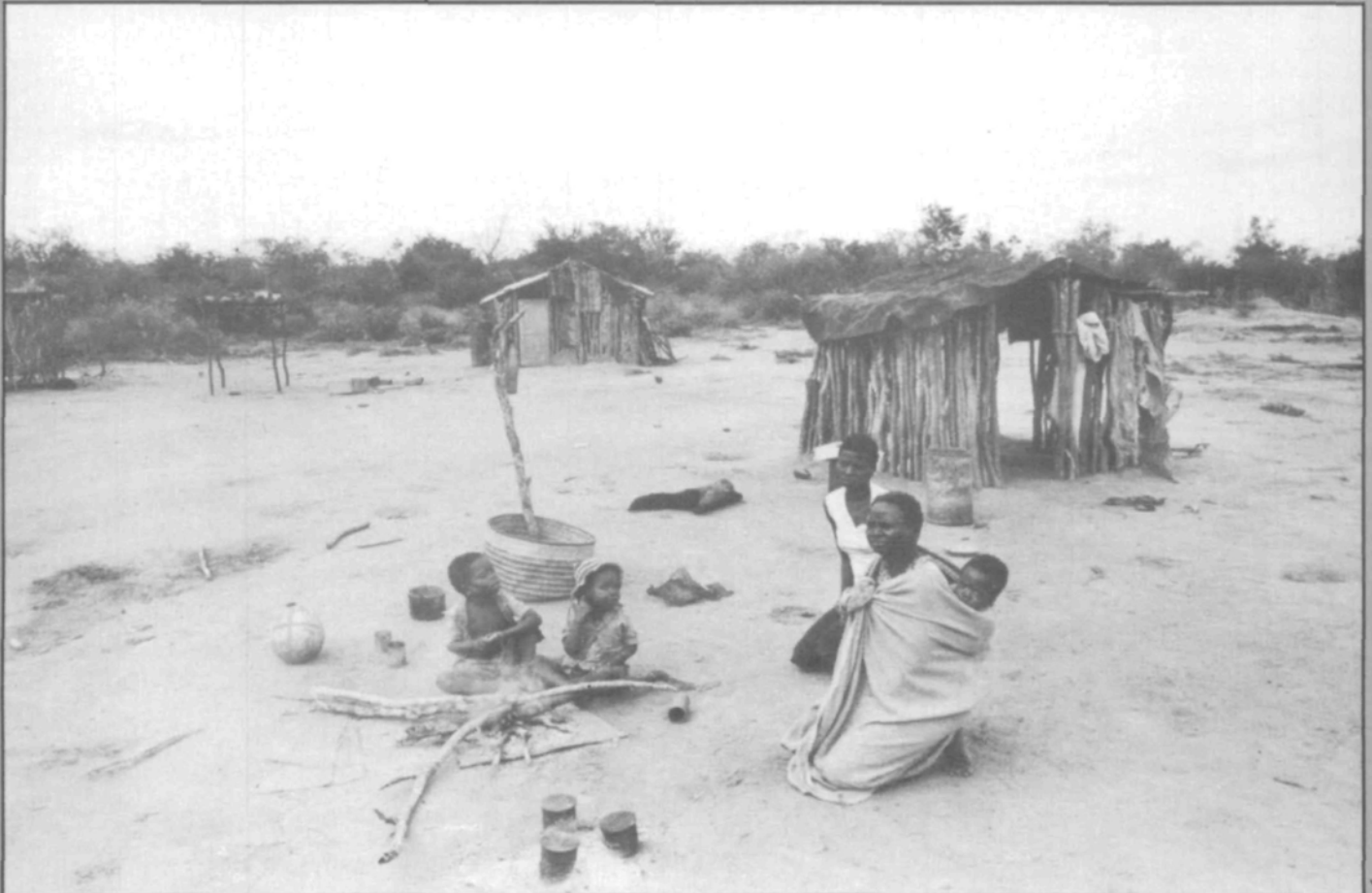
South Africa, aware that the regional cards were stacking up against it, stepped in to take over training and support for the MNR. While Mozambique turned a blind eye to infiltration of African National Congress guerillas across its border into South Africa the MNR were an effective form of retaliation, destabilizing Mozambique and protecting South Africa's economic hold on the other 'Frontline States'.



