

▼ *No obstacle too big for Mozambique's 'Donna Trudi'*

Trudi Schwartz, a diminutive South African woman, who spends much of her time driving deep in the Mozambican bush, is undeterred by a possible encounter with bandits.

So what if demobilised soldiers are roaming around, she asks? Bandits have been ambushing vehicles for years. And the disintegrating, potholed roads that, in places, are virtually non-existent? She sees them merely as an obstacle to be overcome on her mission of mercy.

Schwartz, the country director of World Relief, a United States-based Christian organisation aiding the poor, is totally dedicated to helping displaced Mozambicans and returning refugees re-establish themselves in the land of their birth.

As such, it is part of her job to criss-cross Gaza province in her four-wheeled vehicle whenever necessary — in addition to travelling regularly between her home in Nelspruit and her office in Maputo.

"Yes, I've been stopped by demobilised soldiers who wanted food but I've never had a problem," she said. "When you are doing God's work there is no reason to be afraid."

Trudi (40) heads World Relief's team of 60 in Mozambique. Though she emphasises constantly that her job is very much a team effort, she is undoubtedly the kingpin round which World Relief revolves. She is kept on the go overseeing a variety of projects, ranging from the distribution of seeds and the establishment of community banks to the drilling of boreholes.

So dedicated is she that people are beginning to refer to her as "Mother Teresa of Mozambi-

DESPITE roaming bandits, Trudi Schwartz is dedicated to helping the needy, writes Winnie Graham

que". To the people in the villages she is simply "Donna Trudi". Last week she took time off to work as a monitor in Mozambique's elections.

The daughter of a soldier, Trudi grew up in a conservative but Christian Afrikaans home. She matriculated in Oudtshoorn, then obtained an economics degree at the University of Pretoria.

Last month I joined her to see some of World Relief's projects in Mozambique. We travelled from Maputo, over cratered tarred roads, to Chokwe where the first of 952 tons of seed — maize, millet, groundnuts and cow peas — were being offloaded at a railway siding. The packs were destined for people in villages hundreds of kilometres to the north.

Unpacked

Almost as soon as the seeds were unpacked from the train, they were reloaded on to lorries for immediate redistribution.

Then the difficult part of our journey began.

We wanted to visit the team drilling for water in villages somewhere along the Limpopo River Valley. The journey was little short of a nightmare as Trudi, her hands firmly on the wheel, steered us over deeply rutted and potholed roads.

The bush was dense, the only sign of human habitation the occasional village or the bombed-

out house of some former Portuguese colonist. Water was available only at villages where hand-pumps had been fitted to new boreholes. The Limpopo, in that area, had run dry.

We found the drilling squad — from Maritzburg, Natal — in the village of Mabomo at an opportune moment. They had just struck water. As the muddy fluid, locked into the earth for centuries, sprayed over the excited crowd, a woman began spontaneously to dance. The villagers joined her, singing and dancing.

"The drums will be pounding tonight," hydrologist Steve Ray commented. "That's the way they celebrate here."

Trudi was already on her knees at the outlet, scooping handfuls of water for a small boy to try.

"This is what makes my job worthwhile," she said.

But Trudi's good works are not limited by her job.

Some months ago, on her way back to South Africa, she was flagged down by an elderly African at the side of the road near the border town of Rossano Garcia. She stopped and saw his "patient": her leg had been blown off minutes before.

The woman had been tending her "machamba" (vegetable plot) when she stood on a landmine — a legacy of the Frelimo/Renamo struggle.

Trudi lifted the still conscious patient into her vehicle and rushed to the nearest clinic, about 20 kilometres away. Because there was no doctor there, she had no choice but to return to Maputo.

"It was the least I could do," she said.



Water of life . . . Trudi Schwartz gives a child a drink of water from a newly sunk borehole in a remote village in Mozambique.