

# HUNGER REVOLTS AND CITIZEN STRIKES: POPULAR PROTESTS IN MOZAMBIQUE, 2008-2012

Luís de Brito, Egídio Chaimite, Crescêncio Pereira, Lúcio Posse,  
Michael Sambo and Alex Shankland  
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**FOOD RIOTS  
&  
FOOD RIGHTS**





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**Caption:** Residents of Maputo rush to buy bread as wheat runs short and food prices rise in Mozambique in May 2008 (Photo: ILRI/Mann)

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# ABOUT THIS WORKING PAPER SERIES

The green revolution and the global integration of food markets were supposed to relegate scarcity to the annals of history. So why did thousands of people in dozens of countries take to the streets when world food prices spiked in 2008 and 2011? Are food riots the surest route to securing the right to food in the twenty-first century? We know that historically, food riots marked moments of crisis in the adjustment to more market-oriented or capitalist food and economic systems. Food riots featured as part of a politics of provisions that helped hold public authorities to account for protecting people during price spikes or shortages.

This research project interrogated this contemporary moment of historical rupture in the global food system through comparative analysis of Bangladesh, India, Kenya and Mozambique in the period 2007–12. This was a period of intensely volatile food prices as well as unusual levels of food-related popular mobilisation – unruly political events like riots but also more organised action like the Right to Food movement in India. During the global food crisis of 2007–8 alone, food riots (or subsistence protests) were reported in 30 countries. In many, including the four in our study, the food crisis triggered changes in domestic food security arrangements.

Working with multiple methods and at different levels with media content, with activists and protesters, and with policy and political elites, this research asked: What motivated people to mobilise around food? And did popular mobilisation effect or influence such changes?

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# 1. RESEARCH, PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY

In February 2008 and September 2010, the cities of Maputo and Matola were the scene of violent protests against the rise in the cost of living, undertaken by groups of ordinary citizens. Immediately afterwards, these protests were replicated in some other Mozambican cities, but on a much smaller scale, and they were quickly brought under control by the police. In November 2012, a new protest was set in motion, but immediate repressive action by the police (which in recent years has been greatly strengthened in men and material) in the key places where people were gathering prevented the violence from spreading, although it did not prevent the near total paralysis of activity in greater Maputo for a day and a half.

In this report we seek to show that, while these revolts are part of a broader movement which has shaken many countries since 2008 as a result of the increase and great volatility of food prices on the world market, they are above all a reflection of local economic dynamics and result from the social and political exclusion which the poorest urban strata in Mozambique face. The report begins by presenting a brief historical perspective and a characterisation of the nature of the Mozambican economy and of the authoritarian political tradition which has been dominant since the proclamation of independence, even while co-existing with a profound change in the political alliances of the ruling party. It then looks at the question of food and the cost of living, as well as the immediate context of the protests, the discourses and images used to describe them and the type of government response that they received. We conclude by reflecting on whether these protests have revealed the contours of a contemporary ‘moral economy’ underlying relations between state, market and citizen in Mozambique, and the extent to which they have produced new accountability relations – whether informal and unstable or institutionalised in the formal spaces for debate and negotiation of the country’s political system.

This report is the result of an extensive process of primary and secondary data collection led by IESE, the Institute of Social and Economic Studies (Luís de Brito, Egídio Chaimite, Crescêncio Pereira, Lúcio Posse and Michael Sambo) with the support of IDS, the Institute of Development Studies (Alex Shankland). It is part of a four-country project entitled ‘Food riots and food rights: the moral and political economy of accountability for hunger’ with colleagues in Bangladesh, India, Kenya and the UK and funded by the Economic and Social Research Council / Department for International Development Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research.

The first phase of the research in Mozambique consisted of a review of existing literature and secondary data on food security, urban poverty, wages and food price inflation in the country, and the construction of a ‘political event catalogue’ based on newspaper reports of protests taking place between 2007 and 2012 and of the associated policy responses. The next phase centred on discourse analysis of the material collected, and in particular on comparing the coverage of the protests in government-controlled and more independent newspapers (Pereira et al. 2013).

For the qualitative research component, in June 2013 the team carried out a pilot 'listening post' observation exercise in Maxaquene, one of the neighbourhoods that had been identified as a centre of the protests taking place in Maputo in 2010. This was followed in July and August by fieldwork in Xamanculo and Xiquelene/Ferroviário, two other Maputo neighbourhoods with a similar profile, in which the IESE team were joined by Albino Xinavane, Elisa Machel and Halima Haji, three local young people who had been trained in audiovisual documentation by IDS researchers working with the DFID-funded Diálogo urban governance programme. The fieldwork included observation, interviews and focus groups, with the latter using participatory visualization tools such as timelines and matrix scoring in addition to semi-structured group discussion.

Following a preliminary phase of analysis of the data from the Maputo sites, the team repeated this exercise in one urban and one rural area in Chokwe District in the Southern Mozambican Province of Gaza. Chokwe is a major market town in the rice-growing Limpopo Valley, which saw protests after the food and fuel price hikes of 2010 and was also severely affected by flooding in January 2013. It was selected to provide a range of food producer as well as consumer perspectives, and also to elicit perceptions of the government response to the flooding, a natural disaster of the kind that frequently affects food security in rural areas of Mozambique.

