

CHANGE MAKERS: MOZAMBIQUE



WITH 60 PER CENT OF THE POPULATION LIVING ON LESS THAN US\$1.25 A DAY, DYNAMIC YOUNG MOZAMBIicans ARE OUT TO CHANGE THE STATUS QUO

WORDS SARAH BENTLEY PHOTOGRAPHY CLEVELAND AARON

Colonial rule by the Portuguese, a crippling 15-year civil war and a series of devastating floods and droughts have seriously hampered Mozambique from realising its true potential. Although one of the poorest nations in the world, it has much fertile land, 1,550 miles of coastline, a thriving arts scene and now, having hosted the 2011 All-Africa Games, a series of world-class sports stadiums. Its agriculture-based economy is growing at eight per cent a year despite a limited communications network (in 2010, just 4.2 per cent of the population were online). The most common criticism of Frelimo, the ruling party since independence 37 years ago, is its foot-dragging failure to provide even the most basic public services for the nation's 23million inhabitants. But there are problem-solvers shaking up the status quo and changing the lives of their countrymen – fast.

THE DIVE INSTRUCTOR

CARLOS MACUACUA

33, TOFO

Since co-presenting *Shiver*, a 2011 documentary about the illegal shark fin industry, Mozambique's first black dive instructor, 6ft 7in Carlos Macuacua, has become a local celebrity. His focus is the burgeoning NGO Bitonga Divers. Through the organisation, he teaches coastal villagers about marine biology and trains locals to become dive instructors, an industry currently dominated by foreigners.

"Diving is a lucrative industry yet in 2007 I was the only black Mozambican dive instructor in the country. I founded Bitonga Divers to change this and to dispel myths that stop locals from going in the ocean – some people believe that black people will be eaten by sharks but white people won't because they reflect light. Seriously, Most Mozambicans are scared of the sea but as a child I was drawn to it and swam every day.

"As a teenager I started work as a hotel receptionist and I'd watch boats full of tanks and tourists go out every morning. I was too shy to ask what they were doing. I had no comprehension of diving. One day the boat capsized. I swam out to rescue people and the equipment. To thank me the company offered me free lessons. I did my open-water course but I lost interest because I didn't see a future in it. By the time I was ready to go back, the school had closed. A different place agreed to teach me in exchange for work. It was the most challenging period of my life. I slept on the beach and barely ate, but after a year and a half I qualified as a dive master and they gave me a proper job.

"One day I was approached by an American guy, Tim Dykman from Ocean Revolution. He'd heard about me from other divers who'd visited and wanted to help me start a local diving project. NGOs often promise the world and do nothing so it was only when he flew me to the US to attend a workshop that I took him seriously.

"Now the project is fully active. I do road shows to teach coastal villagers about marine biology and the importance of protecting the environment. The sessions are packed. Also, through Bitonga, I'm getting local dive instructors trained. We pay them a small salary and cover lesson costs. My vision is to train hundreds of local divers and carry out more outreach work but without growing too large. Big NGOs waste money. I want to be a small NGO with a big impact."

□ www.bitongadivers.org



THE ART ACTIVIST

CAMILA DE SOUSA

26, MAPUTO

The daughter of pioneering Mozambican film-maker Camilo de Sousa, Camila is blazing just as maverick a trail as her father did. For her 2011 contribution to the annual exhibition *Precarious Occupations* she created *Precarious Living*, a series of startling photos, videos and installations featuring female inmates at Maputo's women's prison. This work, from the first photographer allowed inside the jail, has stimulated much debate about the judicial system.

"I got access to the prison as our justice minister is a woman and she sympathised with the aims of my project. I didn't take any photos for three months – I just got to know the women and their stories. I practically lived there for nine months and I was treated like an inmate by the guards. I encountered so many heartbreaking stories. A 15 year old jailed for stealing a cellphone; a mother who'd been in jail, accused of minor fraud, for over a year; a very young wife who'd set fire to herself and her children, while she was suffering from post-natal depression, because her husband had taken a new wife.

"There are a lot of cases of women who have snapped after years of domestic violence. In Mozambique a man gets eight years for killing his wife but a woman gets 24 for killing her husband, regardless of whether she was abused – so she's a victim twice. I'm an artist not a documentary photographer so I wanted

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each piece to be a collaboration between me and the women.

Part of the *Precarious Living* exhibition is about the representation of the black female body – bodies that have been brutalised and humiliated. The women totally understood my project and eventually they came to me with what they wanted me to photograph. One girl had a scar where she had been shot by the police when she was 15. Another's father had cut off one of her breasts. Most acts of domestic violence were directed at the breasts. Disturbingly someone described these images as pornography but what sort of mind thinks of these images like this? When people ask how they can sponsor my project I jokingly say 'you can pay for my therapy'.

"Now my first exhibition is over, I'm trying to get some distance to work out what I should do with all the material I have – I have so much more that needs to be seen. Of course I hope the work stimulates conversation and change – but it will be a long process."


THE PEACE ARTIST
GONÇALO MABUNDA

36, MAPUTO

After an apprenticeship with South African sculptor Andries Botha, Gonçalo Mabunda began crafting sculptures using deactivated weapons left over from the 1977–1992 civil war. His work has been exhibited around the world and in 2008 he created awards made of bullets for the Clinton Global Initiative Summit.

