Mozambique: Guitar Hero Reported by Marjorie McAfee

MARJORIE McAFFEE, Reporter: [voice-over] On the other side of the world, far away from modern life, lies a vast expanse of land called Niassa. This is Mozambique's most northern province. Its high elevation makes you feel like you could pluck a cloud out of the sky. Only one dirt road links this remote region to the rest of the country. It's a place the world forgot.

But in a small village up the road, there's excitement in the air. A crowd is gathering. Everyone has come to see this man, Feliciano dos Santos. He's one of Mozambique's best-known musicians, and he's turned up here, in the middle of nowhere, to play with his band, Massukos.

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MARJORIE McAFFEE: If everyone looks a little bewildered, it's for good reason. They've never seen a rock band before. But they recognize Santos as one of their own. He was born and raised in Niassa and sings in the local tribal language.

This is their most popular song, and it's a little unusual.

FELICIANO DOS SANTOS AND BAND: [singing] [subtitles] Let's wash our hands. Let's wash our hands. For the children to stay healthy, for the uncles to stay healthy, for the mothers to stay healthy, we build latrines.

MARJORIE McAFFEE: That's right, Santos is singing about toilets. He's not your typical rock star. He uses his music to teach villagers about good hygiene.

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MARJORIE McAFFEE: Santos wanted to do more than just sing about sanitation. In the mid-1990s, he founded an organization, Estamos, to deal with Niassa's health problems. They focus on water issues, like building pumps and wells to provide clean drinking water. But their main project is toilets, installing ecological latrines. Santos showed me how one works.

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MARJORIE McAFFEE: It's called an Ecosan toilet. Santos didn't invent it, but he's introduced it to rural Mozambique. The brick-lined pits prevent contamination of the groundwater. And there are other benefits, too. Families with an ecological toilet collect ash from cooking fires. They keep the ashes in a location next to the latrine. After each use, you throw a handful of ash onto the waste, which eliminates the smell and keeps away disease-bearing flies. Touching the ash also reminds you to wash your hands, further reducing the chances of contamination.

FELICIANO DOS SANTOS: [subtitles] From here, this compost is ready for the fields. It is a natural fertilizer that doesn't cost anything. It's more economical for the family. With this, they will have more food to eat.

And there's more. Santos tells me that after six months of composting in ash, the waste is transformed into top quality fertilizer.

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MARJORIE McAFEE: But farmers like Jamal needed a little convincing to try it.

JAMAL: [subtitles] Last year, I was at my friend's fields and I saw that his cabbages were growing very well. And it looked like it had a lot of good fertilizer on it. So I went with my friend to his house and saw that the fertilizer was from the latrine. But the cabbages were growing so well, I said I'd like to have one, too.

MARJORIE McAFEE: Today, Santos and the Estamos crew are at Jamal's house, helping him put the finishing touches on his new ecological toilet. In Niassa and other parts of Mozambique, Estamos has installed over 300 toilets, bringing a sustainable sanitation system to places that never had one before.

FELICIANO DOS SANTOS: I don't want to see children growing with the same problem as I have.

MARJORIE McAFEE: Santos has a personal motivation for this work. As a child, he contracted polio from contaminated water. It cost him part of his leg. Not one to give up, Santos made his first artificial leg out of cardboard. But he still bears the scars of being sold short for his disability.

FELICIANO DOS SANTOS: It's sad, but discrimination begins at home. When my wife was pregnant, we went to her uncle's house. In front of my wife and my mom, he said, "Who's this guy? He is not capable of taking care of anybody. I can't give him my daughter because he won't be able to take care of her. Who can he take care of?" He told me to leave. He said this in front of my mother.

[singing] [subtitles] Sit down and think about life. Sit down and think about life. People die every day.

MARJORIE McAFEE: Santos has always turned to music for healing. He started his band Massukos in the aftermath of a long and devastating civil war.

FELICIANO DOS SANTOS: [subtitles] Massukos is the name of a fruit. I was inspired to name the band after that fruit because we were just finishing a war. And after the war, many people needed to fight a spiritual hunger. So our music is intended to fight spiritual hunger.

MARJORIE McAFEE: Santos's message resonates in Niassa, where life is tragically short. Most people here don't live past the age of 42. One reason is AIDS. One out of six people in this area is infected with HIV, so Santos has also taken up the fight against AIDS. His group Estamos does HIV/AIDS education and prevention, including plays like this, where villagers reenact the traumas of infidelity and infection.

MAN: [subtitles] She says she went to the hospital and that she's got a disease.

WOMAN: [subtitles] Joao, you know, if she is HIV-positive, then so are you.

MAN: [subtitles] I'm leaving. You stay with her. She's got HIV, not me!

FELICIANO DOS SANTOS: We teach them how can disease get in the community, how someone can get HIV, and how to avoid HIV also.

MARJORIE McAFEE: Back at Estamos headquarters, Santos tells me about his latest AIDS initiative.

FELICIANO DOS SANTOS: [subtitles] We started a new program to identify and provide access to water and sanitation to people who are HIV-positive.
MARJORIE McAFEE: With this expanded AIDS campaign, their clean water work, and of course, their eco-toilets, Estamos is busier than ever these days. They now employ over 40 people and have an operating budget of nearly a million dollars. It's mostly from Western aid groups. But recently, the Mozambican government has gotten involved, selecting "Wash Your Hands" as the theme song for a national health campaign, a real honor for Santos.

SIMAO FONTES, Lead Singer: [subtitles] He has become a sort of billboard icon. When it comes to water and sanitation throughout the country, he's an icon. This success, he deserves it. He deserves it.

MARJORIE McAFEE: Simao Fontes is the lead singer in their band, and he and Santos work together in the Estamos office. It's a unique combination. They're non-profit health workers by day, Afro-pop stars by night.

And lately, it's not just locals who've recognized the good they're doing. Earlier this year, Santos received an international environmental award in San Francisco for his work with Estamos.

[www.pbs.org: The Goldman Environmental Prize]

FELICIANO DOS SANTOS: [subtitles] I am deeply honored to receive this award for our work.

MARJORIE McAFEE: With his popularity and stature, Santos could have left Mozambique a long time ago. But Santos's heart remains in Niassa, and for now, he and his friend, Simao, say they have too much work left to do here to leave.

FELICIANO DOS SANTOS AND BAND: [singing] [subtitles] I sing out loud, your name is Niassa. I sing out loud, your name is Niassa. I am not embarrassed that you are poor like this. I am not concerned that you are fragile like this, Niassa.

MARJORIE McAFEE: As they continue their work with Estamos, building up this forgotten place, Santos and Simao have a simple message: Don't forget where you come from, and try to do some good while you're here.

FELICIANO DOS SANTOS AND BAND: [singing] [subtitles] Other people say, "I'll never go back to Niassa. Why go back?" But here we are. Santos is Niassa. Simao is Niassa. Estamos is Niassa. Massukos is Niassa.