

IMAGINING DEMOCRACY: ONE YEAR LATER

*A Report on the Second Series of Focus
Groups in Mozambique on
Democracy and Voter Education*

Fieldwork: April 1994

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Report on Focus Group Research in Mozambique

Introduction

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) commissioned a series of focus groups across Mozambique in June 1993 to measure public attitudes toward the introduction of democracy into the country, particularly the populace's understanding of and support for democracy and democratic processes. In April 1994, a series of additional focus groups were undertaken to follow-up and measure any movement in public perceptions as the election drew nearer.

Overview and Summary

A total of five groups involving 63 participants were conducted across the southern part of the country in the provinces of Maputo and Gaza. The groups were conducted in local languages as well as Portuguese and included participants from a range of ethnic groups. A list of the groups, the moderators, and the discussion guide are attached.

The original research generated three central themes:

- Anger and bitterness over what's happened in the past, particularly the actions of key leadership groups and institutions, but also a willingness to forgive and make a new start.
- Enthusiasm for democracy and new personal freedoms, but little understanding of how democracy works and how to vote and participate
- A successful democratic transition in Mozambique faces a number of quite significant hurdles: ignorance, illiteracy, multiple languages, a poor mass communications and transportation infrastructure and lingering distrust of government and other political institutions.

In the intervening ten months since the original research, there has been significant changes in public attitudes.

- More knowledge about the upcoming elections and a greater feeling of certainty that they will actually take place.

- Increasing optimism about the peace holding and the possibility of peaceful elections, the situation in Angola notwithstanding.
- Democracy is viewed somewhat more positively and is a more widely familiar word, and yet it remains a vague concept whose worth must still be proven.

On other topics, there had not been as much progress.

- There was no awareness of who will actually be supervising elections, although many people assume that it will be the United Nations.
- There was total ignorance of the voter registration process.
- As before, almost all of the focus groups ended with the participants entreating the moderators and observers to return to their community soon to tell them how democracy works so that they would know how to participate.
- The public has no idea what the various political parties stand for on any important issues.

Level of Information

On the broad topic of democracy, there is growing familiarity with the word and a generally positive feeling about the concept, but still little clarity about how it works or what it will mean for Mozambique. One participant in Machava said, "It's beautiful like a newborn baby; you can't see its faults when it's born – only later can you see them. We don't know what democracy will be." As before, the group participants reported having had very little personal experience voting themselves and they were very unsure how to participate.

Understanding about democracy was often merely intuitive. One woman in Matola said, "We must vote because the candidates cannot choose among themselves." What concerned the members of the group was not so much what democracy *seemed* to be in the abstract, as a concept it had broad appeal insofar as it was understood, but what it would *prove* to be once elections actually took place. One of the legacies of the past 20 years in Mozambique is a profound mistrust of new solutions to political and economic problems.

The workings of the election process itself were shrouded in mystery in the eyes of the general population. With so little experience with voting, so much illiteracy, so much distrust of institutions, and virtually no reliable information, widespread confusion is the rule. Virtually no one in any of the groups is aware of the national election commission, the CNE, that is charged with the conduct and supervision of the polling. . In lieu of any knowledge of the CNE, it was assumed that the United Nations would be conducting the elections. The U.N. continues to have good reputation among the populace. One woman said, "The U.N. never did anything wrong to us around here. I don't know about other areas."

Nor was anyone aware of the need to register to vote, although once the concept was explained, it struck people as an intuitively sensible process. The need to cast two ballots, one for president and one for parliament, is likewise unknown. There was good-natured debate within the groups about minimum age requirements. In the rural cooperative in Matola, the consensus seemed to be that the smart children ought to be able to vote, but not their less clever playmates. It seemed to be fairly well understood that women could vote, but whether they should or could run for office was a topic for fairly animated discussion

Opinions

Compared to the first round of focus groups, there was significantly more confidence that the peace in the country would hold. The participants felt sure that the lack of violence since the peace agreement was enacted in October, 1992, along with the general fatigue with the fighting, were strong signs that the peace would hold. There was also repeated reference to the meeting of Dhlakama and President Chissano as a symbol of the permanence of the peace.

While the public's reasonably rosy opinion of democracy was discussed in an earlier section, the populace has considerably less faith in the federal government's potential ability to

handle local governance. As one participant said in the rural area of Macia, "The leaders might give good instructions, but local representatives might not do as they are told because the leaders are so far away." With virtually no knowledge of parliamentary voting, and a vision of highly centralized federal authority, there are serious concerns among the public regarding the protection of appropriate local autonomy.