In the final phase of the work, the team focused on understanding the policy response to the protests. This included a further round of document review and a number of key informant interviews with government officials, labour and transport union leaders, civil society activists, academics and bilateral and multilateral donor agency representatives. The initial findings from the study were presented at the February 2014 project workshop at IDS and at IESE's Annual Conference in August 2014, as well as being discussed with members of the national Reference Group convened by IESE.

## 2. A BRIEF HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE MOZAMBICAN ECONOMY

The following periodisation, summarised in the table in Appendix I, is intended to give a general view of the historical evolution of the Mozambican economy, to locate industry in the context of this historical development, to characterise the bases of the model of accumulation over time, and to provide a reference framework for understanding the political alliances which contribute to a large extent to determining public policies.

### ***Formation of the Colonial Economy: Export Industry***

The first period, from the late 19th century to the end of the Second World War, is characterised by two parallel dynamics: on the one hand, the integration of Mozambique into the regional capitalist economy, centred on the South African mining industry (which developed from the second half of the 19th century with the discovery of diamonds and gold in the Transvaal region), and, on the other, the classic relationship of colonial economies, which made Mozambique a supplier of raw materials for the metropolitan industries.

In this period, agro-industries developed aimed at exports, namely of sugar, cotton, copra, timber, sisal and tea, which in the early 1940s accounted for two thirds of the total value of Mozambique's exports. There was also a small industrial sector making consumer goods for the domestic market, notably food processing, soap and oils. As for the extractive industry, it should be noted that at this stage, and almost to the end of the colonial epoch, it was marginal, restricted to small-scale extraction of salt, gold, construction stone and marble. But the main characteristic of the Mozambican economy, which would mark the colonial period, was its orientation towards port and rail services directed at the neighbouring countries (South Africa, but also Rhodesia and Nyasaland) and towards migrant labour (particularly important in the regions south of the Save river). The revenue from these sectors allowed a certain equilibrium on the balance of payments, given that the trade balance was systematically in deficit.

### ***Late Colonial Economy: Import Substitution and Intermediate Goods Industries***

The second period, extending from the second half of the 1940s up to independence, was characterised by the development of import substitution and intermediate goods industries intended for the Mozambican domestic market. This development was intimately linked to the option taken by the

colonial authorities of promoting Portuguese emigration to the colonies and of building the so-called “Portuguese integrated economic space”.

With the growth of the settler population, a domestic market developed and, with this, a growing industrial sector producing consumer goods (drinks, foodstuffs, textiles and clothing, etc.) and of intermediate goods (mainly cement, refined fuels, paints, metallurgical products and material for the railways). Thus the structure of industrial production changed: in the early 1950s it was dominated by the export industries, which accounted for 60% of the value of production, against 40% for the industries aimed at the domestic market. On the eve of independence the ratio was reversed, with the latter industries representing 60% of the value of total industrial production. In addition to this reversal in the position of the industries, it should be stressed that cashew nuts, which were becoming the main export product in this period, ceased to be exported raw, giving way to a relatively important industrial processing sector, particularly from the point of view of its geographical distribution and of employment. Most of the nuts were now processed before being exported as kernels. In the extractive industry, which remained marginal, the beginning of the mining of coal in Moatize in the late 1940s and early 1950s as well as the discovery of gas in Inhambane in the 1960s (although it was not exploited at this time) should be noted.

In terms of exports, at the end of the colonial period, the six agricultural products of the previous period, plus cashew nuts still represented about two thirds of the total value.

## ***Independence: Economic Collapse and the Aid Economy***

The third period, from independence until the moment when the first multi-party elections confirmed the end of the armed conflict and allowed forecasts of political stability, was a period of economic collapse: that is, of a profound crisis in the economy resulting from several factors, namely the impact of decolonisation, the conflicts with the “white powers” of the region, and the civil war. The first factor in the crisis was the exodus from the country of the great majority of the settlers, including almost all the managers and qualified staff, which led to the unravelling of the entire national productive system. The second factor was the confrontation with the Rhodesian and South African regimes, which resulted in a sharp and significant fall in the revenue from services which traditionally allowed an equilibrium on the balance of payments. The third factor was the extension of the regional conflict into a civil war, which, as from the 1980s, reached the entire territory, prevented the normal working of the economy, and caused immense human and material destruction. All the factors operated in the context of a policy of Marxist-Leninist inspiration, which sought to establish a planned economy where the state should have played a central role. Early on, the country's economic collapse led to negotiations with the IMF and the World Bank, to Mozambican membership of these organisations (1984) and to economic liberalisation – which produced few effects due to the war. The country came to live essentially off foreign aid. It was in this period that the intensive exploitation and export of a natural resource, prawns, extraction of which was not affected by the war, began. Prawns became Mozambique's main export product from the mid-1980s to the late 1990s. This is a period which can be considered as one of de-industrialisation, since part of the country's industrial production disappeared, while the surviving industries recorded low levels of production.

