

MDM: a new political force in Mozambique?

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Maputo, Mozambique
for the conference
'Election processes, liberation movements and democratic change in Africa'
Maputo, 8-11 April 2010

CMI and IESE

Abstract

One of the highlights of the general elections of 2009 was the emergence and participation of a new political party, the Democratic Movement of Mozambique (MDM), whose formation resulted from the exclusion of Daviz Simango from Renamo by this party's leader, Afonso Dhlakama. This paper discusses the rise of MDM in the wider context of politics in the Sofala province, an important region in the centre of Mozambique that historically has had difficult relations with a southern elite of Frelimo.

Keywords: MDM, Daviz Simango, Renamo, Sofala, Mozambique.

Introduction

One of the highlights of the general elections of October 2009 was the emergence and participation of a new political party, the Democratic Movement of Mozambique (MDM). The MDM party was created in Beira, capital of Sofala, a province in Central Mozambique, in March 2009, as a result of the exclusion of Daviz Simango from Renamo by this party's leader, Afonso Dhlakama.

The emergence of this new party brought hope and high expectations amongst many Mozambicans. Indeed Mozambican voters who had become disenchanted with the performance of the opposition parties, in particular with Renamo, hoped to avert the collapse of multipartism and the return of an all-powerful Frelimo dominating the political scene. MDM stated that its main goal was to build a true political alternative to Frelimo and to bring a new political approach in the country. Has MDM achieved this aim?

In other words, in examining both MDM's political discourse and programme, can one conclude that MDM has indeed brought the seeds of new political culture to Mozambique?

Based on interviews and taking a socio-historical perspective, our aim here is to retrace and to understand the contours of the emergence of MDM. Understanding MDM first and foremost means understand politically the Sofala province, a region that has always had troubled relations with Frelimo, whether during the anti-colonial war or later. To study Sofala is therefore a gateway not only to understand MDM but also the difficult process of nation-building in Mozambique, and the weight of colonial legacy in the political and economic system of this country. To answer these questions, we divided the text into three sections: the first seeks to provide the historical and sociological elements essential for understanding the complex relationships between Sofala province and the Frelimo party which in turn will help us to understand MDM; the process that dictated the emergence of the MDM as well as a look at their operations, are addressed in the second section; and the last section examines in detail the participation of MDM in the 2009 elections.

Sofala, "a thorn in the side" of the Frelimo

During the colonial period, Sofala in central Mozambique was part of the old district of Manica and Sofala. The capital of Sofala, Beira, and their elites, are, like those in Maputo (formerly Lourenço Marques), in the south, basically products of the colonial capitalism of the late nineteenth century. This colonial capitalism was characterized in both regions by the deployment of an "economy of services", linking them through ports and railways, to neighboring countries, (Zimbabwe and South Africa). This region is historically and for reasons that we sought to clarify here, regarded as politically hostile to Frelimo. Indeed, during the armed struggle against Portuguese colonialism, one of the most difficult conflicts faced by Frelimo - whose main ruling elite originated in southern Mozambique - was with the elite of the old district of Manica and Sofala. This internal conflict reached a critical point in 1969 when Urias Simango, Daviz Simango's father at the time Vice President of Frelimo, was expelled, accused of taking part in the plot that on February 3rd of that same year killed the then President of Frelimo, Eduardo Mondlane, a native of Gaza, southern Mozambique (PIDE: December 1969).

