

## Gender Influencers: Styles of Leadership in the Mediation and Implementation of the Maputo Accord for Peace and National Reconciliation

Neha Sanghrajka

### Abstract

In August 2019, the Maputo Accord for Peace and National Reconciliation (Maputo Accord) was signed after a mediation process that began in late 2016 led by the Mozambican President Filipe Jacinto Nyusi and the Renamo leadership, namely the late leader Afonso Dhlakama and his successor Ossufo Momade. The process was supported by a small group of mediators including Neha Sanghrajka, the author of this paper. Sanghrajka reflects on her personal experience as a mediator, identifying practices such as leading with empathy, active listening and flexibility, key factors that contributed to the success of the process. It also discusses ways in which the Women, Peace and Security agenda was integrated into both the mediation process and the implementation of the peace accord, including harnessing male leaders to advance gender inclusion and highlighting the importance of women leadership at all levels. Based on over seven years of engagement in the peace process Sanghrajka's experience shows the value of long-term support and continuity of involvement from mediators including the United Nations Secretary General's Former Personal Envoy for Mozambique, Mirko Manzoni. The implementation of the Maputo Accord has seen the successful disarmament and demobilization of over 5000 former combatants, including 271 women.

### Author Profile

**Neha Sanghrajka** is a negotiator, mediator and author with extensive experience delivering definitive and positive outcomes in high-stakes negotiations, including working for Kofi Annan in Kenya on the 2007 electoral crisis and, most recently, with the Personal Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for Mozambique. In Mozambique, she was involved in a Track I process, resulting in the signing of the Maputo Accord for Peace and National Reconciliation (2019). She is a founding member of Women Mediators across the Commonwealth, Senior Conflict Sensitivity Advisor for UNOPS and is a board member for the Berghof Foundation.

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### **Background on the Mozambique Process**

In 2012, low intensity conflict returned to Mozambique between the Mozambican National Resistance (Renamo) residual armed forces and the Defence and Security Forces (FDS) of Mozambique, 20 years after the signing of a peace deal, the Rome General Peace Accords (GPA), which had ended a civil war that had broken out in 1975. Central to this re-emergence of violence was Renamo's dissatisfaction with elements of the GPA including the allocation of state resources, the view that political power was overly centralised, and that many ex-combatants were ineligible for pensions. The faltering of the GPA prompted various actors to seek to facilitate dialogue between the Government and Renamo, the opposition, to find common ground and resolve the situation. Efforts spearheaded by national mediators including faith leaders and a university rector, led to a peace agreement in September 2014, that created conditions for a general election, following Renamo's boycott of the 2013 municipal election. However, Renamo disputed the election results and mistrust continued to grow between the parties, including through a failed attempt of Renamo to pass a decentralisation bill in parliament. This lack of progress led to Renamo withdrawing from the national talks in late 2015.

In mid-2016, international mediators initiated another process to assist the Government and Renamo to resolve the situation. Despite six-months of talks, known as the Avenida process (named after the hotel it took place in), the mediation faced several challenges, such as the high number of mediators and lack of confidence building mechanisms, that made it difficult to make progress, leading to their eventual collapse. In late 2016 and following multiple attempts to secure lasting peace and stability, the Principals, namely President Filipe Jacinto Nyusi, and the leader of Renamo, Afonso Dhlakama, agreed to adopt a different approach and engage in direct negotiations that put national efforts at its core. Early in the process Switzerland, through their Ambassador to Mozambique, Mirko Manzoni, was requested to provide Good Offices. The mediation team in those early days was made up of Ambassador Mirko Manzoni (Swiss), Jonathan Powell (British), a Renamo MP Eduardo Namburete (Mozambican), and myself (Kenyan). To demonstrate our commitment as mediators, Ambassador Manzoni and I began conducting shuttle diplomacy between the capital Maputo and Renamo's military base in rural Mozambique. Throughout 35 missions, each over 1,000 kilometres in terrain that required a combination of a flight, dirt road driving, motorbike riding and hiking, we began to build trust with the parties.