## ***Economic Recovery: from the Aid Economy to the Natural Resources Rent and Export Economy***

The fourth period, which began with the establishment of peace, in 1992, was characterised by high rates of economic growth (above 7% a year) and by an economic recovery based on the development of the extraction of natural resources for export. Although there were some signs of the development of import substitution industries, and industries producing intermediate goods, the main dynamic was once again export industries – but this time exporting non-agricultural natural resources. In addition to prawns, the main export crops were timber, gas, coal and other minerals as well as aluminium.

There were also numerous projects for mineral and petroleum exploration. Omitting aluminium, which alone accounted for about 50% of the value of Mozambican exports (2010), energy products (gas and electricity), prawns and timber contributed more than half the value of Mozambican exports. At the same time, despite a certain recovery, the services sector was unable to secure equilibrium in the balance of payments, as it had in the past, and the State Budget continued to depend heavily on funds from foreign aid.

The consolidation of a rentier economy, inaugurated in the previous period with the exploitation of prawns, has been the main trend in the recent development of the Mozambican economy. A rentier economy which is not based simply on the exploitation of resources, but also has the particularity of also depending on another “rent”: foreign aid.

### **3. AUTHORITARIAN TRADITION AND POLITICAL ALLIANCES**

The recent political history of Mozambique is characterised by an authoritarian political tradition, both under the one-party state which lasted from independence in 1975 until 1990, and in the period which followed the introduction of a multi-party system and the end of the civil war. Indeed, after a brief period of weakening and hesitation in the years following the General Peace Agreement and the first multi-party elections, Frelimo chose, as from 2002, to strengthen the model of the party-state which had developed during the one party period. To this end, the network of party branches and committees was reconstituted throughout the state apparatus (including the defence and security forces) from the central to the local level. The principle of accountability of state leaders to Frelimo party leaders at the various levels was also reactivated.

In the period immediately after independence, despite the fact that Frelimo had undertaken its guerrilla war in a peasant environment and with a discourse evoking “the worker-peasant alliance”, its political choices resulted in a de facto alliance with the urban strata, particularly the middle and low income groups. Indeed, even in a context of crisis, it was these groups who most benefitted from price control policies, as well as from the measures to promote access to services, especially health, education and housing. On the other hand, the peasant population, which was only relatively protected by the fact that all land was state property, was particularly affected by the destruction of the agricultural marketing system and by the civil war. The latter caused, in addition to the destruction of economic and social infrastructures, added disturbance to production conditions, and millions of displaced people and refugees.

As from the 1990s, the policy of economic liberalisation which had begun in the mid-1980s, but which had practically no significant effects due to the war, was resumed. Price liberalisation, the privatisation of most of the state companies and the search for foreign investment, begun in the 1990s, accompanied by the offer of fiscal incentives, would lead, a few years later, to the emergence of the mega-projects, mostly linked to the prospection and exploitation of natural resources (mainly natural gas, coal, heavy mineral sands and petroleum). Alongside economic liberalisation, the Frelimo leadership underwent a reconversion, becoming increasingly involved in the world of business. Thus the old political alliance was replaced by a new one, now with business circles, and particularly with large scale foreign capital.

The authoritarian tradition which characterises Mozambican politics, and the hegemony of Frelimo, which always enjoyed an absolute majority in parliament, have been major obstacles to developing alternative ways of thinking and to the ability of citizens to organise themselves and to freely express their opinions, interests and demands, either individually or collectively. Also contributing to this is the fact that the government – and thus Frelimo – exercises direct control over the main publicly-owned mass media, namely the national radio (Radio Moçambique), the public television channel (Televisão de Moçambique) and the historical newspapers (Notícias and Domingo), which belong to a company in which the main shareholder is the Bank of

Mozambique. Additionally the government has influence in many of the new media (written press, television and radio) through the power which advertising, on which this media depend, grants it. Naturally, this control has limited the space for the appearance of an informed and critical public opinion and for open debate on questions such as the rise in the cost of living and in food prices, which are a pressing concern for ordinary citizens.

More recently, the picture of Frelimo hegemony has begun to change a little with the growth of a new informal space (mostly urban) for political debate resulting from growing access to social networks (particularly Facebook) and the emergence of a new generation of young people with relatively high levels of education (including a growing number with university training). However, the creation and consolidation of independent civil society organisations remains a slow progress, heavily dependent on funding from foreign donors.

The hegemonic control of Frelimo has had a double impact. On the one hand, it has made it almost impossible to develop structures of collective representation which might be considered by the regime as legitimate interlocutors, especially when one bears in mind that, while formally tolerating the parties and formal structures of multi-party democracy, Frelimo regards the opposition parties as politically illegitimate. On the other hand, it has largely emptied of content the constitutional guarantees of the right to freedom of assembly and of demonstration, since in practice, while demonstrations which are directly or indirectly promoted by the ruling party or organisations close to it are accepted, they become difficult when the initiatives are taken by independent groups and by opposition parties.

The lack of space for the free exercise of democratic rights has as a consequence severe limitations on the room for social negotiation and on the experience and access of citizens to a range of forms of mass political mobilisations (such as petitions, boycotts, strikes or marches). Under these conditions, the effects of sudden increases in the cost of living, which mainly affect the low income urban population, tend to result in violent street protests without organisational leadership.