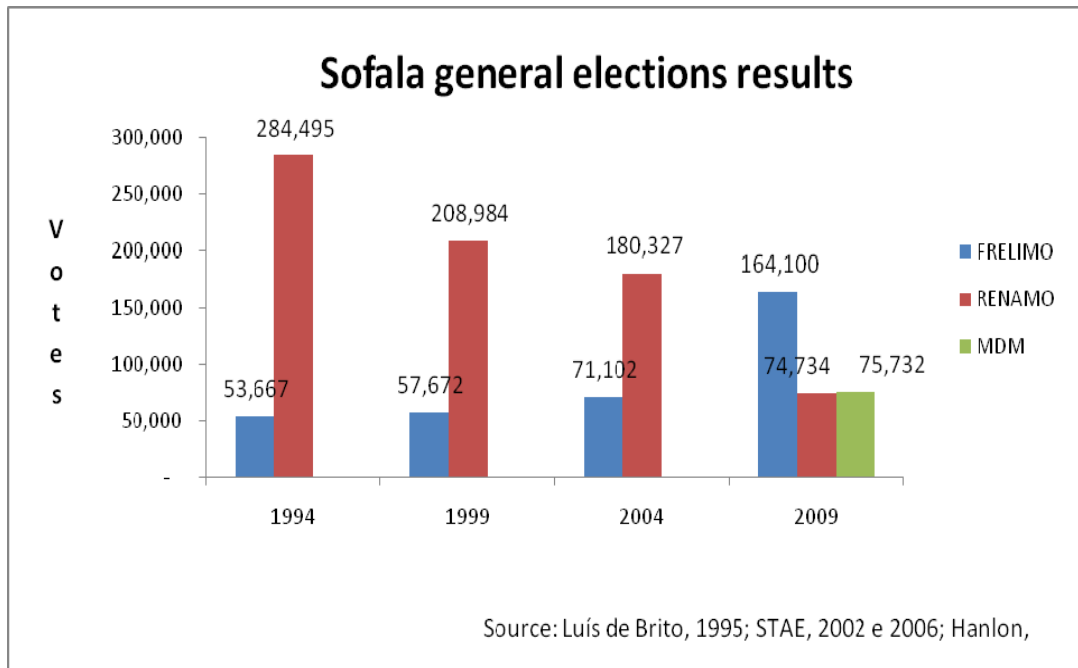
in fact Urias Simango, who after the death of Mondlane should, according to Frelimo's hierarchal structure, have become the president of Frelimo but who was excluded in favor of a triumvirate that, besides him, included Samora Machel and Marcelino dos Santos, complained, among other things, of an attempt on his life, of exclusion, tribalism, and assassinations of Frelimo members from the Center and the North of the country by Frelimo Southern leaders (PIDE: December 1969). Urias Simango was arrested soon after independence and killed along with other former Frelimo dissidents. There is no doubt that the murder of Urias Simango, an emblematic figure of Sofala resistance against Portuguese colonialism left much resentment and anger on local people in relation to Frelimo.

The former district of Manica and Sofala was also where the main leaders of the Mozambican National Resistance (Renamo) were from, and where Renamo, the main opposition political party, was born. Here we are talking about the first leader of Renamo, André Matsangaiça, a native of Manica. We are also talking about the current leader of Renamo, Afonso Dhlakama, a native of Sofala. From 1976 to 1992 Renamo launched the armed struggle that was waged against the Frelimo regime considered as to be "tribalist", "southern" and "communist".

In 1981, recognizing the weak political and social insertion in this region as well as the local popular support to Renamo, the first president of independent Mozambique Samora Machel, named Armando Guebuza, the then Minister of Interior as the new head of Sofala province. In 1983, it was the turn of Marcelino dos Santos, one of the important figures of Frelimo, to lead this province. According to Machel, a province like Sofala perceived as a sort of "stomach of the country" and which had always been an area of acute confrontation between Frelimo and the enemy, was a land of reactionaries, regionalists and tribalists, and therefore needed to be ruled by the more capable leaders" of the party (Machel: 1983). This happened at a time when Renamo occupied large parts of the country, including Sofala.

With the advent of democracy and the subsequent elections (general and local), Sofala has repeatedly voted for the opposition, specifically for Renamo (1994, 1999 and 2004) (graphic 1). Until 2004, Sofala was the constituency in which Renamo always got its' best results at the national level: 77% in 1994, with 71% in 1999 and 65% in 2004.

However, in the 2009 elections, Frelimo won in all the constituencies, including Sofala. But, it should be noted that for reasons that I'll explain later, in this election, Renamo ran divided because of the emergence of MDM, following the expulsion of Daviz Simango, which certainly explains in part its' poor performance in Sofala. Even without winning, because Frelimo won in Sofala with 51%, the sum of the votes of MDM (23%) and Renamo (23%) in Sofala made this constituency the one that voted the most for the Opposition.



So, how can one explain the weak insertion of Frelimo in this region?

In fact, the situation in Sofala is merely a symbol of protest by the Central and Northern Mozambican elites against what they consider discrimination by the Southern elites who dominated Frelimo from the start. During the colonial war, this feeling of discrimination reached one of its highest points in the emerging conflicts within Frelimo, which led not only to the expulsion and the defection of many of its militants coming from these regions, but also to the emergence of regionalist movements demanding their independence in certain portions of the country.