The shift in approach and leadership significantly advanced the process. It led to several formal and informal agreements including a definitive ceasefire in 2017, constitutional reforms to deepen decentralization, an MoU on Military Affairs in August 2018, and a Cessation of Military Hostilities agreement in August 2019. A few days after the signing of the Cessation of Military Hostilities agreement, the Maputo Accord for Peace and National Reconciliation was signed on 6 August 2019. This included a detailed framework for the implementation of DDR, which has since resulted in 5221 former combatants disarming, demobilizing and returning to communities of their choice. A central element of the whole peace process emphasized confidence building mechanisms, implementing while negotiating and a human-centred process that put the interests of the DDR beneficiaries at the forefront. This has included a historic decree that was passed in parliament integrating former combatants into the national pensions system to facilitate a long term and forward-looking approach to peace.<sup>1</sup>

### *Peace Listening in the Case of Mozambique*

To achieve this success, those in support of the process adopted a listening-based influencing role. What was achieved in Mozambique was not simply peace talks, but peace listening. Peace listening involves spending time with people and hearing their stories with humility enabling you to hear their unique truths and valuable experiences that can enhance your understanding of the conflict and illuminate potential routes towards resolution. As one of two international mediators who worked on the process from inception to closure, this author will highlight how gains were made through the style of leadership, mediation, and delivery of this peace process.

While not always explicitly mentioning gender, the mediators drew on soft skills and influence to maintain a successful nationally owned, sustainable, and inclusive peace process. This was about understanding the language of culture. In peace mediation, there is a lot of emphasis on first knowing the languages and the context. However, understanding how human beings are wired, what drives them to do what they do, their unspoken communication, aspirations for the future all hold the key to understanding and resolving conflict and creating space for building peace.

This was about understanding how time and deadlines work in a different context, that in cultures that are polite and generally humble like Mozambique's, sometimes a nod of apparent agreement or understanding may need further facilitation. Not pushing too hard, but turning up every day and little by little, the Parties themselves slowly built the bridge that they would walk together and later maintain. Empathy, resilience and innovative thinking are central to this concept and guided my work and that of fellow mediator, Ambassador Manzoni.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on the process see Vines, Alex. 2019. "Prospects for a Sustainable Elite Bargain in Mozambique. Third Time Lucky?" Chatham House. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/08-05-2019-SustainableMozambique.pdf>; Weimer, Beernhard, and João Carrilho. 2017. The Political Economy of Decentralization in Mozambique: Dynamics, Effects, Challenges. Maputo: IESE. [https://www.iese.ac.mz/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/IESE\\_Political\\_Economy\\_of\\_Decentralisation\\_-\\_Livro.pdf](https://www.iese.ac.mz/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/IESE_Political_Economy_of_Decentralisation_-_Livro.pdf)

Here I will define soft skills through Turner's (2020) application of Stanton's (2018) work, which denotes that while there is a need for epistemic (academic or technical) knowledge in conflict contexts, it should not override the importance of practice based (phonetic) knowledge. This practice-based knowledge is defined as flexibility in 'how to make judgements in a "particular" situation', within shifting contexts through the ability to listen and to respond to others. Listening is considered a 'soft' skill, along with being empathetic and ability to build relations.

When considering the notion of influence, I consider the work of O'Reilly, Ó Súilleabháin, and Paffenholz (2015), wherein what is important is not purely the number of women, but the influence women actually have on a process and, more importantly, that gender is a dimension of the process (as explored in section 4). In this case, the particular focus was ensuring that gender was meaningfully included in the implementation of the peace agreement, notably the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of the 5221 combatants, including 271 women.

## **Section 1: Style of Leadership**

### ***Building a Leadership Style***

Since the adoption of the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda in 2000, by landmark UN Security Council Resolution 1325, we have seen the development of normative approaches for the inclusion of women and gender in peace processes. This has often focused on women's direct participation in peace processes, particularly peace talks, based on the contention that their presence and influence makes peace processes more sustainable (O'Reilly, Ó Súilleabháin and Paffenholz 2015; Ni Aoláin and Valji 2018). Coomaraswamy's (2015) Global Study on the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 advances this to demonstrate that "women's inclusion at the peace table shifts the dynamics towards conclusion of talks and implementation of agreements and centralizes a gendered and inclusive perspective on issues of governance, justice, security, and recovery aspects of a peace agreement" (42).

There has also been a push towards applying a 'gender lens' to mediation, whereby technical gender expertise is provided to mediation teams to promote women's meaningful engagement and to avoid their role becoming tokenistic.

