

MOZAMBIQUE: A FADING U.N. SUCCESS STORY

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As Mozambique enters its tenth year of peace following a brutal and destructive civil war, the signs of continued democratic transformation and pro-market economic reform appear rosy, at least at first glance. Donors and the international community have quietly lauded Joaquim Chissano's recent announcement that he is "not disposed" to seek a third term as president of this former Portuguese colony of 17 million on the southeast coast of Africa. Together with President Frederick Chiluba's similar announcement in Zambia a few months ago, it looks to many like an indication that these two African democracies are maturing and consolidating the gains that they have made in recent years.

Mozambique's continued place atop the list of the world's fastest-growing economies has been seen as another signal that commitment to the "Washington Consensus" will provide the funds required to bring infrastructure, schools, and health care to the rural majority. It is no wonder, then, that Mozambique finds itself highlighted as a success story for the United Nations in conflict-ridden Africa. Many credit Mozambique's remarkable transformation to the UN's efforts to sustain the drawn-out peace negotiations, demobilize more than 90,000 soldiers, rebuild a unified national army, and foster the rise of a legitimate, peaceful opposition. Donor investments continue to support Mozambique today, funding more than half of the government's annual budget.

On the ground in Mozambique, however, the continuation of this upward trajectory looks anything but guaranteed. The newspapers hint at trouble just beneath the surface: two major bank failures, the

assassination of the country's most respected independent journalist, the continued depreciation of the currency, and stop-and-start talks between the Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (or Frelimo, as the ruling party is usually called) and its main political rival, the Resistência Nacional Moçambicana (Renamo), about how to share power at the local level. In November 2000, when police in the city of Montepuez killed demonstrators challenging the government's claim to have won that year's national elections, tensions nearly exploded into large-scale violence.¹

The UN's work in Mozambique was unprecedented in scope, and the results have been dramatic. Two consecutive free elections and growth rates approaching 10 percent a year over the past decade cannot be ignored. Some might argue that the items of bad news cited above are merely "bumps on the road" toward lasting peace, as Mozambicans of all stripes learn to resolve problems through dialogue and democratic competition. But a deeper look at Mozambique's political and economic situation suggests a bleaker interpretation.

The truth is that a number of deep cleavages threaten the future of Mozambique's democratic transition. What are these fundamental divisions? And more importantly, how can the political system be reformed in order to prevent them from worsening or even erupting into renewed civil war? A search for answers should begin with some basic background on Mozambique and its troubled recent history.

The Social Geography of Mozambique

With a shoreline stretching more than 2,000 miles along the east coast of southern Africa, Mozambique has long occupied a strategic position. In colonial times—and even before, as traders made their way up and down the Indian Ocean—Mozambique's abundance of rivers and natural harbors held the promise of unparalleled access to the African hinterland. As colonialism went into decline and the Cold War took hold in Africa, Mozambique's proximity to Rhodesia and South Africa further consolidated its strategic importance, as the Soviet Union and the United States battled to maintain their spheres of influence in the region.

The physical geography of Mozambique also has had profound effects on the social and cultural landscape of the country. Three major rivers flowing west to east—the Zambezi, the Save, and the Limpopo—divide the country laterally into three "broad cultural and linguistic bands."² The northernmost third of the country, above the Zambezi River, is home to matrilineal groups (the Makonde, Macua-Lowme, and Yao) with historic links to the Islamic influences of the East African littoral. A diverse array of smaller ethnic groups that cluster along the valley of the Zambezi divides the north from the patrilineal Shona-speakers

FIGURE—POLITICAL MAP OF MOZAMBIQUE



(Manyika, Ndau, and Teve) of the center, which is the region that borders on Zimbabwe. Below the Save River, in southern Mozambique, the Tsonga and other related groups form a third, distinct band, with strong links to the Swazi and the peoples of South Africa.

