

Local media monitoring of Mozambique elections

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Abstract

Local journalists acting together in Mozambique have overcome many of the limitations of international and domestic election monitoring. In a system developed in three pairs of municipal and national elections (2003-4, 2008-9, 2013-4), journalists from community radio and other local media, while continuing to work for their own organisation, also report to a national daily newsletter on registration, campaigning, voting and counting. Reports of local violence and misconduct are quickly reported nationally, usually bringing rapid responses. In other cases, evidence from local journalists and continued media pressure forced elections to be re-run, and led to changes in the electoral law reducing misconduct. Two aspects proved central: accuracy and local knowledge. Nothing is published unless it can be verified or sourced, making it an effective counter to exaggerated or false reports on social media. Local journalists are known and trusted, so people come to them with complaints, and they have the contacts to verify or refute claims. Central editorial control with its demand for detail and verification means that the reports are accurate and trusted. Local journalists, working together, have made political parties and the electoral system accountable.

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Introduction

"Monitoring has become the flagship of democracy promotion," comments Judith G. Kelley in her book *Monitoring Democracy*.¹ International election monitoring generally involves observation of voting and counting, and sometimes of registration and the electoral campaign. The goal of international observer groups is to write a final report assessing the quality of the election² and to recommend possible changes in law and practice. Only in the most egregious circumstances are comments given to electoral authorities during the electoral process. The advantage of international observers is that they have electoral experience from other countries and can judge the election in an international context, and are not influenced by local politics. The disadvantages are that they rarely speak the local language and have only superficial knowledge of the local electoral law and system, are usually present for only a few days, only go to places which have easy access and are near reasonable hotels, and usually stay in an individual polling station for a short period.

Mozambique national elections typically have had six or more international observer groups, including the European Union, African Union, Commonwealth and Carter Center - usually supplemented by local diplomats who do speak Portuguese, the national language. The main utility of international observers has been their presence, giving the sense that "the world is watching". Reports have largely accepted the outcome of the elections, thus giving an international stamp of approval. Most have been critical, but these international comments and suggestions are largely ignored.

Because of the limitations of international observation, a domestic observation system has been developed, mainly by the Electoral Observatory, a coalition of eight national civil society groups, including the three main religious groups. Observers were mainly trusted people chosen a local level from groups in the coalition. Unlike international observers, they stayed in individual polling stations for longer periods of time - sometimes for the entire voting day. As with international observers, the main output was a final report.³ The two problems with domestic observation have been lack of training, so observers often do not know what to look for, and a failure to adequately collate the large number of observer reports. The only study to look for observer impacts finds that for the 2009 elections the presence of international observers "has no significant impact on any of the fraud indicators", while domestic observers have "significant fraud reducing effects."⁴

Finally, there has been a sample count, or PVT (parallel vote tabulation), which combined national and international organisation. In Mozambique ballots are counted at each polling station and the results are posted on the door, making a PVT relatively easy. The sample count has been organised by EISA⁵ and used observers from the Electoral Observatory to record results from the selected polling stations.

In 2009 national elections there were 3,678 national observers (1,662 from the Electoral Observatory) and 502 international observers (131 from the European Union) to cover 12,584 polling stations. The parallel count (PVT) covered a statistically selected sample of 967 polling stations (8% of the total).⁶

¹ Judith G. Kelley, *Monitoring Democracy*, Princeton, NJ, USA: Princeton University Press, 2012, 15.

² The terms "free and fair" are now rarely used, and there is more of an attempt to assess the validity of the election and if it represents the will of the people. Kelley, *Monitoring Democracy*, 163.

³ The Electoral Observatory report for the 2014 election is on bit.ly/EIObs2014.

⁴ Stefanus Leeffers, "Electoral observation: Evidence from Mozambique", Nova School of Business, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, MA Dissertation, 2016. <http://hdl.handle.net/10362/16509>

⁵ Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa, based in Johannesburg.

