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MOZAMBIQUE

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Completing a Road's Missing Links



Photo: AFRICON

The new Nhamapaza River Bridge in remote central Mozambique was one of 27 bridges built or repaired in a project completing construction of a 150-mile stretch of the main national highway that had been abandoned in 1980 due to civil war.

Only a few years ago, anyone who wanted to drive the 150 miles (240 kilometers) from Gorongosa and Caia in central Mozambique faced a daunting three-day trip that could be accomplished only in the dry season due to poor road conditions. Plans to link the two towns by expanding the main national highway — the EN1 — had existed for decades. But construction of that stretch of road, begun in the 1970s, had to be abandoned in 1980 due to civil war. After peace came in 1992, lack of funds prevented further work.

As a result, no proper road had ever existed between the two towns. Some sections were gravel, or a crumbling, long-abandoned tar road. In other parts, only a

bumpy dirt track cut through the bush. There was no bridge over several rivers along the way, including the Nhamapaza River, located in one of the most isolated and remote parts of Mozambique.

In 1999, USAID began funding a road project that changed the landscape. Workers built or repaired 27 bridges — including one over the Nhamapaza — as part of a four-year, \$50 million effort to link Gorongosa and Caia with a paved, all-weather highway. The Nhamapaza bridge has brought new life and economic activity to a previously desolate place. Today, travelers crossing the Nhamapaza River on the EN1 encounter a village, complete with a small market, primary school and clinic.