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**Enhancing Women's Participation in Electoral Processes in
Post-Conflict Countries
Experiences from Mozambique**

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I. BACKGROUND

Political reform in the Republic of Mozambique has entailed a process of fundamental decentralization approach since 1998. Policy transfer of local power must be considered in light of Mozambique's distinct historical and cultural environment. It is difficult to deploy 'western' democracies to the Mozambican context. Several questions came from the announcement of the multiparty general elections in 1994, two years after the signature of the General Peace Agreement. What challenges did the multiparty general elections pose to Mozambican culture and democracy? To what extent did they reinforce the pacification of the country? What was the starting point for talking about multiparty elections, democracy, opposition, equality, women representation, etc..

The process of building peace and establishing democracy showed the complexity and the grandeur of the Mozambican process and followed a very specific trajectory. Mozambique is now known as a country of good practice of democratic processes and gender equity. And the particularity lies on the imposed dialogue as the method to approach those in power and those in the opposition. Even for women representation and gender equality, dialogue is the preferable method of communication to achieve the goal. After more than 16 years of war the peace process took four phases:

- Peace negotiations between the Frelimo Government and Renamo, the opposition Party, that ending with the signing of the General Peace Agreement – 1990-92;
- Multiparty Conference which adopted the Electoral Law that governed the first multiparty general elections - 1993;
- Electoral process operationalized by the National Electoral Commission – 1994-95;
- Post election period aimed at building Mozambican democracy in a multiparty environment, building acceptance of the voting results – from 1995

Along all the peace-making process, elections and democracy, a lot of seminars, workshops, conferences and discussions took place on national unity and its linkages with cultural diversity, national reconciliation and reconstruction, democracy, opposition, dialogue, trust, competence, gender equity and equality, quotas, consensus and understanding, among others. The country tried to find once again its bearings on a path of understanding through debate and consciousness-raising from which the seed of national pacification was born.

Just like men, women believe in freedom, democracy and peace. This is the reason why women in Mozambique participated in the armed struggle for the national independence from 1964 to 1974 and after the independence developed strategies to take an important role in the destinies of the country on the path of democracy and development. During the civil war women were used by the armed men as targets for rape, sexual assault and violation. After the war many of these women have committed themselves for forgiveness and democracy as they didn't want to see their daughters or any other woman to suffer from those kinds of crimes.

In 1998 took place the first local elections in Mozambique in 33 municipalities. There is considerably more autonomy now since 1998. Last year, 2003 took place the second local elections in the same 33 municipalities.

The municipalization process is part of the political administrative reforms that are in place in Mozambique. The system prioritises gradualism in the creation of the autarchies in cities and villages. The autarchy is part of the local power and has the duty to organize the participation of the citizens in the solution of the problems of their community, to promote local development and the consolidation of democracy. The local power is organized in an elected municipal assembly with deliberative powers and a municipal council, an executive board that responds to the municipal assembly and is directed by an elected President.

II. GENDER-SENSITIVE LEGISLATION GOVERNING ELECTORAL ASSISTANCE

The political and legal framework in Mozambique doesn't always take into consideration the previous political and electoral culture, even to adapt to the country and people reality. The past colonial period had no electoral experience based on pluralism and the free competition among several political parties. The one-party system established in the post independence period has made some exercises of choice and legitimation, based on popular participation, where people were chosen in an opened process. From this experience of participation derived as part of the political culture, the organization of citizens for public discussions of the main laws like the Constitution of the Republic in 1990.

The Mozambican Constitution is the main source of the electoral legislation which provides basic principles of gender equality, civil and political rights, adding rules concerning citizenship, political parties and participation in public life and for the electoral system. The Constitution establishes the principle of equality among citizens to participate in political life, particularly in elections, and enshrines the principle of universal right of suffrage. All citizens, both male and female, except those legally deprived of their civil rights, have the right to vote, so long they are registered as voters, regardless of whether they were members of any particular party, regardless of their level of education, income, language, religion, sex, race or

ethnic group. Relevant to elections are also housed in the Constitution a rich catalogue of freedoms that include freedom of expression, freedom of press, freedom of assembly, freedom of association and the freedom to form political parties.

Following the Constitution ordinary laws on political parties, freedom of association, press freedom and freedom of assembly and demonstration were put in place.

Right from the beginning women start to organize themselves in several NGOs to struggle for their rights, after the New Constitution in 1990, regardless of whether or not they belonged to political parties because women understood that democracy was not only the right to vote. More than 20 associations dealing with women and gender issues were created. For the 1994 multiparty general elections women organizations played an important role in voter education for women at grassroots level so that they could participate in the various phases of the electoral process. Democracy is not limited to the simple fact of casting a ballot. It has to do with a series of issues and rights that guarantee the participation of all in decision making, as well as the representation of their interests in the fora where decisions are taken.

