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*the mozambique liberation front*



It was in October, 1966, in a meeting of the Central Committee, that the Mozambique Liberation Front decided that the Mozambican woman should take a more active part in the struggle for national liberation, at all levels. It was decided that she should receive political and military training in order to make her more capable of fulfilling whatever tasks the revolution might demand of her. Thus, a few months later, in the beginning of 1967, the first group of women from Cabo Delgado and Niassa began their training. At first this was merely an experiment to discover just what contribution women could make to the revolution - how they would use their initiative, whether they were in fact capable of fulfilling certain tasks. The 'experiment' proved highly successful and this first group of women became the founder-members of the Women's Detachment, and were scattered throughout the interior, each with her specific assignment. It was soon discovered that they could play a very important role both in the military and political fields, and especially in the latter.

One of the prime functions of a women's army is, quite naturally, just like the men's army: participation in combat. In Mozambique, the women's military activities are usually concentrated in the defence of the liberated areas, thus freeing the men for the offensive actions in the zones of advance. However, many of the women prefer the more active combats in the advance zones and choose to fight alongside the men in ambushes, and mining operations, where they have proved themselves as capable and courageous as any of their male comrades. As another aspect of this function, we have also women working in the Department of Security constantly on the look-out for enemy infiltration.

Although highly effective in the field of combat, their contribution has been less in evidence (just because of their relatively small numbers compared with the men) than their activities in the political field, where their impact has been far out of proportion to their numbers. Since 1967 the women have demonstrated that they have a key role in the mobilisation and political education of both the people and the soldiers themselves. In this work we explain to the people the need to fight, what kind of struggle we are waging, with whom we fight, and against whom, what are the reasons for our struggle, what are our aims, and why we chose an armed struggle as the only means to independence. We explain the work we are doing and the results we have achieved so far. We explain how we are dependent to a certain extent on foreign aid and which countries and organisations are helping us, and that, despite this help, we must be as self-reliant as possible.

In this connection, it is stressed that the success of the revolution depends on the combined efforts of everyone such that no one can be omitted, and thus the traditional rather 'passive' role of women must be changed so that their abilities are used to the full. Women are encouraged to give their opinions in meetings, to participate in the various committees, etc. Here we have the rather difficult task of fighting old prejudices that women's functions should be confined to cooking, rearing children, etc. It has been proved that we women can perform this task of mobilisation and education better than the men for two reasons. Firstly, it is easier for us to approach other women, and secondly, the

