

**ON THE ROAD  
TO  
LOCAL ELECTIONS**

**FOCUS GROUP OPINION POLL IN THE PROVINCES  
OF  
ZAMBEZIA, SOFALA, MANICA AND NAMPULA**



**NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC  
INSTITUTE - NDI**

**AUSTRAL CONSULTORIA  
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TECHNICAL TEAM

NDI - Selection of the areas and target groups for the poll.

AUSTRAL - Analysis of the focus group and elaboration of final reports.

NDI / AUSTRAL - Moderation of the focus group

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## INTRODUCTION

The National Democratic Institute has been accompanying the development process of multiparty democracy in Mozambique through a series of focus group opinion polls. In June 1993 the poll researched Mozambicans' knowledge of democratic concepts and the upcoming elections. In 1994 the focus groups concentrated on the perception of democracy and the democratic processes while in September 1994 it studied people's expectations prior to the first multiparty elections. The present study continues with this sequence of research.

This study of opinion covers topics related to the voting experience in the general elections, evaluates the existing levels of understanding on municipal elections, motivations for them and perception of the local authority and multiparty democracy (Annex 1).

The focus groups were held in four provinces: Zambezia, Sofala, Manica and Nampula including rural, urban, semi-urban and coastal areas (Annex 2).

In the rural areas the samples involved peasants, peasant women, traditional chiefs (regulos), youth and religious leaders; in the cities the focus groups were composed of primary school teachers and members of the religious community (Annex 3).

Ages of the participants varied from 16 to 60 years. About 75% of the people were illiterate. It is estimated that the remaining 25% had studied up to or through secondary school and were restricted to the urban groups. The use of focus groups as the research method, allows the opinion poll to submit a specific topic to a dynamic discussion of a homogenous group.

As limiting factors to generalizing the opinion poll for all of Mozambique, it must be noted that the sample excluded representation of the southern provinces privileging those in the center and north. In addition the groups did not include participants with medium or superior levels of education nor any profession linked to the modern sector of the economy.

The report presents the results following the order of topics dealt with in the focus groups.



The Technical Team



Primary School Teachers in Quelimane

# I

## SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The most common and preferred way of circulating information in the **rural areas is direct contact** through educational brigades, political propaganda and information from the secretary of the respective location.

In these areas, information on new events come mainly with people from outside the village.

The **radio** is the main source of information in the urban areas with transmission in Portuguese and local languages. Often people possess their own radios, or listen to their neighbors' when it comes to important news or events.

Other sources of information in the cities are:

- seminars
- educational brigades
- newspapers

**In the non-urban areas but with easy access to the cities** few people own radios and most of them listen from friends' radios or get information from public places like public transport terminals. A limiting factor in listening to the radio is the lack of availability of batteries in the markets outside of cities.

No newspaper or magazine reach these areas. They say even if they did, people would not buy them because they (people) have a "low buying power". A newspaper to them is not a priority in comparison to food and clothing.

In all the areas people complain of the lack of information not only of events, but above all, to have greater explanation of the events. People have doubts and they want to discuss them. The modern means of information are very impersonal to this society with a strongly rural characteristic and a tradition of direct, oral and interpersonal communication.

## II

### PERCEPTION OF LOCAL AUTHORITY

#### RURAL AND COASTAL AREAS

In areas outside the city, the Secretary is a leader of the community, recognized by all groups, who has led the village for more than three decades. All know his responsibilities well and his connections with the district power structures. The expression "he does the same as the Secretary" is very common when people want to explain the duties of the new post-war leaders. This means that the people assume that "all of us already know of the role of the Secretary."

The secretary is responsible for a group of houses or a village. The secretary resolves some problems at the **community level** and serves as an **intermediary** in channeling the problems to other institutions like the **police, the court and the Administrator**. Incidents of crime and violence are usually channeled directly to the police.