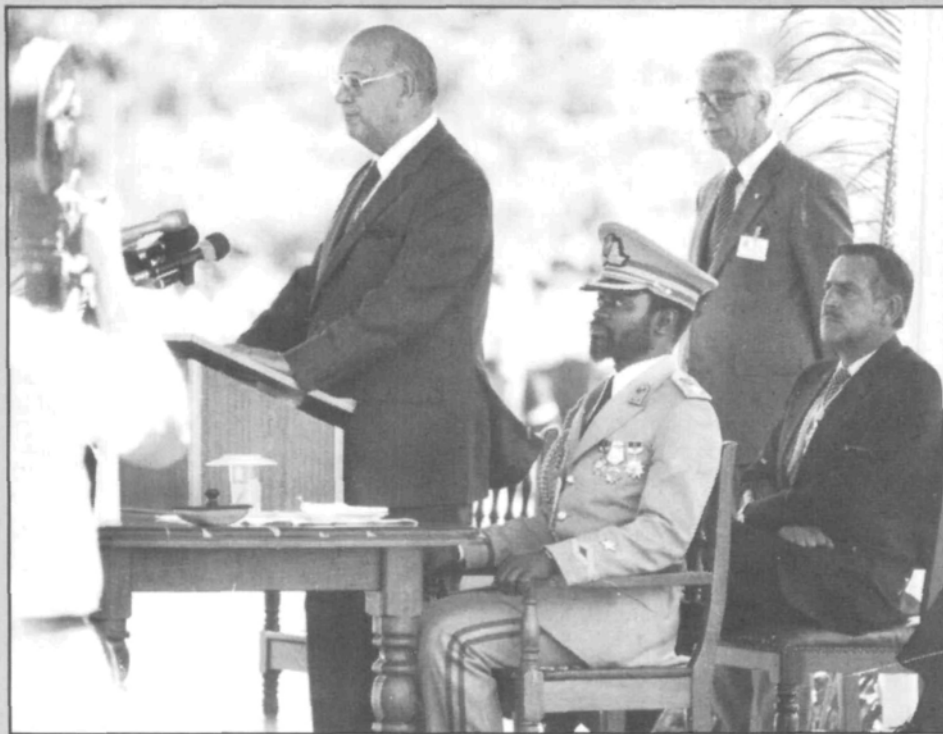
Waiting for food distribution at a relief centre in Inhambane.

Anders Nilsson/AIM

Displaced people outside their makeshift homes in Chicualacuala district.