## 4. THE FOOD QUESTION AND THE COST OF LIVING

Mozambique was always a food importing country.

The situation was particularly serious during the civil war period (1976 to 1992). In the year of independence, 49% of the grain supply was produced domestically, 42% were commercial imports and 9% came from food aid. At the end of the 1980s the situation was radically different. Domestic production accounted for only 14% and the remaining 86% came from food aid.

Although even today food aid continues to play an important role in supplying the country, one can note that, since the end of the war, in the 1990s, domestic food production has been on the increase although it has not yet reached self-sufficiency.

### ***Agricultural Production and the Food Deficit in Recent Years***

Agricultural food production in Mozambique, which essentially comes from peasant family agriculture, has been systematically affected by natural disasters, droughts, cyclones, floods and pests, which regularly strike the country. These situations lead to government intervention which, with the resort to foreign aid, promotes emergency programmes seeking to mitigate the effects of disasters on the affected population. This was the case, for example, with the agricultural campaign of 2006/07. The campaign was accompanied by severe drought in the south of the country which resulted in the total loss of a little more than half of the area sown in this region. In the central and northern areas, the campaign was characterised by irregular rainfall, drought but also flooding which led to the loss of extensive areas of various crops, as well as the displacement of part of the population to safer areas.

In this context of high dependence on climatic factors, agricultural food production and productivity have developed in recent years at small rates of growth, as can be seen from Figures 1 and 2.

Furthermore, Mozambique's food balance between 2009 and 2011 shows a situation of persistent deficit in the production of rice and wheat in comparison with consumption needs and hence a dependence on imports (fig. 3). The deficit on these two products influences the general grain deficit, which is around 17% a year. This deficit is overcome by resort to imports (SETSAN, 2013). Imports, particularly of rice and wheat, must have caused the national and local increase in prices in recent years (2007-2013), since in this period rice and wheat prices on the world market experienced large increases and great volatility.

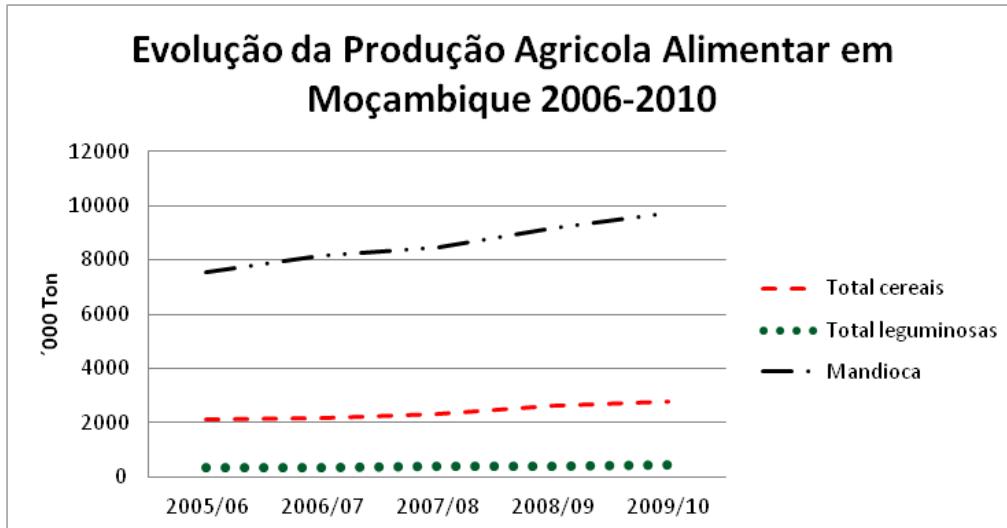


Figure 1: Evolution of Agricultural Food Production in Mozambique 2006-2010 (Source: MINAG Annual Balance of the PES, 2007 - 2010)