“Every bullet used in my work is a life saved – that’s how I look at it. I started working with munitions in 1995. I was working as a cleaner at Núcleo De Arte, the national association for artists, hoping to find a way in with my artwork. It was after the civil war and the Christian Council of Mozambique had set up a demilitarisation programme so communities could hand in weapons without fear of prosecution. In exchange for an AK47, a community might get 10 zinc roofs or five bicycles or a sewing machine – something useful. The programme has collected more than 800,000 weapons and is still going.

Originally the Christian Council wanted to melt the weapons down but the machinery wasn’t available. Instead they decided to distribute the weapons to artists to use creatively for peace messages. The first project was an artists-in-residence programme at Núcleo. I was already working with metal so I was chosen to take part – it was my first major project and it went very well.

“The piece that got me initial recognition was my Eiffel Tower. I created it entirely out of weapons, making the point that a lot of money was spent on the Eiffel Tower in Paris but it brought jobs and tourism. In Mozambique we spent a lot of money on civil war and all we did was destroy our country.

“Sometimes critics read complex meaning into my work when I was thinking simply – particularly with the chairs made of guns. It’s said I’m portraying a despot’s seat of power obtained through violence but I actually wanted to portray the way that after the war, everyone was tired and needed to rest.

“I’m setting up a new project called Street University with a collective of artists. The project will teach street kids how to make art out of rubbish so one day they can make work as good as or better than mine and have it exhibited around the world. If I can do it, they can.”

THE SOCIAL ENTREPRENEUR
ERIK CHARAS

37, MAPUTO

Erik Charas is a dynamic social entrepreneur and World Economics Forum young global leader. His projects tackle some of the country’s biggest problems. The award-winning VidaGas, for example, is an energy enterprise set up to ensure safe storage of vaccines in rural areas. Charas is currently working on improving housing, transport and information access, primarily via @Verdade, Mozambique’s first free newspaper.

“For Mozambicans to demand better from the government they need to be better informed – that’s why we started @Verdade. The majority of the population live below the poverty line so we had to create a business model for a free newspaper. Our advertising revenue covers our editorial costs and for the distribution we got creative. We imported the country’s first fleet of txopelas (tuk tuks) as low-cost distribution vehicles. Before they were allowed on the road we had to lobby for legislative change. Our drivers distribute the paper every Saturday around a route of



densely populated low-income communities, in exchange for using the txopelas during the week to run a taxi business.

“As our mission is to spread information rather than make a profit, it frees us to be more maverick. We encourage people to photocopy the paper and our slogan – Recycle The News: Pass This Newspaper On – is famous. We train our vendors to be particular about who they give the paper to. They insist groups share copies. Anyone who looks like they could access the paper online is refused a hard copy. It’s amazing to see how much people want information. They sprint after our txopelas to get hold of a copy. We’d like to up the print run. Demand is massive but we print just 20,000. It used to be 50,000 but when print costs went up earlier in the year we had

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to downsize. We’re non-politically aligned so we run controversial stories other papers shy away from. During the food riots last year we were the only media that could get into the townships without an armed escort. People wanted us to tell their side of the story.

“I’m also working on an affordable housing project and I’ve just given the government a blueprint for a transport system. People say my work embarrasses the government but I can’t stand to see Mozambicans suffer the way they do. We deserve better.”


THE TOURISM PIONEER
ERICA MANJATE

29, MAPUTO

Erica Manjate is the co-founder and vice president of IVERCA, a company that helps township communities to participate in and benefit from the tourism industry. It currently runs walking tours in Mafalala and the annual Mafalala Festival, a music, art and dance event in what is Maputo’s largest township. Manjate also has her own travel agency, Mapiko Tours.

“I started IVERCA in 2007 with my business partner, Ivan Laranjeira, while we were still studying tourism at college. We realised that a lot of money coming into Mozambique from tourism goes to international hotel chains so we wanted to involve local communities in tourism as a means to eradicate poverty.

“Ivan’s family are originally from Mafalala, which we call the Soweto of Mozambique. The independence movement was based there and our first president, Samora Machel, stayed in Mafalala for a year during the anti-Portuguese campaign. Many of the houses and secret tunnel networks from this period are still intact and writers, poets and activists have lived there. Marrabenta music also comes from Mafalala. With so much cultural heritage it was

the perfect place to start a tourism project. We secured funding to train locals as guides, artisans and food producers and gave jobs to women and young people. We employ 10 people directly but we also employ a local dance group to perform for tourists. We take groups out in the evening to listen to Marrabenta, party, taste the area’s gastronomy and interact with locals. Interaction is a key part of the experience and it can be hard to do this in the city centre. We run three services: the Mafalala Walking Tour, Mafalala by Night and the Mafalala Festival.

“The hardest aspect was getting society to see the area as a tourism destination. People knew its history but because the community suffers from extreme poverty it is also synonymous with crime. It was perceived as too dangerous to take tourists. But our project has proved that tourism in communities like Mafalala can work and so far we have brought 5,000 visitors, mostly foreigners, to the community. Now we want to create more self-sustaining projects around the country. We’ve partnered with the local tourism authority and several tourism schools to explore domestic tourism and stimulate entrepreneurial skills in students so they can start their own locally driven projects.”

● www.iverca.org