

## MOZAMBIQUE

### CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION IN URBAN GOVERNANCE IN DONDO

*Soon after a decentralisation process was introduced in Mozambique, it was realised that there was a need for new institutional structures at the community level to support this process. Since it started in late 1997, an initiative in Dondo created and consolidated such structures, promoted the dialogue between government and civil society and realised a capacity development programme for civil society institutions.*

Dondo, in central Mozambique, is a city of nearly 65,000 inhabitants. Its local government is one of 33 municipal governments established in 1998 following the first Municipal Elections since independence, as part of a new legal framework reflecting a national policy of decentralisation. Yet despite the policy intention to involve citizens in municipal development, the institutional framework and the concrete mechanisms for involvement had not been provided.

The initiative in Dondo responds to the need for an awareness-raising and capacity-building programme for civil society and local NGOs. Prior to the initiative, a rapid appraisal survey in 1997 had shown that 90% of citizens did not have an understanding of their role in local government and development, and there was no adequate organisational structure of civil society to present people's preoccupations to local government or to be involved in self-caring initiatives. On the part of local government, there was inadequate provision of social services coupled with a lack of capacity for needs assessment, planning and management, and lack of community level data.

The initiative began in 1998, with a training programme for young community activists. These activists in turn carried out a civic education campaign in their neighbourhoods, or 'quarters', in which a third of all households were visited to explain the role of citizens in local government. A survey about local infrastructure was also undertaken and incorporated in profiles of each quarter. These were presented at community meetings, during which residents (also elected representatives) marked the beginning of the Development Committees of the Quarters (NDBs). Eight such Committees were established.

In a second phase, each Quarter Committee elaborated short, medium and long-term development plans, based on the needs identified during the survey, and sought approval for the plans from the communities. Profiles and development plans for each of the quarters were then presented to the City Council.

This process culminated in a three-day planning workshop in July 1999 in which the City Council committed itself to incorporate the community plans in the overall municipal development plan.

The second half of 1999 was devoted to the implementation of projects of social infrastructure by the NBD: one project in each quarter implemented with municipal funds, and another with external funds, with a contribution from the community.

Subsequently the City Council invited the Development Committees of the Quarters to a planning seminar in January 2000, with the aim of preparing the budgeting of their activities of the year 2000 - however full participatory budgeting remains an objective for the future, as the City Council does not yet disclose its own budget lines.

The approach faced some barriers. In some instances community politics led to confrontation between opposing groups, affecting the legitimacy of the plans to the extent that in some quarters it is difficult to invite people to public meetings to approve plans because of political tensions. Most supporters of the opposition groups do not want to participate in public meetings, because they are alleged to be for the party in power. One way to overcome this is to rely more on interviews per household as a substitute for public meetings to obtain legitimacy. In addition, despite being grateful for the educating and mobilising work of the initiative, some government officials are not yet ready to work transparently with the community, for example when it comes to publishing budget figures. However, regular talks and advocacy work with government representatives can create in them enough confidence to overcome the problem.

Despite such difficulties, the programme has successfully built the 8 Development Committees as a new institutional framework to represent the community vis-à-vis the City Council and play an active role in planning and project implementation. This has gone hand-in-hand with capacity building for the 40 community activists and 90 members of the Quarter Committees, in particular their ability to prepare community profiles, needs assessments, and community development plans, and to mobilise the population around these plans and manage community projects.

These projects improved living environment in areas prioritised by residents, through, for example, extending access to safe water supply through the construction and repair of bore-holes and water pumps (for 8,500 new users), improving sanitary conditions through construction of 2,250 pit-latrines, facilitating intra-urban traffic through road construction, as well as mobilising residents to participate in community projects of street cleaning, maintenance of drainage systems and garbage collection. The sustainability of the investments made in local infrastructure is based on community management and maintenance. A system of contribution (payment of water rates) is in place, which takes account of the local potential for contributions.

As a consequence of the capacity building component of the initiative, the new development committees in the quarters have developed an agenda of work and terms of reference. Because, they do not rely on external funding and have become partners of the council,

their future existence is guaranteed. The composition of the committees reflects the intention of social inclusion: traditional authorities have been nominated as members, and men and women have been elected. Further, with the integration of the community plans to the municipal development plan, allocation of government funds to the implementation of community projects is secured. In addition, resources are partly contributed locally by the community itself.

The new institutional approach has been successful in changing the mindset that now governs the city. The promotion of dialogue between government and civil society has shown its first results in the change of attitude of government towards community-based initiatives, in the recognition of new community structures and in the inclusion of community representatives in a consultative process. This has brought about changes in the use and allocation of technical resources at the local level, respecting priority needs of the community. On the other hand, dialogue has also caused changes in communities' attitudes and behaviour by mobilising their own potentials and giving them pride in themselves and their living environment.



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