

# Case study Mozambique: 'Guns into ploughshares'

In 1995 the Mozambican Council of Christian Churches (CCM), the coordinating body of the Anglican churches of Mozambique, began the Tools for Arms project (TAE) as one of the first civil society bodies to embark on such an effort internationally. Almost ten years later the TAE project is still in existence.

SALW are an important symbol in Mozambican society. The AKM assault rifle is emblazoned on the national flag in honor of its role in the independence war against Portugal that ended in 1974. After independence an even bloodier civil war ensued that ended in 1992 after at least one million people had died and even more had been displaced from their communities. The United Nations sponsored a peace process that demobilized more than 100,000 fighters and collected and destroyed some 214,000 weapons. Despite this success hundreds of thousand of weapons continued to circulate in Mozambique threatening the peace-building and development processes. Police reform had made major progress in Maputo the country's capital, but had less impact in the interior where many ex-combatants live.

Most Mozambicans cannot read or write, and fewer than one in three people has access to safe drinking water. It is little surprise then that many soldiers demobilised at the end of the war in 1992 hid their weapons, ready to use them again. Those without education, work and food can be sorely tempted to use their guns to rob others, or to sell them to crime syndicates at home or in South Africa.

Senhor Sousa Manuel Goao, 44, lives in the village of Boane Gegege, near Maputo. In 1981, aged 23, he was kidnapped at gunpoint by anti-government rebel troops and forced to march 150 miles to a training camp in the bush near the border with South Africa.

'They made us march barefooted so we couldn't run away. Anyone who did try and run was lined up in front of us and shot,' says Sr Goao. In order to survive, his unit would hunt wild animals, raid farms or attack civilians.

'Five or six of us would stand across the highway and stop cars while the rest of our unit would shoot them under cover of the bush. We would take what we wanted - food for example - and kidnap men to train as soldiers. We were indoctrinated - trained to win at any cost. We had no thought as to whether we were killing soldiers, men, women or children. It didn't matter.'

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When the cease-fire was agreed in 1992, United Nations troops were meant to disarm both sides. They collected some weapons but most remained hidden. Former soldiers like Sr Goao know where many of the guns are and they admit they remain a temptation to the dispossessed - providing a means to threaten, rob and kill fellow Mozambicans.

But today Snr Goao is happy. He is voluntarily handing over his guns - four AK47s and an automatic rifle. He is not giving them up to the UN or to the state authorities but to a small church-based charity, the Christian Council of Mozambique (CCM). In return he will receive a sewing machine - he has two already which were given to him in exchange for guns he previously handed in.

Those who give up their weapons are given tools - ploughs, bicycles and sewing machines. In a land where many struggle to make enough money to eat, a simple plough can be the difference between life and death. CCM staff know how crucial this project is: several of them have been car-jacked and one was shot twice in the shoulder by robbers who took his car.

The Mozambique government supports the operation. It knows former rebels would not hand in weapons to the authorities for fear they would be prosecuted. It allowed CCM to take on SALW collection and destruction in large part because the government did not have the capacity to deal with SALW collection and destruction beyond its joint border collaboration with South African authorities and also because the government had other priorities for national economic development and dealing with natural disasters. With this in mind the CCM set out to collect weapons primarily from ex-combatants in exchange for tools, destroy the weapons so that artists could transform them into works of art and educate communities about the dangers of weapons.

Between 1995 and 2003 the CCM has collected almost 8,000 weapons and more than 400,000 rounds of ammunition and explosives in exchange for bicycles, sewing machines, food commodities, zinc roofing sheets, construction materials and a wide range of tools. The funding came primarily from international donor governments and NGOs while the Canadian University Service Overseas actually provided personnel on a regular basis to support the program's implementation.

In some cases individuals or groups of individuals brought weapons directly to the CCM and its provincial offices or in others provided information on where a cache could be found for recovery. The idea was to provide resources to assist in generating income for the beneficiaries and their families, but it has been difficult to determine the impact for these purposes. Both the police and the military seconded officials as full time employees to work with the TAE project as technical support for collection, safe storage and destruction. The formula developed for providing the value of incentives for information or weapons (one operational weapons is equal to twelve non-operational weapons is equal to 520 units of ammunition is equal to 10 zinc sheets is equal to 1 used bicycle).

The entire project teams consists of a national coordinator, seven project officers assigned each to a different region, a driver, a security guard, the two technical staff

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mentioned above and consultants from international volunteer agencies. Other NGOs also provide moral support and ad-hoc collaboration such as the Foundation for Community Development, the Association of Demobilized Soldiers and the peace group PROPAZ. The project has enjoyed the endorsement of both major political parties as well.

The weapons are cut up in CCM's compound in Maputo and the pieces are handed over to a group of Mozambican artists who turn them into sculptures. They even make chairs and coffee tables out of cut-up Kalashnikovs. These works of art have not traveled all over the world and have also served as marketing tools in obtaining additional international support for the continuation of the TAE project.

It is a practical solution based on the bible, says Mozambican Bishop Dinis Sengulane, chairman of CCM's peace and reconciliation committee. 'I say to people that sleeping with a gun in your bedroom is like sleeping with a snake - one day it will turn round and bite you. We tell people we are not disarming you. We are transforming your guns into ploughshares, so you can cultivate your land and get your daily bread.'

'We are transforming them into sewing machines so you can make clothes. We are transforming them into bicycles so you don't have to spend money travelling to work and so you can collect the fruits of your fields to sell,' he adds. 'The idea is to transform the instruments of death and destruction into instruments of peace and of production and cooperation with others.'

Thanks to CCM, which is supported by Christian Aid, Sr Goao and thousands like him are celebrating a new-found prosperity. He, his brother and an uncle use their sewing machines to make dresses which they sell in a local market. 'I am so happy now there is peace,' says Snr Goao. 'I am free and go where I want. And I thank CCM for these machines. Without them I would have been forced into banditry to live and to support my wife. I used to sell fruit and vegetables on the streets but often we'd have nothing to eat for days. Now we eat well every day.'

For more information on Tools for Arms in Mozambique see:

- Sami Faltas and Wolf-Christian Paes. 2004. *Exchanging Guns for Tools: The TAE Approach to Practical Disarmament – An Assessment of the TAE Project in Mozambique*. BICC Brief 29. Bonn: Bonn International Center for Conversion.
- Ana Leao. 2004. *Weapons in Mozambique: Reducing Availability and Demand*. ISS Monograph 94. Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies.
- <http://www.christian-aid.org.uk/video/201moza/tools.htm>