In modern Mozambique, the Macua-Lowme are the largest ethnic group, making up nearly 47 percent of the population, and remain concentrated in the northern provinces. The Tsonga, of southern Mozambique, account for another 23 percent. However, numbers alone can be misleading. Despite their near-majority status, the Macua-Lowme have not come to dominate politics in Mozambique. In reality, ethnic groups are highly fragmented with the aggregate numbers obscuring important distinctions that subdivide these larger categories. The distinctions with political relevance in Mozambique are regional in nature, dividing the northern provinces (Niassa, Cabo Delgado, Nampula) and central provinces (Zambézia, Tete, Manica, Sofala) from those in the south (Inhambane, Gaza, Maputo).

The differences among Mozambique's three "cultural bands," growing since late-precolonial times, have become more intense over the last century of colonialism, anticolonial warfare, and civil strife. Even as the Portuguese pushed their way inland during the latter half of the nineteenth century, southern Mozambique remained under the sway of the Gaza Empire. This last of southern Africa's Bantu-speaking monarchies did not fall to Portuguese rule until the early 1900s. The example of its final king, Gungunyana, would inspire the anticolonial leaders who emerged out of this same southern region some six decades later.

Under Portugal's violent and extractive rule in the twentieth century, the distinct regional trajectories of development continued. To cultural and linguistic distinctions were added disparities in levels of economic development and prosperity. The colonial state directly administered the southernmost provinces, investing significantly in the development and infrastructure of this region. By contrast, central and northern Mozambique were divided among various Portuguese companies that received private concessions to develop agricultural export industries. The south became the major income earner for the colony, exporting labor to the South African mines in exchange for gold paid directly into Portuguese coffers. The private companies that controlled central and northern Mozambique were mostly a law unto themselves. Forced cultivation was the norm, and although the concessions were revoked between 1929 and 1941, the practice of indigenous slave labor continued until the war of independence was won.

This brief review is meant to introduce a key point that emerges and reemerges in Mozambique's struggle for independence, its civil war, and its attempts to consolidate a fragile peace and a new democracy in the 1990s and beyond. The borders of Mozambique enclose a vast diversity of ethnic and linguistic groups. These have coalesced into three informal regions divided by political and economic cleavages that have contributed to the country's violent postindependence history. Dramatic changes in the structure of Mozambique's democracy are required to

accommodate these differences and maintain the viability of the new political system.

A Legacy of Conflict

When representatives of Frelimo and Renamo signed a peace accord in Rome in 1992, the world breathed a sigh of relief. The war that had raged across Mozambique for 16 years had included all the vicious intrigue of Africa's "old" civil wars, as well as the horrific, media-captivating violence characteristic of the continent's "new" civil wars.³ "Old" civil wars—typically those that ended before the fall of the Berlin Wall—could be classified as "ideological" or based on fundamental political and economic divisions. "New" civil wars, on the other hand, seem to be motivated by personal greed and local, ethnic, or factional hatreds without much ideological varnish. These wars often feature atrocities gratuitously inflicted on noncombatants. The civil war that wracked Mozambique was one of massacres and mutilations—horrific and widely publicized—that showed in awful terms how civilians can suffer when caught between warring parties. Forced recruitment was the main mode of maintaining the conflict (Frelimo's official organs called its policy "conscription" while describing Renamo's practices as "abduction"). Large numbers of civilians were injured, raped, and killed; roads, schools, health centers, and local infrastructure were ravaged across the country.

After its 1975 guerrilla triumph over Portuguese colonialism, the new Frelimo government had set out to transform the social, political, and economic life of Mozambicans, particularly peasants. These changes were dramatic and unexpected for many in rural areas: Traditional leaders were forced to give way to newly minted "party secretaries," subsistence agriculture to collective farming, and traditional settlement patterns to state-mandated communal villages intended to facilitate the delivery of health care and education. Frelimo openly touted these measures as part of an avowed "Marxist-Leninist agenda," cultivating close relations with the Soviet bloc and opening its borders to other liberation movements, particularly those challenging the white-run regimes in Rhodesia and South Africa. Moreover, belief in this new agenda was made mandatory. Political freedoms were curtailed. Oppositionists, soldiers and civilians alike, found themselves carted off to "reeducation" camps.

