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FOR A JUST AND EQUAL WORLD

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Rising to the Challenge:

The Case of Forum Mulher of Mozambique

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1. Introduction and Background

Forum Mulher (FM) is a Maputo-based (Mozambique) network of over 80 national and international organisations that work on behalf of and mainly advocate for women's basic rights in Mozambique. The membership includes NGOs, CBOs, trade unions, national and provincial networks, government gender units, women's political movements, bilateral and multilateral agencies and gender activists. The organisation was founded in 1993 and campaigns for women's access to opportunities in Mozambique that have primarily been male dominated such as in the areas of politics, the economy as well as for the general self esteem and empowerment of women.

Forum Mulher has a proven track record of its commitment to undertaking controversial and challenging work in the interest of its members and of other groups of women and men who are marginalised and excluded from society. The common denominator in all it does is respect for human rights and advancing the position of women in Mozambican society.

In order to contribute to achieving a just society, which has balanced social relations between women and men and a general well-being for all, Forum Mulher has the following main objectives:

- strengthen member organizations, improve their knowledge and performance to defend women's rights;
- influence decision makers on issues of gender equality and promote women's political participation;
- promote exchange of information and experiences among members and inform society on the rights of women;
- network and advocate at national, regional and global levels

Forum Mulher's involvement with One World Action's, Voices, Influence and Access Project started in June, 2003 with the first partners' meeting and the launch of the VIA Toolkit in Windhoek, Namibia. Since then Forum Mulher has been a formidable player in the capacity building, networking, policy advocacy and information sharing efforts of the VIA Project.

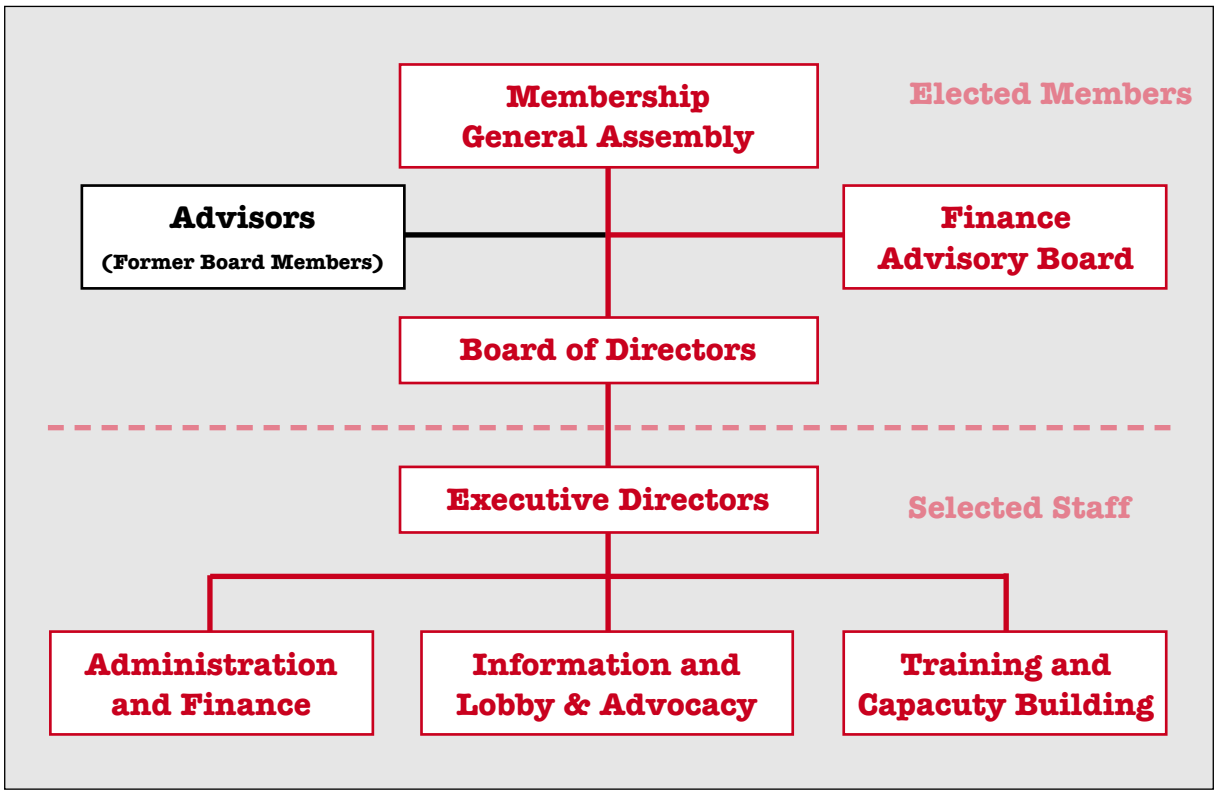
Before its involvement with the VIA Project, FM had very little to do with the Cotonou Agreement, international trade or Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs). However, since becoming a part of the VIA Project partnerships, there have been more opportunities to learn and share for Forum Mulher.

