



Foreword

In a recent series of front-page articles in the national newspaper of Mozambique, considerable optimism was expressed at the pending construction of a new bridge across the Zambezi River, between Caia and Chimuara. There is little doubt that the bridge when finished in 2009 will be welcomed by travellers and business people in many parts of Mozambique. It will speed up the flow of traffic between the north and south of the country and reduce the considerable waiting time experienced by many drivers at the current crossing over the river serviced by an often slow and unreliable ferry. The construction effort itself will bring much needed jobs into the area. Work will be created not only in relation to the building of the actual physical infrastructure. Other opportunities will also open up to service the large number of employees, estimated at several thousand, who will be based in both Caia and Chimuara for a number of years.

Yet past experience in both these locations, as well as lessons from elsewhere, urge a note of caution amid the justifiable enthusiasm that has greeted this initiative. Previous infrastructure projects have brought economic and other benefits but have left a trail of negative social consequences behind them. As the following report documents, the presence of large numbers of single, male workers flush with money in an impoverished community has led in the past to the sexual and physical exploitation

of local women and children, prompted by their circumstances to enter into relationships which frequently pose a threat to themselves and their families around them. Workers' compounds and illegal settlements that have arisen to cater for stranded travellers and delayed truck drivers have, according to many community members interviewed for this report, produced an unsafe, unsavoury and dangerous environment, and one to which their children are exposed.

At a time when HIV/AIDS has assumed a prevalence rate of over 20 per cent in the provinces of Mozambique where Caia and Chimuara are located, the influx of a large army of men without their wives and with money to spend has spread concern among many local adults and children. Teachers warn about children dropping out of school in order to find employment on or around the construction site. Social workers warn about the potential exploitation of children in hazardous activities, including their involvement in prostitution in the shantytowns that have already developed on both sides of the river. Health workers are worried about an escalation in sexually transmitted diseases based on their past experience when migrant workers entered their locations for extended periods of time. And parents warn of the temptations offered to their children by the promise of easy money, and the risks posed to their education, health and social welfare as a result.

None of these negative consequences are inevitable if action is taken now to put in place measures to mitigate against the impacts mentioned above. Indeed the funders of the bridge, as well as the government of Mozambique, have indicated that social protection for indigenous communities has to be a part of this project as it develops over the next few years. With, however, the projected starting date only a few months away¹, this window of opportunity, which might allow agencies to establish adequate protection for children in these locations, is rapidly closing. This report concludes with a series of practical recommendations largely drawn from a process of community feedback, including children



themselves, as to what needs to be established now, and before any significant damage is done. This new bridge across the Zambezi River has been hailed as a welcome development for all of Mozambique in terms of what it will bring to economic progress. With commitment and foresight we also need to ensure that it does not harm the children and adults of the two locations where it will be sited.

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in Mozambique on behalf of the
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¹ The final draft of this report was completed in March 2006.