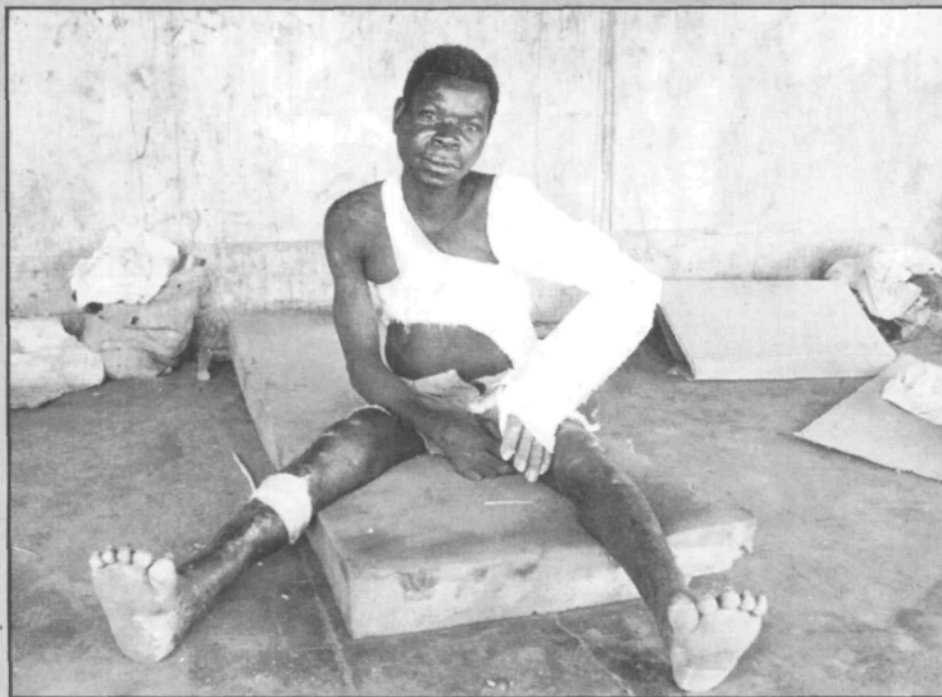


Ian Bray



The late President Samora Machel with South African President P.W. Botha at the signing of the Nkomati Accord in March 1984.

Unable to return home because of MNR activity, a man recuperates outside Quellimane Hospital.



Nkomati: Pretoria's pious fraud

SOUTH AFRICA used the MNR to force Mozambique into dialogue. Although Mozambique refused direct talks with the MNR themselves, it signed a non-aggression pact, the 'Nkomati Accord', with South Africa in March 1984. Under its terms, first and foremost, neither side was to allow its territory to be used for attacks against the other.

Mozambique promptly expelled all but a diplomatic mission of the ANC, seizing a handful of weapons. But the war within Mozambique continued to escalate and air drops of arms to the rebels continued.

South Africa was found guilty of violating the Accord when joint Mozambican and Zimbabwean forces overran the main MNR base in Mozambique, in Gorongosa National Park. They found documents detailing the continued collaboration of senior South African military men and government ministers with the MNR.

The South African Government admitted that Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister, Louis Nel, had visited Gorongosa after Nkomati, and that there had been 'technical contraventions' of the Accord by South Africa. But they claimed that the visits had been made with the knowledge of the Mozambican Government and in order to promote reconciliation. Evidence of South Africa's contravention of the Accord continues to take the form of reported sightings of South African-marked aircraft, especially around the Malawi border area at the time of the MNR's seizure of the town of Milanje in Zambezia Province in September 1986.

Mozambique initially hailed the Nkomati Accord as a victory but although it helped convince the world of the sincerity of Mozambique's search for peace, the Accord is now generally recognised to have been a failure, but it is still upheld by Mozambique.

AN MNR ATTACK:

An Oxfam Relief Worker's report

What are the MNR?

DURING THE RHODESIAN WAR, Rhodesian and Portuguese intelligence agents recruited dissident former FRELIMO officers to lead the MNR as reconnaissance scouts against Zimbabwean guerrillas based in Mozambique. The MNR set up a mountain base-camp in Gorongosa National Park, near Beira.

On Zimbabwean independence, the South Africans took over support for the MNR and created a base inside South Africa. Guerrilla training, sophisticated logistical back up and careful infiltration into Mozambique transformed the MNR into an effective instrument for undermining the FRELIMO Government.

Former Portuguese colonists, many of them still in South Africa, hoped to get back the assets they had so hastily abandoned when FRELIMO took power. And it profited South Africa to keep Mozambique unstable. Mozambique's ports and railways could provide the neighbouring Frontline States with the shortest, cheapest route to the sea; Mozambique is a key to the economic control of the region.

MNR recruitment has largely been achieved, inside and outside Mozambique, by press-ganging and coercion; intimidating and bribing Mozambican migrants, and kidnapping young villagers. Petty criminals and young men from poor families have been attracted by the MNR's apparently adventurous life of banditry, and in some areas peasants disenchanted with government policies have lent their support.