The **secretary is a leader of the community** as part of the organization structure of the Frelimo party, which has been implanted in Mozambique since the beginning of the 70s during the fight for independence. This structure spread throughout the whole country during the post-independence period and was already strongly implanted in the rural areas when the war began to destroy the social structure. Over more than thirty years, **this structure transformed from a form of political organization to a form of social organization**. Despite this, the secretary is connoted with Frelimo up to today. These characteristics (at the community level outside the cities) appear to have survived the war.

In the areas contacted, the authoritative force of this community leader has, presently, different perceptions: from the unquestioning rural youth and women to an undefined situation of "suspension" of power waiting for "the **government to come and clarify who is now the chief**" in order to avoid conflicts with other parties.

**At the community level**, the perception of the local authority is **disturbed** by pressures from outside the community which force the people to obey different leaders. In some areas where Renamo has more influence this party nominated "delegates" and encouraged "regulos" (chiefs) -some of which were not the legitimate "regulos"- to exercise

authority beyond their normal sphere of action recognized by the rural population. These "authorities" occupy positions similar to that of the secretary.

The **Mambo** is a community leader "**delegated by Renamo**" and has similar functions to that of the secretary. The two consult each other for the resolution of problems. Where the Mambo exists he does not substitute the secretary. **He does not have the role of an intermediary** with structures outside the community. This "leader" was referred to in two groups in Zambezia.

**"Regulos"** or other **traditional leaders** (the elders) are referred to as authorities for resolving problems dealing with cultural tradition. They are figures of great social prestige and are referred to as people who know the culture, history and traditional rules of family organization.<sup>1</sup> Families resort directly to this structure.

In all the contacted areas, **the youth do not know this traditional authority** or even its rules. When you talk of "regulos" or Traditional Authorities, the following are common expressions, "This belongs to the old times." "We do not know. This is of the times of our parents or grandparents."

**The older people distinguish the area of action of the traditional authorities:** the modern world is not of their jurisdiction. This traditional structure cannot treat problems which surpass the knowledge of the traditional world, problems like school, hospital, employment, roads etc. The traditional authority is frequently referred to as a consultative organ of the administrator.

Also included in this sample was a group of **"regulos" who recognize themselves as the local authority**. Their origin would require a more in-depth study. Not all of them belong to the traditional lineage of "regulos". Some of the "regulos" of Mogovolas were under thirty years of age. Within the Mogovolas district, fourteen "regulos" and an assistant presented themselves which does not correspond to the traditional divisions of chieftainship. Apparently they are individuals connoted and encouraged by Renamo to "reassume the power" (which they had in the colonial period?) and "be revived". In their communities, they have identical functions as those of a secretary which do not correspond to the

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<sup>1</sup> A "Regulo" is not always a prestigious figure. There are "regulos" who aligned themselves with the colonial government for forced labor and tax payment. Most of these "regulos" lost their authority and recognition.

duties of a traditional regulo. However, they do not have the intermediary role which the secretary has in relation to the other institutions of the district power structure. These "regulos" complain of the fact that they are not remunerated for their duties.<sup>2</sup>

- At the district level, the authority of the administrator is clearly recognized.
- At the village/community level the leadership has **some dilution of authority**, with serious implications in terms of **the isolation of the communities**.
- *"Now to whom are we going to present the problem of lack of nets? Who will hear us?"* asked a fisherman in Zalala.
- Without **clearly defining** who is the present leader, people establish fidelity to authority in a way not to harm the balance of ex-fighting parties in an attempt to safeguard that which is a priority over all other values: **peace**.

The local authority structure at the district level, as depicted by the focus group participants can be graphically presented as the diagram on the following page.

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<sup>2</sup> The secretaries are not paid. The "regulos" who served the colonial administration were paid.