Now that the VIA Project is drawing to a close, it is inspiring to see how partners such as FM have taken on new challenges and became deeply involved in the trade policy making processes.

This case study notes introduces Forum Mulher, the Mozambican civil society, issues confronting the citizens and the reasons behind such increased levels of involvement in trade issues by FM.

2. Structure of Forum Mulher

The organisation's highest authority is the General Assembly (attended by all paid-up members), followed by an elected Board of Directors for up to five years and then a Secretariat headed by an Executive Director, which manages the day-to-day running of the organisation. Below is an illustration of the organogram.



3. Gender, Trade and Poverty

Specific provisions on gender are highlighted in Article 31 of the Cotonou Agreement where it is emphasized that gender issues should be a cross cutting theme and concern in all programmes, projects and activities in political, economic, cultural and social spheres of cooperation (ACP-EU Courier, 2000).

This concern is further elaborated by provisions which underline the need for a gender sensitive approach to development cooperation and the need to ensure that women participate in all activities including politics and decision making; the emphasis on women's access to key production resources namely land, credit and also employment. Article 20 also mentions the need for gender mainstreaming in all activities and programmes while Article 26 on the need to include the youth (and children) in all matters of development, also mentions the need to consider the rights of "girl children (Mate, 2003).

Mozambique, a country located in the south-eastern part of Africa has a population of 18 million of which 53% are women. A study conducted by Forum Mulher in 2006 found that about 60% - 65% of the total female population in southern Africa is directly involved in agriculture. More than 70% of the total poor are women. They largely remain employed in marginal jobs. Globalisation and trade policies have not improved the situation of the poor, hence women, to any significant degree.

Discrimination is worsened by the lack of participation of women in the economy, politics and many other aspects of life in Mozambique as well as in other southern African nations. Forum Mulher is one of the few organisations in the region which are at the forefront of uplifting the roles of women. On average, women are less educated, have limited access to and control over productive resources. Such low levels of education have many negative consequences for women. They mean that girls often marry early; they rarely acquire good technical skills and are less able to educate their own children. They also know little about their rights and are thus less able to defend themselves (Samo, 2006).

Forum Mulher therefore advocates for the inclusion of the economic value of the role of women in the overall macro-economic analysis. This should be followed up with targeted resource allocation to uplift them. The organisation will continue to lobby on gender and trade issues at the political level in order to influence processes, within the PRSP programme as well as for gender-sensitive and pro-poor EPAs.

Ninety percent of women earn a living from subsistence agriculture. This means that women's participation in other sectors is much lower than men. Women make up the majority of the agricultural labour force (62%). Women, especially in rural areas, have to balance the demands of their productive, reproductive and community management roles. When women are overburdened at the household level there is lower productivity and increased production costs affecting both the household and market economies thus perpetuating poverty.

In Mozambique women are generally involved in small-scale trading activities in the informal sector. The informal sector, involving production and trade of goods and services, makes a significant contribution to the Mozambique economy as it creates self employment. Although there is no data to confirm the contribution of informal trade to the economy, it is known that such activities are the basis of subsistence for many Mozambican families, especially in urban

areas. Women in the informal sector engage in different kinds of activities such as manufacturing, small businesses and trade including cross-border trade (Khan, 2006).

4. Forum Mulher and the VIA Project

In Mozambique, Forum Mulher is one of the principal partners of the VIA Project alongside the Economic Justice Coalition of Mozambique (EJC). The EJC supports its members with analysis and research on social and economic justice issues. It works to strengthen civil society interventions in dialogue with EU and ACP institutions at different levels'. Forum Mulher became a partner of the VIA Project in 2004 because it brought so much to the table in addition to being a women's organisation. Its membership is drawn from governmental and non-governmental organisations, to women's sections of political parties, trade unions and local women's groups.

