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The case of Mozambique

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The case of Mozambiqueⁱ

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September, 2021

ⁱ This *Cadernos IESE* is a revised version of a research report prepared under the Action for Empowerment and Accountability (A4EA) research project entitled "Navigating Civic Space in a Time of COVID-19" (see: <https://www.ids.ac.uk/projects/navigating-civic-space/>). The research project was carried out from June to December 2020, coordinated by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and with participation of Institute for Social and Economic Studies (IESE) – for the case of Mozambique, Collective for Social Science Research (CSSR) – for the case of Pakistan, and Spaces for Change (S4C) – for the case of Nigeria. For methodological reasons, all extracts from interviews and interventions by members of the virtual observation panel, throughout the text, are anonymized. Note that a Portuguese short version of the *Cadernos IESE* will be published in the book *"Desafios para Mocambique 2021"*, edited by IESE.

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Introduction

The first case of COVID-19, officially recorded in the statistics of health authorities in Mozambique, was diagnosed on 22nd of March 2020, a few days after the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 pandemic. Considered as an “imported case”, due to the fact that the patient contracted the virus abroad, it was involved in a certain controversy because it had to do with a renowned politician and it was not officially communicated¹. On 30th of March 2020, in the context of the Government of Mozambique’s efforts to prevent the rapid spread of the disease, the President of the Republic, in his address to the Nation, declared, for the first time in the history of the young Mozambican democracy, the State of Emergency (SE) for reasons of public calamity (Decreto Presidencial 11/2020, de 30 de Março)².

With effect from 1st of April 2020 and lasting 30 days, the document decreeing the SE contained a set of measures that imposed limits, not only on the entry and exit of people, but also on the free movement of people and goods within national territory. In addition, the document prohibited “the holding of public and private events such as religious services, cultural, recreational, sporting, political, associative, tourist and any other activity, with the exception of urgent State or social issues... in all cases, preventive measures issued by the Ministry of Health [MISAU] must be adopted” (Decreto Presidencial 11/2020, de 30 de Março).

The declaration of the SE brought with it elements that constitute a threat to the civic space, which, in recent years, particularly from the end of the first and beginning of the second term of President Guebuza (from 2008 onwards), had already been showing signs of closure. However, it is important to note that the threat to civic space linked to emergency measures in the context of COVID-19 is not a Mozambican exception. The literature shows how governments have been using legal restrictions in the context of COVID-19 to aggravate constraints on civic space by imposing serious limitations on freedom of association and demonstration (Joshi, 2020; Brechenmacher, Youngs & Carothers, 2020; Anderson *et al.*, 2021).

This *Cadernos IESE* builds on the Action for Empowerment and Accountability (A4EA) research project “Navigating Civic Space in a Time of COVID-19”, which seeks to analyse the extent to which COVID-19 is contributing to the opening or closing of space for civic action in three countries, namely Mozambique, Nigeria and Pakistan. Focusing on Mozambique,

¹ This was the Mayor of Maputo, who had been in a conference in London days before.

² Presidential Decree 11/2020, of 30th of March.

the *Cadernos IESE* uses theoretical and methodological tools produced by the work stream of the three aforementioned countries and is essentially structured around the three main research questions:

- What is known about the civic space trend in Mozambique before the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic?
- How are different actors responding to the COVID-19 pandemic affecting the civic space in Mozambique?
- What are the medium and long term implications for governance in Mozambique?

The *Cadernos IESE* makes use of the material produced through a methodological approach that combines four components, namely a) baseline assessment on the nature of the civic space in Mozambique before the COVID-19 pandemic; b) virtual observatory panel, made up of Mozambican civil society specialists who met every month over June to December 2020; c) tracking of press and social media using an event catalogue; d) selective key informant interviews to complement the information produced by the other components. In this context, a separate baseline assessment report (Pereira, C. & Forquilha, 2020) was prepared and six virtual observatory panels sessions were held³. With previously agreed themes, the monthly sessions of the virtual observation panel lasted two hours and the subjects discussed in them were recorded, and transformed into monthly reports that were subsequently discussed in monthly international meetings, involving the research teams of IDS, IESE and the Nigeria and Pakistan research partners.

³ The virtual observation panel was made up of nine members representing a diversity of Mozambican civil society organizations, including a journalist from an independent media, based in the three regions of the country, namely north, center and south. In addition, two members of the Institute for Social and Economic Studies (IESE) research team and one member of the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) research team were also part of the virtual observation panel, which met on a monthly basis.

Brief description of the political response to COVID-19

The first case of COVID-19 in Mozambique was announced at a press conference on 22nd of March 2020 by the Minister of Health, Armindo Tiago. Two days earlier, on 20th of March 2020, the President of the Republic, Filipe Nyusi, addressed the nation on the measures to preventing the spread of COVID-19⁴, within the scope of the surveillance which was being observed by the Ministry of Health (MISAU) and the National Institute of Health (INS), considering the evolution of the pandemic in the world and, in particular, in neighbouring countries. These measures were complemented by the creation of a multidisciplinary technical-scientific commission chaired by the Minister of Health and composed of professionals from different specialties who would have, among other responsibilities, to advise the Government in making informed decisions about COVID-19 (see Nyusi, 2020a).

On 30th of March 2020, when the country recorder eight positive cases of COVID-19, President Nyusi declared the SE in the country, as a recommendation by the Technical-Scientific Commission and by the Consultative Bodies of the Mozambican State, namely the State Council and the National Council of Defence and Security. At that time, some reinforcement measures were announced to contain the spread of COVID-19, such as (i) the submission to the mandatory quarantine of all persons who had travelled abroad or who had maintained contact with confirmed COVID-19 cases, considering the period of transmission/contamination of/by the virus; (ii) the prohibition of any public or private events; (iii) limiting the movement of people at the national level and from all border points to the country; and (iv) the closing of commercial or similar activities and in some cases limiting their activity (see Nyusi, 2020b)⁵.

The SE was in force for 120 days, between April to July 2020 – counted up from 1st of April to 30th of April and the three extensions it had, according to the limit allowed by the Constitution of the Republic of Mozambique, that is, from 1st of May to 30th of May, from 31st of May to 29th of June, and from 30th of June to 30th of July. As the SE could no longer be extended in accordance with the Constitution, moreover the fact that there was a belief that the pandemic situation was not critical in the country and, therefore, it was no longer necessary, there was a great expectation in public opinion to see in the next phase of the national response to COVID-19, a certain opening up with regard to the restrictive measures im-

⁴ The measures essentially consisted to suspend the issuance of entry visas in Mozambique, cancellation of visas that would have been issued to date, reinforcement of mandatory home quarantine for all international travelers, prohibition of holding events with more than 50 people as well as closing of schools at all levels, among others – see “Communication to the Nation of His Excellency Filipe Jacinto Nyusi, President of the Republic”, on 20th of March 2020 (Nyusi, 2020a).

⁵ “Communication to the Nation of His Excellency Filipe Jacinto Nyusi, President of the Republic of Mozambique, on the Situation of the Coronavirus Pandemic (COVID-19)”, on 30th of March 2020.

posed to date in order to relieve at some extent the pressure on the economic sector that was increasingly weakened by the effects of the political measures of the pandemic (e.g., Siúta & Sambo, 2020; Sambo & Siúta, 2020; Castel-Branco, 2020; Ibraimo & Muianga, 2020).

However, on 5th of August 2020, President Nyusi announced a new SE, which was in force between 8th of August and 6th of September 2020. On the occasion, Filipe Nyusi remarked that the measures imposed by the SE have been avoiding as much as possible the comple

te closing of the country and the economy through a ‘lockdown’ (Nyusi, 2020c)⁶. Thus, the New SE maintained the previous measures to contain the risk of COVID-19 and introduced, gradually and cautiously, an opening up the reinstatement of social and economic life at three stages of activities, namely “low risk” (from 18th of August 2020), “medium risk” (from 1st of September 2020) and “high risk” (from 1st of October 2020) (see Nyusi, 2020c)⁷.

It should be noted that while the New SE was in force, the Mozambican Parliament discussed the approval of a new Law of Management and Resolution of Disaster Risks (Lei 10/2020, de 24 de Agosto)⁸. This law was envisaged after strong disagreements between the legal community on the next step after the end of the first SE, the three extensions that followed it, and the New SE – this is because, on the one hand, in the Government’s view, as long as the SE came to an end, all restrictive measures would continue to apply in order to contain the pandemic. On the other hand, some jurists understood that the introduction of any restrictive measure would require an appropriate legal framework to comply with the law (Fael, 2020). Thus, according to the Mozambican Constitution, after the end of the SE, the President of the Republic has a constitutional obligation to submit to the Parliament a complete report on the main highlights of what happened during the period of the SE. This report was submitted to the appreciation of the Parliament on 30th of July 2020 and discussed by the Members of Parliament in an extraordinary session, held on 4th of August 2020. At the same time, the draft of the Law of Management and Resolution of Disaster Risks was submitted. And the next day, on 5th of August 2020, the President addressed the

⁶ “Communication to the Nation of His Excellency Filipe Jacinto Nyusi, President of the Republic of Mozambique, on the New State of Emergency, within the scope of the Coronavirus Pandemic – COVID-19”, on 5th of August 2020.

⁷ The first phase included the resumption of classes in higher education, in the academies and schools of the Defense and Security Forces, in technical-professional institutes, in health centres and training institutions. At this stage, religious services could be held with the presence of up to 50 people; an equal number of people could attend funeral ceremonies (but that number would reduce to 10 people if the cause of death was COVID-19). The second phase allowed the reopening of cinemas, theatres, casinos, gyms, driving schools, motorsport, and general technical-professional education. The third phase was accompanied by the reopening of classes for the last year of national secondary education. Pre-school, primary and general secondary education as well as other collective sports, among other sectors, were subject to approval by the health authorities and inspection bodies, after verifying the appropriate conditions for this purpose and taking into account the capacity of the government to control the evolution of the pandemic (see Nyusi, 2020c).

⁸ Law 10/2020, of 24th of August.

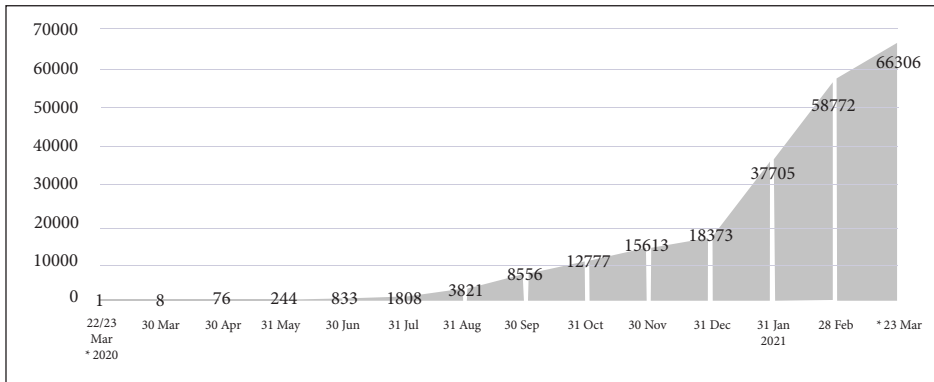
nation announcing the New SE, in force from 8th of August to 6th of September 2020⁹. After the end of the New SE, from 7th of September 2020 to date, the “State of Public Calamity” is in force in the country, for an indefinite period, in accordance with the Law of Management and Resolution of Disaster Risks, approved to better accommodate COVID-19 measures in disaster situations.