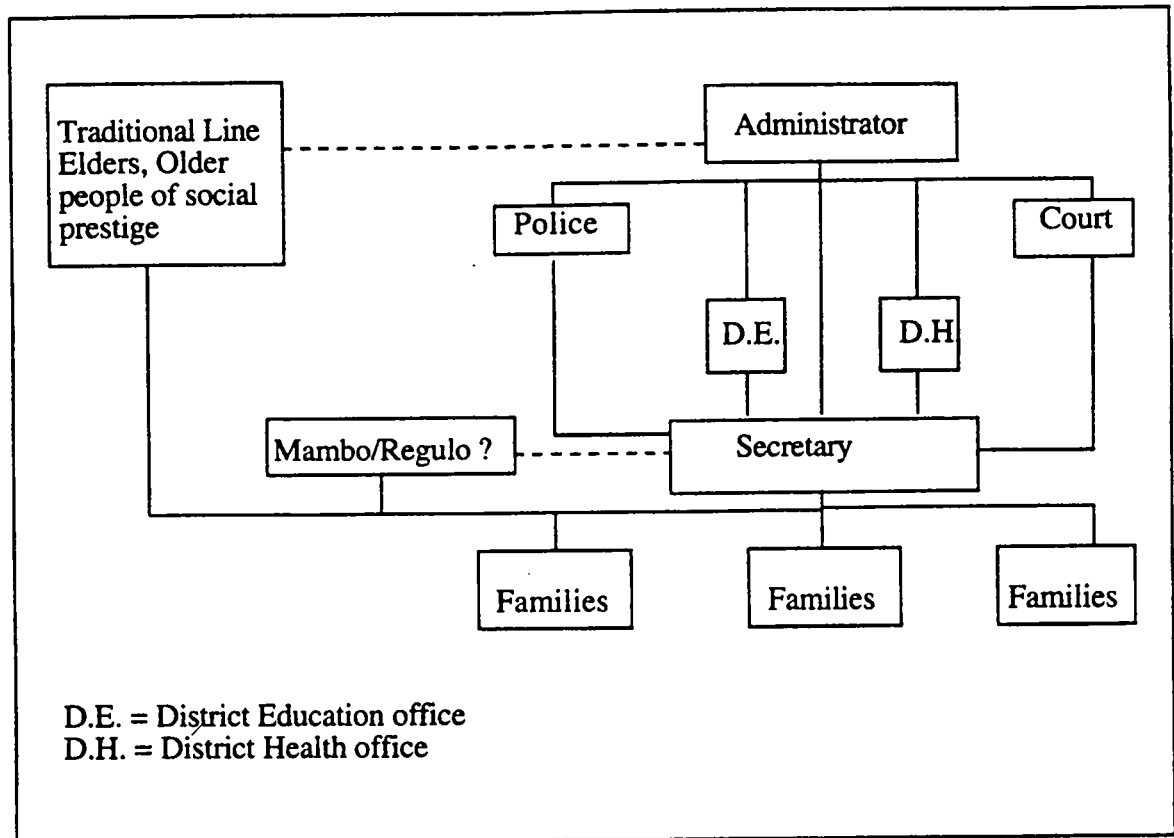


Figure 1. Local Authority Structure at the District Level, February 1996

## URBAN AREAS

The Local Authority in the urban areas is understood as being the mayor (President of the Municipal Council). In one of the focus groups, the local authority at city level was identified as being "the Governor and the Provincial Government" - primary school teachers in Quelimane.

## WOMEN LEADERS

Both in rural and urban areas, people referred to women linked to the Organization of Mozambican Women - OMM or stated that there were no women leaders.

### III

## GENERAL ELECTIONS

### MOTIVES FOR VOTING IN THE LAST GENERAL ELECTIONS

In general, people did not present an intrinsic motivation for voting. External reasons seemed to have been much stronger than the personal will or an individual right as a citizen. In the rural and urban areas, the motive to vote mainly appeared to be associated with:

- ending the war and, consequently, the suffering provoked by it;
- hope to improve the situation of people's lives.

Less common but yet important to note is a completely passive position:

- *"I was only following the others in the queue."*
- *"I went because they told me to go and vote."*
- *"We were put in the situation. We had to complete our task."*

Even less common (in fact, only one case) in an urban and educated group, the motive to vote was associated with his right as a citizen.

