

## Political Institutions and HIV/AIDS Associations in Mozambique

**KENLY GREER FENIO**

I spent the year (2007) in Mozambique working on my dissertation research titled “Between Bedrooms And Ballots: The Politics of HIV’s ‘Economy of Infection’ In Mozambique.” Working from six research sites throughout the country, I collaborated with a number of HIV based and human rights based civil society associations to determine (via focus groups, interviews and 350 surveys) how volunteers are bringing what has traditionally been a private topic into the public and political realms in a relatively new, yet aid dependent, African democracy. The research was conducted with fellowship funding from Rotary International under the in-country project title of *Conhecimento é Alimentação* (Knowledge is Food), a community project designed to offer association members two kilos of food in exchange for information, thus highlighting trade rather than aid in this impoverished country.

My research has found that members are more likely than non-members (those who are not volunteers of any HIV or human rights associations) to: have better relationships at home, discuss political topics, and engage in civic activities (such as debates, political meetings, letter writing, etc). I also found that

volunteers are using theatre in the public arena to change community institutions and that associations have members from different ethnic, religious and political groups (thus illustrating cross cutting ties of a civic nature). Yet many of the associations have been co-opted by government through their corporatist reliance on the National AIDS Council



for funding, which restricts their freedom to critique government’s handling of the disease. My research illustrates how new space for citizenship is opening up, albeit slowly, particularly for women who often struggle under the weight of informal patriarchal institutions in the country.

In 2008, I returned to Mozambique to work on a “Democratic Linkages” project with Duke University whereby I conducted surveys with 20 journalists, academics, and others in the fields of electoral politics and democracy. While in Maputo, I presented “The Politics of Theatre for Development (TFD) in Combating HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa” at the SACHES conference on Education and Regional Development in Southern Africa (to be published later this year in a book of conference proceedings). These were funded by Duke University and travel grants from UF’s College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS) and the Department of Political Science. In addition, I wrote and distributed to several Mozambican organizations five research reports in 2008 based on my dissertation research.

*Kenly Greer Fenio is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Political Science. She is currently teaching at Virginia Tech and serving as a consultant on Africa and Mozambique for several projects.*