It is important to note that in the following months, namely October, November and December 2020, the country witnessed a relative opening up of most of the restrictions that were still in effect as a result of the decrees of SE, which started in April 2020, ended in the first week of September 2020 and have been reinforced by the State of Public Calamity. Nevertheless, the mandatory use of masks and the prohibition of gatherings were reinforced, as it is believed that these measures could reduce the risk of infection in the population. Such measures were not always strictly enforced in the public space, as there were cases of disobedience and protests, particularly with regard to the control of passenger capacity in public and private transport providers, often resulting in the arrest of citizens, drivers and fare collectors, including the impounding of vehicles (see Notícias, 2020a: 5, 2020b: 5, 2020c: 5; SAVANA, 2020: 10).

In turn, since April 2020, the number of positive cases by COVID-19 has increased considerably in the country. At that time, the country recorded 76 positive cases of COVID-19 contamination and no deaths. The notification of the first death occurred on 25th of May 2020 and since then the number of cases of deaths grew, reaching a cumulative number of 747 approximately one year after the outbreak of the pandemic in the country, on 23rd of March 2021. Between 22nd/23rd of March 2020 and 23rd of March 2021, the country recorded a cumulative number of 66,306 positive cases of COVID-19 (see Figure 1 and Figure 2). In this way, as Filipe Nyusi remarked several times when he addressed the nation, because of the worsening evolution of COVID-19, Mozambicans should be prepared to sacrifice, in some way, freedoms, rights, habits and customs, as a result of the situation of public health emergency, in the name of preserving individual and collective health.

⁹ Thus, according to the government, the decision to enact a new SE aimed at “not creating a legal vacuum to support preventive measures and control of COVID-19”, noting that the two states of emergency previously in force responded to “a first line of action that consisted of maintaining restrictions to prevent and control COVID-19”, while the subsequent phase would be “a second line that responds to the need to ensure that social and economic life has its normal course” (see Nyusi, 2020c).

Figure 1. Cumulative number of positive COVID-19 cases in Mozambique, between 22nd of March 2020 and 23rd of March 2021

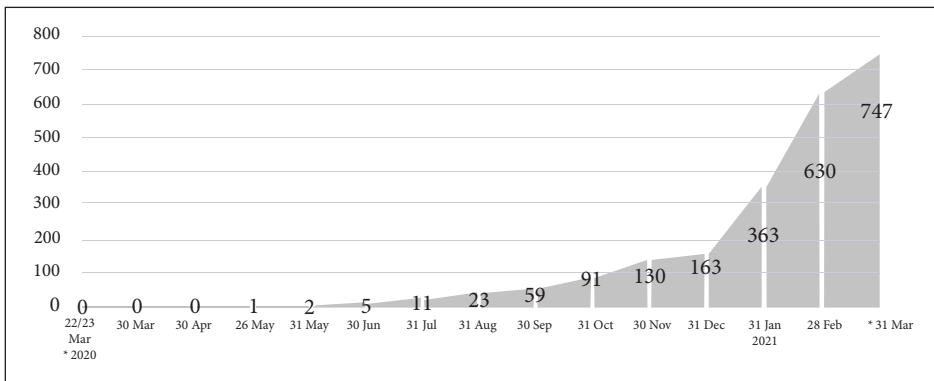


Source: Produced by the authors based on data from the WHO (Access: <https://covid19.who.int/region/afro/country/mz>).

*Notified the first case of COVID-19 contamination by MISAU on 22nd of March 2020 and reported by WHO on 23rd of March 2020.

Note: The data presented in Figure 1 reflect the evolution of the pandemic during the period of the study, which ended with the presentation of the results on the anniversary of the declaration of the pandemic in March 2021. However, until 31st of July 2021, the data from WHO, in reference, show a sharp rise in the cumulative number of cases per COVID-19, with 119,950 people recorded as infected.

Figure 2. Cumulative number of deaths by COVID-19 in Mozambique, between 22nd of March 2020 and 23rd of March 2021



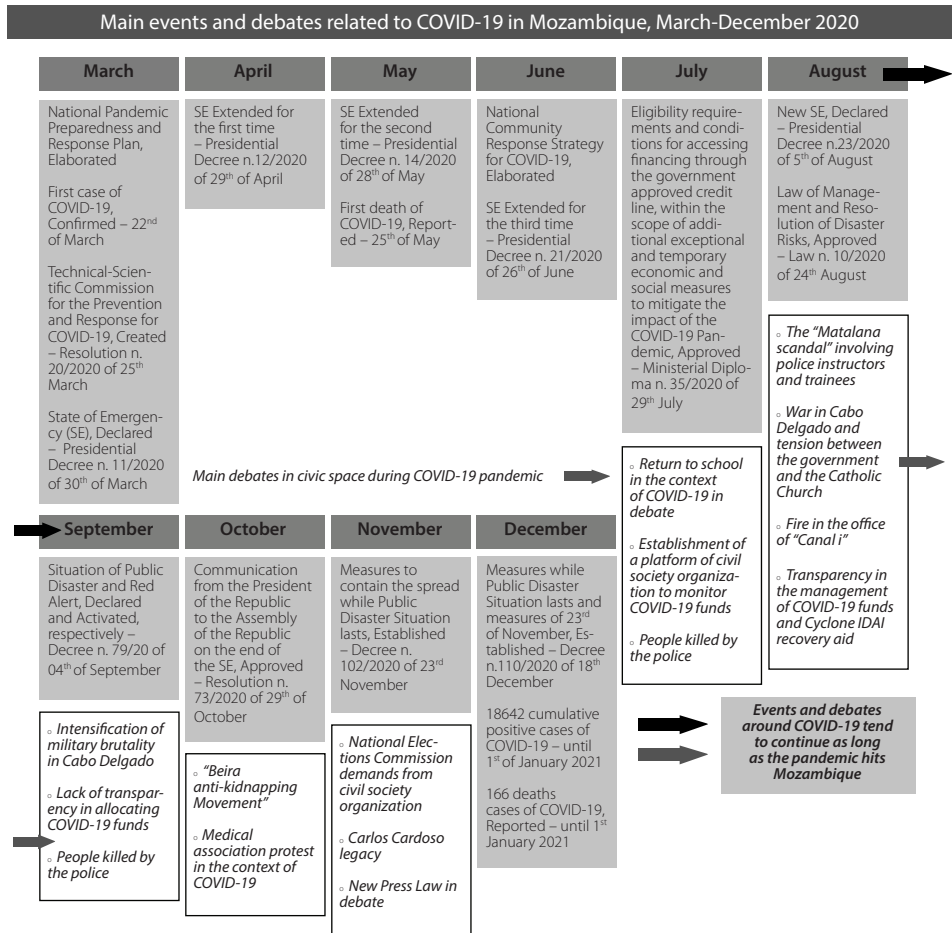
Source: Produced by the authors based on data from the WHO (Access: <https://covid19.who.int/region/afro/country/mz>).

*Notified the first case of COVID-19 contamination by MISAU on 22nd of March 2020 and reported by WHO on 23rd of March 2020.

Note: The data presented in Figure 2 show the evolution of the pandemic during the period of the study, which ended with the presentation of the results on the anniversary of the declaration of the pandemic in March 2021. However, until 31st of July 2021, the data from WHO, in reference, reveal a sharp rise in the cumulative number of deaths from COVID-19, which reached 1,407 people.

Some events and debates related to COVID-19 in Mozambique

Between March to December 2020, there are several events that stimulated the debate regarding civic space in the country in the context of COVID-19. Based on the COVID-19 event catalogue on the evolution of the pandemic and monthly reports of virtual panels, the following timeline illustrates some of the main events and debates.



Source: Produced by the authors.

In relation to the main debates in civic space during COVID-19 pandemic, as showed in Figure 3, it is important to highlight those that deserved the attention of the main media and users on social media, which are classified in the catalogue of events, such as:

Return to school: Classes were suspended, at all levels, just after the pandemic has been declared by the WHO in March 2020. Since then, schools have adopted online teaching, particularly in urban areas. With serious limitations in terms of internet access, online teaching was soon questioned by many social actors because it not only was ineffective, but also brought evidences of marginalization and huge social inequalities among Mozambicans. Indeed, the vast majority of Mozambican children do not have any conditions for internet connection, particularly in rural areas and poor families. In June, the government announced the intention of opening schools and set the 27th of July of 2020 as the date for gradual return to school. The debate on return to school was marked, on the one hand, by the government position insisting on the need for opening schools, and, on the other, civil society organizations and parents calling the government not to open schools yet, because that would increase the number of COVID-19 cases as the vast majority of schools throughout the country do not have required conditions to prevent from COVID-19 transmission. After pressure coming from this group of actors, the government decided to set clear conditions for opening schools, such as safe sanitation and hygiene, social distancing and mandatory use of masks. This was accompanied by the decision to allocate funds to schools for renovation work purposes.

The establishment of a civil society organi-

zation platform to monitor COVID-19 funds:

When the pandemic was declared in March 2020, the government of Mozambique estimated that the impact of the pandemic would cost around 700 million United States dollars (USD). Some donors such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank (WB) and bilateral agencies committed to contribute towards this total. Four months later, the government had received from donors roughly USD 350 million. Concerns have been raised several times by civil society organizations in relation to transparency with regard to the use of these financial resources. Civil society organizations feared that much of these funds would not benefit the most vulnerable families and citizens, ending up feeding corruption networks in the State apparatus. This civil society initiative is called “response to Covid with transparency”.

People killed by the police: At the end of July 2020, two people were killed in Matola and Nampula as a result of abuses and violence committed by police, in the context of the SE. Police alleged that the two people had violated the rules that have been imposed by the SE. These killings provoked different kind of protest from local populations, and in a press conference, the police leadership acknowledged that there might be some exaggeration in the way the SE was being enforced by some members of the corporation.

The “Matalana scandal”: Since the end of the

first week of August, activists on social media began to circulate an information realizing that 15 women trainees from the Matalana training school for police officers, “Escola Prática da Polícia da Matalana”, located in the district of Maracuene (Maputo Province), had been made pregnant by their instructors. The information circulated through a dispatch from the General Commander of the Police of the Republic of Mozambique (PRM), Bernardino Rafael, dated 28th of July 2020, which announced a list of decisions to initiate disciplinary proceedings against both instructors and the pregnant trainees. This case generated a wave of repudiation and solidarity across the country, relaunching the debate on sexual violence against women, including the vulnerable role of women in society. After this episode, President Nyusi directed the closing ceremony of the 40th basic course for police officers at Matalana, on 19th of August, where he admitted responsibility and gave assurances that the scandal would be investigated by the Ministry of the Interior (MINT) and at the General Command of the Police, highlighting that “the State must not tolerate situations like these, the law must be complied with and it is the same for all of us, nobody is above the law”. It is important to note that the president of the Mozambican Police Association, Nazário Muanambane, publicly revealed that similar cases of sexual involvement of instructors and trainees had already been happening frequently at that police academy, saying that the cases had always been resolved internally by the police forces.