⁶ Joseph Hanlon, "Post-Election Review of the Mozambique General Elections of 2009", <http://bit.ly/MozElec2009-1a> and <http://bit.ly/MozElec2009-2>.

Limitations

Mozambique is a predominant party state. Frelimo, the liberation movement that won independence, first ruled a one party state and has subsequently won the presidential race⁷ and a majority in parliament in all five multi-party national elections. The opposition has won in some municipal elections, and in 2013 gained mayors and municipal assembly majorities on 4 of 53 cities, including the 3rd, 4th, and 5th largest cities in Mozambique.

Over five national and four municipal multi-party elections, both international and domestic observers have largely confirmed the validity of the outcome, but with substantial criticisms of the National Elections Commission for its conduct of the elections and its lack of transparency. These reports have largely been ignored by parliament and the Elections Commission, but pressure from media, the courts, civil society and opposition parties have brought changes.

Mozambique has a free press, but it is highly polarised. The state owns the largest circulation daily newspaper, the national radio network (Radio Moçambique, with good coverage and broadcasting in local languages) and a television network (largely available in urban areas). These are seen as biased toward the ruling party. A private group has a smaller national daily newspaper and a TV network, which are seen as neutral. And there is a large group of weekly newspapers and daily e-mail newsletters, which largely see their role as to oppose the government and the predominant party.

National media has two limitations. Except for Radio Moçambique, national media is based in the capital, Maputo, and has few correspondents outside of major cities, which means elections coverage is largely urban and from the capital. Furthermore, the polarization means that reports tend to be for or against the governing party. Finally, competition between newspapers has prevented cooperation on election coverage.

There is, however, a vibrant local media. There is a group of web, social media and print based local newspapers and magazines in larger cities and provincial capitals. And there are 114 community radio stations, many based in market towns and predominantly using volunteers. They are a mix of state, private and community-owned and with a full range of political sympathies. Their journalists are local people, speaking local languages, and with local knowledge, which gives them a very different perspective from the Maputo-based national media. Although they share information, notably community radios through a national association (Forcom, Fórum Nacional de Rádios Comunitárias), there has been little pooling of election coverage.

Social media has not played a major role in election reporting. Facebook is the most widely used in Mozambique, but is primarily used for partisan comments. Various attempts at citizen reporting have not succeeded.

A core problem with election reporting is that traditional media, and even more social media, is based on exception reporting - the extreme and the unusual, such as violence, very large or very small crowds at rallies, long waits at polling stations or no voters at all, and allegations of misconduct. Observer groups try to put this in context - how common is the violence or long waits at polling stations - but they only report after the election when most people have lost interest in the issues and it is too late to respond.

The media alternative

In Europe and the US, no media organisation has enough of their own staff to cover all polling stations and counting centres, so media works together with various pool systems. Organisations cooperate and agree to send reporters to different counting centres and then share the information.

⁷ There is a two-term limit in the constitution, so three different Frelimo candidates have been elected president.

Press agencies usually use "stringers" - reporters who usually work for local media and are paid to also report to the agency.⁸

Municipal elections in 2003 were held in 33 municipalities and the two authors of this paper established an e-mail election newsletter with stringers from local media in each municipality, and a small editorial office in Maputo, under the umbrella of an irregular newsletter, *The Mozambique Political Process Bulletin*,⁹ published by the Maputo office of AWEPA (European Parliamentarians for Africa). This first election newsletter with relatively few correspondents quickly showed it had better and more integrated coverage than other media.

Meanwhile, the Public Integrity Centre (CIP, Centro de Integridade Pública) had been created in 2005 as a civil society organisation which would use investigative journalism techniques to report on corruption and misconduct. CIP has become the Mozambique chapter of Transparency International and continues in the style of producing readable but accurate reports exposing corruption and conflict of interest, and more recently investigating relations with transnational corporations involved in the exploitation of gas and other natural resources. It also works with the authorities in drafting of anticorruption legislation and supporting Parliament to improve its oversight role.

