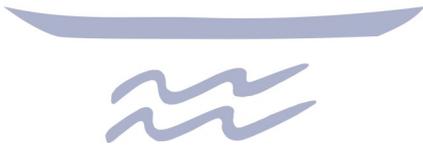


Mokoro



Democracy and Development: Reflections after Recent Fieldwork

By Christopher Tanner



In the course of the last six months I have had the opportunity to work in two countries with very different profiles in terms of their relative wealth and economic complexity. Brazil today is claiming world power status, with the seventh largest economy and a modern industrial base that includes nuclear energy and an aviation sector with customers around the world. Its total GDP is around \$2.3 trillion, which translates into \$11,600 per capita. Oil and gas revenues are providing a huge boost to the economy, and in the last decade have been used to drive diversification and address deep underlying poverty. Inequality remains a huge problem, however, with a Gini coefficient in 2011 of 0.519, and poverty and extreme hardship still tend to be concentrated along racial and regional lines.

Mozambique is much smaller in terms of wealth per capita but in relative terms has an equally impressive natural resource base which now includes large proven reserves of coal, gas and oil. It is ranked 117 amongst world economies, with total GDP of \$14.6 billion and a per capita GDP of \$1,100. Its economy is still largely agrarian and in spite of rapid growth at over 7 per cent per annum in recent years has not really changed very much. Current GDP growth is largely due to a few megaprojects in extractive industries, with the rest of the economy still agrarian-based with a predominantly smallholder farming sector. Its Gini coefficient is marginally better than Brazil's, at 0.46 (2008), but absolute poverty still afflicts some 45 per cent of the population.

Both countries are 'democratic', with multiparty political systems and governments elected by a universal franchise every 4 or 5 years. Both have also implemented significant decentralisation programmes over the last decade. Despite their differences, the chance to work in both countries offered an opportunity to reflect on the impact of democracy and political decentralisation. Are there features present in both places that could point to democracy having a decisive role in local development? Is democracy a necessary but insufficient condition for a more equitable and socially just form of development to take place? What else is needed to make it more than just an incidental or even cosmetic feature of development in both countries, while other more powerful forces drive growth and shape the way each economy is evolving?

Being 'democratic' is definitely considered 'a good thing' by the international development community which has grown up since World War II. Some countries such as the USA structure their foreign assistance to favour countries considered to be democratic, or at least making serious efforts to become so (Mozambique is one of these). While the paraphernalia of multilateral assistance cannot be so instrumental, there is nonetheless an underlying assumption that democratic countries are better than those still beset by one-party or dictatorial regimes; and that democracy is an important condition for improving social indicators beyond the initial improvements that can be made with intensive development assistance.

Both countries have been through turbulent times to reach their present democratic status. Democracy in Brazil goes far back to the middle of the 20th Century, but was interrupted by a long and repressive period of military dictatorship. This ended in the late 1980s, with a new Constitution in 1988 and the beginning of a long but consistent process of democratic rebuilding. After Independence in 1974, Mozambique remained a one-party state until the new Constitution of 1990 preceded the end of its long civil war in 1992 and allowed for multiparty democracy and for a market economy to take root. Its present government is however the latest in an unbroken line of FRELIMO governments going back to 1974, with all the hallmarks of a de facto one-party state still very visible. Current political problems with a resurgence of armed conflict with the RENAMO opposition reflect the lack of real democratic consensus and political opportunities for non-FRELIMO actors. Nevertheless the country has now held four relatively successful general elections for the Presidency, provincial governors and Assembly deputies, and is set to hold the fifth one later this year. A new party, the Mozambican Democratic Movement (MDM) has gained control of three of the four largest cities in the country, and FRELIMO is being forced to make concessions over electoral processes that should see more gains by opposition candidates.

At the grassroots level of local villages and towns, what has all this meant for the people in each country? Has growth trickled down and is economic development becoming more equitable and sustainable? My recent visit to Brazil was the first I had made to the country since working there in the mid-1980s. The difference was remarkable. Perhaps the most notable feature was the 'feeling of democracy', an intangible thing that can perhaps only be felt by someone who was last there during the dictatorship. Democracy has enabled a government to finally take power which then set about redirecting significant portions of the national income to those most in need. This came with strings attached – access to the new Bolsa Familiar, a state-funded package that has reduced poverty dramatically in the last ten years, is conditional upon children attending school and being vaccinated. At the same time massive resources have been directed at basic education and health services. The commitment to delivering on electoral promises is very clear.

In an already vital country the vitality of Brazilian civil society is very evident, ranging from private sector foundations committed to social issues, to NGO groups that regularly hold government to account. The press is vociferous and critical. But the combination of real decentralisation and massive resource transfers to alleviate poverty and improve social indicators takes accountability right down to local level and is producing impressive results.