The MNR are by no means popular, their campaign is one of maximum destruction, targeting government achievements; health posts, schools, successful communal villages, shops and grain stores, as well as key roads and railways. They have massacred hundreds of innocent people in countless attacks on buses, trains and villages. The borderline between organized guerrilla warfare and sheer banditry has become blurred; the MNR have robbed, raped, mutilated and intimidated the population into giving them reluctant support. Their stranglehold on the rural economy has created a vicious circle of social banditry; men taking to the bush with arms in order to survive by stealing what they can neither produce nor buy.

Today the MNR, also known in Portuguese as 'RENAMO', is primarily a military force, not a political movement. It also comprises a handful of Mozambican dissidents, and wealthy, former colonial backers in Portugal and elsewhere. Their political spokesmen are Portuguese, far away in Lisbon and the MNR's backers also employ professional lobbyists in the United States.

Yet the MNR have no alternative political programme for Mozambique. They are dismissed by the Government as 'armed bandits'. Backed by South Africa and using tactics of terror and intimidation, these 'armed bandits' have become an effective military force. They have exploited the Government's weaknesses, — low military morale, under-supported peasant farmers and heavy handed attempts at collectivization — to spread throughout the country.

ON THE MORNING OF 18TH JUNE 1986, MNR troops attacked Mikaune, 80km from Quelimane, provincial capital of Zambezia. Many people like Emilio John, a teacher, fled immediately. He knew he would be a target for killing or mutilation because he was a government employee. Later he heard that the school had been burnt down. 1,025 people fled to Quelimane where they were registering for emergency rations from the local National Disasters Office when I met them.

Carlos Correia, a local trader, told his story: "There were 500 of them, in three groups . . . I was lucky to escape. When we heard that the bandits were in town, everybody with shoes took them off, to appear poor. But they examined everyone's feet and beat up those who had been wearing shoes, or decent clothes, or spoke Portuguese. They hit the party administrator about the head with a machete, shooting at him as he ran away. The bandits shot two others, and burnt an old man to death in his hut. Then they killed all the cattle from Madal (a state company), and after helping themselves to the meat, gave some to the poorest looking people, trying to get a few to join them."

A further 1,112 people fled growing MNR maltreatment some days later, to Chinde relief centre, some 30km from Mikaune. Cortume Salesi and his family were dressed only in rags and sacks, all their belongings stolen by the MNR. Martha Marcalo, a young mother, wept inconsolably for her 7 year old son, taken to train as an MNR fighter, and her aged father, too weak for the treacherous journey through bush and mangrove.

The MNR occupation of Mikaune cut off Chinde, the northernmost island of the Zambezi delta, from Quelimane, so the relief centre can now only be supplied by boat. It receives a steady stream of war victims from the Zambezi valley, where the MNR devastated sugar production, forcing thousands of workers from their homes. I visited Chinde by plane; as the plane overflew Mikaune, a gun barrel flashed towards us and columns of smoke rose from burning buildings below.

This story is a familiar one, but MNR attacks are often more brutal. FRELIMO party members and state employees are singled out for killings, but in areas where the MNR are not established, destruction, mutilation, rape and murder can be indiscriminate. Horrifying tales are commonplace and well-supported.

In some areas, the MNR appear to exert tighter control and are less brutal to the population as a whole. Zambezia saw a big escalation of MNR activity in 1986, but here the rebel campaign has been sustained and organised, undermining loyalty to FRELIMO by targeting successful government projects and crudely attempting to win people over, stealing from those with a few possessions and giving a little to those with none.

The result is to turn the people against each other, reducing all to absolute poverty. The MNR provide no longer-term help to the poorest peasants — those whom they sometimes claim to be fighting for.



All that remains of a house in a village attacked by the MNR.