These conflicts can be essentially explained by two factors: the differences in the social, historical and cultural trajectories which made it difficult for cohabitation between those two elites; the way which the economy of Mozambique was structured in the late nineteenth century, leading to the political and economic hegemony of the South and the marginalization of the other regions of the country.

Daviz Simango: From Renamo-UE to MDM

Daviz Simango was expelled from Renamo allegedly for having violated the party statutes, when he decided to run as an independent candidate in local elections in 2008. In fact, under unclear circumstances in which Renamo's leader favored the candidacy of Manuel Pereira, one of the historical leaders of Renamo, Daviz Simango, in a show of unconformity, decided to be an independent candidate in those elections. Dhlakama then used that as a pretext to expel him from the Renamo party.

Officially, Dhlakama stated that he passed up Daviz Simango under pressure from Renamo's base, which did not consider Daviz Simango to be Renamo member. In fact, Daviz Simango was a member of *Partido de Convenção Nacional* (PCN), which joined *Renamo- União Eleitoral*, a coalition between Renamo and other opposition political parties that was formed in 1999 order to counter Frelimo.

But it appears that the real motivations of the expulsion of Daviz Simango were the persistent rumors indicating that he wanted to overthrow Dhlakama as President of Renamo, rumors which certainly did not please the leader of the party. The fact that on several occasions, Daviz Simango has been considered domestically and internationally to be the best mayor in Mozambique and has received several distinctions (Canal de Moçambique: 22nd May 2007; Canal de Moçambique: 1st June 2009), overshadowing the figure of Dhlakama, has certainly contributed to some circles - disillusioned with the actions of the leader of Renamo - seeing Daviz Simango as a person capable of giving a new direction to the party and prevent its decline. It should also be noted that despite the many awards received by Daviz Simango, the leader of Renamo has never praised Daviz Simango, and has even called him a "kid" unable to replace him as President of Renamo, on several occasions.

Although Dhlakama has implicitly recognized Daviz Simango's good management of Beira, he stated, "he was just a good manager, but not a good politician" (Michel Cahen: 2009). Moreover, Dhlakama said that it was thanks to himself, who invited Daviz Simango to be the Renamo candidate in Beira in the local elections of 2003, that Daviz Simango became important.

Despite the immense challenge of having to face both big parties, Renamo and Frelimo, Daviz Simango won again the local elections in Beira in 2008, and with more votes than his first time in 2003!

So it was in this context that, shortly after the 2008 local elections, Daviz Simango decided to create the MDM party. Claiming to be concerned with the Mozambican political landscape after the consistent victory of Frelimo in the 2004 general elections and the 2008 local elections, the MDM stated as its main objective to ensure that Frelimo does not reach a qualified majority in the 2009 general elections, which would allow this party to govern with little pressure from the political opposition.

According to MDM, another of its' main objectives was to break the political polarization that characterized the Mozambican political landscape, dominated since the first democratic elections in 1994 by Frelimo and Renamo. MDM also presented itself as an alternative to what the party considers the lethargy of the Mozambican opposition parties, which it saw more as a result of "lack of political vision" than the widespread perception that it was due to a "lack of financial and material resources", and claimed to bring a new way of doing politics in Mozambique (Daviz Simango: Beira, 7th Mars 2009).

MDM in the 2009 elections: a failed adventure?

According to MDM supporters moved by the aforementioned objectives, namely to "save political pluralism", MDM decided to participate in the 2009 general elections only six months after its formation. This was indeed, a courageous but very risky attitude for a newborn party, with very small social and political bases and limited material & financial resources, to be able to become a decent political rival for Frelimo and Renamo.

The electoral campaign of MDM was characterized essentially by critiques of the Frelimo government, accused of not being inclusive, as well as being corrupt and unable to lead the country towards development. In order to end this state of affairs and bring change, MDM said that its' government program was divided into four main sections:

1. "Enlargement of citizen participation, especially to young men and women;
2. Accountability of elected representatives;
3. Production of wealth and its' equitable distribution;
4. Improvement of the quality of public services "(MDM, 2009).

Although with a more or less different language, this message was not too different from that advanced by both Frelimo and Renamo, that is, MDM's major opponents.