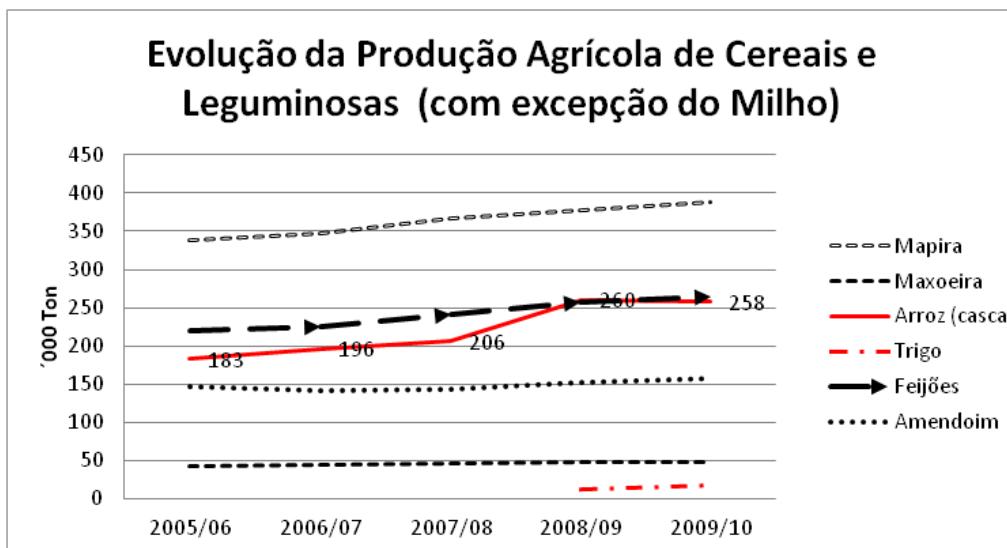
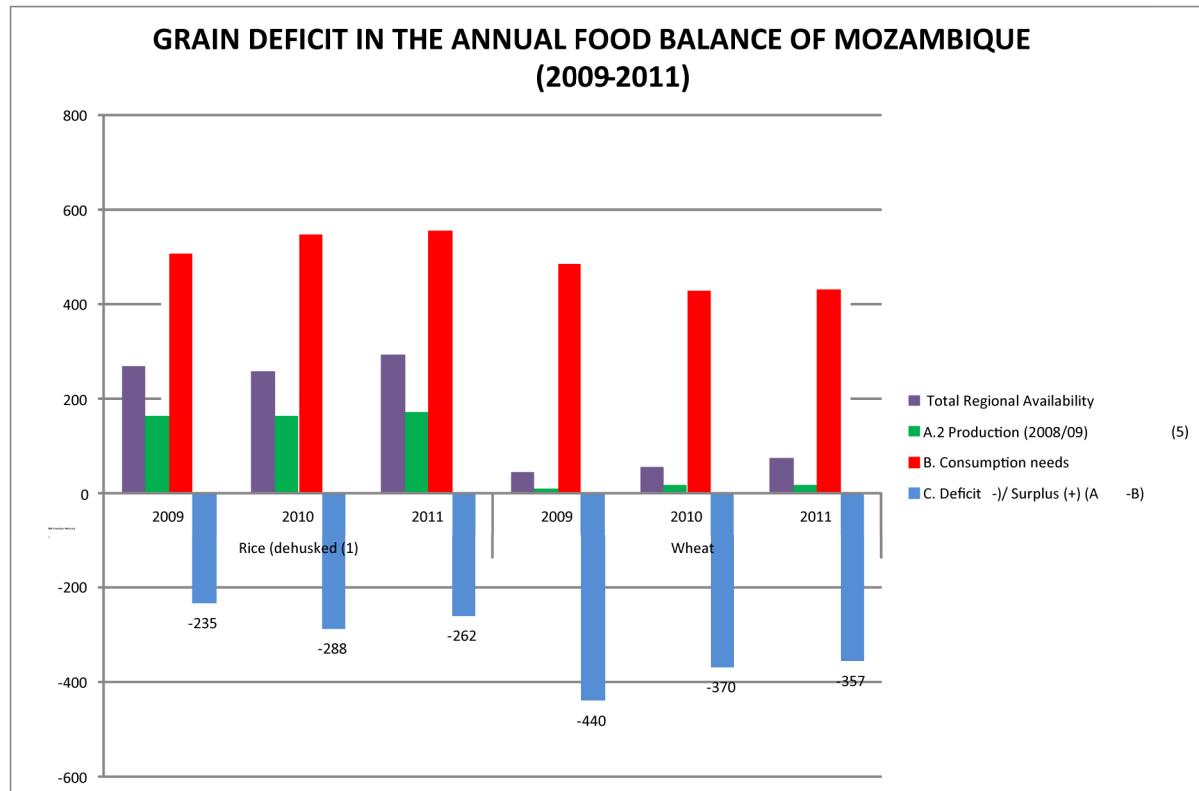


Figure 2: Evolution of the agricultural production of grains and pulses, except maize. (Source: MINAG Annual Balance of the PES, 2007 - 2010)



According to Mosca, based on the agricultural and livestock censuses of 2000 and 2010 and a series of statistical data for the period from 1961 to 2012, per capita domestic food production has been declining in absolute terms over the last fifty years. The same is happening with productivity per hectare: for a significant number of the main food crops (with the exception of maize) this has been declining. Likewise, there has been a fall in the availability of food per inhabitant in the last fifty years, and one also notes a significant reduction in the productivity of food production in terms of calories and the availability of calories, considering production in Mozambique in the period from 2002 to 2008 (Mosca, 2014). These facts help illustrate the dependence of Mozambique on the international market to meet the country's food needs, and also its vulnerability in relation to price shocks of foodstuffs on the international market. As is recognised in the Food Production Action Plan, 2008-2011, there was at the time a deficit in basic foodstuffs (of 316,000 tonnes of rice, 469,500 tonnes of wheat, 169,300 tonnes of potatoes, 24,000 tonnes of chicken, 50,400 tonnes of cooking oil and 54,000 tonnes of fish) and this situation could be "worsened by the current trend for increased prices of the main foodstuffs on the international market".