The journalist and watchdog approach made CIP a natural home for *The Mozambique Political Process Bulletin* and election newsletter, which moved to become part of CIP.¹⁰ Expansion of election coverage continued. For the 2014 national elections, there were 150 correspondents covering nearly all districts, plus an editorial office of three people in Maputo. Voter registration, campaigning, voting, and counting were all covered. A total of 77 election newsletters were issued in Portuguese (the national language) and English, by e-mail and on Facebook; frequency ranged from weekly during registration to three times on polling day.

The primary audience target was the media, and reports were frequently used, with the independent media citing the election newsletter while state-owned media used the material without citing a source. E-mail subscription was free and the list grew to 5000, and the newsletter was frequently circulated to others. It became an important source for diplomats writing reports on elections, and for international election observers.

Correspondents

From the start, the goal was to provide accurate and balanced reports so that the election newsletter became a trusted source, but to do so as quickly as possible. That required a mix of careful selection and training of stringers, active editing, and the creation of an understanding that all articles had to be accurate and verifiable. An attempt was made to turn the correspondents pool into a team and to stress that stringers should use material for their own publications. But whatever the politics of the journalist and their own radio station or publication, correspondents learned that they were expected to report on all aspects of the electoral process.

Selection and training were particularly important. Some correspondents are community radio volunteers without formal media training, and as regional coverage increased, it was not always possible to find journalists and some correspondents are teachers, civil society activists, or workers with international non-government organizations. Correspondents were interviewed, selected and

⁸ Terminology is not consistent, but a "stringer" is normally a journalist paid per article or job, who may be free lance or may be employed by local media and is reporting occasionally for national or international media, while a "correspondent" is often an employee of a media company reporting only for that company. However, the term "correspondent" is often used more loosely and is more widely understood, so it is used by the newsletter to refer to its pool of journalists.

⁹ *The Mozambique Political Process Bulletin* was started in 1992.

¹⁰ The frequent elections newsletters add the election to the beginning of the title, thus *2013 Local Elections - Mozambique political process bulletin* in English and *Eleições Autárquicas 2013 - Boletim sobre o processo político em Moçambique* in Portuguese. All newsletters are posted on an Open University website, bit.ly/mozamb, and the election newsletters are also posted on the CIP website <http://www.cipmoz.org>.

trained by the deputy editor. Those who proved effective correspondents in an election were invited to continue; a few have been correspondents in all six elections.

Newsletter correspondents are known and no attempt is made to conceal their identity, for three practical reasons. First, many of these communities are not large and people's affiliations are well known, so it would be hard to conceal their identity.¹¹ Second, it is important to give them access to polling stations and the district election commission, which means they need to have a press credential for the election. Third, it is important that they make themselves known to party and election officials and the police, so they can make contacts officially to ask for information. This also means party officials can contact them with complaints.

Newsletter correspondents must commit to not being a candidate or active in the campaign for any party. Inevitably this happens, and stringers have been dismissed when strong party links were discovered.

For the most part, having publicly known correspondents has not been a problem. Indeed, local journalists are known and trusted, so people come to them with complaints, and they have the contacts to verify or refute claims. In six elections there has been only one serious incident. The correspondent in Mabalane, Gaza province, witnessed and reported that the district administrator and thugs beat two market stall holders who had displayed opposition campaign literature.¹² The correspondent was arrested for making the report, and was only released after higher level intervention by the deputy editor. However, people have been prevented from being correspondents; for example in several provinces journalists for government-affiliated community radio stations¹³ are not allowed to be newsletter correspondents during the election.

Training

Correspondents need training in the electoral law and procedures, as well as on what to look for and tricks for spotting misconduct and fraud. But few of the correspondents have any formal journalist training and their experience is often limited, so part of the training is about basic journalistic skills and providing the key information - who, what, when, where, why. But most of the training is about guaranteeing accuracy and verifiability. Rumour and exaggerated claims are often repeated in social and local media and are a major problem. Reporters are told they must have been present and seen the event themselves, or have made an effort to verify - for example, where a party claims one of its members has been arrested, the journalist is expected to check with the police. Where a claim cannot be confirmed or refuted, it must have a named source - often a party official. In exceptional circumstances, a source can be kept secret, but the correspondent must at least identify the source to the editor and explain why they believe the source to be credible. The demand for verifiability forces the correspondent to check and to be able to justify the story to the editor.