- *"I voted to exercise my right as a citizen."* (a Church Pastor)

These focus groups leave the image that the general elections were held to **select a candidate and not a program**. On the other hand, even between the candidates the choice was between the two belligerent parties in the war. Statements like the one below are notable:

- *"I voted to choose between the two. Maybe in the next elections I will vote for another person."*

## PERCEPTION OF CHANGE AFTER ELECTIONS

The most frequently noted positive changes after the general elections are:

- the war ended (general feeling);
- one can travel through out the country;
- the Government is accountable to the Parliament (a less common opinion within the urban areas).

All groups strongly expressed their discontentment with the increase in the cost of living which they consider unsustainable. They associate this situation with the changes after the elections.

- *"The War in the bush ended. The war of high prices has started."*

**An excerpt from the focus group in Zalala of fishermen.**

We were almost at the end of the interview. A heated discussion on the cost of living had just been exhausted. When the last point on democracy was being discussed, the moderator noticed that one of the more participative young fishermen was now silent. He directly asked him, "and you, what do you think?" The young man took his time, shook his head and laughingly responded, "I am still far behind... You want to know what I think of Parliament, Democracy, these things... while I'm sitting here and I can't take my eyes off your tennis shoes, and thinking: what on earth does he do to be able to buy such tennis shoes? I can't even dream of them..." He provoked a burst of laughter of general consensus.

## MOTIVATIONS TO VOTE AGAIN

In a general manner, the groups demonstrated some indifference regarding the prospect of voting again. They did not say that they will not vote (with some isolated exceptions from the rural areas) but they did not give an individual position in relation to the process or the elections themselves.

In the rural areas, it is common to associate the individual decision to go and vote or not with a collective decision coming from an orientation: "If it is decided that there must be elections and they tell me to go and vote then I will."

To some people the possibility of voting can be one way of changing the present situation of the high cost of living.



Fishermen in Zalala

## IV

### LOCAL ELECTIONS

#### EXISTING INFORMATION ABOUT THE MUNICIPAL LAW

In the areas covered by this poll, the groups which have **more information** about the Municipal Law and matters related to the electoral process are groups which live in **the cities, its periphery or areas with easy access to the cities**. Nevertheless, even these groups have many doubts to be clarified.

There is a **coincidence** in the degree of knowledge people have of the local elections and the areas (and intensity) of radio coverage.

**In the rural areas** the degree of information about this process was from absolutely nothing to isolated news in the form of rumors which somebody brings to the village from outside.

- **Absolutely no Information**

It must be noted that this was the situation found among all the peasant women.

- **Rumors**

Most of the information which reaches the rural villages comes distorted in the way of rumors. These rumors, associated with lack of explanation through direct contact with the population provoke the spread of "false rumors" and create instability. Some of these false rumors associate the electoral process with the start of a new war. Others, spread the information that this process is to give power to the "regulos."

Frequently we are faced with this reaction:

*"We are tired of you coming to ask questions instead of coming to explain."*

## MOTIVATION FOR THE LOCAL ELECTIONS

The existing information is not yet sufficient to evaluate if people are motivated or not to this process or if what in fact exists is a large gap of information about the electoral process, its objectives and procedures.

Having insufficient information on what are the municipal elections and the process, how can it be decided if people are motivated or not to participate in something which in fact they do not know?

In general, it can be noted with certainty that there exists a **great curiosity and interest** in knowing all that pertains to the local elections.

In summary:

- There is a dramatic lack of information on local elections.
- Information given by the media reach limited areas of the cities and places with easy access to the cities.
- Even in the cities, the utilization of the media seems insufficient: the people need to establish a dialogue so as to clear their doubts.
- It seems premature to evaluate the motivation for people to participate in the process of municipal elections when they still know very little about it.

## PERCEPTION OF GOVERNMENT AND PARLIAMENT

The concept of government is similar in the rural, coastal and urban areas. Society is compared to a family where the people are the children and the government is the father. The son has necessities to develop his life and it is up to the parent to provide solutions for these necessities. As such, the government should guarantee access food, give education, health care and provide employment. It must deal with roads and communication.

On the other hand the government as the father **has authority**: it orients people to how things should happen. In the end, the final decision is of the government: "If the government decides that there are elections for all, then I have to go and vote."