Frelimo, claiming the legitimacy of a victorious army of national liberation, embarked on this program without bothering to obtain popular consent. But the unity forged in order to throw off foreign rule masked profound internal divisions that had wracked the pro-independence forces since the inception of their struggle in 1962. Eduardo Mondlane, Frelimo's founder, had sought to bring together a number of independent

liberation movements with distinct geographic and ethnic bases. These groups included the Mozambique National Democratic Union, the Mozambique National Independence Union, and the Mozambique African National Union (MANU). Mondlane saw a united front, with its pooled resources and coordinated military efforts, as the key to victory. But the groups that coalesced to form Frelimo all brought leaders with ambitions of their own, and their coalition would remain fragile.

A controversy during Frelimo's first year in existence was a portent. Two former MANU officials, expelled from the Front after complaining that they had not been elected to the new Central Committee, charged that Frelimo was a southern-dominated scheme to use young Makonde men from northern Mozambique as foot soldiers without giving them a proportionate say in the party leadership. Such tensions would only grow worse as more educated young southerners continued to flee to Tanzania to join the liberation movement. The 1960s would see constant power struggles, with cries of "southern bias" rising again and again.

After Frelimo's Second Congress in 1968, the leadership struggles within the organization came to a head. A parcel bomb killed Mondlane in early 1969. His death generated a series of charges and countercharges among the leadership factions. Although Frelimo blamed the Portuguese at the time, it is now widely admitted that Mondlane was a victim of leadership infighting within the anticolonial movement. Power shifted to a Presidential Council composed of Uria Simango, Marcelino dos Santos, and Samora Machel. But the alliance was unsteady and Simango, also accused of assisting in the assassination, lashed out at dos Santos and Machel, publicly criticizing the leadership and internal structure of the movement. President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania tried to reconcile the factions, but failed. Simango was ejected from the Presidential Council and Samora Machel consolidated his control.

In the period that followed, the new Frelimo leadership intensified the military campaign and sharpened its political agenda, advocating state socialism as the path to development. Many interpreted this shift as a sign of the growing dominance of southern intellectuals in the movement's leadership. Discontented members, hailing largely from the center and the north, left Frelimo to join splinter groups based in Kampala, Uganda, and Lusaka, Zambia.

By the time that Frelimo came to power in 1975, these regional splits had hardened, foreshadowing the domestic disputes that would grow in intensity after independence. Key leaders from central and northern Mozambique, among them some of Frelimo's founders, had gone over to opposition movements. This left the southerners in charge—even though the south had not been a major theater in the war—and feeling free to press their aim of bringing socialism to an independent Mozambique.

The measures that the postindependence government took to move

toward this goal worsened rather than eased the lot of peasants nationwide, while efforts to consolidate political rule were equally destructive. Viewing tight control as essential to building socialism, the government suppressed all political activity outside of Frelimo and persecuted anyone accused of having “benefited” from the old colonial regime. Marked out for special harassment were members of Frelimo splinter groups and veterans of service in Portuguese-colonial military and police ranks, including many from northern and central Mozambique, where Portuguese recruitment and conscription had been heaviest. Many such Mozambicans found themselves forced into reeducation camps or simply jailed outright.

Given the heavy representation of northern and central Mozambicans in the opposition groups, the repression inevitably took on a regional cast that fed the flames of national division. To make matters worse, during the independence struggle the Portuguese had forced many northern and central Mozambicans to resettle in protected villages and exposed them to extensive propaganda about Frelimo’s “southern bias.” Most people in these regions had no direct contact with Frelimo until the very end of the independence war.

Enter Renamo

While splits within the liberation movement and coercive post-independence social and economic policies created a base of domestic discontent, the emergence of Renamo cannot be understood without understanding the geopolitical situation of Mozambique during the Cold War.

When Frelimo came to power in 1975, Mozambique was bordered by two white-settler regimes, both of which faced internal challenges from nationalist guerrillas. Rhodesia was facing an armed threat from the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), whose guerrilla army had been operating from Mozambique since the early 1970s. In South Africa, the African National Congress (ANC) launched a campaign to unseat the apartheid regime through domestic acts of terrorism perpetrated by armed cadres trained across the border in “friendly” or “front-line” countries. Frelimo offered safe haven to all African liberation movements, including the ANC and ZANU.