Verification is important because of the tendency to exaggerate; opposition parties often say an official has been arrested when there has perhaps only been a verbal argument. The correspondent checks with the police who say no arrest and then returns to the party official who is forced to admit it was not true and the police only yelled at his official, and accepts he cannot make such exaggerated claims in future. On social media, such a claim would never be checked, encouraging exaggerated claims.

Training also highlights particular issues the correspondents must pay attention to. During the campaign it is violence, destruction of party posters by other parties, and obstruction. Correspondents are expected to monitor neutrality of the police and state officials.

¹¹ A few journalists in larger cities who work for state-owned media have been allowed to conceal their identity.

¹² *2009 Elections - Mozambique Political Process Bulletin* 20, 26 October 2009.

¹³ Run by the government's Social Communications Institute, Instituto de Comunicação Social, ICS.

One of the most important changes has been the availability of smart phones. Correspondents now send pictures as evidence, some of which are published.

The importance of training was underlined in 2014 when the newsletter expanded its correspondents pool for the electoral registration. New correspondents were recruited through personal recommendation by telephone and there was no training before the registration period, and the performance of the new correspondents was weak. Regional training took place in August, after registration but before the electoral campaign; after that, performance of correspondents was much improved.

Editing and context

Unlike social media, the election newsletters followed a tight editing procedure. Correspondents submit articles, send text messages¹⁴ or simply phone the editor and provide the information. They are asked to report on serious incidents and problems, as well as more normal conduct. The editors ask for details, especially with respect to verification, and often ask the correspondent to make further enquires. Sometimes the editors hear rumours or complaints about events in a particular place, and contact the local correspondent to ask them to follow up and verify a claim.

Violence and serious incidents grab the normal media headlines, but how common are those problems? Observers in their post-election reports try to put those incidents into context and suggest how widespread incidents and misconduct were. The election newsletter tries to put events in context, but within a day or two rather than after the election. By 2014 the newsletter had correspondents in almost every district, and they in turn were in mobile telephone contact with friends and sources in the area, so it gives a larger sample than anyone else has.

Putting events in context is seen as a central role of the newsletter, and the editors can conduct quick surveys by sending SMS text messages to correspondents. For example, in May 2013 at the start of registration, some correspondents reported that voter registration cards could not be printed. The newsletter reported the problem - caused by toner cartridges incompatible with the printer in some areas - before the electoral authorities were aware of it. Editors also sent out a text message to correspondents to ask how widespread the problem was. The newsletter published lists of registration centres with toner problems, others with different problems, and noted the many registration posts which were functioning normally.

In an overlap between monitoring and journalism, the newsletter tries to provide a survey of the on-going electoral process - with single line or summary reports of processes running normally.

Thus the newsletter was able to report that violence does occur, but was actually quite limited. In contrast, the use of state resources, particularly cars, by the governing party as part of the campaign - which is explicitly illegal - was widespread. As part of the verification demand, correspondents were asked to report the registration number of any state cars used, and the newsletter published daily lists of cities and government car registrations.

In other instances, problems occurred in specific places. For example in 2014 in Beira, some polling stations had the wrong electoral register book so could not open

Finally there are specific surveys which correspondents are asked to do. For example, on voting day one hour after polls are scheduled to open, they send a text to say if polls are open and functioning, and to estimate the queue length. Then a newsletter is issued in the late morning estimating national turnout and indicating any areas of problems. In the early afternoon, correspondents again estimate queue length (or report no queue) and report any problems. An afternoon newsletter refines the turnout estimate. And when polls are due to close, correspondents report if people are still waiting to vote.

¹⁴ The software FrontlineSMS has been used to collect text messages.

