

MOZAMBIQUE:

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Mozambique, a nation fraught with the aftermath of civil war and, more recently, torrential downpours devastating the countryside, has attained sufficient stability to attempt the mammoth task of reconstructing its social and economic foundation. After suffering through 16-20 years of civil war, which eventually subsided in 1992, Mozambique's demining efforts were progressing when the nation was struck by Cyclone Eline in late February 2000 and Cyclone Hudah in mid-April 2000, complicating the demining mission. Initial reports indicated that mine fields that had been previously mapped for clearance had suddenly vanished, as the violent storms swept the mines to unknown locations. This movement caused demining specialists to fear that the exposed and/or shifted landmines would make rehabilitation increasingly more dangerous for the Mozambican people. Though the shifted mines were an initial fear, later reports debate the severity the displaced land mines pose to the rehabilitation efforts.

As demining activities were postponed until the flooding ceased, mine awareness campaigns have become more important in Mozambique. Confronted with the overwhelming reconstruction task, civilians now face the possibility of encountering "new" landmines. Not only is the population in the midst of rebuilding its country—repairing damaged roads, bridges, schools and infrastructure—but now Mozambique's demining teams must also conduct new surveys and redraw maps to pinpoint the shifted mines.

The Landmine History

During Mozambique's civil war, government soldiers and rebels scattered mines indiscriminately, rendering vast portions of the country virtually uninhabitable. After the conflict, landmine accidents



Three U.S. Black Hawk helicopters from Rescue Squadron 41 based at Moody Air Force Base, Georgia, arrive with rescue crews at Beira Airport, Mozambique, Thursday, March 9, 2000, to help in the aid and recovery efforts following the devastating floods.

Photo c/o AP/World Wide Photos

numbered at approximately 40 per month. On average, 15 of these accidents were fatal. Currently, a total of 7,000 Mozambicans have been fitted for prostheses—a number the Mozambican people do not want to see rise.

Presently, the United Nations believes Mozambique is one of the most heavily mined countries in the world. As records were not officially kept during the war, there is a large degree of uncertainty con-

A Country Ravaged by Civil War and Nature

rector of the Mozambique Demining Program, stated, "We were beginning to see the light at the end of the tunnel. No one knows where the mines could be today."

Flooding Aftermath

The initial floods from Cyclone Eline tearing through Mozambique forced over 450,000 people from their homes and possessions and killed an estimated 500. CNN news reports indicate 160,000 civilians were displaced from Chokwe, Xai-Xai and Chibuto. Specialists believe that the floods likely pushed the mines to these high-density areas, resulting in another complication in the rebuilding and demining tasks. Furthermore, the floodwaters could take up to six months to completely recede, lengthening the detection and mapping process. One CNN news report estimated the cost to demine Mozambique at three million dollars, money the country obviously does not have to spare after the disastrous after-effects of Cyclone Eline.

After struggling to pick up the pieces Cyclone Eline dispensed, Mozambique suffered another twist of fate when Cyclone Hudah struck in mid-April, hampering the humanitarian and demining efforts. Though the storm did not register as severely as Eline, Mozambicans were hardly prepared to endure another cyclone in the midst of rebuilding their impoverished country.

Mozambicans must now approach the reconstruction task with the utmost caution, as they are unaware of the precise location of the deadly devices. Uncertainty consumes every aspect of these people's daily routines. Landmines do not expire. Many relief organizations are unable to provide extensive assistance, as their supply trucks are not built to withstand a landmine explosion. Mozambicans face a dire situation: they are unable to return to their homes, farms or work, resulting in severely limited incomes for people whose country's economy has suffered the

cerning the number of planted landmines; the reported numbers range from 400,000 to five million. Prior to the flooding, deminers had mapped much of Mozambique to assist the mine clearance efforts, and since 1994, deminers have removed approximately 18,000 mines. These maps also enabled government officials to warn citizens of unsafe areas.

Unfortunately, the rains have derailed mapping efforts. Deminers' efforts must begin anew, returning the focus from mine clearance to mine assessment once again. Another disturbing fact is an increase in the mine count, as floodwaters may have unearthed previously undiscovered mines. Jacky D'Almeida, di-

worst at the hand of nature. The majority of the population lacks access to safe drinking water, food resources and medical facilities, and the floods have created a shortage of many essential items. In turn, this shortage has caused the prices of these items to skyrocket, which does not correlate with the restricted incomes of many Mozambicans.

Challenged not only with reconstructing their homes and communities, Mozambicans now also face multiple physical ailments. UNICEF officials have emphasized the outbreak of diseases that typically occur after massive flooding to include malaria, diarrhea, measles, meningitis, dysentery and respiratory infections. In a country where only 46 percent of the total population has regular access to safe drinking water, the majority of Mozambicans are now forced to subsist on contaminated rainwater, which can induce these severe diseases.

Humanitarian Action

To return the country to its previous economic status, the local population and humanitarian organizations must take action against the devastating effects Cyclone Eline left in its wake. President Joaquim Chissano of Mozambique has beseeched the international community to forgive its foreign debts. Prior to the flooding, Mozambique was experiencing a significant economic increase, as the economy was growing at an annual average of 10 percent. For a country whose reputation of poverty has dominated its existence, Mozambique appeared to be on the road to recovery when Cyclone Eline ravaged the countryside.

Because of the immediate need for villagers and farmers to return to their communities, the United Nations must redouble its Accelerated Demining Program (ADP) efforts originally begun in 1992. While landmine related fatalities had been steadily decreasing since the program commenced, demining teams fear this number will again rise as people will be unaware of the location and counteraction to take against the shifted landmines. Indigenous populations inhabiting previously cleared areas must now remember and relearn the appropriate procedures when encountering a landmine. Therefore, increased monies

must be allotted to fund mine awareness campaigns to educate Mozambicans of the dangers of landmines. Mozambique urgently requires monetary donations and equipment to prevent a 10-year economic setback.

President Chissano also has implored humanitarian organizations, primarily the U.N. Development Program (UNDP), for monetary assistance to rebuild his devastated country. The UNDP estimated that a minimum of \$450 million (U.S.) is needed to rebuild the homes, schools, hospitals and roads demolished by Cyclones Eline and Hudah. UNICEF has donated \$1 million in educational and mine awareness supplies for the 30 schools Eline destroyed and has offered technical guidance in planning, monitoring and coordinating Mozambique's government agencies in rebuilding the nation's infrastructure.

The UNDP has indicated several categories of emphasis for a portion of the estimated \$450 million. It has assigned \$120 million to rebuild transportation systems, \$63 million for agriculture, \$26.6 million for administrative costs, \$38.1 million for industry and \$15 million for disaster control.

In addition to the monetary support, Mozambicans have found themselves in dire need of medical supplies. UNICEF is currently shipping essential medicine and safe drinking water in an effort to combat the outbreak of disease. They have also begun a national communication campaign aimed at preventing the spread of diseases.

Conclusion

The rippling aftereffects of Cyclones Eline and Hudah have beaten mercilessly at the heart of this devastated country. Only time and financial assistance can return it to its previous state. As displaced Mozambicans are slowly trickling back to their homes and communities, starting to rebuild their lives and towns, they must do so cautiously. The financial assistance and donated supplies Mozambique so desperately requires will enable Mozambique's demining efforts to continue, eventually ridding the country of its horrendous and life-threatening problem and returning it to a state of economic stability and growth. ■