Rhodesia took these acts as a declaration of war, and Renamo grew out of the Rhodesian effort to mount a counterthrust. The Rhodesian military and security establishment recruited discontented Mozambicans based in Rhodesia, including colonial-army veterans and ex-Frelimo guerrillas who had lost out in the factional struggles of the 1960s. Later, to swell the ranks, the Rhodesian army and its Mozambican subsidiaries targeted areas of discontent within Mozambique. They raided reeducation camps and prisons, releasing unjustly imprisoned Mozambicans and

offering them a chance at revenge. Although its domestic support was at first shallow and its funding wholly foreign, the new Mozambican insurgency was filled with hungry recruits spoiling to topple Frelimo's postindependence government. With its key military and political bases in central and northern Mozambique, Renamo also resurrected claims of Frelimo's "southern bias" in order to rally the support of peasants throughout the countryside.

South Africa stepped in as the major financial backer of Renamo after Ian Smith's Rhodesia became Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe. The South Africans encouraged the insurgents to expand their internal operations and their social base. In addition, right-wing backers in Europe and the United States assisted Renamo in developing a clear political agenda, advocating a capitalist approach to development and a transition to multiparty democracy. By late 1984, Renamo was operating in every province of Mozambique and had grown eightfold, from 2,500 to nearly 20,000 soldiers.

Nor was Renamo's growth purely the result of foreign money and logistical support. Owing to substantial research completed after the war, the once-prominent view that Mozambique's civil war was simply a South African-backed destabilization campaign has given way to a more complex picture in which the local dynamics of the war, and local support for Renamo, also emerged from Frelimo's socialist ideology and high-handed efforts to make peasants change their customary ways. Renamo's appeals fell on ready ears at least in part because Mozambique's peasant majority was reeling from the disastrous effects of Frelimo's failed socialist agricultural policies and nationalization campaigns. Further, Frelimo was overthrowing traditional village leaders and sending in party cadres to enforce a program of social transformation that became more coercive and increasingly dictated by state-security concerns as the 1980s wore on.

How the UN Helped to End the War

Sixteen years was too much, both for those at the top and those who had to live through the conflict on the ground. By the early 1990s, Frelimo's and Renamo's armies alike were crumbling. With press-gang tactics the only means of filling the ranks, it was becoming ever harder for either side to maintain cohesion. When the Berlin Wall fell in November 1989 and South Africa's President F.W. de Klerk freed Nelson Mandela from prison a few months later, Renamo's leaders could read the handwriting on the wall: South African military support for Renamo was coming to an end. As early as 1987, the Frelimo government in Mozambique had begun talks with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank for loans to transform the economy. In 1990, Frelimo adopted a new constitution that called for multiparty politics. With money

drying up and ideological differences fading, the civil war was losing steam. But what would come next?

A peace agreement and a smooth transition to democracy were anything but guaranteed. More than 90,000 young men remained under arms. The destruction of schools and health posts throughout the countryside had mired a generation in ignorance and disease. The economy was in shambles, still suffering from nationalization and collectivism and unable to attract foreign investment. And it was not yet clear how the rebel leadership would benefit from laying down its arms. Renamo had made major gains in the later stages of the war, successfully launching attacks on the capital, Maputo, in the far southern part of the country. Some Renamo commanders believed that victory lay within their grasp, if they just fought a little longer.

Efforts to coax the parties toward peace began in the late 1980s under the leadership of the Catholic Church in Mozambique. With Renamo and Frelimo leaders proving reluctant to speak to each other formally and directly, the Church found ways to foster informal contacts. In 1990, spurred by the commitment of the Italians to host negotiations, the warring parties agreed to initiate conversations mediated by the Community of Saint Egidio, an independent lay-Catholic organization with a long history of work in Mozambique. Over two years, Saint Egidio hosted a dozen rounds of negotiations, succeeding in the signing of a cease-fire and general peace agreement in late 1992.