While the Mozambique case did adopt a gender lens and had a lead woman mediator, what was also key was shifting the power dynamics regarding the style of leadership. Here, Sargsyan and Möller-Loswick's (2021) reflection on redefining peace leadership applies, wherein 'both men and women need to move away from traditional forms of "power-over" leadership and towards a more inclusive style of "power-with" leadership, which prioritizes broader human connections and includes values such as empathy, patience, and humility at its heart' (9).

During my participation in the unsuccessful Avenida mediation process between July – December 2016, I noted certain aspects that could quickly be reimagined. The hotel as the location for the talks and the presence of a large number of international mediators with varying strategies were not effective. The lack of trust following leaks to the media and miscommunications between the mediators and the Parties also contributed to the process breaking down.

What was key to the current process was that we were a small core group of mediators, who were able to occupy certain roles. An African woman, working for a non-governmental mediation organization and previously on a peace process in Kenya working closely with Kofi Annan, I sought to bring a leadership style based on empathy and flexibility that was guided by a sharp strategic focus. Mirko Manzoni had extensive mediation and humanitarian experience in Africa and Europe and was a well-respected diplomat in Mozambique, Jonathan Powell, who had been involved in many high-profile processes, notably Northern Ireland, and Eduardo Namburete who had close relations with the Renamo leadership as well as respect from Government.

This links with the idea that women bring soft skills to mediation as was emphasized by Turner (2020) and Stanton (2018) when analysing influence and the Good Friday Agreement negotiations in Northern Ireland. The idea that I was perceived as non-threatening, a confidante or support to the parties, and as having a ‘quiet’ approach is in line with Turner’s analysis in relation to women in the Northern Ireland process.

Certainly, one could argue that our gender, ages, or nationalities affected how we approached the Mozambique mediation process. However, what was also key was our trust in each other, teamwork, and ability to utilize our shared skillset. In a sense this builds on Bowling and Hoffman’s (2000, 22) analysis of mediation, wherein we should ‘shift our focus from the interests of the individual parties to the set of interactions and relationships of the parties and the mediator’. This goes a step further in that it also requires a focused effort on how co-mediators relate to and develop with each other, as individuals, together and how we interact with the parties. Throughout the process we remained focused on a shared goal – that is to build peace in Mozambique, working towards this goal kept us aligned and coordinated.

### ***Expanding Leadership***

In the early stages of conducting shuttle diplomacy between the capital Maputo and Renamo military base in the bush of rural Sofala province, we were trying to create a sense of trust and empathy between us and the Parties, and Nyusi and Dhlakama themselves. This was driven by years of broken trust between the Government and Renamo at all levels that had reached some of its lowest moments in 2015 following the breakdown of talks and renegeing on temporary agreements that culminated in the house arrest of Dhlakama. In those early days Ambassador Manzoni invested significant time (often hours at a time) engaging with the Renamo leader to build trust, requiring persistence and flexibility. Mozambicans needed to have faith that the international

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community could serve as suitable brokers of peace, following a failed international process, it took time for us to build that trust. In this new process as mediators, we brought a renewed energy and dynamic to the table.

Despite varying experiences as mediators, we treated each other with utmost respect and, despite of course having egos as everyone does, aimed to act without them. This became particularly important when, in negotiation contexts, something was said by a fellow mediator in front of the Parties that another disagreed with. We all knew that we could not display any cracks or lack of trust in each other, as we needed the Parties to believe in us, and by extension to build confidence in the process that we were supporting. This trust was built over time, both based in Mozambique Ambassador Manzoni and I spent countless hours discussing and strategizing. We always appreciated and prioritized that the two leaders were taking huge political and personal risks to engage and to meet. Being conscious of the reality that those directly involved in the conflict have much more to gain and lose than the mediators and being grateful to be in that sensitive space, helped to keep egos in check.

Some means of building trust with the Parties were small touches like learning the Mozambique communication style and adapting to meet it or developing more personal connections beyond the topics of negotiation. Another essential trust-building exercise was taking the aforementioned long journeys involved in shuttle diplomacy, from Maputo to the headquarters of Renamo, in a remote location in the central province of Sofala, to move negotiations forward, which were central to building relationships. As we built trust in each other and the Parties, this increased the confidence of the Parties in the process, resulting in initial in-person meetings that laid a foundation for work on the key issues of decentralization and military affairs.