Cabo Delgado war: The war in Cabo Delgado is one of the main topics discussed during the COVID-19 time (and previous to the pandemi-

c)¹⁰. The war increasingly attracted the attention of public opinion while the insurgents spread terror in almost all districts of the province and official propaganda claimed that government forces had been driving the enemy back. Nevertheless, complaints about the disaster affecting the province have come from all sides, particularly from the Catholic Church, which has denounced the terrorist attacks and criticized the lack of commitment on the part of the Government to find a solution to the problem since the beginning. Sometimes, as observed since August in the media and social media, the Catholic Church, particularly the former Bishop of Pemba, Dom Luíz Fernando Lisboa, one of the leading figures in denouncing the situation of Cabo Delgado to the public, suffered many verbal attacks from so-called “friends of the regime” on social media. It is important to note that information on the war in Cabo Delgado is very difficult to access due to the situation of insecurity. This is reflected in journalists’ efforts to put pressure on the State, demanding that they should be able to cover the armed conflict in the region, safely and without fear. The discussion highlighted the case of Ibraimo Abu Mbaruco, a journalist of the Community Radio of the district of Palma, who disappeared under dubious circumstances in April 2020. Organizations such as the Southern African Institute of Social Communication for Mozambique (MISA Mozambique), United Nations (UN) and the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR), and many other human rights protection actors have been

¹⁰ The province of Cabo Delgado, in northern Mozambique, has been facing an Islamic insurgency since October 2017, resulting in the growth of terror and humanitarian crisis in the region.

addressing the issue, but no response has been received to date from the authorities.

Fire in “Canal i”: The office of “Canal i”, an independent Mozambican media group that has two important newspapers (the daily newspaper “Canal Moz” and the weekly publication “Canal de Moçambique”) was set on fire in suspicious circumstances on the evening of 23rd of August 2020. It was said that an unidentified group “broke down the office door, poured out fuel and placed home-made bombs on folders and bottles”, causing total destruction of the facilities and equipment. The attack came four days after the “Canal i” published, on 19th of August 2020, an investigative report into what the newspaper claimed was an unethical tender process involving senior officials from the Ministry of Mineral Resources and Energy (MIREME) and members of the ruling party’s elite, regarding a 2 billion metical (about USD 30 million) public contract for fuel control/management in the country. “Canal i” is one of the main media playing a watchdog role in relation to State malpractice, especially in public service and in political life. This attack was strongly denounced, repudiated, and condemned by a wide range of social and political actors as evidence of the restrictions on press freedom and freedom of expression in the country, at the national level and international level. On 31st of December 2019, the editor “Canal de Moçambique”, Matias Guente, had escaped a kidnapping attempt after being brutally attacked. The police authorities never solved this case.

Transparency in the management of COVID-19 special funds and cyclone IDAI recovery aid: In

the context of the end of the first SE that was in force until July, the government was accountable to the Mozambican Parliament, reporting on the activities and decisions taken over this period. However, public opinion found the government’s report problematic from the point of view of financial transparency. For example, the two opposition parties in Parliament, Renamo (*Resistência Nacional de Moçambique*) and MDM (*Movimento Democrático de Moçambique*), considered that the report hid the way in which the funds raised were used to tackle COVID-19. For example, they demanded the nominal list of people benefited by the funds as well as the list of companies that benefited from ‘indirect adjustments’ worth 58 billion metical (about USD 900 million). The government announced that it had spent 68.22 million meticals (about USD 1,07 billion) in four months of managing COVID-19 with public works contracts for supplying goods and providing services using the direct adjustment modality, that is, ignoring the standard procurement regime, which is the public tender. The second issue has to do with the popular tension/unrest regarding the allocation of subsidies for post-cyclone IDAI reconstruction to affected families in Sofala Province, particularly in Beira city, at the end of August. Tropical cyclone IDAI had destroyed thousands of buildings, mainly housing in the central region of Mozambique, in March 2019. Thousands of people gathered, on the 28th of August 2020, in the vicinity of the building where the Sofala Provincial Government is located, to demand justice in the allocation of the funds that should be channelled to them. The people complained about the lack of transparency in drawing up the list of beneficiaries of these funds, which

had been prepared by the political structures of the neighbourhoods, since many of the people in need were excluded from the lists or did not have the opportunity to be listed by the authorities. The intervention of the Governor of Sofala Province, Lourenço Bulha, as well as the police forces, was necessary. Lourenço Bulha promised the people that the list of beneficiaries would be reviewed by the neighbourhood structures and that the money allocated would be properly distributed. This episode of popular unrest did not respect the safety measures intended to prevent COVID-19 infection.

Military brutality: Public opinion, particularly civil society organizations for the defence of women's rights, condemned the murder of a helpless woman in Cabo Delgado – this after the circulation on social media of a viral video illustrating the brutal episode, around mid-September. The images show a group of individuals wearing uniforms of the Mozambique Defence and Security Forces (FDS) who slaughter a naked woman. She was executed by being shot in the back several times. The FDS issued a statement in which they proposed to investigate in order to confirm the authenticity of the video. A few days later, the Minister of Interior, Amade Miquidade, publicly denied that the FDS committed the atrocity. However, organizations like Amnesty International have confirmed the authenticity of the video and urged the Government of Mozambique to carry out an independent and impartial investigation so that justice is done. According to the organization, the macabre episode occurred in the district of Mocímboa da Praia (Awasse), on the coast of Cabo Delgado.

An example of problems in allocating COVID-19 funds: The Center for Public Integrity (CIP) carried out a visit to the District Services for Health, Women and Social Action (SDSMAS) at the Bureau for Women and Social Action (RMAS), in the district of Matutuine, in the province of Maputo, in order to monitor the use of COVID-19 funds. According to a document on the status of the commitments under COVID-19 in the country, from the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF), the National Institute of Social Action (INAS) would receive an allocation of USD 20 million to increase by 186% the number of current beneficiary households in the country (from 592,179 to 1,695,004) and to support families with monthly subsidies of 1,500.00 meticals (about USD 20), every two months, for six months. CIP noted that the resources allocated for social protection in the context of COVID-19 may not reach all beneficiaries as claimed, due to the lack of inter-sectoral coordination and lack of clarity in the selection of beneficiaries, and corruption. Some of those responsible for the registration of beneficiaries, usually the chefes dos quarteirões (the block chiefs in the neighbourhoods, which are one of the ruling party's local structures), register themselves and their family members or contacts, and the funds do not always reach the hands of the beneficiaries.

“Beira anti-kidnapping Movement”: Led by a group of local businessmen from the second largest city in Mozambique, Beira, located in the province of Sofala, through a press conference on the morning of 22nd of October 2020, the movement protested against the wave of kidnappings that have recently intensified, at least in two major cities of Mozambique (Beira and

the capital, Maputo). The businessmen appealed to the private sector to promote the closure of local business for three days as a way of demanding responses from the government and greater vigilance in guaranteeing the security of citizens¹¹. Local businessmen responded to this “strike call” by temporarily shutting down the local market as recommended, after the press conference. As a consequence of the “strike”, the local National Inspection for Economic Activities (INAE) ordered the businesspeople to appear at their office on Monday 26th of October 2020, alleging that the closure of their business was unjustified, caused disruption in the distribution and sale of goods and essential products, contrary to the public interest; thus, it would be subject to a fine of 500 times the minimum wage, according to the law. A strong reaction by civic, religious, and political actors, as well as journalists, used the media and social media to condemn the government response, by giving their support to the movement. An example is the press conference organized by Daviz Simango¹², the former Mayor of the city of Beira, who was also the president of the third most voted political party in Mozambique, MDM, on Saturday 24th of October 2020, who stated that “it is clear that INAE seeks to respond to acts of citizenship with intimidation and violence”. After being heard by the INAE, the participants of the

Movement did not suffer any penalties; instead, they were informed that that from now on an official communication to the legally responsible bodies should be made. As reported in our baseline country report on Mozambique, in October 2013, a “strike” had already been led by a different group of citizens in some Mozambican cities, including Maputo and Beira, who a peacefully joined a mass march where they demonstrated against the crimes and corruption in the country, among other issues.

COVID-19 and the Medical Association protest: The Medical Association of Mozambique, including the Medical Council, brought, on 22nd of October 2020, a court action against the government (both the Finance Ministry and the Ministry of Health) for not fulfilling their promises to pay the overtime and risk subsidies that had been promised before and after the national health authorities diagnosed the first case of COVID-19 in the country, which dated from 22nd of March 2020. In a public statement, besides complaining about the lack of equipment to protect health personnel and shortages of medicines in health facilities, the Medical Association claimed the subsidies that they should have received from the State. This is not the first time that the Medical Association has confronted the government as a way of demanding their rights. In 2013, doctors went on strike to protest against low wages and precarious working conditions, as highlighted in the country baseline report for Mozambique.

CNE demands from civil society organizations: Some civil society organizations working in the field of electoral observation unsuccessfully de-

¹¹ A cartoon, by the weekly newspaper “Canal de Moçambique” of 28th of October 2020, symbolized the failure of the government to combat the crime in the country, showing the Police Commander of the Republic of Mozambique, the Minister of the Interior and the Prosecutor General of the Republic of Mozambique playing the “blind goat game” in the search of kidnappers’ clues.

¹² Daviz Simango died on 22nd of February of 2021 in a private hospital in South Africa, where he had been urgently transferred due to health problems.

manded, through a press conference and several appearances in the media and social media, the invalidation of the announcement made by the Mozambican Parliament for the establishment of the new body of the National Elections Commission (CNE). They demanded a public consultation on the profile of the members of the CNE coming from civil society. They argued that candidates for members of the CNE coming from civil society should not have any activist or other connection with political parties in order to not undermine the independence and impartiality required by Constitution. They also argued that candidates for members of the CNE coming from civil society organizations must have proven work experience and expertise in different key areas of electoral administration and electoral matters in general. Finally, they argued that the 15-day period established by the Committee on Constitutional Affairs, Human Rights and Legality of the Mozambican Parliament to submit candidacies by civil society was too short and did not allow for an open discussion on candidates' profiles. In the end, the Parliament of Mozambique elected, on 14th December, the 17 members of the new board of the CNE (seven coming from civil society organizations and 10 from political parties represented in Parliament, namely five from Frelimo (*Frente de Libertação de Moçambique*), four from Renamo and one from MDM. It should be noted that 36 civil society organizations submitted, 151 candidate proposals to the parliamentary committee, of which 16 were considered eligible for the vote to be elected those seven representing civil society for the next electoral cycle.

Carlos Cardoso: Two decades after the murder

of the famous journalist who wrote for the first independent newspapers in Mozambique ("MediaFax" and "Savana", owned by the Mediacoop journalists' cooperative), at a time when the country witnessed the first cases of large-scale corruption being investigated by the media, several actors, particularly journalists, launched a campaign throughout the month of November to honour his life and legacy for investigative journalism in the country. The key moment of this celebration was a webinar promoted by journalists, political and economic actors and social activists, on 23rd of November 2020. Carlos Cardoso was murdered on 22nd of November 2000, and although the murderers were arrested, judged and sentenced, those responsible for ordering the crime are still unpunished. Carlos Cardoso was one of the martyrs in the fight against the limitation of freedom of expression and the press in Mozambique.