After the count at the polling stations, there is a first tabulation at district level, which in 2014 was open to the press for the first time, following pressure from the newsletter. Correspondents were expected to attend, report on the process, and send the district results (which are used to provide a check on the national tabulation). The reports surprised even the editors, because correspondents reported there was no official tabulation procedure and each district did it differently, highlighting a major organisational failure.

Doing surveys and providing context are two of the most important roles of the newsletter and its correspondents, bridging the gap between media and observation. It allows serious incidents to be put in the context of a normally smooth election, but also highlights more widespread issues.

Technicalities and number crunching

Mozambique has not developed the concept of specialist journalists, so there are few journalists who regularly cover the electoral process. Thus few journalists, observers or civil society members know the electoral law or can understand the implications of decisions of the National Elections Commission. This leads to confusion and unintentional mis-reporting in the media.

One role of the Maputo editorial team is to report on and interpret actions of parliament, the elections administration and the courts. Often aspects are linked - correspondents report problems with the registration printing, the Maputo team reports on the response, and then correspondents check to if the problem has been resolved.

Another role of the Maputo team is to follow the numbers, for example to compare results announced at the district and provincial levels with those announced as official at national level and to look for discrepancies. This is important because the National Elections Commission can, and does, make changes to the results in secret and without explanation. This sort of comparison is the only way to identify such changes, and neither observers nor media do this.

Although the team is disbanded at the end of each election, the editor and deputy editor continuing a monitoring brief, pushing for legal action in the event of misconduct and parliamentary changes to the electoral law.

Impact

This mix of journalism and election observation has led to both short term and long term responses. At the simplest level, the reports of registration numbers of state cars used in the election campaign in each election has a rapid and noticeable response. Some registration plates are simply covered with paper (making it obvious it is still a state car). One correspondent told us: "I met a friend who is working in the Frelimo [governing party] campaign, and he told me: 'you guys are causing me trouble. I had a phone call this morning from Maputo to say be careful about the cars'."

Publication of a verified report of an arrest of an opposition party official does seem to speed their release - probably by prompting an official telephone call from Maputo.

Publication seems important in curbing the spread of violence. On 23 and 24 September 2014 at the height of the presidential election campaign, the car of an opposition presidential candidate Daviz Simango was attacked repeatedly by organised groups with bottles, stones and machetes in Gaza province, with damage and injuries. The newsletter was able to confirm and detail the violence. The President of the Elections Commission promptly issued a statement calling the violence "disgraceful" and calling on party leaders to stop it. Frelimo presidential candidate Filipe Nyusi then called on his supporters to stop the violence - and they did.¹⁵ One cannot be sure of the role of the newsletter, but it seems reasonable to assume that credible reports that could not be challenged as exaggerated spurred official action.

¹⁵ 2014 National Elections - Mozambique political process bulletin 47 & 48, 24 & 28 September 2014.

Working with civil society the newsletter played an important role in forcing a re-run of the municipal election in Gurué, Zambézia province. Official results of the 20 November 2013 election showed that the Frelimo candidate for mayor defeated the MDM candidate by 106 votes. But a complete parallel count showed that the MDM candidate had won by 52 votes. MDM protested, but it appeared to have been publicity from the newsletter for the parallel count that forced the Constitutional Council to take up the issue. It found "flagrant violations of the law by polling station staff as well as the Zambézia Provincial Elections Commission," and annulled the election. In the 8 February 2014 re-run, on a higher turnout, the MDM candidate won by 1,427 votes.¹⁶