One of the few differences between MDM with Renamo and Frelimo is the proposal of Daviz Simango's party to transform the Constitutional Council into a Constitutional Court; another one is the proposal to appoint the Presidents of the courts, (Supreme, Administrative and Constitutional) as well as Attorney General of the Republic, through a contest overseen by the Parliament. One must note that under the current system, the holders of these positions – who are often accused of political bias - are appointed by the President. There was also the question of public universities rectors, which, according to this party, should now be appointed by the "university community" and no longer by the President of the Republic (MDM, 2009).

Likewise MDM proposes that 1% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) should be used to finance housing of Mozambicans as well as the establishment of what the MDM calls "direct democracy" with the massive use of referenda as well as the so-called "class action" (*acção Popular*) are also relevant differences with Renamo and Frelimo's programs (ibid.).

In terms of discourse, and in terms of program or ideology, there are basically no differences: and it came as no surprise when in February 2010, soon after the 2009 elections, the MDM appeared claiming that it could support Frelimo (the political party that won the 2009

elections), if this party meets its electoral promises of good governance and adopts an inclusive attitude.

At the beginning of the electoral process, MDM was faced with a challenge to its political project. The National Elections Commission (CNE) excluded the party in seven of the eleven constituencies, on the grounds that their applications were full of irregularities. They could only compete in Maputo and Inhambane both in the south, and in Sofala center and Niassa in the north (O País, 8th September, 2009). The CNE decision triggered a wave of opposition not only within the MDM, but also from various sectors of society, who saw it as a clear attempt to block the MDM party's participation in elections.

Considering the CNE decision unfair, even though the Constitutional Council (CC) then confirmed this decision, MDM decided to proceed with a criminal complaint against members of the electoral body. They claimed that in the constituencies in which they were excluded, the CNE intentionally lost the dossier of their party in order to render unfit its participation in the elections – to the benefit of Frelimo. MDM also contested the draw, which dictated the positioning of political parties competing for the 2009 elections on the ballot, claiming it only favored Frelimo and Renamo.

Apart from Frelimo, Renamo and MDM, fifteen other political parties participated in the 2009 elections. In the presidential elections, there were only three candidates: Armando Guebuza of FRELIMO, Afonso Dhlakama of RENAMO and Daviz Simango of MDM. In a politically hostile context completely dominated by Frelimo and their candidate, which had both 75% of the vote, the MDM and their candidate still managed to get 4% and 9% of the votes respectively. Dhlakama, the big loser in this election, won only 16%, and his party, 18% (Hanlon, 19th November 2009). In terms of parliament seats, Frelimo had 191, Renamo, 51 and MDM, 8. Regarding the provincial elections, Frelimo, who competed in all 141 constituencies, won 83% of the votes, equivalent to 704 seats; Renamo, who competed in 62 constituencies, obtained 13%, equivalent to 83 seats, and MDM, who competing in only 19 constituencies, obtained 3%, corresponding to 24 seats (Conselho Constitucional: 27th December 2009).

Conclusion

In terms of its discourse, political program or political practices, MDM did not represent any real alternative, because they are not different from the other political parties, especially Frelimo and Renamo. Like Guebuza and Dhlakama, Daviz Simango wants to promote youth and to reduce regional imbalances. Daviz Simango was unable to draw up a clear alternative program, different from the others, with strong proposals that impose the politicization of the debate in the country and not only its personification.

At least with regards to his policy proposals, Daviz Simango was unable to make a difference! In practice though, if on the one hand, they failed to prevent Frelimo from reaching a qualified majority (i.e. more than 2/3) vote - especially because of their exclusion in many constituencies and their low social and political insertion – However, in winning three seats in the Maputo city constituency, MDM made history: this is a feat never accomplished by any opposition party before, not even Renamo, which had never gone beyond two seats in Maputo city, the “political heart” of the country.

Despite all the obstacles we can say that MDM has some assets and possibilities to survive as a political party. But this will depend on the one hand on the way that the Party will manage the council of Beira and their few seats in the Parliament; and on the other hand, it will depend upon in how it will manage its followers or supporters who, because of MDM’s exclusion from many constituencies, lost the possibility to access parliament, especially in the provincial assemblies.

Will these supporters resist Frelimo’s political bribes? It remains to be seen but we should not forget that we are in a context where politics is for many, a matter of survival and that Frelimo control the access to most of the country economic opportunities.

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