

# Ownership matters

## Capacity development in post-conflict Mozambique

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**After more than 17 years of internal conflict, Mozambique was littered with thousands of landmines. This article describes how locally recruited deminers contributed to local ownership and the state's legitimacy.**

Mozambique is one of Africa's largest countries. However, by 1992 its infrastructure was totally ravaged. Most of the rural areas in Mozambique were held by the rebels while towns and cities were securely in the hands of the government; over one million refugees had fled to neighbouring countries and a further three to four million people were internally displaced.

One of the key goals of the UN peacekeeping mission in Mozambique was to quickly repatriate displaced populations and rebuild the rural communities of the country. If trade, people and basic services could again freely move between the southern capital city of Maputo and the central and northern provinces, then the chances of a successful transition from conflict to post-conflict would increase significantly.

One of the biggest impediments to rebuilding the country was the presence of landmines that blocked most roads, railways and bridges connecting Mozambique's 10 provinces. Therefore, the task of demining the transportation arteries was one of the first humanitarian and political priorities of the aid and recovery effort in the country. Shortly after the peace accord in 1992, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) helped the Mozambican interim government establish the Accelerated Demining Programme (ADP). Its 400 demobilised ex-combatants tackled the landmine threat in the southern third of the country.

The work undertaken by the ADP quickly reconnected the southern provinces where some of the largest displacements and fiercest fighting had taken place. In the beginning there were around a dozen technical advisors assigned to the ADP. This team did not do any mine clearance, but ensured that the management and field personnel were properly trained in planning the operation and in lifting mines.

The rapid establishment of the ADP as a unified, sub-national institution turned the former combatants into an important development instrument. The UNDP's investment paid off almost immediately as it enabled the delivery of goods and services, and, most importantly, allowed uprooted populations to return to their homes after almost two decades of displacement.

As a nationally owned and operated institution that literally ploughed its way towards recovery, the ADP also helped establish the state's image as being serious about leading the transition to

a better future. The ADP was able to establish trust with local communities and at the same time gained important local knowledge on the whereabouts of mines and unexploded ordnances. In rural areas this process even helped to (re)create a sense of 'Mozambicaness,' which had existed only briefly after independence before the country spiralled into its long civil war.

Although the UN mandate in Mozambique came to an end in 1994, the ADP continued to work in close partnership with major reconstruction and development (industry, tourism and infrastructure) initiatives until 2006. For example, before the multi-billion dollar Mozal aluminium smelter could be built, the ADP went in and cleared the area of landmines. During this second phase of capacity development support, the UNDP's contribution was gradually reduced to providing two technical advisors seconded from the New Zealand army.

The work undertaken by the ADP contributed to the amazing turnaround of the Mozambican economy, which grew by 10% a year for seven years running, and helped cement the transition to development. Institutionally, the ADP continued to be the leading demining operator in Mozambique. Many of its deminers and team leaders found employment in reconstruction efforts throughout Africa, Europe, and the Middle East.

Drawing on the example of the ADP does not imply that the successful Mozambican transition from a war-torn society to one that is thriving today is due to the work of 400 deminers. There were many internal and external factors that merged to build the foundations for lasting peace. However, the case of the ADP is instructive in showing how timely and strategic capacity development projects during the delicate period of post-conflict transition can play an important role at many different levels 'humanitarian, nation building and recovery.

The example of the ADP also demonstrates how a balance between the immediate need for technical service delivery (demining) and the slower process of developing core state capacities is both practically and politically possible, and indeed desirable. For it could be argued that creating true local ownership is what matters most during the fragile periods of transition when a country often teeters between a return to conflict, impasse, or a lasting recovery.

## Further reading

UNDP (2007)  
*Capacity Development during Periods of Transition*, UNDP.

A.J. Mckechnie (2003)  
[Building Capacity in Post-Conflict Countries](#), *Social Development Notes*, Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction 14, World Bank.