

# Ten-minute chat

Throughout his career, Peter Edmondson has specialised in milk quality and mastitis in dairy cows. He is also an accomplished communicator and uses his skills in training and as an expert witness. He leads the XLVets FarmSkills Africa programme, carrying out voluntary work in Africa.

## Tell us about FarmSkills Africa.

It's an XLVets initiative to help train and support small-scale dairy farmers in various parts of Mozambique where they are re-establishing a dairy industry to create income for smallholders. There are fewer than 3000 dairy cows in the country. Each farmer starts with one in-calf Jersey heifer. We train the initiative's technical team and brought three key staff over to the UK for a two-week study trip last year and will have three more again this year. It's the best way to show best practice and what can be achieved.

## How did you get involved?

I was volunteered by Mike Thorne of Rutland Vets who is originally from Zimbabwe and who set up the whole project; a brilliant idea.

## Why did you get involved?

I worked in Saudi Arabia and China earlier in my career and really enjoy challenges in

developing countries. I love travelling and meeting new people.

## Describe the activities you are involved in.

We train the smallholders under a tree, no technology there, you are right back to basics. You teach, demonstrate and get them to show that they have learnt. We visit farmers and see how they can improve health, welfare and production. We also train paravets – there are no practising farm vets there.

## What do you like about it?

The people and the fact that this project really works. The people are amazing, so welcoming and keen to learn. They have so little and yet are far happier than most people in the UK. They radiate happiness. At one village, the locals danced and sang as a welcome when I arrived – that never happens in Somerset! The project has been very successful, with less than 2 per cent mortality of cows in the first three years. It has generated a lot of income for smallholders and some now have two cows and are expanding.

## Is there anything you didn't like?

The mosquitos.

## Can others get involved?

We only use XLVets practice staff; so



far more than 20 vets have given up two weeks of their time to participate. We have about 30 vets on a waiting list to go out to Africa, which is superb, and many would like to go back.

## What's the best piece of advice you were given before you went?

Enjoy African time. It's a totally different pace of life, yet things do get done . . . eventually.

## Tell us something that nobody knows about you.

I spent a short period of time in jail in Saudi – not to be recommended!