

# NiZA Conference on Mozambique

## Constraints and Perspectives for Democracy in Mozambique

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## 1 Background

As part of its Human Rights Programme and the Amsterdam Beira city link, NiZA is organising a conference on constraints and perspectives for democratic developments in Mozambique. The conference is to take place on Friday, February 1<sup>st</sup> 2002, in the Van Kleffenszaal of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in The Hague.

### 1.1 Object

After a successful peace process, Mozambique currently finds itself in a transitional phase towards democracy. This will ideally result in a stable democratic constitutional state. During the transitional phase, the role and authority of constitutional institutions and other parties within a 'mature' democracy has yet to crystallize or find its place. This is a process with ups and downs where, especially in the case of Mozambique, donors will exert an important influence. The crucial question is: how can these donors use their influence in a positive – i.e. democracy strengthening - manner?

Various partners and contacts of NiZA in Mozambique have expressed concern about the recent developments in their country that form a threat to the fragile democratic process. Examples are the aftermath of the elections of late 1999 of which Renamo disputes the results; the nationwide demonstrations orchestrated by Renamo in November 2000 which ended in violent confrontations with the police and left at least 45 people dead; the following tragedy in Montepuez where nearly a hundred Renamo supporters were locked up in a tiny cell and died after a week without food or drink; the murder of the critical journalist Carlos Cardoso who was doing in-depth research into the country's corruption and the murder of Antóni Siba-Siba, the young bank manager who wished to expose how the Banco Austral had practically gone bankrupt because of 'bad loans'.

In a vulnerable country like Mozambique, it is essential to spot increasing political tensions at an early stage and to analyse the factors that threaten stability and the possible solutions. The object of our conference is to give an impetus towards doing this. The most important questions we will debate with Mozambicans and representatives of Dutch development policy

are: What role can Mozambican *civil society* play in strengthening democracy? What opportunities do northern NGO's have to strengthen this process? How can donors play a role in preventing the escalation of political tensions at an early stage?

## 1.2 Situation in Mozambique

- Politics

Mozambique is frequently referred to as a success story of democratisation in an African country. It is true that in Mozambique, as opposed to a lot of other African countries, the peace process has succeeded and was followed by elections with various parties and the transformation of the armed opposition into a civil political party. But it is also true to say that since the first elections in 1994, little progress has been made in the direction of a mature democracy.

An explanation for this stagnation is the initial heavy foreign pressure to come to a peace agreement and to free elections, without the ruling political elite really wishing for actual democratisation from conviction. We see the paradoxical situation that the prevailing (Frelimo) elite controls the democratisation process and gives it form all by itself, without any substantial contribution from the opposition. In addition, there is the ostentatious enrichment of some of the political leaders, which stands in stark contrast to the continuing poverty of the population.

The result is that the population distances itself in apathy and no longer holds faith in politics, especially in the regions where the majority supports Renamo. But also in a province such as Cabo Delgado, traditionally a stronghold of Frelimo supporters, the lack of development leads to explosive situations, which, with some steering from the opposition, could easily lead to ungovernable chaos. Mozambicans worry about this increasing polarisation between Frelimo and Renamo.

- Economy

Despite high growth figures, Mozambique remains one of the poorest countries in the world. There is vast regional inequality, with the South and in particular the area around Maputo undergoing immense development, but the rest of the country lagging behind. Foreign investments in a number of mega projects have given the industrial sector an enormous boost, but for the time being such projects remain isolated and have little effect on the rest of the economy. Although the macro-economic situation is relatively advantageous, the local private sector is still a problem child, due to both a limited capital input and weak management. Furthermore, over half of the national expenditure is financed by foreign donors. The huge damage caused by the floods in 2000, and again in 2001, has set development back many years.