New Press Law debated: The revision of the Press Law is under discussion in the country. Some activists and experts consider that this is not an appropriate moment to approve this law, due to the risk that exists in passing a Law in a context in which the country is at war. They are afraid that the Press Law allows for restrictions on freedoms, such as the episodes that are being observed in Cabo Delgado in which the space for action for journalists (and other actors) is limited by the authorities in the name of sovereignty. However, it is expected that the debate may result in a law with more freedom and independence for the media sector. Note that the proposal of the law was already authorized by the government, pending debates on its approval in the Mozambican Parliament.

The civic space trend in Mozambique before the arrival of COVID-19¹³

Mozambique had its first legal provision regarding the opening of civic space in the 1990 Constitution, reflected, months later, in the laws on the right to free association and the right to freedom of assembly and to demonstrate (respectively, Lei 8/91, de 18 de Julho; Lei 9/91, de 18 de Julho)¹⁴. This allowed, on the one hand, the emergence and flourishing of a diversity of associations – an important element for any process of democracy building (Tocqueville, 2008) – on the other hand, the strengthening of civic space, whose construction process was underway with the approval, months before, of the law on political parties (Lei 7/91, de 23 de Janeiro)¹⁵. Both the law on political parties and the laws on strengthening civic space are signs of democracy-building in the country.

With the end of the civil war and the holding of the first multi-party elections in 1992 and 1994, respectively, Mozambique made important progress in opening up civic space. In fact, not only did political participation gain a new dynamic with the ‘routinization’ of elections, but also the creation of municipalities in 1997 opened space for greater participation at the local level (Brito, 2013; Weimer, 2012; Weimer & Carrilho, 2017; Forquilha, 2016). In addition, the reform of local State bodies carried out in 2003 allowed the creation of a set of local institutions at community level and their integration into the governance process (Weimer, 2012; Forquilha & Orre, 2011). Spaces for interaction between the government and civil society actors were created within the scope of the local ‘councils’ and ‘development observatories’ at provincial and national levels, in order to monitor the process of implementing the government’s economic and social plans (Francisco & Matter, 2007; Muendane, 2008; Pereira, J., 2012). But, at the end of the first and the beginning of the second terms in office of President Armando Guebuza¹⁶, the strengthening of the political and party-based alliances of national elites with local elites, in the context of the broadening and strengthening of FRELIMO’s domination, led to the political capture of spaces for participation and interaction with the government at all levels (Forquilha & Orre, 2011; Macuane, 2012; Pereira, J., 2012), exacerbating political intolerance, contributing to an ever greater reduction in civic space.

The dependence of civil society organizations on donor funding has also given them an incentive to follow “external” agendas – where access to funds has been to some extent

¹³ For an in-depth and detailed analysis of the civic space before the arrival of COVID-19, see the baseline assessment report (Pereira, C. & Forquilha, 2020), produced in the context of the research project “Navigating Civic Space in a Time of COVID-19”. (Access: <https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/handle/20.500.12413/16563>).

¹⁴ Respectively, Law 8/91, of 18th of July; Law 9/91, of 18th of July.

¹⁵ Law 7/91, of 23rd of January.

¹⁶ President Armando Guebuza was in power from 2005 to 2009 and from 2010 to 2014.

marked by competitiveness, 'protagonismo' (competition for visibility) and lack of coordination – instead of building their own agendas based on dialogue with citizens. It is worth remembering that civil society organizations do not necessarily have a 'representative' function in the same sense as political parties or class associations, but rather a function of capturing and articulating society's agendas in general for public debate. However, despite continuing to pursue their agendas within the above mentioned legal framework, civil society organizations, especially formal ones, increasingly found it difficult to channel and express popular demands, particularly in a context of a growing economic crisis. The urban strikes of 2008, 2010 and 2012 are an interesting example of this, as the demonstrators, mostly young people, who took to the streets to protest at the high cost of living, were not mobilized by any civil society organization (Brito, Chaimite & Shankland, 2017; Johansson & Sambo, 2017; Bertelsen, 2017).

In this context, the State's response was simultaneously characterized by minor adjustments, seeking to respond to popular demands, and repression by the police forces with the aim of discouraging other street demonstrations (Brito, Chaimite & Shankland, 2017). In addition, the government became increasingly hostile to criticism from public opinion, particularly from institutions, intellectuals and academics who were seen as being at the service of "foreign interests"¹⁷. In order to confront critical public opinion, the so-called Group of 40, or simply G-40, emerged, linked to the ruling party. Using public media, such as newspapers, radio and television, they sought to delegitimise critical public opinion, building opinion that was more favourable opinion to the government. At the same time, recurrent threats against influential figures in Mozambican public opinion and members of opposition political parties have been recorded. In some cases there have even been murders, particularly since President Nyusi's first term¹⁸, carried out by so-called "death squads" (DW, 2019)¹⁹.

The aforementioned development observatories, which had been established within the framework of political reforms and incorporated into the governance process, ceased to function regularly and, above all, began to lose their relevance given the increasingly marginal space that civil society organizations had in these forums. From 2016 onwards, when the development observatory sessions took place, civil society organizations were convened at almost the last minute and, consequently, went to sessions without adequate

¹⁷ These are institutions, intellectuals and academics considered to be very critical of government action.

¹⁸ President Filipe Nyusi's first term was from 2015 to 2019.

¹⁹ Some examples are the murders of Franco-Mozambican Professor Gilles Cistac and Renamo politician Jeremias Pondaca; the attacks against Professor José Jaime Macuane and Journalist Ericino de Salema. In addition, opposition parties, particularly Renamo, have on several occasions publicly lodged complaints about the persecution and murder of their leaders at grassroots level, particularly in the central and northern areas of the country.

preparation, in terms of being able to read the documents that were to be discussed (DW, 2016). The same was happening with the local councils created at different levels of local governance (Forquilha & Orre, 2011). In the latter case, the space for participation decreased as a result of political capture, visible not only in the training process but also in the functioning of the councils. Regarding development observatories, one of the members of the virtual observation panel mentioned:

[...] the government is not regularly conducting Development Observatories [...]. For example, we had Development Observatories in 2017 and then only last year [2019], after much insistence, and it probably only happened because we are entering a new governance process or because we just left the elections, we ended up doing an Observatory. We don't know when the next one will be, whether it will be this year [2020] or not. So, it is these spaces for dialogue that are increasingly closed and reduced. However, the government knows how to remember that civil society exists when it has its own interests. When you need the guarantee that you consulted civil society on X, Y and Z aspects, they consult us. But, of course, it is a consultation that is not properly prepared because it is with one day's notice, there is no advance information, we are not sure what we are going to hear there to be able to prepare. So there is this tendency to overshadow what is participation and citizenship in Mozambique. In general, I would say that the civic space in Mozambique has tended to reduce a lot and in a very accelerated way²⁰.

But if fear, intimidation and political intolerance have become established in the Mozambican civic space over the last ten years, the experience of these phenomena has not been uniform throughout the country, due essentially to two elements. The first element concerns armed violence. In areas where armed violence affects the daily lives of local populations, namely the central and northern areas of the country affected by attacks by the so-called Renamo Military Junta and the northern areas faced with jihadist/terrorist attacks, fear, intimidation and political intolerance have tended to increase. In this regard, one of the members of the virtual observation panel, based in Pemba in Cabo Delgado province, mentioned the following:

(...) I speak on behalf of civil society organizations, mainly because of the limitations we have here because of displacement. We can no longer go to the northern part of Cabo Delgado because of conflicts as colleagues know. And also, for what is our job, there has to be all that bureaucracy. We have to inform [the authorities] what we came to do, who we are going to work with, what the approach is, we want to see the texts, who you are. And when it comes to surveys, the government itself does a thorough and point-to-point screening of what exactly they are going to ask. Not long ago, there was an organization which wanted to carry out a survey on the issue of violence against women and girls, but when the government realized it was a civil society organisation, yes, but when it realized it was "ORGANIZATION A" Cabo Delgado, who were the activists

²⁰ Intervention by member of the virtual observation panel, in the second session of the panel, Maputo, 30th of July 2020.

*of "ORGANIZATION A" that they were going to do the work, that, the program was totally cut. "ORGANIZATION A" activists cannot work there, "ORGANIZATION A" cannot work on this (...)*²¹.

The second element refers to geographical space, in the sense that the farther one gets from the country's capital and urban centres the greater is the level of fear, intimidation and political intolerance. In fact, during the sessions of the virtual observation panel, in the context of the research project on "Navigating Civic Space in a Time of COVID-19", the panel members mentioned how in rural and remote areas freedom of expression has been stifled by intimidation and political intolerance. In a context marked by high levels of illiteracy, difficulties in accessing information and the justice system, citizens' fundamental rights, such as the right to freedom of expression, become a privilege of local elites, namely those close to the ruling party.

In recent years, different instruments for measuring democracy, such as Afrobarometer surveys or democracy indices, have been showing a tendency for democracy and, consequently, for civic space to deteriorate in Mozambique. For example, Afrobarometer surveys show that from 2011 to 2015 the demand for democracy dropped, from 25% (2011-2013) to 9% (2014-2015), one of the sharpest declines in sub-Saharan Africa among countries covered by the survey (Mattes & Bratton, 2016). In addition, Mozambique has recorded significant setbacks in its score relative to the democracy index. In fact, from a hybrid regime its classification changed to that of an authoritarian regime in 2018 (The Economist, 2019)²². The democracy index measures five dimensions that are directly linked to civic space, namely pluralism and electoral process, government functioning, political participation, political culture and civil liberties. Some of the interventions by members of the virtual observation panel illustrate this trend, as shown in the following extract:

*One of the virtual observatory panel members said that this issue of closing civic space is something that we have observed for a long time. Of course, because when we talk about opening up the civic space, we are saying that civil society and other groups have the right to freedom of expression, the right to association and assembly, among others. And what we have seen in the last few years is that this is not happening strictly. There are restrictions in the laws, as mentioned in the law of associations, many media professionals have been threatened and there is some history of aggression. Regarding civil society, [another member of the virtual observation panel] spoke several times. She said that it is difficult for us to have meetings, marches and to speak as we intend (...)*²³.

²¹ Intervention by member of the virtual observation panel, in the second session of the panel, Maputo, 30th of July 2020.

²² It should be noted that this classification was made by one of the institutions that produces the democracy index (The Economist), although many others have registered a significant deterioration regarding the level of freedom and/or political openness in Mozambique in recent years.

²³ Intervention by member of the virtual observation panel, at the second session of the panel, Maputo, 30th of July 2020.

What is interesting to note in this period is the fact that Mozambique has benefited from two major programmes to strengthen civil society, entirely financed by donors. The first programme is called the Civil Society Support Mechanism (MASC), and it started in 2007 as a governance program under the management of the Danish consultancy firm COWI and financed by a number of cooperation partners, namely the European Union²⁴, Department for International Development (DFID)²⁵, Irish Aid, Swiss Agency for Cooperation and Development (SDC), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) and the Norwegian Embassy. Transformed into a foundation, MASC today works in different fields to strengthen civil society and local development. The second program is called Action for Inclusive and Responsible Governance (AGIR), which started in 2010 and closed in 2020, with funding from the Swedish and Netherlands Embassies. Like MASC, AGIR also focused on support and training for civil society organizations.

