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S.A. invests in Maputo ⁽⁴⁾

By Iain Christie

MAPUTO — Some are fixing up hotels, some breed cattle, some sell hot dogs. But all are South Africans hoping to reap a financial harvest from newly accessible Mozambique.

South Africa, which for years backed right-wing rebels in a war that has crippled Mozambique's economy, is now being welcomed as the sponsor of a business revival.

The once-hated South Africans appear as farmers in far-flung provinces, managers of restaurants and businessmen seeking contracts in everything from plastics to shipbuilding.

Hot dog seller Neil van Niekerk, a white South African from Johannesburg, came to the Mozambican capital Maputo last November and says he is glad he made the decision.

"We are making a very good profit," he said, taking the equivalent of little more than a dollar for a South African style "boerewors" (farm sausage) hot dog smothered in tomato sauce, mustard and onions.

"People doing the same business in Johannesburg would never make the turnover that we do in a little thing like this, never, never, never."

David Ankers, who works for the South African hotel company Karos, is equally enthusiastic about doing business in Mozambique.

For the last two years he has been manager of Maputo's Polana Hotel, an ageing but elegant relic of Portuguese colonial days.

The hotel in the tree-lined Avenida Julius Nyerere was nationalised soon after Mozambique won independence from Portugal in 1975 and still belongs to the state, but the business is now effectively under South African control.

Karos is also the biggest single shareholder in the local company, Hoteis Polana Limitada, with 32,5 percent of the shares, he added.

Ankers said that since Karos won the lease agreement with the Mozambican government in 1990 it had spent 38 million rands (£13 million) on refurbishing the hotel.

The cash for this investment — large by Mozambican standards — was raised by borrowing, but Ankers says he is confident hotel profits will repay the loan.

"I have no fear of competitors, I think people will come to the Polana for the sake of nostalgia," he said. — Ziana-Rtr.