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Mozambique

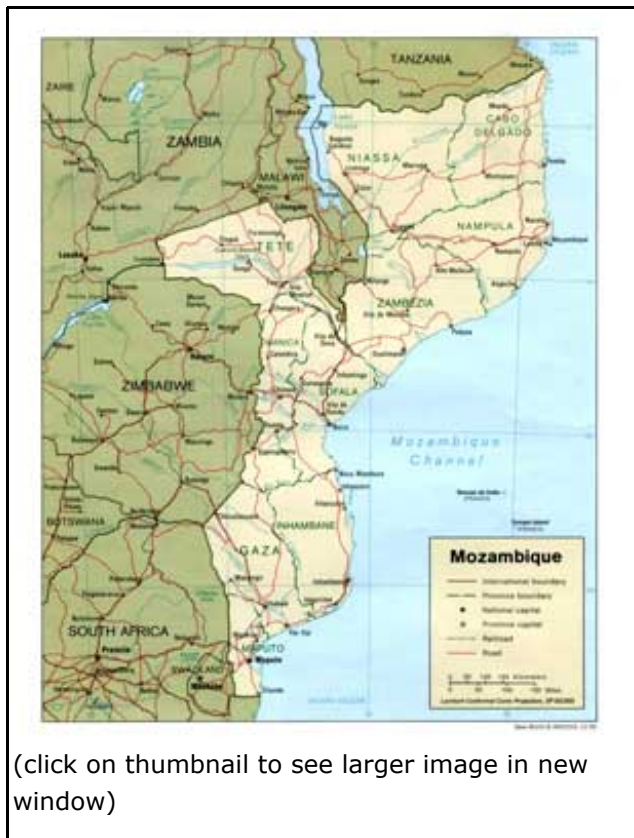
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By: Sarah Sensamaust [Mine Action Information Center]

Once a Portuguese colony, Mozambique achieved independence in 1975 after a 12-year struggle led by *Frente de Libertação de Moçambique* (FRELIMO). Between 1977 and 1992 about a million Mozambicans died as the result of fighting or famine in a war that left the country unstable and its economy in ruins.¹ In 1992, a United Nations-negotiated peace agreement led to the end of a civil war between FRELIMO and the rebel group *Resistência Nacional Moçambicana* (RENAMO). Following a brief period of stability, Mozambique suffered severe flooding in 2000 and 2001, which destroyed much of the nation's infrastructure. Then in 2002, a drought hit central and southern parts of the country, leaving previously flooded areas dry. Thirty years of war, combined with floods, drought and famine, have left Mozambique one of the poorest countries in Africa.

Landmines

Though Mozambique has never produced anti-personnel mines, landmines manufactured in 15 different countries were used by all sides during Mozambique's war.² Mines were randomly emplaced in fields and on paths to prevent villagers and farmers from accessing land to produce food.² This use of landmines accelerated a famine cycle that caused many Mozambicans to flee to neighboring South Africa, Zambia, Tanzania and Malawi.² According to Fernando Vicente of Mozambique's *Instituto Nacional de Desminagem*, it is estimated 204 communities with a total population of 806,000 and covering 171.6 kilometers (106.6 miles) are mined.³ In addition to blocking arable land, landmines have been emplaced near power lines, roads, bridges, railroads and airports.



(click on thumbnail to see larger image in new window)

Clearance

In 2004, Foreign Minister Leonardo Santos Simão announced Mozambique's goal to be mine-impact-free by 2009. Vicente, however, believes this goal will be very difficult due to a lack of funding.³ Clearance efforts made progress in 2004 with the IND clearing 11,826,476 square meters (2,922 acres), 68 percent more than in 2003. During this time, 18,600 mines and 80,628 items of unexploded ordnance were destroyed. Mines that once were a threat to 379 villages and 217,000 people were cleared.⁴ Clearance was conducted by five humanitarian agencies in 2004—the Accelerated Demining Program, HALO Trust, Norwegian People's Aid, Handicap International and, with support from the U.S. Department of State, RONCO Consulting Corporation. Together, these organizations cleared a total of 4,990,485 square meters (1,233 acres).⁴

Recently, Mozambique has gained attention for using rats in mine detection. APOPO, a Belgian demining research group, is in the process of training the Gambian giant pouched rat to sniff out suspected areas.⁵ In a recent study, APOPO showed these rats have a sense of smell as good as (or better than) a dog without weighing enough to detonate a mine.⁶ (See [related article](#) in this issue.)