Despite all this investment in the past ten years, Mozambican civil society continues to face major challenges, particularly with regard to the lack of financial sustainability and weak networking to boost collective action (Topsøe-Jensen *et al.*, 2016). Indeed, in one of the sessions of the virtual observation panel in the context of the research project on “Navigating Civic Space in a Time of COVID-19”, the members of the panel highlighted competition and poor collaboration between civil society organizations as reasons for the lack of success of civil society in its governance activities. But there are a few exceptions, among which we can highlight three examples.

The first example is the movement that led to the drafting of the domestic violence bill. Tabled in Parliament in 2007 by a group of civil society organizations working on the defence of women’s rights, the law was approved in 2009 (Lei 29/2009, de 29 de Setembro de 2009)²⁶. Nevertheless, in a session of the observatory panels, participants expressed regret that this law has not been effectively used because of “distrust” of the protection of rights, especially of women, given the strong cultural context of male domination in the country. Therefore, fear of exposure and social shame (for both men and women) are some of the reasons given for the lack of compliance with the law, allied to the social order itself which is structured by inequalities between men and women, with the position of women considered to be subordinate. One participant showed, for example, the weakness of the law on domestic violence, which in the name of “safeguarding the family”, makes it possible to

²⁴ Note that the European Union also funds other civil society organizations, through Support Programme to Non-State Actors (PAANE), another important element of global funding for the sector, in addition to MASC and AGIR.

²⁵ Now called Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).

²⁶ Law 29/2009, of 29th of September 2009.

some extent to ensure that “sanctioning aggressors cannot be done in the name of family reconciliation”²⁷.

The second example refers to the process of passing the right to information law. Tabled in Parliament in 2005, this bill took nine years to secure its approval, which happened in 2014 (Lei 34/2014, de 31 de Dezembro)²⁸ with the significant participation of civil society organizations and the media. Since then, journalists, organizations and citizens have been demanding access to information of public interest held by various institutions, but access to it has often been hampered, especially by State institutions, because of their excessive bureaucracy or intention to hide certain facts (DW, 2020a)²⁹.

Finally, the third example is the coalition that formed around the Budget Monitoring Forum (FMO) to bring an action before the Constitutional Council with a view to invalidating the procedures for the contracting of debts, in 2013 and 2014, for the Mozambican Tuna Company (Ematum), ProÍndico and Mozambique Asset Management (MAM), thereby rendering these illicit debts void. This secured Judgment number 5/CC/2019 (Conselho Constitucional, 2019) and Judgment number 7/CC/2020 (Conselho Constitucional, 2020), which continue to receive special attention on the part of civil society organizations and the international community, building alliances and mechanisms to ensure that justice is done around this case of corruption which has tarnished the country’s image³⁰.

The civil society sustainability index (CSOSI) for 2019, published by MASC in 2020, mentions that the legal environment of Mozambican civil society organizations deteriorated throughout 2019, at the same time as they suffered threats and intimidation. In addition, there is a clear distinction in the treatment by the government of civil society organizations working in the area of governance in relation to those engaged in service delivery. In this regard, CSOSI underlines that “CSOs that work with governance and policies such as health, education and public spending are seen as opponents (...) and CSOs that work in service delivery and other compatible areas tend to be accepted by the government” (MASC, 2020). It is important to note that this distinction is not a unique feature of Mozambique.

²⁷ Intervention by member of the virtual observation panel, in the third session of the panel, Maputo, 27th of August 2020.

²⁸ Law 34/2014, of 31st of December.

²⁹ Note that in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, due to the intensification of the debate on issues such as misinformation and ‘fake news’, the risks and uncertainty regarding treatment and vaccines, in addition to the concealment of data by the authorities, the protection of the right to information has become a key element to ensure the credibility of information (see e.g., Pereira, C., 2020; DW, 2021).

³⁰ As will be discussed later in this *Cadernos IESE*, considering the history of corruption/mismanagement of public funds, in the context of COVID-19 civil society organizations invoking the right to information have continued to demand and advocate for transparency and accountability on the part of the government regarding the allocation and use of emergency funds and resources which were made available by the international community to respond to the dramatic effects of the pandemic in the country.

Indeed, in a recent article, Toepler *et al.* (2020) consider that in authoritarian contexts similar to that of Mozambique, the “claim making NGOs” are victims of government repression, whereas “service providing non-profits” and “loyal NGOs”, in general, receive government support (Toepler *et al.*, 2020).

But how, in the context of COVID-19, do civil society organizations in Mozambique navigate a context like this, marked by an ever greater closure of the civic space? This is what we will discuss in the following section. It is important to note that, according to the research report “Navigating Civic Space in a Time of COVID-19” (Anderson *et al.*, 2021), the pandemic shifted attention and civic energy to certain issues that stood out in a situation of global and national public health emergency. Thus, civic action, which was marked by the emergence of new actors and new coalitions, appears to focus on issues such as health and emergency aid, considering their relevance to controlling the spread and effects of the virus, beyond the issues of daily life that have been affected by governments’ responses to the pandemic, such as gender-based violence, livelihood challenges, education, and law and order. According to the authors, these repertoires provide signs of how civic actors’ navigation through the pandemic can allow them to maintain their existence in contexts of closed civic space. For example, in the case of Mozambique, the following comment from a member of a civil society organization in the city of Beira, Sofala province, reflects this trend:

In recent years, the government, I don't know if it's because of the financial difficulties it has had, adopted a measure of working more with civil society organizations. But this measure they took happened because of the lack of funds to implement their activities and they end up seeing civil society organizations as a support; we ended up carrying out some activities in partnership. They take advantage of civil society organizations, opening up the space, but in order to be able to fulfil their plans. And on the other hand, we, civil society organizations, are aware that the government is taking advantage of us, but we are also implementing our activities, because what is important, what we want, is the opening up of the government. The government opens up because it wants to implement activities, they don't have funds, and they end up being more friendly, always inviting organizations to take part. And we go there, we implement the activities even though we know that all this is happening because there is an interest behind it. Therefore, in recent years, especially 2020, there has been a lot of openness at the level of Sofala province. There was a much greater openness on the part of the government. There was space for us to work, but behind this opening is what I just mentioned a short time ago. But it's up to us to know how to take advantage of this opportunity and try to make the best use of it³¹.

³¹ Virtual interview with CA, member of a civil society organization in the city of Beira, Sofala province, 21st January 2021.

How are different actors responding to the COVID 19 pandemic affecting the civic space in Mozambique?

Based on what we have discussed above, it can be seen that the civic space in recent years in Mozambique has tended to deteriorate. In this context, the arrival of COVID-19, with the declaration of restrictive measures within the scope of the SE, only worsened the trend, insofar as the implementation of the measures has been accompanied by excesses by the government authorities, embodied in police brutality and in some way by hardening of the government's position in relation to civil society organizations working on issues related to governance and policies in different sectors.

From the virtual observation panel and interviews, it can be seen that civil society organizations seek to explore the possibilities that exist within the legal framework to develop their actions, despite the tendency towards closure of civic space. In this sense, COVID-19 has led civil society organizations to reinvent themselves, essentially, in four ways³².

Firstly, investing more in virtual media as a mechanism to continue to mark its presence in society, in a context characterized by restrictive measures that affect mass meetings or any other type of in-person activity. Indeed, since the declaration of the first SE, at the end of March 2020, many civil society organizations have started to organize online events in order to discuss issues related to their respective fields of action. Despite facing a set of limitations (e.g., lack of quality access to the internet and the impossibility of street demonstrations), the use of virtual platforms allowed civic actions to reach a wider audience – although not a very diverse one, at least from the point of view of educational levels and income, as participation depended on literacy in Portuguese and on internet access.

In this context, there was an intensification of online seminars (webinars) on different subjects, in certain cases, seeking to reflect on the impact of COVID 19³³. In addition, in some cases, WhatsApp groups were created, often set up by civil society organizations with the objective of circulating information on different ongoing activities relating to COVID-19. But, as mentioned above, the online intervention modality also brought with it many limitations in the activities of civil society organizations. In this regard, one of the panel mem-

³² The issues raised in this section are limited to portraying the discussion of research participants around the responses of civil society organizations and the media, leaving intentionally aside other important aspects of civic space such as the protests of the business community through the "Beira anti-kidnapping Movement", and the grievances of "chapeiros" (transport providers) around the lack of compensation for the restrictions on the number of passengers they could carry, besides the criticism expressed by citizens themselves in social media, as well as informal actions of solidarity and mutual support.

³³ For example, IESE is one of the organizations that has held virtual debates to analyze the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 in the country (see here: <https://www.iese.ac.mz/webinars-iese-gravacoes/>).

bers noted:

I would look first at the advocacy actions initiated by civil society organizations. It is true that, before COVID-19, there was some closure [of the civic space]. But we had other spaces for us to be able to claim our rights as civil society organizations and develop concrete actions, such as marches, consultation meetings and discussions that now in the COVID-19 era, we cannot do. Just see what kind of meetings are being held through communication and information technologies³⁴. And in terms of advocacy, a lot of weight is lost when we have to develop, trigger actions using simply information technologies. In advocacy strategies, the presence, the physical participation, as shock movements towards the situations that we want to be changed, makes a great difference. I believe that if we look at the current context and look at the dynamics of civil society organizations themselves, they are also limited because there are no longer spaces for discussion, there are no longer spaces for people to go out and face this. And that also meant that, in the current context, organizations had to review what their initial planning was. We did not expect that the COVID-19 situation could reach the proportions that it is now reaching day after day³⁵.

Second, civil society organizations use service delivery activities as an entry point for actions more linked to governance issues. In fact, in the context of COVID-19, due to the closure of civic space, activities related to governance have become difficult to implement compared to those related to the provision of services, such as awareness raising and distribution of masks, disinfectants, buckets, etc. Many civil society organizations, since the first moments of the pandemic in the country, have been involved in service provision activities, with the status of “government partners”, especially those that have been more strictly independent and vocally critical of the government in the past and that have received significant support from donors in terms of financial resources to carry out their missions without being subject to major disruptions. This is the case of the MASC Foundation, CIP, the Civil Society Learning and Capacity Development Center (CESC) and the Women’s Forum, just to mention a few examples. The target groups of these actions have been low-income population groups who have experienced difficulties in accessing the means of infection prevention, particularly masks and disinfectant. Some of these organizations, based in Maputo, managed to extend their actions to rural areas at the provincial level, as was the case for the MASC Foundation and CESC. But at the provincial level, there have also been service delivery initiatives carried out by local civil society organizations, such as the Network of Women’s Associations of Zambezia (NAFEZA), the National Pressure for Human Rights (PNDH) in Sofala, and in Cabo Delgado, the Diocese of Pemba and the Women, Law and

³⁴ See for instance, the Facebook pages of FMO (@FMO.Mozambique); *Observatório do Meio Rural (ORM)* - "@OMRMZ.ORG", *Centro para a Democracia e Desenvolvimento (CDD)* - "@CDDMoz"; *Centro de Estudos Africanos (CEA)* - "@CeaUem"; *Instituto Eleitoral para a Democracia Sustentável em África – Moçambique (MISA Moçambique)* - "@EisaMocambique", as some examples classified in the event catalogue.

