

Mozambique: from war to peace and reconstruction

The Mozambique conflict (1975 to 1992) essentially resulted from friction between the superpowers in southern Africa during the cold war, and cost over a million lives. With the end of the cold war, support for the opposing factions dried up and peace finally broke out.

Led by its founder, Eduardo Mondlane, Frelimo (Front for the Liberation of Mozambique) began waging a guerrilla war against the Portuguese colonialists in the early 70's. Led by Mondlane's successor, Samora Machel, Frelimo came to power upon the departure of the some 200,000 Portuguese settlers and administrators in 1975, following the revolution in Portugal. Frelimo installed a Soviet supported African socialist government that made quick gains early on in health and education.

Contrary to the experience in other African states, the warring factions in Mozambique were not ethnically divided. Opposition to Frelimo initially came from Rhodesia who in addition to sabotage missions across the border in central Mozambique, created Renamo (National Mozambican Resistance) led by Afonso Dhlakama, to destabilize the Frelimo government and prevent the spread of the socialist model. After the demise of Rhodesia, Renamo was handed over to the apartheid regime in South Africa and the war against Frelimo intensified. The fragile Mozambican economy was devastated by the war. The considerable infrastructure and industrial assets left behind by the Portuguese were gradually all but lost due to deferred maintenance, nationalizations and poor management.

Samora Machel saw the handwriting on the wall, and the fourth Frelimo congress in 1984 decided to begin a gradual move towards a market economy. Mozambique joined the IMF and the Bank, and the first operations in education and urban rehabilitation began in 88/89. Hard on the heels of the peace agreement brokered by the Catholic church in 1992, the Bank fielded the large multi-sector "vision" mission to map out a strategy for the reconstruction of the war-torn country. The report was the basis for the first CAS in 1993, and served as guide for the Government in the reconstruction of the economy.

A central component of the reconstruction of Mozambique, however, was not fully recognized by the various CAS and the PRSP, was the local knowledge or cultural traditions of thousands of communities and their traditional leaders in the resettlement of close to 3.5 million displaced persons and 1.7 million refugees, and the treatment of hundreds of thousand for post traumatic stress syndrome. Two brief descriptions are attached and a more detailed discussion on the 500 thousand land transactions conducted without government, NGO or donor assistance from 1992 to 1994 is in the annex.

Mozambique: Land Allocation Process. Following the peace agreement in 1992, about one third of the population or approximately five million Mozambicans, including refugees and internally displaced people, returned to their villages over a two year period. In many cases, refugees and internally displaced people had been away from their villages for ten or fifteen years, and their dwelling and agricultural plots had been occupied by other displaced people. I estimate conservatively that 500,000 land

transactions took place during the two year period, that is about a quarter of a million transactions per year. These transactions were all carried out at the local level by local and/or traditional authorities using indigenous knowledge and local capacity, with no external assistance of any kind from government, donors or NGOs. This massive and rapid land allocation process permitted the Mozambican small holders to re-launch economic growth based on dramatic increase of agricultural production. Two years after this unique land allocation program, there were no reports of land conflicts except in cases where government had allocated communal lands to outside business interests. Needless to say, if the government or donors had tried to undertake such a program it would have taken many years, with substantial external human and financial resources required.

Mozambique: Post Stress Traumatic Syndrome Treatment Process. During the war in Mozambique there were over a million military and civilian deaths, and at the time of the 1992 peace agreement, about 90,000 surviving combatants. Both sides inflicted brutality and horror on each other, in which stories such as child soldiers being forced to kill their own families to ensure their loyalty to rebels, were quite common. In 1997, Dr. James Gordon, a Harvard trained psychiatrist, found that there were no practicing psychotherapists in the country, and that there was no formal treatment of PSTS of any kind. We eventually learned that traditional healers were indeed doing a great deal of PSTS treatment following the war. Indeed, child soldiers cared for by foreign NGOs were frequently brought to traditional healers for therapy. While there are no statistics on the number of cases treated, the president of the association of traditional healers of Mozambique, AMETRAMO, explained that healers' workload of what he called mental cases due to the war had increased dramatically after the peace agreement. The process for treatment of these cases involves complex and lengthy rituals that vary from one ethnic group to another. However, they all have some features in common such recognizing and accepting the atrocities the individual had committed or suffered, asking forgiveness of the spirit of the victim or victims, as well as of their surviving family members, and compensating the victims or their families, usually with livestock or other goods. Gordon noted that the process has some similarities with the western approach to PSTS therapy.