The newsletter's investigative journalism has also been instrumental in changing the electoral law. Mozambique uses paper ballots which are counted in the polling stations immediately after they close. A ballot paper is considered invalid if it has marks for two different candidates, and all invalid ballot papers - typically at least 200,000 - are sent to the National Elections Commission in Maputo to be reconsidered and sometimes accepted - for example when an ink fingerprint has smeared but the intent of the voter is clear. In the polling station the counting process is slow and can take eight hours or more, and polling stations often have only a single lamp and no electricity. In the 2004 national election, the opposition Renamo party complained to the newsletter that in several polling stations officials in the shadows were invalidating ballot papers for the Renamo presidential candidate by adding an extra inked fingerprint. Checks by the newsletter showed there were polling stations with 10% or more invalid votes, suspiciously high compared to the average of 3%. Newsletter editors in Maputo attended the reconsideration of the invalid ballot papers and found incidents where an entire group of ballot papers had the same extra fingerprint in exactly the same place, indicating that a group of votes had been invalidated. This was publicised, but drew little official reaction. The problem was repeated in the 2009 national election, and this time photographs of improperly invalidated ballots were published.¹⁷ The newsletter showed this to be a serious problem, with perhaps 40,000 opposition votes falsely invalidated. It was the only media that repeatedly raised this problem and showed that opposition complaints were justified. When parliament revised the electoral law in 2012 a change was inserted in the law requiring that all ink be removed from the polling station before the count starts. That simple change worked, and invalid presidential ballots fell from 4% in 2009 to 3.2% in 2014.¹⁸

Is this a model?

This mix of journalism and election observation has been successful in Mozambican elections in providing an impartial, timely, accurate and respected monitoring of three pairs of elections. But was it specific in time and place, or can it be continued in Mozambique and replicated elsewhere? The operation of the newsletter is dependent on the existence of a neutral space in a highly polarized environment, which in turn requires: 1) tolerance by the state, 2) a willingness of enough journalists to participate in a neutral election coverage pool, and 3) tight central editing.

Tolerance

Frelimo is the predominant party, having been the liberation movement, then ruled a one-party state, and then genuinely won all five multi-party national elections. The result is a strong Frelimo party presence in state administration and the security services. This has been balanced by allowing space for a vibrant media - not just independent press, but also space for debate within the state-owned Radio Moçambique and the daily *Notícias*. Thus the newsletter and its pool of correspondents has been tolerated and allowed to operate, despite criticisms of the government and the electoral administration. In some other countries in southern Africa this would not be possible.

¹⁶ *2013 Local Elections - Mozambique political process bulletin* 63, 67, 72; 12 December 2013, 23 January 2014, 9 February 2014.

¹⁷ *Mozambique Political Process Bulletin* 31 & 43; 29 December 2004 and 18 November 2009.

¹⁸ *Mozambique Political Process Bulletin* 43, 52, 56; 18 November 2009, 23 January 2013, 28 November 2014.

However, even in Mozambique, this tolerance is fragile. Mozambique is a large country and power within the party and state is significantly decentralised, leading to wide variation in attitudes, actions and the amount of latitude allowed. For example, in the largest province, Nampula, in 2014 issuance of observation credentials to members of the Electoral Observatory were delayed by several days and only began after the start of voting. But there were no similar problems elsewhere.

And there has been some pressure to close the space for debate. In 2013 Rogério Siteo, the long time and respected editor of the state-owned daily *Noticias*, was dismissed and replaced with an explicitly political appointment, a Frelimo local government official with no journalistic experience. And then after the 2014 national elections there was a campaign against academics noted for public comments critical of government. These included vitriolic Facebook campaigns, and two academics were shot.¹⁹ There have been threatening telephone calls to one of the authors of this paper, and to his family. Thus the newsletter can operate in such an open way only on sufferance of the governing party.

Neutrality and polarization

A free press and tolerance sit side by side with a deep political polarization and history. In 1981, six years after independence, Mozambique became victim of a cold war proxy war. The Frelimo government had socialist policies and was supported by the then Soviet Union, so the West backed apartheid South Africa to launch a vicious guerrilla war in which a million people died.²⁰ The 1992 peace accord brought multiparty elections, and the South African supported guerrilla movement Renamo became the main opposition party. It was allowed to maintain an armed wing, which returned to attacking road traffic in 2013. Frelimo remains the predominant party and won all five national elections and control of most municipalities in local elections. The MDM (Mozambique Democratic Movement) broke away from Renamo and became an independent unarmed opposition party in 2009. Divisions are partly, but not completely, regional. The opposition won majorities in the two largest provinces in 2014, but the Frelimo presidential candidate won 44% and 39% in those two provinces.