A good example is a UNICEF-supported programme which the Mokoro team looked at as part of an evaluation of education



sector policy work. The 'SELO Municipal', or 'Municipal Seal' programme works with local governments to set clear goals for key social indicators. Those that achieve these goals over two-year cycles are awarded the 'SELO Municipal'. 'So what', one might ask, 'what difference does getting an award make in real terms?' Compared with many indicator-

driven programmes, responsibility for implementing this one is clearly laid at the door of local government leaders, who also take part in assessing baselines and deciding realistic targets. Successful municipalities get access to new Federal and State resources, and the process moves forwards again as they re-enter the competition to improve their indicators still further and achieve more SELOS. The programme has indeed achieved impressive gains in things like infant mortality and education over short periods of time. Critically however, governments who do not deliver run a real risk of being kicked out, as the SELO cycle is linked to the electoral cycle.

A critical extra ingredient provided by UNICEF is a mobilization and rights-based activity to empower local people. Through participating in 'Child Rights Committees' which then go out and talk to local residents, local activists help their communities to understand their rights and exercise them in their interaction with local social services and political leaders. With a constitutional structure that obliges Government to deliver fundamental rights in practice, a decentralisation model that holds local leaders to account and also gives them a voice at national level, an active civil society and a free press, real progress has been made.

Poverty and inequality remain deeply entrenched and the political and social structure is still dominated by a largely white class able to access and use the massive material and technical resources of their country. But it is unlikely that Brazil will fall back on its impressive recent performance. The underpinnings of power are now firmly based in a growing awareness of how the Constitution can be used as a tool to achieve social as well economic objectives, and in a decentralised political system that takes political accountability down to local level. Keeping this going requires investment, however. A key ingredient of the mix is education, a statutory right that is now backed up by massive resource flows into the sector over recent years. Moving these resources into social sector programmes was an act of political will, backed by a mandate achieved through the democratic process. Subsequently, a better educated and aware population is far less prone to manipulation by its political elites, especially when other measures are in place to ensure that these same elites have to achieve concrete results in order to survive.

At first glance the situation in Mozambique could not be more different. Democracy has few believers, the population at large feels disillusioned with the political process, and there is little sense of effective accountability when things go wrong or promises remain just that. New projects are mistrusted, while the poor remain largely untouched by the growing wealth of the country in GDP terms. In Mozambique there is an expression that has been around since well before Independence, and which some say captures an essential aspect of the national psyche. The saying 'é para o ingles ver' – literally, 'it's for the Englishman to see' – comes from the first half of the 20th century when British capital was flowing into Mozambique. A flurry of activity preceded visits by British investors, to spruce things up and ensure that everything was working perfectly. A less rigorous, natural order re-emerged once the visitors had left. What was done was largely superficial, 'for the English to see', implying that once they left it would be business as usual. Today, whenever something is suddenly done ahead of an important visit or inspection, perhaps after years of neglect, or a big new infrastructure project is announced, the more cynical will say the same thing: 'é para o ingles ver' – it is either merely a gesture, or the project is more to benefit the already-rich than the people. Behind the scenes nothing has changed.

This almost fatalistic attitude characterises a lot of what people say about their democracy in Mozambique. Present developments do little to change this view, unfortunately, in spite of real progress in policy and legislative terms. Mozambique has an excellent constitution, although it lacks the provisions which in Brazil tie government into delivering on indicators that key rights are being respected. It has excellent policies and laws. The area I work in, land, is characterised by what is often called 'one of the best land laws in Africa. The progressive and inclusive principles of the 1997 Land Law provide mechanisms for investors, local people and the State to work together in pursuit of 'sustainable and equitable use of land and other resources'. Yet in practice these principles are often set aside. Admirable mechanisms like the mandatory consultation between investors and local land rights holders take on a cosmetic character as they are used to give a patina of social respectability to projects that are, in effect, a modern form of the 19th century British enclosures.

Like Brazil, Mozambique also has been implementing a significant decentralisation programme. This basic framework was set by the 2003 Local Government Bodies Law, and since then the process has deepened and widened. A growing number of cities and towns have achieved 'Municipality' status, giving them a significant degree of autonomy over budgeting and service provision. Critically, Municipal Presidents and Assemblies are also directly elected. In these areas, it is clear that local people are beginning to seriously evaluate what they see around them – poor roads, poverty,

poor public services – in terms of what 'their' municipal government is doing. Two elections ago a new opposition party, the Mozambican Democratic Movement (MDM), gained control of Beira, the second largest city, and set about showing what it could do. At the next elections, they held on and extended their success to one or two other smaller municipalities. In the 2013 municipal elections they emerged controlling three of the four largest cities, with Maputo still in government hands after what many say was a fixed result. Whether this is true or not is irrelevant at this point – where decentralisation is linked to real accountability through the ballot box, sooner or later the oligarchs will fall.

