

Implementation of governance reforms in Mozambique - the impact of selected political and institutional factors

An input prepared for the HHGR-seminar, organised by Danida, to be held in Copenhagen on 27th and 28th February 2006.

Among the many, very different, political and institutional factors that impact the implementation of governance reforms in Mozambique we have chosen to focus on the following:

- the institutional bias across government towards accepting an overly ambitious reform agenda;
- the political power struggles delaying implementation but also providing windows of opportunity for reform; and
- the question of inter-institutional cooperation and the role of cross cutting reform units.

Each of these factors is briefly introduced below in a way, which we hope invites comments and further analysis.

External pressure - adding to the reform wish list

Mozambique is a highly aid dependent country. Over the last decade the scale of donor involvement, and the added complexity of the direct budget support modality, has led to a sharp increase in the demand for governance reforms. In response to this pressure, an institutional bias has developed towards accepting the requests from the donor community for the introduction of concurrent large scale governance reforms, as commitment to reform, albeit “para o Inglês ver” (for the Englishman to see), is seen as guarantee continued funding.

Unfortunately the ever increasing reform agenda is only partially aligned with the dynamics of the domestic political arena, where often entirely different concerns and priorities prevail. The main governance reforms in Mozambique now include (a) the broad public sector reform with a main emphasis on restructuring of government and improved service delivery to citizens; (b) financial management and revenue reforms, which includes the introduction of a large IT-based budget-and accounts-system; (c) justice sector reform to enhance efficiency and effectiveness of the courts and combat corruption. Furthermore a range of institutional change activities have been initiated in the various sector ministries. This all adds up to a comprehensive and complicated reform scenario, where little progress has been made towards achieving a common understanding of priorities and a shared idea for sequencing of reform implementation. Furthermore, the requirements in terms of capacity development to ensure successful reform implementation have never been thoroughly analysed.

Political power struggles and reform momentum

Mozambique has succeeded in ensuring several peaceful transfers of power through democratic elections over the last decade, which builds hope for the future of a vibrant democracy that is still not secured, however, as was reflected by the national elections in December 2004, won again by the ruling party, in power since independence 1975. Although the elections were assessed as free and fair, there was no credible opposition at play and a sharply declining voter turn-out.

An expected effort was made during the election campaign by the ruling party to reflect the concerns of the citizens regarding the widespread corruption in the state and the limited access to basic services, often of poor quality. Following the elections, a considerable reshuffle of political and technical positions took place, encompassing most levels of government. Old alliances were broken and new were sworn. As witnessed in many other countries this was more a struggle for

control over resources between different fractions of the ruling political and economic elite than reflecting a shift in political orientation or policy priorities.

The stated commitment during the campaign to improving the efficiency of the state apparatus and deal with the problem of corruption was reflected in a set of actions taken in the early days of the incoming government. In an attempt to align with the new political discourse, newly appointed Ministers and leaders in other positions, implemented ad-hoc actions to provide a response to the key priorities set out in the election campaign with little or no consideration for the long-term impact of these actions. This involved not uncommon antagonisms between the technical and political level, where the political leadership in some cases lost confidence in the technical level, doubting that it stayed close enough to the political steer.

On the other hand, the dynamics created by this process of political reshuffling also provided windows of opportunity for reform initiatives to be taken forward. Several of the newly appointed political leaders have shown a commitment to supporting sector specific reform activities. The opening of One Stop Shops to improve service delivery to citizens reflects the same political energy. Where such commitment manifests itself, prior capacity building efforts, including change management training, are likely to impact positively on the effectiveness of the actions.

Inter-institutional cooperation - and the task of reform units

The Government of Mozambique has achieved some important progress in terms of inter-institutional cooperation for certain priority areas of governance reforms. In the area of deconcentration and decentralisation several agencies have joined forces to develop a new legal framework and accompanying capacity building efforts. This process also involved a useful engagement between government and parliament for the approval of the new legal framework. Within the justice sector reform a coordinating body is beginning to play the role for which it was created.

However, in other areas of the reform inter-institutional rivalries, and the fact that few government agencies will accept the imposition of reform agendas by "an equal", e.g. a fellow Minister, with no clear overriding authority, complicate the implementation of reform. Reform units have been set up attached to cross cutting ministries, with a varying degree of direct support by the political leadership. The ebb and flow of the political backing influences greatly the extent to which reform units are capable of introducing change. In situations of declining political support, the relatively well resourced cross cutting reform units are often left pretty much powerless to ensure that agreed results are achieved. Although the donor community may be well informed, there is a tendency to turn the "blind eye" to this development. At times - in the name of national ownership - a pro-active partnership approach is substituted by a reactive approach, which yields few results.

Conclusions

What do these political and institutional factors mean for the future of governance reforms in a country like Mozambique - and, perhaps, in other countries as well? For a start it means that the absence of sufficient political change maker commitment is limiting the impact of technical level efforts to introduce change. The technical outputs of reform programs may be excellent, but the outcomes may be invisible or insignificant because political leadership and commitment is insufficient. Stimulating the demand for change, building a conducive change environment and developing change maker commitment become important tasks of any reform program. Only where there is clear cut political backing for a reform process, from the very top, including a personal backing of the people in charge of reforms, significant and sustained impact is

achievable. For donors the sequencing of the reform agenda being pushed remains a serious challenge. There is also a need to become more realistic about timeframes, capacity requirements and the design of institutional arrangements for effective reform management.

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