With these efforts having laid the groundwork, the United Nations was able to step in and make a critical difference. It did this first by offering to guarantee a peace accord, and then by providing a huge financial and logistical boost to Mozambique's political and economic recovery. The ink was hardly dry on the 1992 peace agreement when the UN went into Mozambique in force. The Security Council set up a United Nations Operation in Mozambique (ONUMOZ, in its Portuguese acronym) as a central organizing body for the collection and distribution of international donor funds. The UN made enormous investments to finance the demobilization of soldiers from both sides—and to create a new national army composed of individuals from both Renamo and Frelimo. The UN also set up a process to reintegrate Renamo-controlled areas into the country's system of public administration and fostered a plan to hold democratic elections in 1994, giving Renamo two years in which to develop as an opposition party before the cards were really on the table.

International assistance provided financial incentives for soldiers to demobilize and for Renamo's leadership to end the conflict. In particular, foreign donors established a trust fund to transform Renamo into a political party. These resources gave the Renamo leadership a realistic chance of competing in the multiparty elections and provided its former military commanders with salaries, houses, offices, and vehicles to

sweeten the deal. High levels of international attention and a UN military presence on the ground ensured that anyone who broke the agreement would pay a high price.

The transition to democratic, multiparty politics unfolded with remarkable smoothness. Joaquim Chissano, who had served as president since Samora Machel's death in 1986, won the 1994 presidential election, thereby continuing Frelimo's hold on national power. Chissano won again in 1999, this time by a razor-thin margin, providing Frelimo with a full decade of leadership following the end of the war. Yet at the same time, Renamo's leader Afonso Dhlakama was building his old rebel movement into a national political party. He recruited educated Mozambicans and former exiles to fill its legislative posts and organizational positions, in the process almost winning the 1999 elections. The economy took off—posting annual growth rates approaching 10 percent—and South African investment flooded into southern Mozambique.

The UN can rightfully claim credit for much of this transformation. UN funds, technical expertise, and staff time nurtured Mozambique's transition—demonstrating the payoff that can come from making a sustained commitment in a country moving toward peace. But success breeds complacency. This is a particular danger in cases where progress is evaluated mechanically, as if one is checking off items on a simple list of indicators: “Economic growth, check; democratic elections, check; a functioning opposition, check; and a military out of politics, check!”

A Crisis in the Making

Even as it looks back on a successful transition, Mozambique today faces a brewing crisis. Old, deep-rooted divisions linger and threaten to grow worse. And the structure of Mozambique's political system is uniquely *ill-suited* to the challenges ahead. It lacks the capacity to govern effectively at either the national or the local levels. And what is still more troubling, it possesses none of the levers that it would need to forestall a possible relapse into civil strife after the 2004 presidential and parliamentary elections.

Mozambican political life is riven along two equally troubling lines. The first division is geographic. As the results of the last two elections show, the political parties have startlingly different geographic bases—Frelimo draws its support largely from the south and the far-northern province of Cabo Delgado, while Renamo supporters cluster in the central region and parts of the north. These geographic divisions are not surprising. As we have seen, Frelimo's leadership has been charged with harboring a “southern” bias since the dawn of the national-liberation struggle in the early 1960s. Renamo's base during the long years of civil war lay in the central provinces of Manica and Sofala. Not sur-

prisingly, many Renamo leaders hail from those areas. Majorities in those provinces back Renamo freely to this day, belying the claim, heard often during the war, that Renamo lacks popular support.

In a democracy, geographic divisions as such need not be especially worrisome. In the United States, for example, the Northeast and the Pacific Coast are strongholds of the Democratic Party, while many Great Plains, Rocky Mountain, and Southern states are firmly Republican. These patterns are strong and fairly consistent over extended periods of time.

But in the Mozambican context these spatial distinctions are ominous for two reasons. First, they mirror patterns of economic inequality. On the street, people say that the south is nine times richer than the center and the north. The Mozambican government's own poverty statistics reveal that the three poorest provinces—Sofala, Tete, and Niassa—all lie in the center and north, with the first two registering more than four-fifths of their respective populations below the country's official poverty line. In the southern districts of Gaza and Maputo Province, by contrast, less than two-thirds of the population lives below the poverty line, and fewer than half do in the capital city of Maputo itself.

