

# Reflections of Annica Holmberg, team leader of the Mozambique evaluation



Photo: Mai Rasmussen

## **On a partnership of passion and strong commitment – for good and bad**

The task to evaluate the Danish support to Mozambique during the period 1992-2016 was interesting because there were so many strong feelings on what the successes and failures over the years had been. Many of the Danish respondents had invested a great part – up to 30 years – of their career in development cooperation in Mozambique. I was not surprised to meet this passion. As a Swede, I know that many Swedes share it. Mozambique, Frelimo and the liberation struggle appeal to Nordics.

### *Is this passion an advantage or a disadvantage?*

It is a big advantage in that it can lead to true and long-standing friendships and partnerships, to responsiveness and an openness to listen to the priorities of Mozambicans. But it also comes with a risk of developing blind spots and forgetting to be critical towards government and the ruling elite and of accepting things that we would not accept at home. This, though, does not only apply to Denmark. We have seen the same from other Nordic countries in Mozambique. And it should be added that we do not know whether Danish ambassadors and MFA representatives have confronted their Mozambican counterparts with their criticism, because this dialogue is rarely documented.

## **On a post-conflict dilemma: Strong alignment and the risk of favoring the elite**

Denmark was a staunch supporter of aligning with government policies and priorities and state-building in Mozambique which was positive. But it also comes with the risk of favoring the elite, and Denmark – as one of “the friendly and solidary Nordic countries” – tolerated to a certain extent the advantages the Frelimo elite created for themselves.

## **On the Danish/Nordic passion for low-profiled, ‘unsexy’ support with huge impacts**

It caught our attention that Denmark many times put money in slow institutional and technical support like public financial management, which does not bring headlines in the media but creates conditions for transparency and accountability and plays an important role in building a more

democratic and open society: No democracy without transparency and no transparency without solid financial institutions and systems. Nordics share a passion for building strong institutions rather than strongmen and therefore focus on social engineering and building institutions, also in Mozambique. Denmark could do this, because Danida to a large extent made use of long-term experts seconded to ministries and other institutions. They were very devoted, spent a long time in Mozambique and were given the space to pursue their goals by the Danish leadership/system.

### **On Denmark as a bold donor**

Another finding from the evaluation was that Denmark proved to be a bold donor, supporting initiatives and sectors that did not attract the attention of other donors. In the justice sector, for example, the Danish support played a major role despite the fact that it did not involve large financial support. Still, it was assessed as very strategic and necessary. Without Danish support there would hardly have been any qualified legal professionals available in many areas of the country. There may not be public awareness in Mozambique – or in Denmark – about this, but people in the sector know. Actually, a respondent in the justice sector said: “Denmark is probably not even aware of the impact this has had”. The Danish “boldness” also showed in a willingness to test new approaches.

### **On a Danish showcase – and lost opportunity: Malnutrition**

A recent example of the Danish willingness to test new approaches was the support to a multi-sectorial government initiative to address the serious issue of malnutrition. 40 per cent of the children in Mozambique suffer from malnutrition. This has serious implications for years to come. Even if Mozambique sees strong economic growth, a big proportion of the future workforce will suffer from the effects of malnutrition. Denmark was the only donor willing to support the test of the full model of the new approach in the Tete province including core support at central level. The experience was unique and so successful, that the EU addressed Denmark to be the lead of new and large EU-funds for the area of malnutrition. Due to the exit decision, though, the embassy had to turn down this offer. This was a lost opportunity for Denmark and for Mozambique.

### **On the legacy Denmark leaves behind in Mozambique**

Few Mozambican stakeholders distinguish between the Nordic donors. But in the Tete province, Denmark leaves behind a very strong legacy. Even young people know about Denmark and Danida, because of the Danish support to health, education and agriculture which has left strong and visible marks. Also, in certain sectors like justice, there is a strong awareness of the Danish impact.

### **On the Danish decision to exit and the way it was implemented**

A Danish decision to gradually phase out aid to Mozambique might not have come as a big surprise, but the sudden exit came as a shock in Mozambique and to other development partners, who are not aware of the domestic Danish political context and tend to suspect that the exit was caused by an ongoing corruption scandal in Mozambique. The decision to so abruptly phase out and close the bilateral cooperation with Mozambique meant, according to many consulted stakeholders, a lost opportunity to contribute to a larger impact based on the many Danish lessons learned. An example of this is the Danish support to the private sector, which had a strong focus on agriculture. Lessons learned and new insights from this sector support were in the process of being translated into a new and innovative programme, which, however, could not be realized due to the sudden exit.