Frelimo is accused of using its position as predominant party to tighten control over the state apparatus which has led civil society and the independent media to increasingly see their role as providing a check on the state. This also affects election observation. A minority of official observers come from the Electoral Observatory and are non-partisan, but most come from organisations that are aligned. Increasingly opposition aligned civil society observers see their role as watching the election administration for Frelimo bias, and report during polling day on Facebook. In turn, there are now Frelimo-aligned civil society observers watching the opposition aligned observers.

Mozambique is a poor country and "civil society" is largely donor created and funded (other than religious groups). This has created two problems. First high salaries paid by donors mean that officials of local non-government organizations (NGOs) earn more than they would in Europe, even though Mozambique is a poorer country. Second, donor fashion is constantly changing, making it harder to build institutions. And it would appear that the current fashion is against supporting neutral institutions and more to promoting the polarization.

Public acceptance of the election newsletter depends on its ability to be seen as neutral in a highly polarized environment. It is not clear if this can continue.

Editing

The newsletter is unusual in Mozambique because of the way it combines a large pool of journalists with tight central editing. Many journalists see their role as publishing partisan reporting, and small staffs of the independent press make following up stories difficult. Meanwhile, there is

¹⁹ Constitutional lawyer Gilles Cistac was shot and killed on 3 March 2015 and social sciences lecturer José Jaime Macuane was shot and seriously injured on 23 May 2016. Both were at the country's largest university, Universidade Eduardo Mondlane.

²⁰ Joseph Hanlon, *Peace without Profit*, Oxford: James Currey, 1996, 16.

increasing use of social media for unverified and even fake reports. Thus the newsletter's stress on verification, neutrality and context can only be enforced through tight central editing. This requires the willingness of correspondents to participate in such a system, but that may actually be easier for local journalists who have gained experience with a more neutral reporting of very local events. Verification and sourcing are important, as is the demand to report complaints relating to both sides.

Satisfying election monitoring principles

Two decades ago in the early days of election monitoring, a speaker at a Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs conference noted that the role of international election observers was most useful in the first elections, especially after a violent conflict, and that "the broader democratic process requires 'monitors of democracy', but this role is best left to local actors, notably independent media." But she continued by noting that "governments - not only in Africa - have a tendency to dismiss media as 'irresponsible' and therefore not very relevant to the democratic process."²¹ This has continued, and international observers rarely cooperate with the media and observers are always briefed not to talk to the press or post on social media.

The goal of the election newsletter was to make journalists a responsible and relevant part of the democratic process and especially of election monitoring. Although it was never a specific goal, the stress on neutrality, accuracy and central editing and publication means that the newsletter actually satisfies the Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors' 2012 "Declaration of global principles for non-partisan election observation and monitoring by citizen organizations"²² - and in some respects does better than conventional observers.

The Declaration of global principles and linked Code of Conduct has nothing which prevents the inclusion of journalists as non-partisan observers. The Code does contain two relevant sections: One is that observer bodies will "report impartially, accurately and timely all observations and findings, both positive and negative, with sufficient documentation of all serious problems to permit verification of the events, and with sufficient documentation of positive aspects of the process to provide an impartial and accurate picture of what took place." The other is that observer bodies will "maintain strict non-partisanship, by remaining politically neutral in all activities concerning the election process" and "work independently of government in support of a genuine democratic election process, without regard to who wins or loses." That fits very closely with the procedures followed by the election newsletter.

The question of media comes up in the Election Monitor Pledge contained in the Declaration of global principles. Monitors promise that: "I will refrain from making any personal comments about my observations to the news media or members of the public before the election observation/monitoring organization makes a statement, unless specifically instructed otherwise by the organization's leadership." That fits closely with election newsletter rules. Journalists are never allowed to personally speak or write as observers, and must report to the newsletter editors and the newsletter publishes its verified report. What is, perhaps, unusual, is that pool correspondents are, in the words of the rule, specifically instructed to also report for their own media, but writing only as a correspondent for that media.