During this time, discretion was a key element of leadership that sought to safeguard the process in the initial early stages allowing negotiations to advance without unnecessary outside interference (a dimension that had been missing from the early Avenida process). This also helped to solidify the national ownership of the process. With the approval of the Parties, we formed a Peace Process Secretariat (PPS) to support the implementation of technical elements of the process with the Swiss Embassy taking on the role of administrative agent (a role taken over by UNOPS in 2020). The PPS was and has remained in its expansion, majority Mozambican personnel and women lead, with over 75 per cent of leadership roles being occupied by women.

A key strategic element of our leadership had been to advocate for and support implementation while negotiations were still underway. As a result, tangible gains had been made before the peace agreement was signed, including a ceasefire, a decentralization bill, and an MoU on Military Affairs in 2018 and the start of DDR activities. This was instrumental in building confidence in the process. This style of leadership was critical to the effectiveness of the United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres appointing Ambassador Manzoni as his Personal Envoy for

Mozambique in July 2019, for which I was a Senior Advisor to the process. We had built a strong and shared team, vision, and working relationship that was carried through during implementation of the peace agreement. The Office of the Personal Envoy of the UNSG for Mozambique, closed in late 2023 following a successfully completed mandate, maintaining the full support of the host state.

## **Section 2: Style of Mediation**

### ***Actively Listening Towards a Nationally Owned Process***

The overarching principle of national ownership in large part dictated the style of mediation. It was clear from the early stages that traditional big man mediation would not work; not only had it failed before in Mozambique but many of its central elements are at odds with the leading role given to national ownership. What emerged instead was a distinctive style that championed quiet diplomacy, creativity, and a commitment to fostering local ownership, enshrined in the style of leadership referenced above. Saraiva (2022, 167) refers to this as adaptive mediation, ‘a facilitated process whereby the content of agreements emerges from among the parties to the conflict themselves, informed by the context within which the conflict is situated’.

This behind-the-scenes mediation style was above all flexible and adaptive to changing circumstances while focused on an end goal. By actively listening you can gain insights that enable you to tailor negotiations to the reality of the context, in turn building confidence as those involved see their needs reflected in all aspects of the process. For example, in 2018, we successfully negotiated the start of planning for DDR activities after intense discussions with the Parties where we identified the key issues for both. For the Government, this was to begin the DDR and for Renamo, it went a step further to guaranteeing that an agreed number of former combatants would join the Police Force of Mozambique (PRM). These issues, both symbolic and practical, were important, the latter particularly to the Renamo combatants. Once we unlocked the issues that were key to the Parties, as mediators, we were quickly able to work with the Parties to put their needs in motion. DDR began in Gorongosa in late July 2019 with a group of 50 former combatants, several of whom immediately began training with PRM. With this positive momentum, the Cessation of Military Hostilities was signed days later, and the Maputo Accord, to which Ambassador Manzoni was a witness, was signed one week later.

### ***Being Adaptive in Finding Solutions Based on Trust***

A key aspect of our mediation style was creating an equal playing field between the Parties at every level. A peace process where a government is involved often requires concerted effort for the other party to feel included, while also maintaining government trust. Some elements of these strategies were design based, such as the equal membership of Government and Renamo in the structures mandated to support the peace process – the Military Affairs Commission (MAC), Joint Technical Group for DDR (JTGDDR) and Joint Technical Group for Monitoring and Verification

(JTGMV). Others were more personal, focused on maintaining dignity and a shared sense of ownership at the most senior political level, on issues such as access to accommodation, transport as well as our time.

Gestures had also become a key confidence building measure with each other. A particularly significant instance was when the Renamo leader, Dhlakama, unexpectedly died of natural causes in May 2018. Instead of focusing on how this could derail the process, we worked with the Government and new Renamo leadership to ensure that Dhlakama received a state funeral, a gesture that was appreciated across Renamo membership. By bringing the new leader Ossufo Momade up to speed on every aspect of the negotiations, the process was able to continue relatively unharmed, demonstrating the importance of flexibility and resilience in the face of challenges during a process.

