

Maputo, Beira mayors rejected by own parties

The two best mayors have both been rejected by their parties and were not selected to stand again in the 19 November local elections. Both paid the price of giving too much attention to managing their cities well, and too little attention to jobs and privileges for party officials.

In Maputo, the Frelimo Maputo City Committee on 22 August named the Minister of Youth and Sport, David Simango, as candidate for mayor (municipal president). Simango gained 53 votes (67%) to only 25 votes for the present mayor, Eneas Comiche. Generosa Cossa, the current chair of the municipal assembly, gained only one vote.

In Beira, it was announced on 28 August that Renamo president Afonso Dhlakama had selected as mayoral candidate Manuel Pereira, a member of the Renamo National Council and member of the national parliament (Assembleia da República). He was chosen over the existing mayor, Daviz Simango.

The two Simangos are not related.

Comiche and Daviz Simango were seen as Mozambique's two best mayors. Both cleaned up corrupt and badly run city administrations. But both proved unpopular with the party leader. Comiche as seen as representing the Chissano era and Armando Guebuza named a governor to Maputo city – a post which had not existed before, and was seen as a way of keeping check in Comiche. Daviz Simango was not originally a member of Renamo, but rather of one of the minor parties, and he was always marginalised by Dhlakama. Both have been criticised by their parties – Comiche for blocking land titles and buildings to important party figures, and Simango for not giving enough jobs to Renamo members.

By contrast, Pereira has a strong following inside Renamo in Beira, while David Simango is popular in Frelimo and was seen to have done well in a previous post as governor of Niassa.

But the selection has provoked a strong backlash in both cities, where the mayors are popular, and it could have an impact on the vote. In particular, in Beira in 2003, Simango won over the Frelimo candidate by the relatively small margin of 29,610 to 23,405, giving Frelimo a real chance. In Maputo, the Frelimo candidate is sure to win, but the backlash could affect the assembly election, pushing some Frelimo members to vote for the citizens list Juntos Pela Cidade.

For Rogerio Siteo, director of Notícias, it is another case of “putting politics in command” and is a victory of the politicians over the technocrats. Clearly Frelimo needs to build its base and have leaders in contact with the base, but has the party gone too far in picking people because they are trusted politically? Has the Maputo “new rich” made a mistake, and “perpetuated the erroneous thinking that technocrats always lack values and political goals”? (article attached)

Savana published a series of angry articles (attached), saying the choice of David Simango by Frelimo “shows clearly Frelimo's extreme arrogance and disrespect for the residents of Maputo”. His problem was that he kept party and government money separate, and did not use city money “to sustain the immense battery of first secretaries of his party”. In the end, argues Savana, he offended “powerful financial interests” within the party.

In his column in Savana, Machado da Graça notes that “the first time that the party had a leader who was honest and competent, accepted and applauded even by those who were not Frelimo sympathisers, the party kicked him out at the first opportunity.” He continues: “Frelimo is increasingly supporting a growing corruption network, and anyone who does not play by the rules of this game is thrown out of the cart.”