According to Antonio Martins of IND, mine-detecting rats are superior to their canine counterparts because they are much easier to work with and cheaper to keep. "You do not need to import food for rats; we have all the bananas here in Mozambique they can eat. Also, they are easy to transport and don't have the medical requirements of a high-maintenance dog."⁶ On average, rats take less than half an hour to search 100 square meters (120 square yards).⁷ At the end of 2003, a year after starting their work, the APOPO rats successfully found 95 percent of the mines in the highest calculated risk area.⁸ Approximately 80 percent of the total area searched by the rats could be declared "mine free." APOPO believes rats are a very promising and cost-effective method for the future of mine detection.

Mine-risk Education

IND is responsible for the coordination of Mozambique's mine-risk education. With the adopted focus of targeting children and those in positions of power to spread the message about landmines, IND reported that there was little MRE conducted in 2004 due to limited resources.⁴ IND did, however, train 45 schoolteachers to educate their students about MRE. As a result, the organization stated that 25,565 schoolchildren and 182,340 others had become mine-aware.⁴ According to the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, there have not been any MRE activities in the country since early 2004. Despite the lack of widespread MRE campaigns, Handicap International's demining teams continue to conduct basic MRE sessions on a small scale.

Conclusion

It will be difficult for Mozambique to become mine-safe. Donor support for clearance is decreasing, victim assistance is cited as the mine-action program's "weakest component,"⁴ and mine-risk education is on the decline. Despite these challenges, Mozambicans remain hopeful that someday their land will be free from the impact of mines. Martins feels his work at IND has brought him the most success toward giving community land back that was once mined. He says it brings hope for the future of Mozambique.⁶

Biography

Sarah Sensamaust graduated from the University of Virginia with a degree in international relations and a concentration in African studies. She currently lives in Keezletown, Va., but she will soon move with her husband to Cairo, Egypt, to pursue her master's degree in professional development.



Endnotes

1. "Mozambique." Adopt-a-Minefield Web site. <http://www.landmines.org.uk/274>. Aug. 8, 2005. Accessed Feb. 1, 2006.
2. "About Mozambique" *United Nations Cyberschoolbus*. <http://www.un.org/cyberschoolbus/banmines/schools/background.asp>. Accessed Feb. 1, 2006.
3. Interview with Fernando Mulima Vicente, National Demining Institute. July 8, 2005.
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5. "African Rat Sniffs Out Mozambique Landmines" *ABC News*. Jan. 16, 2005. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200501/s1282859.htm>. Accessed Feb. 1, 2006.
6. Interview with Antonio Martins, National Demining Institute. July 8, 2005.
7. "Direct Detection" *APOPO*. <http://www.apopo.org/newsite/content/index.htm>. Accessed Feb. 2, 2006.
8. Verhagen, Ron, et al. "Rats to the Rescue: Results of the First Test on a Real Minefield." *Journal of Mine Action*. Issue 9.2. February 2006. p. 96. Also available online at <http://maic.jmu.edu/journal/9.2/RD/verhagen/verhagen.htm>. Accessed Feb. 2, 2006.
9. Editor's Note: Some countries and mine-action organizations are urging the use of the term "mine free," while others are espousing the term "mine safe" or "impact free." "Mine free" connotes a condition where all landmines have been cleared, whereas the terms "mine safe" and "impact free" refer to the condition in which landmines no longer pose a credible threat to a community or country.

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