³⁵ Intervention by member of the virtual observation panel, at the second session of the panel, Maputo, 30th of July 2020.

Development Association (MULEIDE).

Thanks to this status of “government partners”, in the provision of services for the prevention of COVID-19, some of the civil society organizations manage to go further, developing activities to monitor government action, thus navigating within a civic space marked by major constraints. This was the case, for example, of CESC, which carried out monitoring of secondary schools in six provinces in order to assess the degree of preparation of each school, in terms of preventive measures, for returning to school, after the interruption decreed under the SE, at the end of March 2020 (FMO, 2020a). To illustrate the way in which civil society organizations use service delivery as a gateway, one of the participants in one of the sessions of the virtual observation panel clarified:

I have noticed that organizations are doing a kind of “win-win”, doing the following: we intervene a little in this Covid issue, we support government authorities so that we can have space on the ground to do our actions, which are linked to the mandate of each of the organizations, that is, we support with kits for Covid, we support with group communication. At MISAU [the Ministry of Health], I have seen many CSOs that are part of and support with ideas, pamphlets, initiatives to combat Covid. And they end up creating free mini-access to do their actions. It is an entry point because it is not easy. Everything is now closed. Authorizations are not given because of Covid. Organizations cannot carry out their actions because the country is trying to resolve Covid, and extreme violence. So it was really closed. So, the organizations created this intervention strategy, partly in support of the government, to fight Covid, but also to have a little space to intervene in the field as if it had a partnership with the government. I think it's working like this³⁶.

But, at the same time, the provision of services in the context of COVID-19 allows civil society organizations, whether at the level of the country's capital or locally, to secure access to financial resources for their activities, since the pandemic has been prioritized in the agenda of many of the cooperation partners that finance civil society.

Third, civil society organizations are able to navigate the civic space by reinventing the mechanisms for monitoring public funds. Three weeks after the declaration of the first SE in April 2020, through the MEF, the government of Mozambique presented its needs to the international community in the context of combating COVID-19. The official announced value was USD 700 million – a sum considered by many to be exorbitant for the country's real needs (DW, 2020b). This was distributed as follows: USD 100 million for the health sector for the purpose of purchasing protective and treatment equipment, including ventilators; USD 200 million for the State Budget to offset the loss of revenue due to the

³⁶ Intervention by member of the virtual observation panel, at the fifth session of the panel, Maputo, 29th of October 2020.

downward revision of GDP growth from 4% to 2.2%; USD 240 million for the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Action (MGCAS)/INAS, to be used to increase the number of assisted families from 592,179 to 1,695,004; and USD 160 million for the MGCAS/INAS and municipalities for the purpose of financing micro-enterprises, with a ceiling of USD 200 per business, to be paid back over six months (see MEF, 2020).

The MEF, in its third report on the status of the partners' commitments under COVID-19, states that, by November 2020, the government had received USD 492,732,055, or about 70% of the USD 700 million initially requested. It is important to note that the financial resources disbursed include the loan of USD 306 million granted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to help Mozambique meet urgent balance of payments and fiscal needs arising from COVID-19 pandemic.

The issue of transparency in the management of public funds has been a major concern for civil society organizations, particularly those working in the area of governance who have come together in the FMO, such as CDD, CESC and CIP. As noted above, in the context of the scandal over debts that were illegally contracted with the approval of the State in 2013 and 2014, the FMO played an extremely important role in bringing, in 2017 and 2019, an action before the Constitutional Council with the aim of declaring null and void the acts originating the contracting of the debts of Ematum, ProÍndico and MAM. In response to COVID-19, the FMO, building on past experiences of monitoring government action, launched an initiative entitled "Responding to COVID-19 with Correct Accounts" with the aim of ensuring transparency and consistency in the management of public funds. In its press release, the FMO describes monitoring COVID-19 funds as an act of citizenship, and emphasises that "the participation of civil society in monitoring the response to Covid-19 is essential not only for these measures adopted by the IMF to be effective, but also to stimulate an environment of good governance, vital for improving confidence between the Government and cooperation partners" (FMO, 2020b: 2). But, how are funds being monitored?

The FMO's monitoring work for COVID-19 funds essentially consists of monitoring procurement processes and tracking expenses allocated to provinces and districts for works and service provision in different sectors, with emphasis on education, health, social protection, water and sanitation (FMO, 2020a). In this context, civil society monitors the accounts of the MISAU, the way the resources linked to COVID-19 have been spent and the way work has been awarded to contractors involved in the rehabilitation of school infrastructure in the context of the return to the classroom. The findings produced on the ground are compiled into reports, presented and discussed with the participation of government representatives, at the level of the ministries involved. In the December 2020 report, for example,

the FMO writes the following:

In analysing the accounts of the Ministry of Health (MISAU), the FMO found that 67% (...) of the amount allocated to this sector up to 31 October was spent at the central level; 31.4% (...) was transferred to the provinces; 0.8% (...) went to the National Health Institute and 0.7% (...) to the Central Hospital of Maputo (HCM). With about 38 million metical, Tete is the province that received the most funds from MISAU, followed by Nampula (27 million metical) and Gaza (24,4 million). Inhambane with 8.8 million, and Zambézia with 8,1 million metical are the provinces that received the least funds from MISAU (...). In general, just over 80% of funds allocated to the provinces were spent on food and accommodation expenses for health professionals. For example, the financial resources allocated to the provinces of Nampula and Maputo were spent entirely on food expenses and accommodation (FMO, 2020a: 4).

What is interesting in the process of monitoring COVID-19 funds is the fact that civil society is able to confront the government with the findings produced. Indeed, when presenting the results of the monitoring report in December 2020, the representative of MISAU, for example, responded to the civil society findings in the following terms:

It is correct to say that 60% of the budget was allocated to the central level of MISAU. The justification is that purchases of personal protective equipment, tests and medicines are centralized, because they are international tenders. The fund is spent centrally, but is used for the 1,600 health units in the National Health System. As for the allocation of funds to the provinces, we take into account the reality that existed before the Covid-19 pandemic. Provinces received less money than others because they had infrastructure in place or did not need major interventions. They say that most of the money transferred to the provinces was spent on food and accommodation expenses for health professionals. It is necessary to realize that the professionals assigned to fight Covid-19 had to be followed up, including visits. The personnel who worked in the isolation centres could not return home after work (FMO, 2020a: 4).

Fourthly, there is another group of civil society organizations, particularly those linked to the defence of press freedom or even to safeguarding justice in general, which, in the context of COVID-19, monitor cases of violations of individual and collective freedoms. With regard to press freedom protection actions, one of the members of the virtual observation panel emphasized that:

At the end of the day, we work in a complicated context. The context is an opportunity to reinvent ourselves. The closure of civic spaces should be used in the context of a rhetoric of claiming spaces. In the previous meetings, we reported what is happening: the tendency towards greater authoritarianism... for us, as "ORGANIZATION B" it has been difficult, because we work on this issue of responding to violations of freedoms of press and expression and also on the issue of security... There is this challenge of thinking about the safety of

*our beneficiaries and ourselves. There are many uncertainties about tomorrow*³⁷.

Civil society organizations do not navigate the civic space across the entirety of Mozambique's national territory in the same way. In fact, as we mentioned above, there are geographical variations regarding the closure of civic space, in the sense that the further away from the country's capital and urban centres one is, the more closed the space becomes and, because of that, the more difficult to navigate it is. Indeed, civil society organizations based in the provinces are unable to explore the possibilities afforded by the legal framework in the same way as those organizations based in Maputo. It should be noted that although the country's new decentralization framework is an important mechanism to expand participation locally, government control over civic space continues to be one of the greatest obstacles to the action of civil society actors.

In the context of COVID-19, although the use of virtual media also occurs in the provinces, it is relatively infrequent compared to that made by organizations based in Maputo, as organizations based in the provinces make less use of virtual platforms for activism purposes than their counterparts based in Maputo. In part, this results from the limited financial, material and human resources available to civil society at provincial level. As mentioned by an interviewee from the city of Quelimane, in the central region of Mozambique:

*...A multinational and regional movement of debates started to happen, in practice limited to webinars. Not all people have the ability to be able to attend. So, it means a large part of the reflections and discussions start from the principle that only people who are within that environment can follow the debates. So, not everyone has the ability to have a computer, to have internet available. So, this somewhat obscures participation and I believe that there is a certain narrowing of the debates and reflections*³⁸...

With regard to service delivery, civil society organizations in the provinces are also involved as "government partners". However, because of the scarcity of resources, in part because of the barriers that funding agencies impose on 'less formalized and professionalized' structures, they often become involved in association with Maputo-based organizations in a partnership that exacerbates the logic of service provision by local organizations (operating at provincial and district levels) to those based in Maputo. In practice, a power relationship is structured that reflects and reproduces the regional asymmetries and dependence relations of local civil society (based in provinces and districts) in relation to civil society organisations based in Maputo. An interviewee from the city of Beira, in the central region of Mozambique, put this in the following terms:

³⁷ Intervention by member of the virtual observation panel, at the fifth session of the panel, Maputo, 29th of October 2020.

³⁸ Virtual interview on 21st of January 2021 with CQ, member of feminist organization in Zambézia.

... to design a project from Maputo without a deep knowledge of the needs of the province means that this project, a priori, may be unsuccessful. Likewise, to design a project at the Maputo level without the organization which is based here [at the local level], and without coming to the local level, which is the province, and making a partnership and implementing a project together, I also think it is a failure. It would be good for those Maputo organizations to always have a national organization here, as a focal point. I think that is what is missing³⁹.

For example, in the context of COVID-19, there was a criticism among interviewees related to the fact that funding for health promotion campaigns at the local level was exclusively oriented towards awareness and prevention of COVID-19, leaving aside more widely-prevalent diseases, as well as the socio-cultural and linguistic issues for the involvement of local people in implementation. According to one of the interviewees from the province of Nampula, this signals a lack of knowledge of the local social and cultural context, which to some extent leads to the failure of interventions that aim to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19.

The monitoring of COVID-19 funds remains very centralized, in the sense that it is practically nonexistent in the provinces. In fact, the FMO, the platform that brings together civil society organizations active in monitoring COVID-19 funds, itself does not even have a single member organization that is based in the provinces. This, again, shows how civil society reproduces regional asymmetries and imbalances.

When looking at the way in which civil society organizations navigate the civic space within the scope of COVID-19 in Mozambique, it appears that the dynamics are very similar to those found in the literature (Brechenmacher, Youngs & Carothers, 2020; Anderson *et al.*, 2021), although with some particularities, which refer to the specificities of the Mozambican context described above. What implications do the dynamics of the civic space described above have for governance in Mozambique? This is what we will discuss after showing three case studies on how civil society actors are navigating in a time of COVID-19 pandemic.

³⁹ Virtual interview on 22nd of January 2021 with HC, member of civil society organization representing Sofala, Tete, Manica and Zambézia.

