

DROUGHT

The misery of Mondlo



Mbuyiseni Mazibuko (18 months) lies near death from masmarus at the Charles Johnson Memorial Hospital at Nquthu, kwaZulu. Drought has aggravated suffering in these regions.

Mounting toll of the drought

Mbuyiseni Mazibuko (18 months) is a victim of the kwashiorkor/masmarus disease which is wreaking havoc along the length and breadth of kwaZulu, especially in the Nquthu district, where the drought has exacerbated the suffering of the local populace.

Mbuyiseni is a shocking sight — a grotesque-looking creature of shrivelled flesh, spindly limbs, bulging eyes and oversized head.

His chances of survival are slim. If he does live, he stands to suffer side effects.

In 1968, I wrote a poem entitled "The Face Hunger" for the Mbuyiseni Mazibuko's of this world:

*I counted ribs on his concertina chest
bones protruding as if chiselled*

by a sculptor's hand of famine.

*He looked with glazed pupils
seeing only a bun on some sky high shelf.*

*The skin was pale and taut
like a glove on a doctor's hand.*

*His tongue darted in and out
like a chameleon's
snatching a confetti of flies.*

O! child

*your stomach is a den of lions
roaring day and night.*

Talking to Dr Bill Foster (26) the Gloucestershire-born acting superintendent of Charles Johnson Memorial Hospital, where

Mbuyiseni is a patient, one gets a sense of helplessness among the dedicated medical staff fighting to alleviate suffering in the whole drought-stricken Nquthu district.

"There are so many factors involved which compound the problem in this community. Grantedly, famine is a Third World problem, but here the most crucial factor is water and how it is utilised to improve the agricultural conditions of this part of the world.

"This is the most contributory factor to the poverty and disease around this region, but the worst area is around Nondweni in the nub of the whole consolidation scheme for the kwaZulu homeland."

The socio-economic and political issues are aggravated by bureaucracy. There is much passing of the buck between departments.

About 30 km from the town of Vryheid and 13 km south-east of Blood River lies Mondlo Township, a depressing dustbowl of poverty, disease, crime and violence. In March this year two suspected ANC guerillas, Boyce Bogale and Thomas Mngadi, were arrested there.

It is not too difficult to understand why guerillas should choose Mondlo.

The residents of this drab and dreary place were resettled there as pawns in Pretoria's game of chess known as consolidation. They were fitted into a little patch of the jigsaw that makes up the bits of kwaZulu scattered all over the map of Natal.

The dream is a viable, independent homeland. There's little sign of viability or independence at Mondlo.

The town is governed by the administration of Chief Gatsha Mangosuthu Buthelezi from the capital of Ulundi. Inkatha is the instrument used by Ulundi for local governance.

Mr Paul Nhlapho, former "mayor" of the town and regional secretary of Inkatha, had this to say:

"I'm thinking of resigning from Inkatha."

"Mondlo has about 35 000 residents, but only about 500 are known and active members. People

around here don't seem to care about Inkatha even though one reads in the Press about its inflated membership of 300 000.

"This is a hotbed of hatred. People resent the fact that they were brought from their homes in more fertile areas and dumped in this wasteland."

The people of Mondlo also resent the fact that they have been forced by the township council, under the chairmanship of Mr Nhlapho, to pay increased rents and property rates which, they say, do not benefit them, but go to the coffers of the kwaZulu Government.

Mr Nhlapho can vouch for his unpopularity. He has been shot at four times and wounded in the arm. But, he says, he was only doing what he was required to do in his office. He has since resigned from his mayorship.

The roads are unlit at night and dusty. The local clinic reports a large number of patients suffering from respiratory ailments such as tuberculosis, bronchitis, asthma and sinusitis. The dust and poor diet are among the chief causes.

Robbery, rape, murder and theft are common. A police station has been built at the western entrance to the town but it is seen less as a symbol of protection than of oppression.

Stock theft from the surrounding white farms — "do you expect it to be different?" — is one of the station's main areas of

concern. And the farmers have formed commando-like groups to protect their animals.

Mondlo residents complain of harassment both from the police and the farmers.

The situation, as one resident commented, is "volatile."

Two new schools on the western side of the township remain unfurnished and pupils have to sit on the bare and cold floors because the regional authority and some industrialists have withdrawn their sponsorship.

The kwaZulu Government stands aside because it is not responsible for building the schools, electrifying the township or tarring the streets.

Nobody, it seems, is responsible for improving the quality of life in this bleak place.

One would expect to find guerillas there



When Mildred Khumalo (33) of Mondlo Township heard of her mother's death at the Charles Johnson Memorial Hospital, she collapsed sobbing. "I've no money to bury my beloved mother; who will help me?" she moaned. The hospital authorities have informed her that as she is unemployed they will help give her mother a pauper's funeral. But she would like to give her mother a decent burial. Her mother was a victim of malnutrition and bronchitis, and Mildred herself is a TB suspect.