With South Africa so nearby, the southern provinces have been the major beneficiaries of foreign direct investment since the war; moreover, the flood of aid and aid agencies has boosted the southern economy dramatically, infusing Maputo in particular with new jobs and new construction. It does not help that the Portuguese had a long history of favoring the southern provinces, building roads and agricultural infrastructure there while largely ignoring the center and especially the north. As a result, central and northern Mozambicans live in deeper poverty and have less access to schools, health care, and infrastructure than their southern neighbors. Voters in strong Renamo areas tend to be poorer than those in Frelimo areas, and little has been done to rectify the situation since 1992.

Second, within each district or province that leans towards Frelimo or Renamo, the population votes not with a simple majority, but with a supermajority. For example, in Gaza province in the south, Frelimo's Joaquim Chissano won 9 of the 12 districts with more than 80 percent of the presidential vote in 1994. In Sofala in 1994, three-quarters of the districts saw Renamo's Afonso Dhlakama top 70 percent. The 1999 election saw this pattern intensify; Dhlakama's jump from 34 to 47 percent of the national vote did not reflect a geographically broad diffusion of his appeal. The average Mozambican voter lives among and knows only people who support the same party and candidate—hardly a recipe for a vibrant democratic civic culture.

The second major division separates those with access to the national political dialogue from those isolated at the local level. Although Mozambique, with its numerous small tribes, is not beset by the strong

ethnic tensions with which some of its neighbors are cursed, the quality of its democracy does suffer from the de facto political isolation of its rural majority. Frequently illiterate and cut off from information by poor roads and lack of electricity, rural Mozambicans are largely left out of national political debates and structures. Competing elites from Frelimo and Renamo squabble in Maputo to advance their own respective agendas, and spare little time or attention for local party administration and other matters related to “grassroots” politics.

Considering a pair of hypothetical but representative Mozambicans shows what these divisions mean. A former Renamo fighter living in Sofala Province (the center of Mozambique) finds himself surrounded by other Renamo supporters, with only a negligible Frelimo presence in the area, living in poor conditions with little access to health and education from the government. At the same time, he lacks access to the senior leaders of his own party; even the local Renamo officials are almost totally ignored by the higher-ups who debate national policies in Maputo. A similar example could be described for a Frelimo supporter, yet she would be living in better socioeconomic conditions in the southern part of the country.

An Ill-Equipped Political System

The problems caused by Mozambique’s violent recent history, its geographic divisions, and its isolated rural majority (so badly cut off, through no fault of their own, from national political life) are all sharpened by the country’s political structure. Mozambique has a strong form of centralized presidentialism, in which the nation’s chief executive forms the cabinet and appoints provincial governors, who in turn control appointments to every other administrative post, right down to the district level. The only formal channels that the opposition can use to take part in governance are the unicameral 250-seat Assembly of the Republic and a new, rather truncated system of elected municipal governments that currently covers only 33 cities and districts out of the 411 localities that were eligible for inclusion.⁴

This type of political system has significant implications for Mozambican political life. After a first-past-the-post national election to choose the president, the winner *appoints* members of his own party to administer *every* locality (save for the 33 cities and districts with the new elected mayors and councils). Control is excessively centralized and top-down everywhere, and even in Renamo strongholds it is exerted by Frelimo, which can hardly make the yoke seem lighter.

Given the bloodiness of Mozambique’s recent history, this system should be cause for grave concern. Moreover, when one takes into account the economic dimensions of Mozambique’s political geography, it becomes clear that Mozambique’s political minority is also econo-

mically disenfranchised. As time passes, and little changes at the local level, it is possible that those Renamo supporters who once bore arms but grew weary of war may grow less weary, and conclude that their only avenue to political change lies outside the system, in the realm of force.