The government is associated with the "organization of the people", it is the **root of order and life**. "To have a tree it is necessary that there is a root: the government is that root."

Considering the sample collected, it gives the picture that citizens do not feel primarily responsible for their lives as individuals. The government appears as a paternal entity which protects them. There is also somebody, an external entity, to blame if things go badly in an individual's life.

In areas with access to radio coverage, the notion of the **parliament** is that of a **great assembly of party confrontation**, a forum to discuss political questions of the country or a place where deputies air their personal rivalries. The idea of confrontation and discussion of different ideas is usually understood as detrimental, leading not to solutions but to conflicts.

To the contrary, a less common position was that the **possibility to discuss** government policies in parliament impedes that it is one party only governing the country. This latter idea comes from the educated individuals and religious people in the urban areas.

In the rural areas included in the study, people do not understand what the parliament is and its functions.

Just like most of the questions discussed with the focus groups, people demonstrated a great interest to acquire more information and clarifications on these matters. They asked for explanations as to what was happening in the country.

All groups with access to transmission of parliamentary sessions deplored the behavior of **deputies**.

- "We did not elect the deputies to treat personal or party questions and insult one another."
- "Deputies in parliament discuss matters which have nothing to do with our suffering or issues like the high cost of living."
- "A deputy is somebody I elected to represent me. However, when they return from Maputo they do not inform us of any thing they discussed 'down there'."

Some people described how a deputy should be. To their understanding, a deputy should be living with his or her electorate, have meetings with them, "take the amount of our salaries in their pocket and try to do the shopping in the market."

Here, it can be drawn (yet to confirm) that the people (mainly urban) understand better their interaction with their deputy than they understand the relationship between the parliament and government.



## VI

### DEMOCRACY IN MOZAMBIQUE

There is a significant difference between people living in the urban areas and those in the rural areas on the understanding of the concept of democracy.

#### In the rural areas

- Nobody defined the meaning of democracy nor associated ideas to the word.
- In these areas most of the people heard of the word but do not know what it means.
- Among the rural women the word itself is unknown to them.
- To religious leaders in the rural areas strongly affected by the war, democracy is an injustice. They associate democracy with the period of conflict and with the division of people. They said it impedes reconciliation.

#### In the urban areas

- In the first place democracy comes as everything like freedom of expression, in the sense that it is possible to criticize the government or to "say all what I think." Some opinions contrary to this point say: "truly you can talk, you can shout but who will hear you?" On the other hand citizens of these areas expressed satisfaction in seeing the press denouncing situations which oblige the government "not to govern alone."
- Democracy is also frequently associated with the freedom to travel anywhere because there is no war on the one hand, and because one does not need 'a travel permit'<sup>3</sup> on the other.
- Still more, democracy was defined as "people's power", a definition of which no concrete example was found.

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<sup>3</sup> A document used in the first decade of independence authorizing a citizen to travel from one place to another.

We find more frequently in the cities than in rural areas a repetition of phrases which show that they read those phrases or heard them from the radio but there is no debate to clarify their meaning.

## MULTIPARTY SYSTEM

Be it in the rural or urban areas the existence of many parties is not well accepted. Few voices (and even these are strongly contested within any other group) defended the benefits of the multiparty system.

Reasons which lead people to say the multiparty system is "not good" are fundamentally related to the absence of finding a consensus as solutions to the real problems of the country.

Quoted examples are:

- *Many ways complicate reaching a point. We all know what this "point" is: it's improvement of our lives (an older fisherman).*
- *Having various parties is like two families living in the same house. Sooner or later, the two will not agree on how to take care the house. They will argue and then nobody will take care of the house.*
- *Having various parties is like having various priests: they all want to pray at the altar.*
- *Why more parties? They all promise the same thing! In the process the pieces of cake become smaller and smaller.*
- *To have sixteen parties is not good. Perhaps if there were two, three or four parties it would work. (a priest)*

## THE CONCEPT OF RIGHTS

Most of the responses in the discussion of this topic indicate the concept of a right as equivalent to "having access to..." There is no concept of a right associated to a written Constitution. Continuously and frequently people say:

*"Today, a citizen has no rights: he pays to go to the hospital, to enter school, has no money to eat, has no employment etc."*

On the other hand, the concept of rights is associated with a conduct which has to do with values defined in the rural or traditional society. People in the rural areas talked, amongst other points, of **respect for the elders** and **obedience to authority**. This can represent a code of rights and duties (responsibilities) from which these people govern and regiment their lives.