Three case studies on how civil society organizations are navigating during COVID-19

Case Study 1: Action Aid Mozambique, seeking innovative strategies for civic action⁴⁰

Action Aid International was established in Mozambique in 1988 as a UK delegation in order to respond to emergency situations and provide basic services in the country. When their activities began, Mozambique had been plunged into a deep economic crisis, civil war and natural disasters and, consequently, the government tried to find strategic partnerships at the international level to respond. It became one of the government's main development partners, through a variety of interventions to assist populations in emergencies, fight poverty and promote human rights. Some 25 years later, in 2012, it became ActionAid Mozambique Association (AAMoz), a national non-governmental organization. Presently, AAMoz gives priority to actions to promote the rights to (i) education and a violence-free environment and (ii) fair resource collection and democratic governance. The organization argues that it is vital that women, girls and young people have the knowledge, resources, power and resilience to be able to develop actions that allow them to enjoy a life with dignity.

In March 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit Mozambique, AAMoz was in the middle of implementing its 2018-2023 national strategy, aiming to strengthen the capacities of organizations and movements of people in situations of poverty and exclusion in the country, with a particular emphasis on the empowerment of their target groups in terms both of income and of active participation in spaces for dialogue. COVID-19 imposed limitations and challenges for the ability of AAMoz to conduct field activities and group meetings, for example. Such activities have become less and less successful as a result of the of situation calamity that the country has been in since April 2020.

An example of this is the postponement of the courses that had been delivered in partnership with the Ministry of State Administration and Public Service (MAEFP)⁴¹ to train

⁴⁰ This case study was prepared using two documents from Action Aid Mozambique, namely the National Strategy 2018-2023 and the Profile of Action Aid Mozambique 2018, in addition to a virtual interview with MC, a member of ActionAid Mozambique.

⁴¹ It should be noted that, depending on the type of collaboration, the government has not always cooperated with AAMoz, especially when it comes to demanding accountability. Despite this, as indicated by the interviewee, it is important not to give up on maintaining a positive relationship of dialogue, because "we need to be connected and coordinated with the government". The interviewee went on to answer a criticism that has been made of the kind of activism that AAMoz practices in its relationship with the government, noting that AAMoz is considered by some

members of the district platforms and civil society associations, government officials from provincial and district secretariats and public sector actors – specifically in the fields of education, finance and agriculture – regarding the “new decentralization package”⁴² which came into effect in the country after the general election held in 2019. A member of AAMoz mentioned the following in an interview:

Because of COVID, we are still analysing how this training will be done. Because our plan last year was to hold regional meetings [by now]; one for the central zone and another for the north zone in order to reach a larger number of people. At the time, we thought that we could go up to 70 [participants]. But we have to review this. So, there is a need for new spaces (Interview on 20th of January 2021 with MC, member of AAMoz).

As a consequence, COVID-19 led the members of AAMoz to initiate changes to their 2021 plan of action, with the aim of ensuring that activities such as training, monitoring visits and planning meetings could proceed smoothly in the regions where there are interventions under way, namely in the provinces of Cabo Delgado, Niassa, Nampula, Zambézia, Tete, Sofala, Inhambane, Gaza and Maputo. Members recognize that it is important, for example, to reinvent themselves in the sense of finding new strategies for civic action, increasingly favouring the use of information and communication technologies:

(...) We are still in the process of reinvention. When we had this situation [COVID-19], we chose to bet on the use of digital channels, such as webinars. We have a Microsoft Teams program that we have used for our meetings with partners and everything in between. So, for 2021, we will have to apply these means of communication again (...). Of course we will have to have one or other civic meeting [in person], but then we have to have other basic requirements to avoid contamination and, of course, try to obey what is a government directive. So, the only alternative we have so far was to bet more on online meetings. But this is more between us and our partners. However, there are still some that it is not possible to hold online and which continue to happen physically. They manage to be there. We have, for example, activities that we cannot do online. We have something that takes place on the ground. It is clear that the care here is doubled so in order to not give space for contamination. Even with young peo-

opinion-makers as pro-government; but stating that AAMoz is an organization for dialogue and having its own position regarding any issue under discussion.”

⁴² This legal instrument makes it possible to deconcentrate or transfer power from the central to the local level, as well as to expand citizen participation in governance processes from the local level. As reported in the country assessment report, some authors indicate the danger of this instrument being used to reinforce “democratic centralism” by the ruling party. Hence the AAMoz’s action focuses on strengthening spaces for participation and dialogue at the local level to avoid that they are co-opted.

ple, we have supported a lot on the issue of participation, we have also invested a lot in digital communication. There is a website. I don't know if you already heard about that. It is called Kuvonelela [mainly used to denounce cases of denying access to public information, of corruption and of deprivation of human rights in general]. Last year [2020] we had to do an update on it. It was created in 2017 and went dormant and we had to reactivate it. We have introduced more fields of action (Interview on 20th of January 2021 with MC, member of AAMoz).

Thus, AAMoz expects that their interventions in civic spaces may result in a mixed model, where not only there are possibilities to meet people face-to-face, but also to open up spaces for online participation, recognizing that, now, both ways of taking action are coming together in navigating a new way of being.

*Case Study 2 - The Catholic Church in Pemba: "we are with those who are suffering"*⁴³

Among the different actors participating in the process of State building in Mozambique, the Catholic Church is one of the most important, given its spiritual, charitable and welfare functions. Its power to influence the behaviour of individuals and groups in society from a Christian perspective, advising them, monitoring their social relations and seeking to protect the most defenceless, is almost beyond question. With a centuries-old presence in Mozambique, including a more recent relationship with the independent Mozambican State since 1975, the Catholic Church has been responding to various challenges in the national context. As an example, we present the role of one of the Catholic Church's dioceses in Mozambique in its relationship with the State from the perspective of the Church itself, over the past three years. This is the Diocese of Pemba in Cabo Delgado.

The Diocese of Pemba has faced three main challenges since 2017. The first one, which emerged before the COVID-19 pandemic hit the country, concerns the humanitarian crisis resulting from the attacks perpetrated by the armed group known as "Al-Shabaab". The Catholic Church has taken on the mission of bringing this phenomenon of war to the world's attention and, in particular, putting pressure on the government to bring an end to it. The Catholic Church took on the issue with great responsibility and directness, sometimes causing tensions in its relationship with the State. For example, the former Bishop of Pemba, Luís Lisboa, has suffered threats and verbal attacks from some conservative sectors of the ruling party. However, in a very calm way, the Catholic Church has responded to the

⁴³ This case study is based on a virtual interview with FK, member of Rádio Sem Fronteiras, Diocese of Pemba.

attempt to silence its voice, expressing interest in dialogue and understanding with the government. In this specific case, the President of the Republic of Mozambique, Felipe Jacinto Nyusi, had a courtesy meeting in Pemba with Bishop Luís Lisboa, as a way of dealing with the existing tension between both institutions. At that meeting, the Bishop mentioned that the role of the Church is solely to defend the rights of the excluded, the people, stating that a response from the Head of State was urgently required to alleviate the suffering of the people, as can be seen in the following interview excerpt:

(...) There came a time when the President of the Republic had to meet with the Bishop... because, certainly, if you do not know the role of the Church, you may think it is an affront. So, firstly, you have to understand what the role of the Church is and what the Church wants to achieve when it criticizes something, when it suggests something. It is for public benefit, it is for the good. And those who do not understand this can misinterpret ... The Bishop, as the representative of the local Church, took the initiative to meet the President to say 'look, I am not here to take the place of the government, I am not here to challenge, I am not here to create an affront. I am here to help. I am here because I suffer with the people'. So, it was an initiative welcomed by the President and it was a very fraternal meeting, a meeting that I believe that, as the door was closed, both left there happy (Interview on 29th January 2021 with FK, member of Rádio Sem Fronteiras, Diocese of Pemba).

It should be noted that the meeting between the Catholic Church and the government received positive support and appreciation from various segments of society, nationally and internationally; this after President Nyusi recognized the important role of the Catholic Church and other social actors in responding to the humanitarian crisis affecting Cabo Delgado. The campaign against the Bishop of Pemba led Pope Francis to send a message of comfort, resilience and encouragement for the solidarity that the Catholic Church has been providing in a region that has been heavily affected by armed violence and, consequently, has been facing a situation of humanitarian crisis.

Unlike what happens when the Catholic Church openly criticizes the government for violating human rights in general, its charitable actions are almost always well received by government authorities, among other actors, as noted in the interview:

As it is not always a bed of roses, because sometimes we know that it is a job that perhaps the government would do, sometimes not all of this is seen in a positive light. But as Caritas we never had any problems. Only when the time comes to speak, to denounce the violation of human rights, to denounce that, I believe that there have been these clashes [with the government]. But we know the danger we are in. So, there

is also no reason to regret it so much, because after all we are fighting for the good of the people... (Interview on 29th of January 2021 with FK, member of Rádio Sem Fronteiras, Diocese of Pemba).

The support of the Catholic Church in Cabo Delgado, in fact, has been observed in relation to two other challenges highlighted in the country's recent history. On the one hand, the Catholic Church has been helpful in providing humanitarian assistance in response to tropical cyclone Kenneth which, in late April 2019, intensely affected this northern province of the country, and, just as the war has done, caused deaths, injuries and the displacement of people to safer places such as camps and resettlement sites. On the other hand, with the evolution of COVID-19 pandemic in the country, the Catholic Church also started to pay special attention to the pandemic, by carrying out sensitization activities. This has involved supporting government authorities in spreading official messaging about how to prevent the disease through the Church's own channels, such as masses, meetings, local radio stations, social media and its website⁴⁴.

The Catholic Church does not do its charity work alone. It collaborates with other partners, to whom it is also accountable. For example, the Caritas Diocesana of Pemba, a social department of the Church, has been trusted by partners such as the UN, World Food Program (WFP), International Organization for Migration (IOM), WHO, civil society organizations and informal groups, in addition to other sectors of the Church itself, to act as an intermediary in emergency response or social assistance actions, channelling the aid received to people in need, whether in cash or in kind or even investing resources in public goods. For example, it is currently managing support provided by Pope Francis for the construction of two health centres in the districts of Chiure and Montepuez in Cabo Delgado.

Faced with the challenges outlined above, the Diocese of Pemba and the Catholic Church in general have intensified their commitment to holding face-to-face reflection meetings (respecting the guidelines of the government and health authorities) and discussions on digital platforms on strategies to continue to alleviate the suffering of the population, protecting "the excluded". They have launched the following appeal to society: "do not get tired of Cabo Delgado... [since] all these sufferings [wars, cyclones, diseases], are not God's punishment. They are phenomena [of the world]."

⁴⁴ It should be noted that the first significant outbreak of coronavirus infection outside the capital, Maputo, began in Cabo Delgado, in a camp run by a multinational that is in the process of exploiting gas and oil, located in the district of Palma just under 400 kilometres north of Pemba, the provincial capital.

Case Study 3: MASC Foundation, thinking outside the box⁴⁵

COVID-19 hit Mozambique at a time when the Civil Society Support Mechanism Foundation (MASC Foundation), initially created in 2007 through a project to promote good governance and an equitable, fair and inclusive development process in the country, was due to start a new phase of social intervention for a period of 10 years (2020-2030), through a capacity building programme for civil society organizations and vulnerable communities entitled the “URITHI Program”⁴⁶. This programme introduces three main approaches which the organization considered to be innovative in the Mozambican civil society sector. The first is the transformation of non-profit civil society organizations, formal and informal non-profit groups, into a model of cooperatives and social enterprises, based on the principle that the social capital of vulnerable communities can be strengthened by investing in the development of their economic capacities, in addition to making organizations self-sustainable. The second approach is designed to produce long-term results in communities, assuming that changes need time, patience and permanent investment, especially in the most remote areas where government and other programmes are not present. The third approach is based on building trust and involvement of communities and local authorities, in which ownership of their knowledge is built by the organization and formal and informal groups in the development of the capacities needed to break the existing cycle of poverty in the country.