The other side to the picture in Mozambique is an active civil society and a free press that do manage to keep the flag of a rights-based approach waving, and critique the government to the extent that it is being forced to take note of what its own laws and policies say. While land is still being 'grabbed' or allocated to large projects (national as well as international), local communities are ever more aware of their rights and how to fight for them, after years of grassroots work by NGOs working with the Land Law. Paralegal programmes backed by high-profile State judicial institutions take the messages of the Constitution out to communities, and to the women who live in them as well. And education is slowly working, with a growing group of 'thirty and forty somethings' who are well trained, experienced, and increasingly tired of the dominant political system which now appears as self-seeking and only interested in staying in power. At village level too, younger people who can read and write are elected onto 'Land and Natural Resources Committees' instead of traditional leaders; and women gain experience of leadership in new 'Nutrition Groups' and 'Health Committees'. Change at a deeper level is afoot. While not so apparent as in Brazil with its genuine and radical form of political decentralisation able to access massive resources, democracy is also at work in Mozambique.

Comparing these two very different countries is perhaps not a realistic way of assessing why each is where it is today in terms of social and economic development. Just the fact of massive resources in Brazil is a huge difference. Yet Brazil itself is a massive country, and needs resources at such a scale if it is to achieve what in Mozambique requires a far smaller budget. The comparison does show that the question of democracy and inclusive development is central to the relative success of each country to date. At one level Brazil has the political structure and measures in place to build democracy and allow it to work as it should. A critical ingredient is the decentralisation process that gives genuine political power to local governments vis-à-vis the 'Union' (the Federation of Brazil and its central and State governments), and takes accountability down to local level through the electoral process. This is not 'para o ingles ver', but is instead a political innovation to bring about real change with its roots in the post-dictatorship constitutional reforms. It has since been given

practical form and content by the policies of the Workers Party under President Lula. These gains ultimately come from the legitimacy of the victory of the left and its consequent mandate, both won through the ballot box. They are also tied to an increasingly powerful and vociferous civil society, and a Constitution that is not just a set of 'fundamental principles' but also obliges whatever government is in power to deliver on key issues.

Mozambique is less clear in practically all of these areas. It has a strong Constitution which mandates the State to 'construct a society built on social justice and the creation of the material and spiritual wellbeing and quality of life of all citizens', and 'to defend and promote human rights and equality under the law'. In principle it has a democratic system that can deliver on these objectives, but which so far has been prone to manipulation and control by the entrenched post-Independence oligarchy. A generalised lack of education and awareness of their rights amongst the population has contributed to a democracy which in many ways is 'para o ingles ver', one which is sold to an outside world looking for 'democracies' to support with development assistance. The illusion of successive successful transfers of power through the ballot box belies a decades-long grip on power and 'business as usual' attitude on the part of the national elite once the electoral dust has settled.

To date few people have had the courage or the basic tools to challenge the orthodoxy and competence of a long-standing government and administrative machine (which does indeed run the country with some efficiency and better than many other governments in and beyond Africa). And the decentralisation process has been nothing like as radical as that put in place in Brazil in the late 1980s. Democracy is

however beginning to have an impact, and decentralisation is beginning to turn on its creators, as people become more educated, and as more towns and cities acquire the right to directly elect their leaders. It remains to be seen if this process can now begin to have an impact on social indicators, and bring current excesses of land exploitation and wealth concentration to an end.

What Brazil does show Mozambique and in fact any other country including those in the 'developed world' is that problems long seen as intractable and requiring long periods of time to resolve can be sorted out quickly and effectively with serious commitment, political will, and real accountability. In a short speech at the launch ceremony of a new SELO competition attended by the Mokoro team in Ceará, Northeastern Brazil, a regional political leader told the enthusiastic audience of civil society and local government leaders that he had been to New York to present the results of their efforts. Over a four-year period they reduced infant mortality from 38 per cent to 4 per cent by focusing resources, improving management, mobilizing citizens, and political will. 'You can do it too!' he had called out to the assembly of UN delegates.

These words underline what a programme like the SELO can achieve, but it is essential to also understand the underlying power of a genuinely democratic and accountable system which allows the SELO programme to function as it should. The same applies whatever the sector, where good laws may well be in place but on their own are not enough to bring about the equitable and sustainable development we all strive to achieve.