The public had very little concrete sense of how the elections would be organized, and in lieu of any definitive information made a series of assumptions about how things would be organized that appear to reflect common sense, but are not necessarily accurate. For example, it was widely assumed that literate election workers would be available to illiterate voters to help them work their way through the ballot. There were some residual fears of the consequences of voting for the losing party, but there was no evidence that such concerns would lead to people failing to vote. In the group in Gaza Province, one elderly man said he planned on escaping into the bush to hide if the party he voted for failed to win, but all the others in the group quickly assured him that he need not run away.

Others evinced a significantly more sophisticated understanding of the subtleties of the democratic process. One man in Maputo was asked if he had any fear of reprisals for voting for the losing party and said, "I'll lie to my boss about who I'm going to vote for and then ask for a raise by telling him I voted for his candidate." It would seem that some reasonable reassurances of the secrecy of the ballot would go a long way toward assuaging what latent fears there are of reprisals for voting for the losing party.

There is only widespread knowledge of the two largest political parties, FRELIMO and RENAMO. And the election is more often than not viewed as a contest between these two forces alone. One of the most often expressed frustrations with the new process of democracy is the difficulty of voting for candidates with whom one is not familiar. None of the people with whom we spoke had an understanding of what the parties' positions on any of the important issues, such

as health care, education, and the economy. One of the most baffling aspects of democracy to Mozambicans to date is how to vote in the absence of any real information of what the candidates plan to do. Clearly, the candidates and parties have a lot to do to address these concerns.

Voter Education Campaign

The focus groups, like the groups of a year ago, were desperate for more information about the election. The single best means of communicating with the population in their areas, they reiterated, was through personal visits from voter education teams. Only through personal visits, could voters establish the credibility of the educators and have the chance to learn at their own pace. With little, if any, education, many Mozambicans are frightened of the education process and asked for the chance to take their learning at their own pace. While radio was widely cited as the second most effective means of reaching out to the population, there was the lingering issue of how to verify the intentions of the broadcaster, not to mention limited numbers of functioning receivers and serious shortages of batteries.

Most of all, people were concerned that they didn't know how to vote and that no one would reach out to help them in advance of the election. The focus group team was beseeched with requests to return and spend some time teaching the community about the elections and how to vote. One young man from Maputo asked, "I'm a university student and I don't know how to vote. How will the peasants know?"

Reviewing a number of pieces of voter education material with the groups revealed some fascinating insights into the minds of Mozambicans. Particularly compelling was the absolute lack of a socio-cultural context for political symbolism. One poster from South Africa showed a young man, amidst a large crowd, holding up two fingers, symbolizing either peace or victory. This poster made a highly negative impression among the groups, because the participants felt it

symbolized the ascendancy of two leaders at once and that such a state of affairs would be highly unstable and unsatisfactory. Asked to review a series of potential slogans for a civic voter education campaign, the groups suggested that the word "projeto" or project not be included because of its connotations of the hundreds of non-indigenous economic development projects that dot the countryside. The most popular slogans encouraging Mozambicans to vote focused on the future and a new Mozambique, or on children, who seem to symbolize the future in a very tangible way, particularly for more rural populations.

List of Focus Groups

<u>Date</u>	<u>City</u>	<u>Site</u>	<u>Size of Group</u>
Maputo Province			
April 18	Maputo	United Church of Christ	13
April 19	Matola	Building Cooperative	10
April 19	Machava	Town Square/Near Market	16
April 19	Maputo	Methodist Church	9
Gaza Province			
April 20	Macia	Catholic Community Center	15

Moderators

- Yvette M'Boa
- Natividad Carmelo
- Armando Edérito

Focus Group Discussion Guide
Project Vote Mozambique
April, 1994

1. Introduction

15 Minutes
(15 Minutes)

- A. Introduce self, other observers
- B. Explain what focus group research is
- C. Explain purpose of group
- D. Why tape recording, observers
- E. There are no right/wrong answers
- F. Keep answers short to give all a chance to speak
- G. Have participants introduce themselves

- 1. Name?
- 2. Occupation?
- 3. Marital status? Children?

RECORD ALSO ON SIGN IN SHEET

- 4. Sex
- 5. Ethnic/Linguistic group
- 6. Age

2. Peace (Conversational Warm-Up)

10 Minutes
(25 Minutes)

- A. What did the end of the civil war mean to you and your family? How was your family affected by the war?
- B. What changes will the peace mean for Mozambique?
 - 1. What's the biggest problem facing Mozambique?
 - 2. What opportunities does the peace create?
 - 3. What kind of changes in your life will come with the peace?