During the first year of implementation of its new strategy, 2020, in addition to the financial and technical support it provided to the civil society sector, MASC Foundation also provided support to local communities, creating savings groups and civic incubators in three provinces of the country (Cabo Delgado and Niassa, in the northern region; and Gaza, in the southern region). These instruments of civic participation aim to mobilize, bring together and empower women and young people, respectively, on the basis of their experiences and interests, with the overarching goal of leading them to intervene actively in the local governance process, in addition to encouraging them to be entrepreneurs. MASC Foundation has noticed interest in and uptake of thematic groups for participation by communities at local level, because, in their absence, they almost always feel excluded from local governance processes. At the same time, MASC Foundation has observed inte-

⁴⁵ This case study is based on interviews with MM, MP and AM, consultants of MASC Foundation. The MASC Foundation Strategic Plan (2020-2030) and a project report of the organization, entitled “Community mobilization and awareness for resilience to Covid-19” were also used.

⁴⁶ Meaning “legacy” in Swahili, the program favours a multisectoral approach. The interventions result from the needs determined by the national, local and international context and incorporate five programmatic pillars, namely democratic governance, peace-building and social cohesion, improved access to basic services, rural livelihoods, resilience and income generation and institutional development of MASC Foundation itself.

rest and openness on the part of government authorities in collaborating with these local thematic groups:

I'll give you an example. At the level of the province of Niassa, last year we held an event with the savings groups where women were able to present their demands and the gains they had with the adoption of the initiative of MASC Foundation. The President of the Municipal Council, President of the Municipal Assembly and the directors of the district services (health, education and economic activities and Infrastructure) were all present there. For the women, it was an important moment of interaction with the local government (for the first time for them) where they were able to present their concerns for themselves. And it was so interesting that the President of the Municipal Assembly himself said that "you have a seat in the Municipal Assembly to come and discuss your problems, at least we will understand directly from you what is happening, and your concerns" (Interview on 26th of January 2021 with MM, consultant at MASC Foundation).

So, MASC Foundation takes into account the importance of having a good relationship with the government for the implementation of any civil society initiative, as can be observed in this excerpt:

...We have been talking to the government about what we are doing, what we want, what is our vision, what we want to achieve and what mechanisms we are going to apply. And we try to bring the local government closer to our beneficiaries so that they can follow, interact and see the changes that are happening... I am focusing perhaps on Niassa and Cabo Delgado, because is where we started, but Gaza is also having good results... Recently, more at the end of the year [2020], we launched the civic incubator there and the representative of the Governor was present and made a point of showing the need for a movement like that ... The Permanent Secretary [representative of the State] was also present at the launch to show that they are interested in supporting youth initiatives (Interview on 26th of January 2021 with MM, consultant at the MASC Foundation).

In addition, the same interviewee argued that:

We want to show that there are other ways of doing it and that they can contribute positively to development which, at the end of the day, is what we want; to support the improvement of people's lives and stimulate development ... which does not mean that when there is a need to present critical elements, we do not do it. But ...contributing to the solution of the problem that we are going to identify (Interview on 26th of

January 2021 with MM, consultant at the MASC Foundation).

MASC Foundation took up COVID-19 as a cross-cutting issue in its interventions. The actions on the ground continued throughout 2020 without major problems, respecting the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, such as the reduction of the number of participants for the meetings of the thematic groups, the use of masks and hand-washing. It also developed a project to mobilize and raise awareness among its intervention partners at the local level and the population in general about the knowledge, attitudes and practices in need to mitigate the spread of the pandemic. During the interventions, protective masks, soap and information were also delivered to the public, as part of a complementary project.

Digital platforms have become an important resource to arouse the attention and interest of their local partners about the focus of the interventions, as can be seen from an event held in 2020:

We managed to bring the Governor of Cabo Delgado and his entourage to interact directly with the donors, through a webinar and later individual meetings, and it was very interesting. The Cabo Delgado government itself later said that it had secured support and the opening of doors to obtain financing for some of its interventions (Interview on 26th of January 2021 with MM, consultant at the MASC Foundation).

For MASC Foundation, COVID-19 represents a major challenge for the way it carries out its actions. However, the present context is also an opportunity to “think outside the box”, that is, to innovate and develop strategies to carry out activities differently, because in many cases the “traditional ones are no longer useful”.

What are the medium and long term implications for governance in Mozambique?

The deterioration of the civic space has medium and long-term implications for governance in Mozambique. Based on the discussions that took place in the sessions of the virtual observation panel, on the baseline assessment (Pereira, C. & Forquilha, 2020) and on the semi-structured interviews, three major implications can be highlighted.

The first implication is the risk of increasing political inequality. Indeed, although Mozambique is formally a democracy, the closure of the civic space constrains individual and collective freedoms and affects access to mechanisms for political participation, such as

elections, strikes, demonstrations, etc. (McAllister & White, 2009). In this context, the closure of civic space is accompanied by the use of police repression by the authorities and, in general, groups connected to the political opposition are less likely to participate and, consequently, to influence the governance process. Electoral processes in the past ten years in Mozambique have shown the difficulty that certain groups have to carry out a simple electoral campaign in certain regions of the country or hold simple peaceful marches in the face of fear, intimidation and political intolerance. Associated with this, there is a risk of an increase in political violence.

Furthermore, authoritarian drift can lead to attempts to adjust the legal instruments in force with a view to creating even greater constraints on civic space. In fact, the process of revising the current associations law (Lei 8/91, de 18 de Julho) is an example of this. In this regard, one of the participants in the virtual observation panel mentioned:

The issue of limiting and prohibiting marches and campaigns on public roads. This does not come from today. COVID is being used today as a justification. So, there is a serious need to look at the issue of democracy in the country and especially the participation of civil society. If we as civil society are not really coordinated, united and strong to advocate for our space, we are in danger of disappearing. Since 2008, the Law on Associations has been under review. And there is a tendency to restrict even more, to control even more what is the space of participation of civil society ...

So, we really need to engage. Mainly in the process of revising the Law of Associations. Otherwise, the Assembly will pass a new law that will cut off our legs ... if we look at the past two years, I don't know if there were any civil society groups that were authorized to march, peacefully, in public. They always find ways to cancel and justify not doing it. This topic of dialogue spaces is serious⁴⁷.

The second implication, which stems from the first, is the risk of segmentation and weakening of civil society. Toepfer *et al.* (2020), talking about authoritarian contexts, show that while some civil society organizations are co-opted and enjoy government support, others are repressed. Thus, it is difficult for civil society organizations to unite and mobilize around common causes in order to influence government processes. This is further exacerbated by the financing difficulties faced by the vast majority of civil society organizations. In recent years, Mozambican civil society has tended to segment itself more and more and with an internal struggle to seek 'protagonismo' (visible leadership), which ends up weakening its activism. In the fifth session of the virtual observation panel, one of the panel members mentioned:

⁴⁷ Intervention by member of the virtual observation panel, at the sixth session of the panel, Maputo, 26th of November 2020.

I will bring the experience of "ORGANIZATION C". With regard to more or less structured interventions within civil society, it is an old problem. In the context of COVID, "ORGANIZATION C" created a civil society group, a civil society initiative to support the government in combating COVID. This was circulated. The lesson learned is that unfortunately the group lasted a short time before we even had a joint intervention. We realize that there is a struggle for 'protagonismo' in all of this. Each civil society organization wants to show its relevant role in this activity in relation to COVID-19. Yes, that is important. But when we forget that the focus is on being able to support and not do it individually, we end up having unstructured initiatives. For example, several organizations have provided masks. And, probably, they offered masks in the same places because we were not structured ... It is because of the struggle for 'protagonismo' within civil society. Some organizations want to be more visible than others. The question of who is going to talk to the funders, who is looking for funding to support these initiatives, whether the funding will be in one organization and not in others where there is no trust in that organization, depending on the history of each one; it even leads to very personal questions in which the person A, from organization A, does not get along very well with the person B, from organization B. So, these actions all undermine the actions of civil society organizations. There are organizations that simply have already decided not to enter into consortium-type initiatives and make their own interventions without deviating from the focus they intend to follow⁴⁸.

In this context, the closure of the civic space has direct implications not only for the development of Mozambican civil society, but also for the development and quality of democracy itself. For example, although in recent years there has been a growth in the use of online space such as Facebook and other platforms for holding virtual meetings as well as a greater extension of civic action through traditional media (radio, television and newspaper), there is a strong limitation on the use of these spaces for action in defence of freedoms, due to the emergence of a climate of fear and violence against citizens and journalists who use these platforms to publicly debate issues related to the status quo. It is no coincidence that, in recent years, Mozambique has been falling in its Democracy Index score. As we mentioned above, one of the international institutions that compiles a Democracy Index has concluded that the country has moved from a 'hybrid regime' to an 'authoritarian regime' (The Economist, 2019).

⁴⁸ Intervention by member of the virtual observation panel, at the fifth session of the panel, Maputo, 29th of October 2020.

Conclusion

The declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic by the WHO, in March 2020, took place in a complex context marked by enormous political, economic and social challenges. In Mozambique, the arrival of COVID-19 aggravated existing challenges for the functioning of civic space. Indeed, the discussions carried out in the context of the virtual observation panel and the in-depth interviews, as well as the events catalogue compiled by the research project on “Navigating Civic Space in a Time of COVID-19”, show that in recent years, civic space in Mozambique has been characterised by a deteriorating trend and that COVID-19 has only intensified this trend.

Despite this deteriorating trend, civil society organizations have sought to explore existing spaces, within the legal framework, which they have been navigating in different ways. First, they invest in virtual media, organizing online events as a way to continue their activism. Second, civil society organizations use service delivery as an entry point for actions linked to the area of governance. Third, civil society organizations have reinvented the mechanisms for monitoring public funds, with a new emphasis on COVID-19 funds. Finally, some of them also monitor respect for individual and collective freedoms, in the context of the implementation of the restrictive measures of the COVID-19 State of Emergency.

However, the closure of the civic space has implications for medium and long-term governance. Based on the semi-structured interviews and the discussions in the sessions of the virtual observation panel as well as media observation, two implications can be mentioned. The first implication is the increased risk of political inequalities, translated into unequal access to the mechanisms of constitutionally enshrined political participation, namely elections, marches, protests, strikes, etc. The second implication, which stems from the first, is the risk of segmentation and weakening of civil society, a fact that compromises the quality and development of democracy. Indeed, it is important to deepen the reflection among civil society organizations and, above all, among donors on strategies to prevent mechanisms for the allocation of emergency funds in contexts such as COVID-19 pandemic from leading to an intensification of the processes of competition and segmentation among these actors, whose role is so relevant for the health of civic space and for democracy itself.

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IESE é uma organização moçambicana independente e sem fins lucrativos, que realiza e promove investigação científica interdisciplinar sobre problemáticas do desenvolvimento social e económico em Moçambique e na África Austral.

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