Two former state banks, the Banco Comercial de Moçambique (BCM) and the Banco Austral were declared bankrupt during 2001 due to a total of over one hundred million dollars in 'bad loans', i.e. loans to persons and companies never paid. Loans and debt exemption under IMF and World Bank programmes were therefore suspended until a solution was found for the banking crisis. In September, the IMF decided to resume the loans, but some local economists are unhappy with this decision. They feel that the government should be kept under pressure to have the debtors pay up, to prevent the banks being recapitalised from state funds.

- Human Rights

According to diverse reports by human rights organisations, the various police and security services in Mozambique are guilty of all sorts of human rights violations, such as the murder and disappearance of prisoners, excessive violence and torture. In addition, arrests are made

more or less at random and long durations of detention without trial still occur, although Amnesty International has observed some improvement. Furthermore, a relatively large number of prisoners die of disease and ill nourishment as a result of the abominable hygienic conditions. The constitution does in theory protect the rights of civilians and of prisoners, but there is no effective control. The judiciary doesn't have enough (qualified) staff and is, like the police, easily bribed. Freedom of the press is generally respected and government and president are sharply criticised, but the media hides its head in a shroud of self-censure when it comes to exposing corruption scandals. Last year, unknown perpetrators killed Carlos Cardoso, the most important research journalist in the country, but the police enquiry into the case got off to a slow start. A number of critical journalists were threatened and a radio reporter had his tongue cut off. A murder attempt was carried out on the deputy Attorney General Albino Macamo, who was investigating corruption within the judicial system. None of these cases have been cleared up in a satisfactory manner.

## **2 Themes and Guests**

Various partners and contacts of NiZA in Mozambique have expressed their concern about the increasing polarisation between the two leading parties on the political horizon, Frelimo and Renamo. A preparatory trip to Mozambique in September 2001 confirmed that many Mozambicans attach importance to the subject of the conference. Two themes proved to be essential: decentralisation of power and the role of the media and *civil society organisations* (CSO's) in demanding more transparency in policy.

### **2.1 Decentralisation and Local Government**

Good rule has many facets. One of them is decentralisation of power, by which the population can exert more influence on decisions concerning its own welfare. The Mozambican government has been characterised by a highly centralised system since colonial times. Decisions were initially taken in the motherland of Portugal and following independence, by the national government in the capital of Maputo. Even Beira, the country's second city, had very little say in the council policy to be carried out.

Central government allied to unequal regional development had formed a source of discontent among the population in the central and northern parts of the country for a long time. During the last elections in 1999, Renamo won the largest number of votes in six provinces. But the constitution does not provide for a translation of these votes into governor seats for the opposition and Frelimo keeps to the letter of the law. In this way, the political system strengthens the latent political tensions. With the introduction of the (as of yet) 33 independent councils in 1998, a first step was made towards decentralising government. But the road to democracy knows many obstacles. The distance between the government and the population is one of them: In Beira, a mere 10% of eligible voters turned up at the first council elections in June 1998. The largest opposition party Renamo boycotted the elections but the second candidate that did take part won a staggering 45% of the votes. This means that the current municipality, consisting of members of the ruling Frelimo party, has been elected by a small minority and does not possess the support of the people.

Another problem is the lack of administrative and other capacities of council members, district rulers, provincial directors and their civil servants. This leads to bad planning, inadequate realisation of plans and eventually an even larger chasm between civilians and rulers.

In Mozambique, there are many different initiatives to help bring politics closer to the people. An example is the NGO **Asserco** in Beira. Asserco is active in Dondo and in the district of Buzi (province of Sofala) in setting up participatory planning structures. It organises meetings with the community in order to ascertain what the development priorities are on the basis of 'most votes count'. It teaches people to draft plans, for example, a draw-well this year and a school next year. In addition, it helps people discover what they can do by themselves and for which issues they need the input of the local authorities. Finally, it trains representatives of the community so that they can present their plans to the local authorities.