Finally, the Declaration of global principles contains one section which most observer groups ignore, but which the specifically commits observer groups to "issue regularly to the public (including electoral stakeholders) accurate, impartial and timely reports, statements and releases that present fact-based analysis, observations and findings." The failure to do this is the main gap in both international and domestic monitoring, whereas the Mozambique system of a

²¹ Ineke van Kessel, "Stability or Democracy: on the Role of Monitors, Media and Miracles", in Jon Abbink and Gerti Hesseling, eds, *Election Observation and Democratization in Africa*, London: Macmillan, 2000, 72-73, based on papers for a conference held at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, February 1997.

²² Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors, "Declaration of global principles for non-partisan election observation and monitoring by citizen organizations," 2012, <http://www.gndem.org/declaration-of-global-principles>

correspondents pool and newsletter was able to issue regular, accurate, impartial and timely reports.

Newsletter correspondents never register as observers and always register as journalists. But a tacit recognition has grown of the newsletter's *de facto* dual status, and there have been closer links and information sharing with domestic and some international observer groups.

Conclusion

Judith Kelley in *Monitoring Democracy* argues that international monitors largely fulfil a verification role, and she argues that in Mozambique in 1994 "the environment was so polarized that without international monitors the victor might not have been able to establish a governing mandate." And monitors do seem to influence the government and sometimes reduce cheating. Verification and the sense that someone is watching is important. But even in monitored elections there is often cheating. And international monitoring fails to promote improvement over time in the conduct of elections.²³ Also, it is argued that international observation simply shifts the misconduct to periods when observers are not there, particularly the long pre-election period. One study of 144 elections found that "on average, high-quality election monitoring has a measurably negative effect on the rule of law, administrative performance, and media freedom."²⁴ Thus a study of African elections 1990-2009 showed that the presence of election observers actually increases the incidence of pre-election violence (when observers are not present), but has no effect on election-day violence (when observers are present).²⁵

In Mozambique, international observer teams are small and present for only short periods, lack local knowledge and report only after the election. All that matters is the brief press conference at the end of the mission, which gives a simple thumbs up or thumbs down. Detailed reports are often critical, but by the time of publication the president is in office and the report can be shelved and ignored. There has been a move to domestic monitoring. Mozambique's domestic Electoral Observatory has better coverage than international monitors and the PVT has proved particularly important as domestic verification; but the Observatory also reports only after the election. Media and partisan domestic observation groups report quickly but with few checks on accuracy or context: did reported events actually happen as presented, and were they unusual or common?

Thus conventional election monitoring in Mozambique does serve an important verification function, but fails to influence the immediate conduct of the election because it reports only after the election, and fails to improve conduct because reports are rarely read or used. Media and partisan domestic observation also has limited influence because of assumptions of bias.

Mozambique's local correspondents pool and election newsletter has attempted to fill important gaps in the election observation by bringing together journalist and observation skills and processes. The correspondents pool and newsletter filled the gap by providing accurate information in context during the entire electoral process and then following up on it afterwards.

Is this experience specific to the three pairs of Mozambique elections, or is it more broadly applicable? This experience depends on having community radio and local journalists willing to participate, tolerance from the government, and a structure to provide the editorial coordination; there are probably few places where this example could be replicated. But the broader lesson is that it is possible to use a correspondents pool and central editing to combine journalism and election monitoring techniques to fill the gaps in election observation.

²³ Kelley, *Monitoring Democracy*, 166-169.

²⁴ Alberto Simpser, and Daniela Donnob, "Can International Election Monitoring Harm Governance?", *The Journal of Politics* 74 (2012) 501-513.

²⁵ Ursula E. Daxecker, "All quiet on election day? International election observation and incentives for pre-election violence in African elections", *Electoral Studies* 34 (2014) 232-243.