My guiding goal throughout my engagement in the process has been to work with the Parties to build a sustainable peace. What we need to remember is that it is the Parties own timelines that will guide the process, this is not something that can be externally imposed. Personally, it is extremely hard to limit my engagement in blocks of time, as would be more the norm among mediators. What we tend to see in this field is people coming to a country for a number of months or maybe a year. This was not an option for me or for Ambassador Manzoni, we were aware of the value of physical presence as it can be viewed by many as a show of commitment resulting in us both spending several years engaged in the process. This reliability and consistency provided more opportunities to meet people face to face and to build relationships to positively impact peace, particularly with stakeholders who had felt they had not been given enough time during previous processes. It was about giving the parties the time, space and support required to build consensus towards peace.

Thus, this mediation style can be characterized by quiet diplomacy, working behind the scenes, focused on local ownership and building trust at all levels. It was solutions focused, adapting, and changing, always thinking politically and strategically while paying attention to details and focused on the longer term.

### **Section 3: Style of Delivery**

This style of leadership and mediation heavily influenced the way in which the agreement, notably the DDR of combatants was implemented. The focus on dignity for all at each stage extended to each beneficiary, when considering policy to operational issues. The approach did not just take 5221 as an abstract number, it created a DDR, which looked at each individual, their families and their communities.



***Beneficiaries as Full Citizens***

From an operational perspective, disarmament and demobilization activities took place at specially designed Assembly Areas (AAs), beginning with a COVID-19 prevention briefing, an individual health consultation with a doctor and a meal. DDR beneficiaries participated in a wide range of services, including registration activities and access to birth certificates, identification cards, tax numbers, mobile phone numbers and bank accounts – many for the first time. They also attended a reintegration information session, collected reinsertion packages that contained personal and household items to facilitate the transition to civilian life, and received final briefings on health prior to receiving secure transport to their self-selected communities. This built confidence in the DDR process as beneficiaries left the assembly area with tangible inputs to re-engage in civilian life.

From a policy perspective, pensions had emerged as an important peace dividend from the beginning of consultations with Renamo and the Government. It was identified as an area that had not been included in the 1992 GPA which had contributed to its unsustainability. Bearing this in mind the Personal Envoy and I worked closely over several years with the Government, particularly the Ministry of Finance, International Financial Institutions (hereafter, IFIs), and the private sector to advance work to secure a lifelong and dignified civilian life for the beneficiaries. Progress was made in April 2022 when President Nyusi and Ossufo Momade agreed to form a Pensions Working Group to discuss the issue and work towards the development of a proposal. The Group, made up of representatives of Government, Renamo, IFIs and PPS, and chaired by Personal Envoy Manzoni, met frequently over the course of the following months. The final approval came following intense mediation efforts to ensure the proposal was financially viable and on 21 March 2023, the Council of Ministers approved the historic decree that extends a pension to eligible women and men demobilized as part of the implementation of the Maputo Accord for Peace and National Reconciliation. The decree came into force following the closure of the final Renamo military base on 16 June 2023 and as of August 2024 over 3700 DDR beneficiaries and family members have already begun to receive their pensions, with that number growing. This consistent focus and quiet style of negotiation was a building block and continuation of the approach that began in 2016.

***Bringing in Families and Communities***

Recognising that reintegration cannot exist in a vacuum, we took a whole of society approach, focussing on families as we sought to support the re-establishment of relationships in DDR beneficiary households. This acknowledged the full humanity of the beneficiaries and was often an area where the importance of empathetic leadership and emotion became the most evident. Once at a military base, I was walking down the hill in a convoy of people. Behind me were two former combatants talking in Portuguese and one of them said, “I wonder if my children will recognize me? Having been in the bush for more than ten years, I wonder if my family will still be there.”

These fears and human moments highlight the need to foster a realistic and sustainable support network during times of adaptation, and to promote coexistence, sharing, and a sense of belonging. As such a key focus of reintegration has been to connect beneficiaries with socio-economic and livelihood opportunities, this was also opened up to families and communities. This was a means for them to have a future and feel connected to the DDR process. Over 2,400 individuals (beneficiaries and family members) have been connected with training and/or internship opportunities to date in locations across Mozambique. This took on an intergenerational dimension wherein families and communities themselves were empowered as peacemakers. In this case the older generation, namely the former combatants, are passing on peace dividends to the younger generation through livelihood opportunities.