Moreover, there is equal cause for concern when one looks at the situation from Frelimo's point of view. Renamo came very close to winning the 1999 presidential election—many in that party still believe that their victory was stolen from them through fraud and mismanagement. Renamo's strong showing sent shivers of fear through both Frelimo's hierarchy and its rank-and-file. A Renamo victory in 2004 would summarily rip the enormous appointive powers of the Mozambican presidency from one set of hands and place them squarely in another and opposed set. In a country where the two leading parties were shooting at one another only a few years ago, the prospect of "payback time" is frightening to contemplate. Unfortunately, Mozambique's constitution—with its conspicuous lack of federalism, separation of powers, and checks and balances—is tailor-made to become a charter of revenge for sore winners lusting to punish their defeated rivals.

Since 1999, President Chissano has engaged in an on-again, off-again dialogue with Afonso Dhlakama about the issues of power sharing and local governance. Sadly, these talks have barely progressed, given the hard feelings that exist about the results in 1999.⁵ Furthermore, Chissano has moved to address the fundamental problems created by the system itself—identifying local people to become administrators and governors and flirting with the idea of allowing Renamo to have a say in sensitive gubernatorial appointments. But these steps have been too few and too tentative. What is needed is a fundamental transformation of the system of local governance in Mozambique—a plan that would give electoral power directly to local voters at every level of government. The voters of the nation as a whole should choose its president, the voters of each province as a whole should choose its governor, and the residents of each district should choose their own local administrators. Such a step would be a fundamental move away from the failed "big-man" model that is too common in Africa, even in countries that have multiparty competition.

The Benefits of Decentralizing Elections

A move toward electoral decentralization would have three main effects. First, it would improve the prospects of democratic consolidation by building the *local* capacity of both political parties. Since the peace accords were signed, much attention has been paid to the need to make Renamo over from a rebel group into a political party. Consequently,

donor funds went to assist Renamo in developing its national political capacity and in building local party organizations.

These efforts to strengthen political parties continue in Mozambique today; as in other countries, many donors have invested in parliamentary training programs in an effort to build the skill base of Mozambican parliamentarians to manage and pass legislation in the national assembly. Yet these efforts have had almost no local effect. Local party organizations, particularly in the opposition, are almost nonexistent. And where they do exist, they are constrained by a lack of money, skills, and access to the national political structure. A move toward electoral decentralization would redirect the donor and party focus to the local level—necessitating an investment in skills and training for those working in local party organizations. More than rhetoric would change as the parties responded to concrete incentives in order to build effective local affiliates capable of helping the party compete for power at every level.

The idea of building local party capacity is linked directly to the second main effect. Electoral devolution would also strengthen the hand of the rural majority relative to the urban minority in both the parties and the national political system as a whole. Given that discussions are already under way about how to devolve functions to local administrations (requiring the shifting of funds), this proposal would alter that only slightly, by making those local administrators accountable through democratic elections. To truly govern at the national level, parties would have to compete at the local level—highlighting the program of their presidential candidate, while working with local candidates to articulate policies that could benefit their areas. National leaders would have to spend less time in their “parliamentary workshops” in Maputo and get out into the bush in order to recruit rural supporters and help win local elections.

Third, and most fundamentally, this system would help to preserve a fragile peace. With the next national elections less than three years away, Renamo salivates at the prospect of finally winning the national poll, and with it every level of government. At the same time, Renamo lives in fear of another loss—a loss that would relegate it to powerless opposition for another five years. Frelimo, which has grown comfortable leading Mozambique at every level, faces the very real prospect of losing for the first time, with their banner candidate standing aside, and with memories of an election victory that was far too slim in 1999.

The idea that Renamo might gain control of districts, provinces, and the national government—all at once, with unlimited control—makes Frelimo shudder. Shifting more offices and indeed whole levels of government from the “appointed” to the “elected” category would substantially reduce the pressure to win that each side feels as the next election approaches. In particular, a Renamo with some offices to its

credit would be less tempted to believe that trying to force change from outside the political system could be preferable to another five years of near-total Frelimo dominance.