It might have been expected that, with the fluctuations and rise in prices for food on the international market in the 2007-2013 period, national food production would increase in response. However, the increase in food prices had practically no impact on the domestic agricultural production of foodstuffs. According to some producers in Chókwe, the crisis in food prices did not directly affect agricultural food production. However, they state that production is strongly affected by the rise in prices of inputs and pesticides, by climatic conditions (regularity and intensity of rainfall, floods, and drought), as well as by a guarantee of a market for their crops.

## Government Policies and Food Security

In addition to the government's five year plans and the poverty reduction action programmes negotiated with the donors, there are a very large number of strategy documents, policies, programmes and plans which, directly or indirectly, are supposed to promote development, eliminate poverty and ensure food security. Among those that deal with agricultural questions, there stands out the Strategy for the Green Revolution in Mozambique, approved by the Council of Ministers in 2007 and which includes six national programmes (Grain Programme: Maize, Rice, Sorghum and Wheat; Seed pulses: Beans, Groundnuts and Soya; Roots and Tubers: Cassava and Potatoes; Vegetables in the Urban Centre Green Belts; Programme for the Development of Small and Medium Cattle Breeding Enterprises; Integrated Programme for the Development of Poultry Farming in the Peri-Urban Areas), the main objective of which was "to induce an increase in the production and productivity of small producers for a greater supply of foodstuffs in a competitive and sustainable manner" and the Food Production Action Plan, 2008-2011, approved by the Council of Ministers in 2008 and including chapters on production, agricultural marketing, agro-processing, markets, fiscal and budgetary measures, coordination mechanisms and measures to be taken by the government. The objective of this plan was "the elimination of the deficit in the main foodstuffs in the next 3 years and to reduce dependence on imports".

The question of food security is specifically dealt with in the Food and Nutritional Security Strategy and Plan of Action, 2008-2015 (ESAN II), which revises and continues the Food and Nutritional Security Strategy approved in 1998. According to the document, "the general strategic objective of ESAN II is to guarantee that all citizens have, at all times, physical and economic access to the necessary foodstuffs, so that they may enjoy an active and healthy life, achieving their human right to adequate food" and its main objectives are: "to guarantee the country's self-sufficiency in food; to contribute to improving household purchasing power; to reduce the incidence of malnutrition (both acute and chronic) through improving conditions of health, water, sanitation, and food and nutritional education; to guarantee the gradual achievement of the human right to adequate food for all citizens; to increase household capacity to respond to seasonal variations in production, and physical and economic access to adequate food; and to create and develop an adequate structure for a comprehensive and inclusive multi-sector and inter-institutional intervention".

These policy documents lay a great stress on agricultural production and productivity, indicating in general as the main elements the distribution of inputs and of instruments of production, as well as the repair of damaged infrastructures (irrigation schemes, dikes, dams and silos) and the construction of new ones. However, apart from being largely repetitive and overlapping (as well as being little more than simple lists of objectives and intentions without the due coordination) their impact has been practically nil, as shown by the feeble growth of the agricultural food sector in recent years and the stabilisation of poverty levels in the country.

## Food Defence Movements

In Mozambique, according to the perceptions of some key informants, most of the initiatives by civil society organisations in the food area are based on resources from outside the country. The Network of Organisations for Food Sovereignty (ROSA), a coalition of organisations of advocacy in the area of food and nutritional security, is the grouping that has been most active in this area. It was set up in 2003, by ActionAid, the Association for Sustainable Development (ABIODES) and the National Union of Peasants (UNAC), with the support of FAO. It gained in visibility mainly in 2006-2007, when it launched for public debate a draft bill on the Right to Food. However, when this bill was analysed by government bodies, ROSA was unable to bring sufficient political pressure to bear to guarantee that it was approved. Currently the bill has been shelved, and it is not clear whether it went to the Ministry of Agriculture or the Assembly of the Republic.

The activities of ROSA and of other movements of the kind have been insignificant and often depend on the government's agenda, as can be understood from the testimony of a foreign consultant of one of the organisations which finance the food sector in Mozambique:

*"The attempt by civil society to organise itself around food is very opportunist. There are networks such as the Network of Organisations for Food Sovereignty, which look at the global context of the emergence of this type of network and look at the opportunities which exist in Mozambique, which the government convenes (...). There are no civil society initiatives on food and food security. Everything is convened by the government. For me, in this regard, civil society is semi-parasitic since it feeds off the proposals from the government."*

Although ROSA is one of the main groups "active" in the food sphere, with representations in all Mozambique's provinces, none of the interviewees or the participants in the focus groups for this research had ever heard of it or indeed of any initiative in support of the right to food. Not only is the activity of this movement unknown in general, but the interviewees revealed that, even through other channels of communication, they are not identified as an integral part of the process that defines sustainable policies and strategies for the production, distribution and consumption of food, which guarantee the right to food, respecting their own traditions and cultivation techniques..

In the case of Chókwe, the peasants have a strong link with the local agricultural associations in order to obtain some formal protection from them. From the interviews and the focus groups held, it was understood that UNAC and other small local associations were recognised as those who formally represented the interests of the peasants. However, no benefit was seen from affiliation to them, because of a lack of transparency in managing the products and the profits for the association from selling them. This refers to the associations' collective fields where all the peasant members had to provide voluntary labour at least twice a week.