Furthermore, the community aspect sought to address the broader social and physical context in which the entry of DDR beneficiaries takes place, focusing on activities that benefit entire communities such as the development and/or improvement of community infrastructure. Seeking to highlight the positive impact of peace and reintegration at the community level, activities provide tangible support to communities that had received DDR beneficiaries as new community members. Ensuring a ‘do no harm’ approach, and to advance both social reintegration and reconciliation work, partnerships were formed with ‘Peace Clubs’, a network of interfaith religious and community leaders promoting non-violence and peace education at a community level.

This interfaith cooperation and collaboration for peacebuilding was facilitated by the Office of the Personal Envoy. One example of such facilitation is the ‘training of trainers’ of Peace Clubs representatives, in partnership with Folke Bernadotte Academy, to enable Peace Clubs to independently further implement their gender-responsive reconciliation activities in different parts of the country. This was supported by a broader focus on reconciliation, called ‘Peace is Our Culture’ which through an inclusive approach to reconciliation formed partnerships with musicians, local artists, and with the Ministry of Education to develop peace education materials to be integrated into the school curriculum. The premise for this partnership rests on an understanding that engaging youth, in essence the next generation, is of critical importance to build a more peaceful future. The campaign also included musicians from across Mozambique, joined together under the slogan ‘Peace is our Culture’ that brought themes related to reconciliation and peace to a wider audience in a dynamic and accessible way.

#### **Section 4: Gender Influencing**

##### ***Gendering DDR***

As explored in the style of delivery, many dimensions of this process, whether the focus on family or community, already positively benefit the wider community and its women members. The reintegration process adopted a holistic and socio-economic focus. It did not draw solely on

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reintegration strategies based on joining the national army, which is a more militarized approach that has been increasingly unsuccessful in terms of DDR in other contexts. While not specifically articulated, our empathetic approach with a focus on socio-economic opportunities and community reintegration addressed many of the needs of male beneficiaries. In this sense it promoted non-violent masculinities, by looking at their roles as former soldiers, fathers, farmers and humans in search of a dignified life. Although the term gender is only mentioned once in the Maputo Accord, its basis as being ‘guided by respect for human rights’ and ‘citizen’s rights’ was also a helpful framework within implementation. As the agreement was implemented while negotiated, elements of gender arose during mediation, such as the agreement that women would be reintegrated into the Mozambican Police Force.

In terms of ensuring substantive and meaningful inclusion of issues that were important to beneficiaries of the process, we travelled extensively to meet with key stakeholders including DDR beneficiaries and their family members to listen to their needs and hopes in order to ensure the process is responsive to them and to enhance dialogue at the community level.

Through these discussions concerted efforts were also made to ensure particular impacts of the process on women. In 2020 PPS developed a gender-analysis on the perceptions, expectations and challenges for women in the DDR process to inform future DDR activities and the reintegration process. The analysis found that the potential challenges faced specifically by women DDR beneficiaries in reintegration cover a number of different areas such as education, health, social norms and access to productive resources. In addition, for women and girls in host communities where there is an inflow of male DDR beneficiaries, potential challenges related to health and premature marriage were identified. This along with strategic partnerships, including with Peace Clubs and partners such as the Folke Bernadotte Academy, enabled the development of a holistic gender approach. Despite only 5% of beneficiaries being women (257 out of 5221), we maintained the importance of ensuring their needs were taken into consideration.

During the demobilization phase at the Assembly Areas, women were interviewed separately to understand their specific needs and experiences. The reinsertion packages were tailored to provide women with gender-appropriate materials, such as feminine hygiene projects. Our Office also actively encouraged external service providers to ensure their employees carried out their work with a gender-sensitive approach. Recognising that the return of former combatants can have gendered impacts on them and their families, monitoring the impact of DDR on women through follow-up calls and visits, and setting up a DDR hotline were key. As part of work on pensions concerted efforts have been made to ensure widows and widowers have the opportunity to register for pensions following the death of their spouses.