Big Steps in Uncertain Times

“Payback” and all its damaging implications can be avoided. Often, people believe that they should make big decisions only when they are certain or close to certain of their impact. Electoral decentralization, by contrast, is a good idea that both sides should support precisely because things are so *uncertain*. Both parties are gazing into an opaque crystal ball. Neither knows whether it will find itself victorious in 2004, or whether it will end up counting the days until the next election, when there will be another shot at taking full administrative control of Mozambique in a single stroke. And both parties value equally the ability to maintain administrative control of the areas that they hope to win. Although donors can push an agenda of electoral decentralization through conditional aid and the “bully pulpit,” dramatic changes in electoral law become truly possible only when the incentives are aligned for both parties. In Mozambique, that time is now.

For far too long, in Mozambique and around the world, donor countries have focused too squarely on the idea of national presidential elections as a way of legitimating governments. Donors seem to breathe a sigh of relief when the second national election (after dictatorship or civil war) has passed successfully with a free and fair vote. Full consolidation is seemingly assured when power is passed from one party or leader to another through national elections. The investments of donor agencies are targeted at national-level institutions in hopes of ensuring that national party leaders, members of parliament, and senior government officials have the tools they need to manage political and economic change.

National elections and institutions remain important, of course. Yet the case of Mozambique shows plainly that national elections may not always be enough to guarantee peace and democratic consolidation. The divisions that drove Mozambique’s civil war are regional and local. A presidential system without any devolution of electoral power to the local level only strengthens these subnational divisions, laying the groundwork for future conflict and instability. Donor attention to holding national elections and strengthening national institutions has diverted attention away from the structural weaknesses of the political system that came out of the 1992 peace agreement.

To focus purely on national-level elections while ignoring the importance of democracy at the subnational level is a grievous mistake. Commenting on the emerging democracy of the United States in the early nineteenth century, Alexis de Tocqueville argued that democra-

tic governance works because people are organized and involved at the local level. And their involvement at the local level is spurred by their capacity to influence the conditions of their own lives and governance—particularly by choosing their own local officials and weighing in on policy disputes that are close to home as well as those that are nationwide. As the international community and its members push for democratic transformation in countries around the world, they must be careful not to keep their eyes just on the top. To ensure that democracy takes hold in societies emerging from war, tyranny, and misrule, the checks on power that the ballot box provides are imperative at all levels of government.

NOTES

1. Accounts vary as to why these shootings took place. Some blame Renamo for urging its militants to challenge the police. Others point to hard-liners within Frelimo and the military who allegedly provoked and then fired on the protestors in hopes that such an outbreak of violence would undercut President Chissano and stymie his plans to bring Renamo into the government.

2. See Margaret Hall and Tom Young, *Confronting Leviathan: Mozambique Since Independence* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1997). A good source for the precolonial and colonial history of Mozambique is Malyn Newitt, *A History of Mozambique* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995). For a concise description of Mozambique's civil war and the role of South Africa in destabilizing its neighbors, see William Minter, *Apartheid's Contras* (London: Zed Books, 1994). An alternative viewpoint, emphasizing the internal dynamics that gave rise to the conflict, is presented in Christian Geffray, *La Cause des armes: Anthropologie de la guerre contemporaine au Mozambique* (Paris: Editions Karthala, 1990).

3. See Stathis Kalyvas, "'New' and 'Old' Civil Wars: A Valid Distinction?" forthcoming in *World Politics*.

4. It should be noted that Renamo boycotted the 1998 municipal elections for mayors and civic assemblies to protest alleged fraud and other abuses. As a result, the new municipalities have almost no representation from opposition parties. It should also be mentioned, however, that by implementing a local government elections scheme in largely urban areas, local power was given to traditional Frelimo strongholds and not to those living in the countryside, where Renamo maintains its greatest strength.

5. Renamo accuses Frelimo of "stealing" the election, citing the disqualification by the National Elections Commission of a large number of ballots from regions where Renamo is strong. With a razor-thin margin of victory and arguments about the validity of certain ballots, the 1999 Mozambican elections were a sad foreshadowing of the events to come in the United States one year later.