As for the family farms, the peasants admitted they have the possibility of resorting to credit for investment, which is granted by local micro-credit institutions, benefitting from preferential interest rates and guarantees. In this case, membership of the local associations is beneficial, because one of the fundamental conditions for granting micro-credit is generally associated with the formation of groups among the persons interested in obtaining the resource. But this practice is sometimes

turned down by the peasants, since cyclical disasters and the lack of markets in that rural region easily put them in a difficult situation.

In fact, the peasants regard the state as the most secure resource in order to guarantee seeds, compost, fertiliser and sprayers in order to minimise their losses, particularly in crisis situations, such as those resulting from the cyclical floods which have affected that part of the country. Furthermore, the peasants have urged the government to rehabilitate and possibly increase the height of the defensive dikes which protect this region from rises in the levels of the Limpopo and Elephants Rivers. These measures are fundamental to reduce the vulnerability of Chókwe to floods (Pereira, et al, 2013).

The population in general, and the poorest social groups in particular, do not have strong representation, or spaces of representation, to defend their interest on the food question. They are foreign to the government's programmes and plans on the matter. Under these conditions, informal and violent mobilisation seems the only way of drawing the government's attention to the problems, and this is the framework in which we should consider the revolts of 2008 and 2010, in the cities of Maputo and Matola, followed later by small foci of disturbances in cities such as Chókwe, Chibuto and Chimoio, among others.

## ***Minimum Wage, Structure of the Household Budget, and Cost of Living***

In recent years, the constant rises in the prices of various goods, particularly foodstuffs, contrasts with small increases in wage levels and high rates of unemployment and under-employment. For this reason, it is common for households to seek more than one source of income to deal with their monthly expenses. In general, the trend in the urban areas is for at least one member of the household to be a formal or informal worker, earning a monthly wage. However, for many Mozambican households, the income is below subsistence level, which obliges other household members to undertake commercial activities, or informal work, known as "biscatos" (odd jobs) in order to minimise the gap between their income and their basic expenditure. This is common in both urban and rural areas. In the latter the alternative forms of work are generally the supply of labour for the largest and most productive farms, the sale of agricultural products and other forms of informality similar to those practiced in urban zones.

Listening to the popular discourses on the cost of living, one gets the impression that wages are far below subsistence level and are tending to decline year after year. The popular perception is clearly that real wages are in decline, particularly when one considers that most people spend the greater part of their income on food and that food prices rise frequently, while wage rises are lower and happen just once a year (in April). A comparison of the nominal minimum wages with the prices of the basic basket of goods shows that this perception corresponds to reality. However, although some drop in real minimum wages was recorded in the period under analysis, this trend was not continual. In general, real minimum wages are tending to increase slightly, year after year, albeit at a slow pace. However, from 2007 to 2008 the real minimum wage in the public administration fell. This phenomenon recurred a year later, that is, from 2009 to 2010, when there was a reduction in

the real minimum wages of almost all sectors, except for financial services, a sector in which the real minimum wage increased (fig. 4). Note that these two moments correspond to the moments of popular protests related with rises in the cost of living.