3. Elections/Democracy

*35 Minutes
(60 Minutes)*

- A. When people talk about democracy in Mozambique, what do you think they mean?
- B. Do you think there will be voting/elections in Mozambique? When?
 - 1. Will the country be able to hold free and fair elections this year? Why or why not?
 - 2. Will there be violence associated with an election?
- C. How have you been learning about the elections and what is planned for the country? What are your sources of information?
 - 1. Radio
 - 2. Television
 - 3. Newspapers
 - 4. Civic, community and religious groups
 - 5. Political parties
 - 6. Neighbors/friends
 - 7. Regulos (traditional leaders)

TELL EVERYONE THAT ELECTIONS WILL BE IN OCTOBER

- C. If there is no peace, can there be an election?
- D. Have you ever voted before in any circumstances (school, sports team, religious group)?
- E. What positions in the government will the voting in October be for?

DISCUSS ALL AFTER ALLOWING FOR SPONTANEOUS MENTION

- 1. President
 - 2. Parliament
 - 3. Political parties
- F. Would you like to vote in these elections? Why or why not? Would anyone you know be afraid or unwilling to vote?
- G. Who will be in charge of directing the election and making sure that it is free and fair?

4. Voting

35 Minutes
(1 Hour, 35 Minutes)

- A. Do you know how to vote in a national election?
1. Is who you vote for a secret?
 2. What qualifications do you need?
 - a. Do you have to be able to read and write?
 - b. Do you know about political parties?
 - c. Do you have to have government identity papers? (Do you have such identity papers?)
 - d. How old do you have to be?
 - e. Can women vote?
- B. Do you know what a ballot is?
1. Do you know how to use one?
 2. Do you think anyone will show you before the election?
 3. Do you think you will be able to learn how?
 4. Who should teach you about elections -- husband, chief, government, church, others?
 5. Will it be more difficult for people who cannot read and write?
- C. What will happen to the people who support political parties who lose?
- D. Do the elected officials in government owe anything to the people who elected them?
1. Do you expect the elected officials to work in the interest of the people who voted for them?
 2. Do you expect the elected officials to work in the interest of the people who did not vote for them?
 3. Should women be candidates and serve in government?
- E. What would encourage the politicians to work in the interest of all Mozambicans?
- F. What issues should candidates in the election be talking about?

5. Voter Education Materials/Techniques

55 Minutes
(2 Hours, 30 Minutes)

Intro:

The organization that came here to conduct these groups is called the National Democratic Institute. We have worked in elections all over the world in many countries. In many of those places we have developed programs that teach people how democracy works and how they can vote and participate. We have begun doing these same things in Mozambique. We would like your help in learning how we can best communicate with the people here and tell them about democracy and voting.

A. Message

1. What would you say are the best reasons to vote?
2. What things will prevent people from voting?
 - a. Fear
 - b. Illiteracy
 - c. Not knowing what to do
 - d. Not knowing where to go
 - e. Lack of transportation
3. What would be the best way to inform people in your family and community about voting?
4. Slogan test. Which of the following do you like best and think would be most effective in persuading people to vote? (Read all slogans. Allow everyone to name one or two and ask for other suggestions.)
 - a. A vote is a say in the future.
 - b. Everyone has a right to vote.
 - c. Vote for your children.
 - d. Vote for a new Mozambique
 - e. Vote for peace and freedom

B. Language

1. What language(s) do you normally speak?
2. What do you associate with Portuguese, native languages?
3. What languages should we use in a voter education campaign?

C. Which techniques and groups should be involved in educating the public on voting and democracy?

1. Religious groups
2. Civic groups
3. Advertising
4. Traditional leaders (tribal chiefs/regulos)
5. Public meetings
6. Political groups
7. Youth groups

D. Print Materials

A number of voter education materials have been developed for use here and in other countries. Let me show you some and tell me what you like and think would work well here in Mozambique.

Items to be shown:

South Africa sample ballot

Angolan voting steps poster without words

South African newspaper on voting, *Voting Time*

Cambodian registration poster

Reasons to vote poster from South Africa

Color voting steps poster from South Africa with all steps shown within one polling station

E. Radio

1. Do you/can you listen? (Try to ascertain how many have a radio or access to one?
 - a. How much?
 - b. Do you have a set? Batteries or electric? Do you have problems getting batteries to operate it?
 - c. What types of programs do you listen to?
 - d. What types would you like to hear about the election?
2. I am going to play a radio announcement that we are thinking in Mozambique? Tell me what you think about it.

F. Video

1. Television/Videos
 - a. Do you/can you watch?
 - b. How much?
 - c. Where?
 - d. What types of programs?
 - e. What types would you like to hear about the election?
 - f. Do you watch videos on a VCR?
 - g. Would you like to see videos on the election?
2. Films/Slides