The main VIA programme activities undertaken with these Mozambican partners have included but not confined to:

- the convening of several workshops, seminars and information sessions on EPAs and gender issues;
- participation in the VIA exposure and lobbying visit to British and EU institutions;
- participation in VIA regional networking activities on EPAs;
- initiation of work with the local media in Mozambique on EPA issues;
- the commissioning of a study on the economic and social impacts of the Mozambique/EU fisheries agreement;
- a scoping study on the Costa do Sol artisan fisheries development project;
- a scoping study on securing social benefits in the sugar sector through an empowerment project for Magara small-scale women farmers and field workers.

Although some of these activities have drawn broad appeal and popularity to the course pursued by Forum Mulher, they did not come easily. There are still capacity challenges to be overcome if the effects of such activities are to be felt widely.

5. Projects, Activities and Campaigns

Over the years Forum Mulher has been involved in advocacy, campaigns and information seminars; and continues to do so in the areas such as land reform where they are fighting for equal rights for women and men in access (and control) of land; family law where they address matters concerning equality between women and men in marriage, children registration and care, property rights, recognition of traditional and religious marriage and equal rights for children born outside marriage.

Poverty reduction is at the core of Forum Mulher's activities since women constitute the majority of the poor in Mozambique. The organisation has brought a lot attention to the situation of women through their participation in the poverty reduction strategy and programme (PRSP) processes, participation in the monitoring of decentralisation, promotion of transparency and accountability in governance and the national budgeting process.

Forum Mulher has contributed directly to several positive outcomes for women especially in the areas of girls' education where government's budget allocation has increased by 23%, reduction of maternal mortality by 12%, increase infrastructure allocations by 21% for the promotion of micro, small and medium enterprises (Forum Mulher, 2007).

In line with their newly-found confidence to tackle issues around international trade and

economic justice, Forum Mulher organised a landmark regional workshop in August, 2008. The workshop was held in Maputo, Mozambique was called "Gender and Women's Rights Analysis of EPAs and trade liberalisation".

The Workshop sought to put gender and women's rights issues on the trade liberalisation agenda, especially EPAs. The workshop also included an analysis of Interim EPAs (IEPAs), initialed, capacity-strengthening as well as advocacy at the regional and EU level. Participants were drawn from Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, Lesotho, Botswana, South Africa and the United Kingdom. It included Civil Society representatives, Gender and Women's Rights advocates, Government Officials and Policy makers from Trade Ministries and Gender Machineries, representatives of the European Commission and the British High Commission, as well as academics.

Aiming to critically analyse and understand the gender dimensions of EPAs in the SADC region (with a focus on Mozambique), the workshop also offered an opportunity to reflect on the local and regional experiences in gendering trade liberalisation, both at the governmental and civil society level (experiences, challenges and successes). Furthermore, at a time where EPAs are shortly going to be signed, the workshop provided space for assessing how best to take this forward (identify possible actions and allies). Spread over two days, the workshop was organised into presentations and plenary panel sessions followed by small group discussions, all of which provided valuable sharing and learning spaces.

The workshop was linked to research being carried out in three ACP countries aiming to look at the economy-wide impact assessment of EPAs on gender equality and women's rights.

6. Conclusion

Mozambique emerged from a long and bitter civil war in 1992 when fighting ended – over 900,000 people had died by then, five million civilians were displaced and many were made amputees by landmines – a legacy from the war that continues to plague the country to this day. Organisations like Forum Mulher play a pivotal role alongside government to reverse the ill-effects of those years. There plenty unique and very dynamic activities to talk of but much more remains to be done and this is why there is a need for Forum Mulher's work to succeed much more than it has ever been.

Mozambique's continuing challenges include eliminating poverty, growing the economy, reduce inflation, fighting HIV/Aids, land reform, environmental degradation, etc. and Forum Mulher is in the middle to fight for the rights and space for women to gain from the benefits that may accrue.

Forum Mulher will also continue to campaign on socio-economic issues; however, this requires that they look into capacity constraints and other shortcomings. They will need some dedicated persons in the office to ensure they stay on top of the issues.