***Getting Gender on the Table***

Gender evidently has been an important element throughout the process; however, we were cautious to be seen not to push the issue. We adopted a subtler approach ensuring that gender and the impact of all dimensions of the process on women were never off the table. We did this in a discreet manner, mirroring how we mediated the rest of the process. For example, while discussing plans for disarmament and demobilization we held numerous planning meetings with military experts and members of the nationally led joint technical groups. Every time a topic was discussed, be it plans for the implementation of disarmament or the structure of the reintegration programme, we would make sure that gender was discussed, independent of whether it was on the official agenda or not. This soft approach meant that over time it was no longer us mediators tabling the issue but rather members of the technical groups themselves.

We were also strategic on which of us would address an issue relating to gender. In one case, we recognised the need for women beneficiaries to have separate accommodation and hygiene facilities at the Assembly Areas. We strategized that it would be more effective for Ambassador Manzoni, then Personal Envoy to explain to the Military Affairs Commission why it was needed despite requiring more resources. In this particular case, it was noted that the Personal Envoy's seniority and gender (as a man) would be an effective strategy in building support for this decision. Focusing on specific issues and tangible examples, particularly around the DDR's overall principle of dignity, ensured stakeholders felt brought along and understood the value-add of thinking about gender. This meant that during the mediation and implementation phase women's experience of the DDR was part of discussions and planning in the same way that all topics related to needs of former combatants were addressed. It was a practical approach based on the expressed and identified needs of the female combatants. In this sense it aligns with O'Reilly, Ó Súilleabháin, and Paffenholz's (2015) notion that making women's participation count is more important than merely counting the number of women included in peace processes. For me the proof of that was in the implementation. Particularly important was that women staff at PPS occupied all types of roles including those that may have typically been occupied by men, such as Head of Office or Reintegration Coordinator. There was not just one gender focal point but instead it was a shared responsibility led by the Reintegration Coordinator ensuring it was transversal to all work.

Building a peer network of women Ambassadors was also highly important to me, and I identified strategic supportive individuals who provided learning, support and reflection throughout the mediation and implementation of the agreement. Being aware of and furthering the number of gender influencers has been an identified strategy (Buchanan, 2021) in advancing the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda in peacemaking which we saw as effective in this process. These Ambassadors, who were contributors to a Basket Fund that supported the work of the PPS, along with their male counterparts, enabled financial support that was flexible and sensitive to the needs of the process. This involved serious trust in and empathy towards our methods of mediation and being effective interlocutors within their own systems to give us flexibility when needed.

This approach was further enabled as Mozambique is already, in terms of parity in Government, a hugely successful example for gender equity. In March 2022, Mozambique, for the first time in its history, achieved gender parity within its Council of Ministers. It became the third country in Africa (following Rwanda and Guinea Bissau) to do so. This meant gender was not perceived as an imposed idea, but rather one which other contexts could learn from. As of August 2024, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Combatants are both women. Thus, two of the most prominent positions who speak domestically or internationally on the peace process and DDR are women. Mozambique has also created a National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace, and Security (2018-2022) which promotes a prominent place for women in peace negotiations and the need to have a gender sensitive approach to DDR.

## Conclusion

Boulle (2005) has suggested that successful mediators are empathetic, non-judgmental, patient, persuasive, optimistic, persistent, trustworthy, intelligent, creative, and flexible, and that they have a good sense of humour and common sense. While this is somewhat a dream list, myself, and the colleagues, who I worked with in this process certainly strived to embody these characteristics as much as possible, with one of us often having different or stronger versions of these attributes than others. This could even depend on the day. Some days I could feel more emotional, or feel impatient and frustrated, but by leading and meditating with empathy as a principle, this could be overcome.

Moreover, we often expressed how lucky we were by the generosity shown to us by Mozambicans, to welcome us into their process, to take risks and to trust. I could list Boulle's traits also to describe so many of them who I have met. From the leaders, President Nyusi and Dhlakama and Momade who took enormous political risks, to the Commanders who helped us up mountains in dangerous circumstances and the service providers who took the risk to work with us in Assembly Areas, a leap of faith taken at every stage with the Parties.

This style also expanded to how we approached gender in the process. It was based on a combination of an expressed or sought after need, a slow and steady focus, evidence, and empathy. In this regard, Ambassador Manzoni was an important ally who never shied away from the issue helping to ensure that it was consistently brought to the table. While specific and targeted actions were made to include gender, the human-centred approach, focused on dignity for all, with a nationally owned framework also extended to expand the pathways to ensure that gender was a key component in the implementation of the Maputo Accord.

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