As a conclusion, it is recommended that a base of conduct (in terms of rights and duties) of the rural/traditional community is studied before introducing constitutional concepts of rights and duties - alien to the knowledge of the people.



Peasant women in Nhamatanda

## ANNEX 1

### Question Guide for the Focus Groups

#### I. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- a. Where did you obtain the information about the elections and how to vote?
- b. Where do you generally obtain information about important events?
  - Radio
  - TV
  - Newspaper
  - Friends and Neighbors
  - Church Organizations
  - Market
  - Community leaders
- c. Have you got a radio at home which functions?
- d. Do you usually listen to other people's radios? Whose?
- e. In which language do you usually listen?
- f. Do you know where the transmission is coming from?

#### II. LOCAL AUTHORITIES

(These questions were elaborated to check the perception on the present structures of authority in the local community: who governs and who resolves problems.)

- a. Who are the leaders in your community?
- b. Do you have women leaders in your community?
- c. Who generally resolves the problems of your community?
- d. Who resolves conflicts in your community? (example)
- e. Do different people resolve different types of problems?  
(Do you know what the administrator does, other people mentioned as authority or traditional authority if it exists.)
- f. What do you do to solve problems in your community?
- g. To whom should the problems be channeled?
- h. Which organizations or groups help you to resolve the problems in your community?
- i. What does local authority mean to you?

### III. GENERAL ELECTIONS

(These questions are to discover the motivations and feelings of people on voting in the general elections.)

- a. Why did you vote?
- b. What has changed in your community since the elections?
- c. What is the change in Mozambique since the elections?
- d. Would you vote another time?

### IV. MUNICIPAL AND LOCAL ELECTIONS

(These questions are aimed at verifying what the people hear or know about the process of democratization and the local elections.)

- a. What have you heard about the municipal law?
- b. What have you heard about the municipal elections?
- c. Would you like to vote in these elections?