Women NGOs, like OMM, MULEIDE, Forum Mulher, GEDLIDE Institute and some others started to challenge the gender imbalances in the society, claiming for a more active participation by women to have more access to decision making bodies. Seminars with political parties leaders were undertaken in 1993/94 for lobbying and giving evidences of the gender disparities. Women are acquiring more rights, particularly the freedom of expression, assembly and association. Society began to look upon women with other eyes. Nowadays, it is not strange listening to men saying that there is an element missing: gender in the different lists and working groups. By gender many people still mean women. But we know that gender is the social constructed roles, relationships, attitudes and standards of behaviour that characterize the differences between men and women. And this is the rational for having a quota system in the Frelimo Party.

Each electoral process in Mozambique has its own electoral legislation package, which regulates processes of voter registration, education, electoral observation, the electoral commission, etc. In the Electoral Law for 1998 local elections, there is a provision that was kept for 2003 local elections, to give priority to pregnant women, elderly, handicapped and patients, during the vote.

III. VOTER REGISTRATION AND EDUCATION

For the 2003 local elections the Assembly of the Republic approved the Law No. 18/2002 related to the institutionalisation of the systematic electoral registration for elections and referendums. The registration is compulsory and unique for all the elections by universal, direct, equal, secret, personal and periodic suffrage as well as for referendums and it is a duty for all the citizens with 18 years old at the elections

day to register in the electoral census. This law is not specific to gender issues, only for handicapped people in the act of signing the registration bulletin.

From the first days of the electoral process in 1994, women hastened to the registration posts so as to obtain their voter's card which ensured their right to choose the country's future rulers. The number of total registered voters was 6,396,061, where women constituted 54% and men 46%.

It was necessary to bring millions of voters to the registration posts and to ensure it, each of the voter registration brigade organized by the Technical Electoral Secretariat had a voter education agent. The overall slogan for the elections was 'in your vote the future of Mozambique'.

For the first time people didn't understand what was the registration for as usually registration was for military recruitment for people over 18 years old. Others thought it was for a new identity card. In the other hand, few people new what voting was. So, voter education played a very important role. For the 1998 local elections many people didn't understand what it was as they had already chosen a new President in 1994. Why to choose another one for the municipality. And again voter education played a very important role. For the first general elections 87% of the voters went to vote and the abstention was only 13% in 1994. For the local elections in 1998 the abstention was 85%, only 15% of the voters went to the ballots. Last year in the second local elections, there was a small increase in the number of voters who voted.

This is something to think about. In 1998 there was the idea that the high level of abstentions was due to the boycott made by Renamo who didn't participate in the first local elections. However, they participated last year with a coalition, Renamo Electoral Union and the level of abstention is still high. In many other countries in Europe and in the United States local elections are also not very popular! Aren't we forcing a kind of democracy for people at local level which is not appropriate to their needs? I call upon researchers, politicians, analysts and others interested on these matters to study it deeply. Because the way to the pooling station people know and go for the presidential and national assembly elections. Not for the local ones!

Voter education is undertaken by the electoral structures and also by NGOs, political parties and the media. The difference is that the political parties do voter education to vote for their candidates and the National Electoral Commission, NGOs and the media do civic education for people to know the electoral process, where, how and when to register and vote. The materials were produced in Portuguese and in different local languages.

IV. WORKING WITH POLITICAL PARTIES

In the multiparty system scenario, there are in Mozambique 31 political parties formally registered and none of them has a woman as President or Secretary General.

Among the majority of the political parties, women only appear in the lists of candidates for the elections, displayed as a proof of democracy and interest from a particular view for the women agenda, as they are the majority of the voters. Some others have mainly one or two female in their board, where one representing the head of the women's wing inside the party. Frelimo, the ruling party, has in its Political Commission, the Political Bureau, 15 members and four of them are female, corresponding to 26,66%. The Central Committee Secretariat has seven members and three of them are females, constituting 42,8%. At the provincial and local levels 30% of the members are women. During these eleven years, the Central Committee could have a representation of women up to 35%. This is due to Frelimo's women emancipation policy which has an empowerment approach under the principle of gender equality. In 1992 in its 6th Congress Frelimo took the decision to have a quota system for the representation of women and youth in all the bodies at all levels, from the central to the local levels.

Frelimo Party Rules attribute the minimum quota of 30% for women, 25% for youth and 10% for the former freedom fighters. So, in all the lists of Frelimo bodies at central, provincial and local levels, a representation of women and youth must be ensured. It is the same when it comes to the local and general elections for the Assemblies. However, for the president of the municipalities in 1998 we had only one female who won among 32 male. This was a one person election. Last year no one woman could win the internal elections for the presidency of the municipalities. For the Municipal Assemblies, in 1998-2003, the percentage of female was 33% in medium. Of course the quota system is a principle of equity to achieve equality, taking into account social and historical disadvantages. Frelimo has the same quotas as SADC, but we, women inside Frelimo, we want more than 30%.

Having women represented and participating in all the electoral process depends in the major political parties on the sensitiveness of the person in charge to nominate, who are mostly men. Even women in certain positions, sometimes don't nominate women. There is the need for a more mature position, for more empowerment for both men and women. The political parties struggle for gender equality is just on the beginning. There is a lot still to be done to see our dreams come true. However, the seed has been sown and there is no way back. This is a common challenge for both men and women.

