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50 YEARS OF FOOD FOR PEACE

Mozambique's Harvests Grow After End of Conflict

MAPUTO, Mozambique —Ana Antonio is a young mother who grows cassava and vegetables to feed her family and expects to earn a profit this year raising tomatoes and cabbages. She knows how to preserve food as well, assuring a healthy supply for her two children even if a crop fails.

Only a decade ago, families like Antonio's were struggling to stay alive in the wake of a 16-year civil war, relying on food donated by USAID and other aid organizations.

Since then, Mozambique has moved toward peace and development. While the country remains one of the world's poorest, its economy is growing, and the U.N.'s Food and Agriculture Organization counts it among 22 countries that have "succeeded in turning the tide against hunger" since the mid-1990s.

U.S. food assistance in Mozambique has changed too, from emergency handouts to food that is sold commercially to finance agricultural development.

The USAID mission is investing $20 million in food security programs in 2004, compared to $67 million spent on free food distribution in 1993.

In 2003, more than 200,000 rural families benefited from the Agency's agriculture and nutrition education programs that helped them grow more food, eat better, and earn higher incomes.

USAID finances its food security program by selling U.S. wheat on the local market. Because wheat is not produced in Mozambique, the imports do not compete directly with local farmers. The wheat imports do keep food costs down for the urban poor, who rely on bread as a staple. The imports also spur competition in the milling industry.

Funds raised from wheat sales pay for local agriculture experts who introduce farmers to new high-value and high-nutrition crops, show them how to increase yields, and help them form cooperatives to market their products.

USAID also supports a network of community experts in nutrition. These volunteers teach mothers about preventing diarrhea and maintaining healthy diets for children, who often are fed only plain porridge even when other food is available.

Women like Antonio are also learning business and farming skills. For the first time in their lives, they are earning money with cash crops such as sesame, sunflower, and vegetables.

All programs also teach how to prevent HIV/AIDS, a growing health threat in Mozambique. ★

Melissa Thompson contributed to this article.

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Ana Antonio holds a basket with squash leaves that she will dry for later use. These leaves add protein and vitamins, especially vitamin A, to her children's porridge.