### V. FUNCTIONS AND RESPONSIBILITY OF THE GOVERNMENT

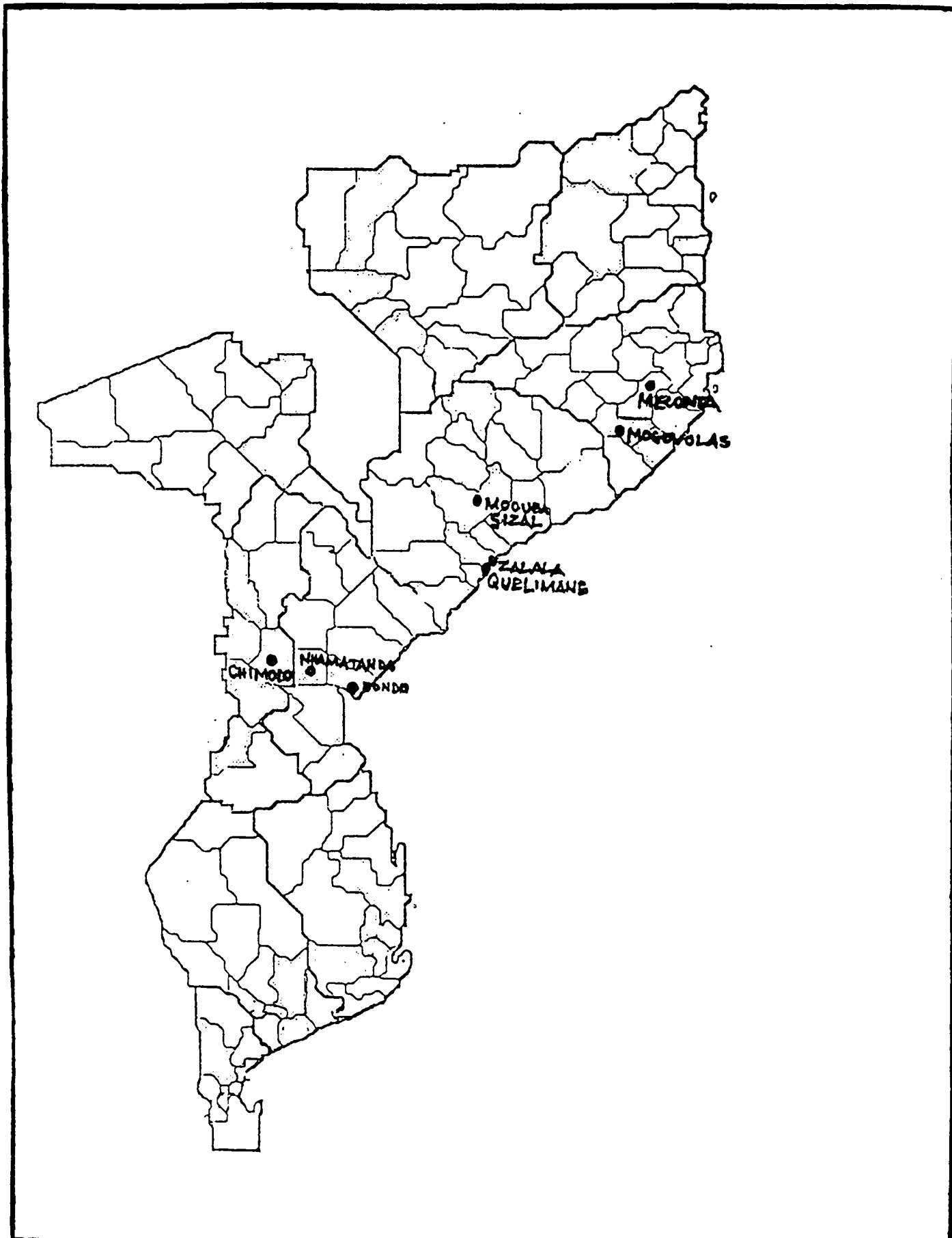
(Questions to evaluate how many people know about Parliament and its function and about the Government and its functions.)

- a. What is Government to you?
- b. What problem should the government solve?
- c. What have you heard about the Assembly of the Republic?
- d. What do you know about the Deputies of the Assembly of the Republic?
- e. What is the duty or function of the Deputy?
- f. If you were to talk to a Deputy what would you request him to do for your community?

### VI. DEMOCRACY IN MOZAMBIQUE.

- a. They say there is democracy in Mozambique. What does it mean?
- b. Do you think having various parties is good?  
(try to know the reasons)
- c. Have you heard of the Constitution?
- d. They say all people in Mozambique have got rights. What have you heard about this?

**ANNEX 2**  
Locations of the Focus Groups



## ANNEX 3

### Composition of the Focus Groups.

| Province | Location     | No. of Participants | Profile                 | Km from provincial capital | Language used |
|----------|--------------|---------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|---------------|
| Zambezia | Zalala       | 13 (12%)            | Fishermen               | 60                         | Chuabo        |
| Zambezia | Mocuba Sizal | 13 (12%)            | Peasants                | 130                        | Chuabo        |
| Zambezia | Quelimane    | 11 (10%)            | Primary School Teachers | 0                          | Portuguese    |
| Sofala   | Dondo        | 17 (16%)            | Youth                   | 30                         | Sena          |
| Manica   | Chimoio      | 14 (13%)            | Religious Community     | 0                          | Portuguese    |
| Sofala   | Nhamatanda   | 11 (11%)            | Women, Peasants         | 100                        | Sena          |
| Nampula  | Meconta      | 11 (11%)            | Religious Leaders       | 75                         | Macua         |
| Nampula  | Mogovolas    | 15 (14%)            | "Regulos" (Chiefs)      | 80                         | Macua         |

Total Number of Participants 105

Men - 77%  
Women - 23%