V. IDENTIFYING AND TRAINING WOMEN CANDIDATES

The identification of women candidates for local elections is made by the political parties in connection with their women wings. Some women and gender NGOs sometimes give some names to the members of some political parties with influence. The decision of taking the lists belongs to the political parties leaders or of the electoral citizens groups who have the right to present candidates only for local elections. Inside Frelimo the decision is taken by the electoral conferences that elect the number of male and female candidates.

The training for candidates is more to knowing the electoral package, preparing for vote education and for electoral campaign. There is no special training for gender issues up to now. In 1998 local elections there was a training organized by the Gender Institute in connection with Frelimo Party at Maputo Province, for the only one woman candidate for the President of the Manhica Municipality, particularly to prepare for her campaign to build assertiveness and self-confidence, empowering her as a female. For the 2003 local elections Frelimo candidates were trained to prepare their programmes expressed in the manifests and also for the electoral campaign.

Training activities are undertaken mainly after the elections. In the past local assemblies 1027 members, being 26,38% women, were trained to build capacity on the functioning of the municipalities and the legislation; 393 women and 77 men members of the local assemblies were trained in gender issues and personal growth. Members of civil society from the 33 municipalities were also trained in several seminars to know the role and tasks of the Municipal Assemblies and its interaction with the civil society.

To ensure the decentralization process in the financial field, 247 men and 89 female members of the Municipal Council and Assembly were trained in municipal finances, budget, revenues, planning and management of finances and patrimony.

During the past mandate some supportive materials for education and information, such as publications and manuals, films, video cassettes and bulletins were produced. Visits to exchange experiences among different municipalities within Mozambique and in the Southern Africa region were also undertaken.

VI. WOMEN REPRESENTATION IN THE LOCAL ELECTORAL PROCESS IN 2003

| STRUCTURE | | Total of Members | Men | Women |
|-----------|--|------------------|-----|-------|
| 1 | National Electoral Commission | 20 | 15 | 05 |
| 2 | Technical Secretariat of Electoral Administration Directors and Head of Departments | Central Level | | |
| | | 13 | 12 | 01 |
| | | Provincial Level | | |
| | | 37 | 28 | 09 |
| 3 | Candidates of President of Municipal Council Elected | 79 | 77 | 02 |
| | | 33 | 33 | 00 |
| 4 | Municipal Assemblies Elected Supplants | 825 | 605 | 220 |
| | | 326 | 233 | 93 |

VII. CONCLUSIONS

Having women in political boards at local level do make a difference. The discourse is changing. However, in the last local elections the representation of women is 25.45%, immediately after the elections. We are below the SADC quota of 30% till the year 2005. To have gender equality at local elections is necessary for all the political parties to commit themselves. One measure to reinforce could be the establishment of quotas for women representation in the electoral law what implicates to lobby the Assembly of the Republic for it.

Policy-making is a complex, interactive process thus it is vitally important to recognize that political leaders are not the only participants in the policy process. The role of the NGOs in the registration, voting and post-election period is still very important and they should review their agenda to mentor more women, particularly young women to stand for the elections and advocate for them with political parties and leaders. More than this they must deal with some issues that constitute barriers for women in politics, namely low status of women, illiteracy, lack of knowledge and information, burden of the reproductive role and the position of women in the household, regarding who takes decisions in the family. When a woman is invited to stand for elections, before she accepts, she consults her husband and many times it is him who creates difficulties for her to participate.

Critical interventions should be promoted by national and international organizations to empower men and women for equal rights; to provide information at different levels; and to build capacity for NGOs and local governments to train and empower candidates and future candidates and the elected members to improve their performance.

Being a country who faced conflicts in the past years, Mozambican people have developed survival strategies, and enriched from these experiences are now more established to face the new challenges from the last local elections which created situations where the presidency of the autarchy belongs to one political party, Renamo, in Marromeu, but the municipal assembly belongs to another political party, Frelimo. From the first time Mozambicans citizens will experience some situations in four municipalities where the district and provincial government are leaded by the ruling party, Frelimo and the autarchy will be governed by Renamo. In this scenarios what will be the role of women and men to create a peaceful environment where the differences will be respected and the focus must be the development of the municipality.

Quota is one of the mechanisms that should be taken by all the political parties. Other factors to facilitate the access of women should be networking and economic empowerment. Many countries from Southern Africa and other regions are having elections at almost the same time. A concise programme among them towards local elections, gender and autarchies should be taken into consideration from this

meeting. Summarising the lessons of the post conflict local elections in our countries is a starting point.

Programmes to support women in electoral processes should assess their needs and interests. There are a lot of studies in our region about electoral systems and laws, however, if we want any changes on the gender imbalance we have to assess gender needs in politics at local level. Examples of good practices to mainstream gender at political and local level must be shared, raising awareness around these issues and demystifying politics.