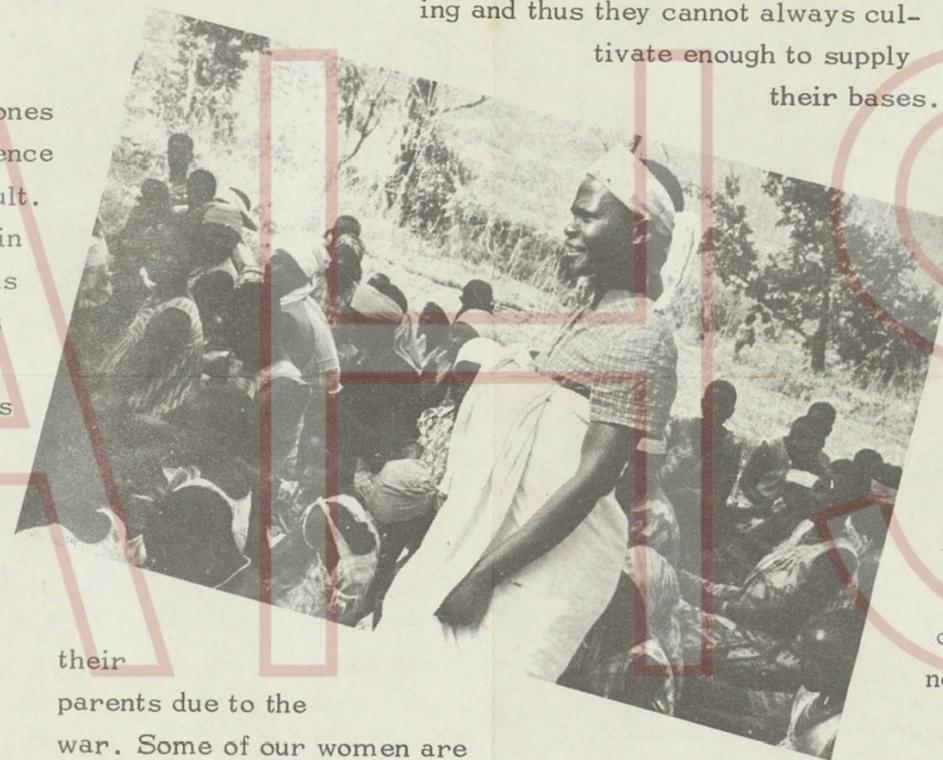


men are more easily convinced of the important role of women when confronted with the unusual sight of confident and capable female militants who are themselves the best examples of what they are propounding. However, our activities are directed equally at the men and the presence of emancipated women bearing arms often shames them into taking more positive action.

In order to achieve self-sufficiency in the liberated areas, we explain to the people that agricultural production must be increased, not only for themselves but also to help feed the army, as the first duty of the guerrillas is fighting and thus they cannot always cultivate enough to supply their bases.



We also need extra supplies to assist our comrades in the zones of advance where the constant military activity and the presence of enemy troops make regular agricultural production difficult. There is no question of persuading the people to participate in the war effort but they have to be explained the political basis and implications of the revolution, and while well aware that they themselves have certain important responsibilities in the struggle, they need guidance as to which particular fields they should work in. Once the people are fully aware of the situation they act without hesitation. In addition to increasing agricultural output, they help transport the sick and wounded, help care for the sick, help transport war material and organise themselves into militants.



There are some areas in the combat zones where it is difficult to obtain food because the populations are widely dispersed. Therefore, it is necessary to transport food from the liberated areas to the fighting front. Up to today, the only means of transport we have are our own legs. The Women's Detachment is responsible for the movement of these vital supplies.

In addition to its political work, the Women's Detachment also has extensive duties in the field of social welfare. We assist and give comfort to families who have lost relatives in the war. This is extremely delicate work requiring a great deal of patience. We also run the FRELIMO orphanage, which not only cares for orphans but also children separated from

their parents due to the war. Some of our women are trained in first aid so that they can help the medical assistants in the health centres. Many of our women are also working in the Department of Education in their literacy campaigns and in the primary schools. Here again we have to overcome the outdated prejudices of fathers and husbands regarding the idea of education for women. But we are gradually winning the battle for they realise that a literate and educated woman can make a far more constructive contribution to the revolution than an ignorant one. We now have many girls in our schools, some of whom have female teachers, and some of these girls are already participating in literacy campaigns for the older people.



Thus, apart from its strictly military functions the Women's Detachment has important political duties on two levels. At one level it is charged with the mobilisation and education of the people, to increase the effectiveness of their participation by developing their political understanding of the war. This we do for everyone, irrespective of sex, although we have a unique opportunity to reach our own sex that is denied to our male comrades. Once this has been achieved, we work at the next level of encouraging even more active participation by inviting people to follow our example, to leave their homes and train as fighters, nurses, teachers, etc. In this way the size of the women's detachment has increased considerably since that first experiment group and the point has now been reached where some of those first recruits have gained enough experience and knowledge so that they can become political and military trainers for their own detachment, and also assist their male colleagues in the bases to instruct elements of the population.

At the meeting of the Central Committee in April, 1969, it was decided that the Mozambican Women's League (LIFEMO) should be completely fused with the Women's Detachment. This joining of the Women's Detachment and the duties of what was once called LIFEMO has been realised in the formation of the Women's Section of the Mozambique Liberation Front. Whereas the Women's Detachment is a special group within the Women's Section, the general duties of the Section include the making of household items, the care of orphaned children and the carrying out of production. Two members of the Women's Section have been elected to sit on the Central Committee. Comrade Deolinda Raul Guessimane is a primary school teacher and is in addition a member of the Political Commissariat. Marina Pashinuapa is one of the three national leaders of the Women's Detachment and is also a member of the Political Commissariat.

Our struggle grows day by day. Our duties are doubled. We are ready to actively contribute to its advance until the complete liquidation of colonialism from our country is achieved.

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