Another initiative that strengthens local authority is the programme by the UN Capital Development Fund (**UNCDF**) for capacity building in the field of district planning. This programme is partly financed by the Dutch government. The first phase of the programme ran from 1998 to 2000 in the province Nampula and the aim is now to extend it to other provinces. The programme originates with the district authority, which makes a plan and then presents it to the community, a different approach to that of Asserco, which originates with the public and then works towards the local authority from there.

We would like to invite representatives of both organisations in order to present the programmes. In addition, we wish to invite someone from the civil service on district level with experience of decentralisation processes.

Guests:

1. **Dr Carlos Roque, director of Asserco, Beira**
2. **Representative of UNCDF, Nampula**
3. **Mr Braga, district administrator Angoche**

## **2.2 Role of Civil Society Organisations in the Democratisation Process**

The past ten years have seen a rapid increase in non-governmental organisations in Mozambique that aim to improve the quality of life in one way or another. Up until the peace treaty of 1992 and the introduction of the constitution (drawn up with Renamo), independent organisations were forbidden. There was an organisation for women, one for the youth and a trade union organisation, but these were directly dependent on the Frelimo party.

With the introduction of the multi-party system, the way was also cleared for independent organisations. Foreign donors were eager to support such organisations in order to form an active *civil society*. In a number of cases, this led to rapidly growing *donor driven* projects that received large sums of money but showed insufficient results. In addition, foreign NGO's and their Mozambican partners pumped the best people out of the civil service because they offered better conditions. Currently, many of these CSO's are in a phase of consolidation and reflection of their aims. They are faced with the limits to their capacity and ask the question: do we wish to grow further? And: how can we contribute to the democratic process?

Some local NGO's see their role as purely technical and an addition to that of the government: "so much needs to be done for the development of our country, the government can't manage on its own". Others assume that in addition to their social development work, they also need to express a critical voice. An organisation such as the League for Human Rights for example, is constantly faced with the corruption of the judicial system in its daily

task of providing legal assistance. The corruptibility of public prosecutors and magistrates is disadvantageous for the weaker part of society for which the League acts. This is why the League sees it as her duty to observe the functioning of the state machinery with a critical eye and why it has been involved in recent campaigns against corruption.

From the moment of its foundation, ProPaz has involved itself in the reintegration of war veterans, especially in the central provinces where war was waged most intensely. With the passing of time, ProPaz has extended these activities to conflict prevention and reconciliation on community level. In this way, ProPaz plays an important role in the democratic process.

During the conference, we wish to have representatives of these two CSO's speak on how they view their contribution to the democratisation process, what the possibilities and the obstacles are and what they expect from our civil society and government policy.

In addition, we wish the media to express how it can play a role in building a democratic system and how this can be strengthened. A report by the Commission for the Protection of Journalists (CPJ) in New York in July 2001 shows that Mozambican journalists indicate that there is an atmosphere of fear. They are afraid to do in-depth research into politically sensitive issues, such as corruption or cases concerning prominent Frelimo members. It is true that there is formal freedom of the press and much criticism of the government is expressed in general terms, but the level of research journalism is so low that politicians have little to fear.

Another problem is the unequal distribution of the media over the country. The daily and weekly papers in particular, have little reach beyond the two largest cities Maputo and Beira. One of the causes is the high transport price charged by the national airline LAM. A number of fax papers that can also be received electronically do penetrate deeper into the country but the readers group remains limited to a small group of highly educated people. In a country where 70% of the population is illiterate, channels such as radio and TV are obviously very important. In the past few years, UNESCO has been involved in a large project that aims to support the media and radio in particular. Radio Moçambique has received some strong frequencies enabling it to reach the whole country. Furthermore, thirty community radios have been set up in a short space of time, bringing information closer to the people. TVM is still limited to a number of provincial capitals.

Guests:

**Alice Mabota, president of the Human Rights League**

**Victor Igreja, psychologist, co-founder of AEPATO ("Hope forAll"), consultant for ProPaz**

**Gil Lauriciano, anthropologist, media researcher with the Higher Institute for International Relations (ISRI)**