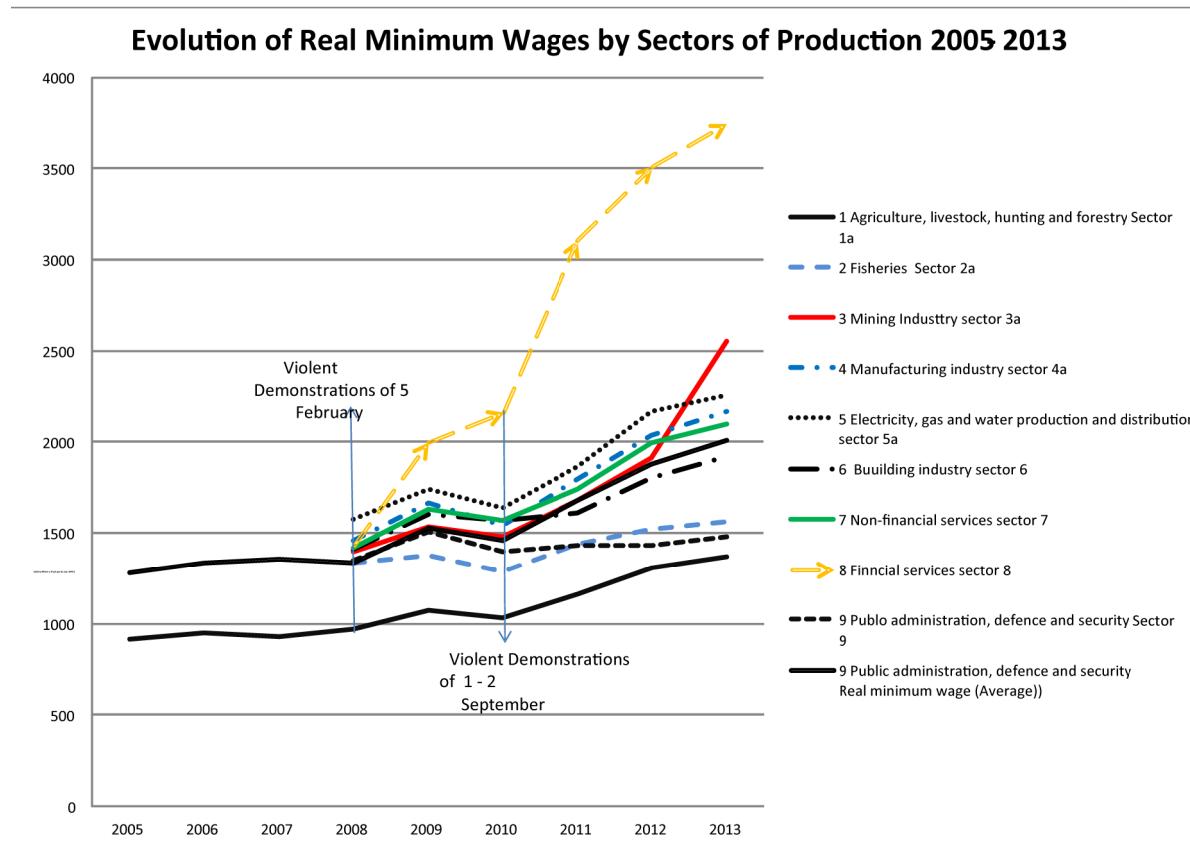


Figure 4: Evolution of real minimum wages by sector of activity (in meticais)

From the interviews held in some Maputo neighbourhoods, it was found that, faced with the rise in food prices, households had no choice but to eliminate goods regarded as less of a priority and to reduce significantly the frequency of consumption of other foods (such as chicken, itself already an alternative to beef, eggs and other foodstuffs necessary for a balanced diet) because they did not have enough money to buy them. According to the interviewees, few households manage to replace one food item by another cheaper item, and those who do achieve this are relatively well off, for this shows they still have some room for manoeuvre. In general, households reduce their consumption of basic foods by reducing the number of meals they eat in a day. Others, particularly households with young children, provide meals based on rice or spaghetti without any accompanying sauce or stew, simply in order to satisfy the children's hunger during the day.

In Mozambique the average number of members per household is five. Considering this average household composition, the Mozambican Workers' Organisation (OTM) has estimated the monthly cost of a basic basket of goods in order to negotiate increases in the minimum wage based on this. But the government and the employers have refused to consider this as a negotiating basis. In 2012, the cost of the basic basket per household was estimated at 8,021.5 MT, while the average of the minimum nominal wages approved was 3,304.71 MT.

Some of the interviewees stressed their discontent and frustration at the cost of living and access to food. For example, one trade union official said:

*"The evolution of the minimum wages is not satisfactory, because it is still not enough to acquire the desirable basket of goods for a family of five people. We see that the government does not take responsibility for protecting the producers of wealth. When the government presents us with data on jobs created, we ask "what kind of jobs?" What we want is to abandon the negotiation of wages on the basis of percentages, and move to negotiating on the basis of the basic basket. But the government insists on negotiating based on the average inflation and on the growth in GDP per sector. How many citizens are able to buy milk? How many kilos of rice are citizens able to buy? The government does not have an employment policy. Today jobs are allocated personally, and it's full of corruption." (Senior trade union official)*

Another interviewee, living in the Maputo neighbourhood of Ferroviario, who said he had worked in several areas, expressed the common feeling when he described his individual condition in the following terms in relation to access to food and conditions of income:

*"(...) there's not enough food because of the wages. Because (...) when I receive my wages, I go to the shop and first I buy a little sack of rice, which is the base. I buy some three litres of cooking oil. I leave and I have to go and buy some stock, onions, things which don't rot easily, and basically that's it, the wages have finished, and there's nothing left. But I also like to buy eggs to eat. It's a necessity. Buying a chicken is a necessity, beef, pork, but there's not enough money. So automatically we're living a difficult life because these goods are necessary for a person to feed himself well, but we don't manage it. We feed ourselves badly. I buy a little sack of rice and I can't manage to buy at least a sliver of fish. So what have I got to vary my food? I have to vary it with these herb things, with cabbage, mboa, tseke, and I don't know what, and the cheapest things which don't even give us vitamins, such as magumba, these little fish, which cost 10 to 20 MT. So we are just surviving on this! The most important things which give us vitamins we can't buy because of the wages. This is psychological torture, the government is torturing us psychologically, they know very well, because they also go shopping. (...). Apart from these basic foodstuffs, I have to pay for water and electricity. I have children who go to school and they need a briefcase, exercise books, coloured pencils, and many other things. Then this money doesn't get us anywhere. I'm very sorry, but the government knows. The wages really don't help. (...) You see what it is to receive a wage and still be unable to take a soft drink? To end a month without eating an egg or a potato. What is this!? I can even say that in the colonial period life was much better in terms of food, health, etc.! My father used to give me six Escudos and I would buy all of this - potato, chicken, meat and other things. My father earned 240 Escudos, but it was a wage from which enough was left over to drink a few glasses in the bar." (Resident of Ferroviário)*

These passages illustrate the popular feeling of adults (workers and retired people) living in the three neighbourhoods visited (Maxaquene, Chamankulo and Ferroviário). For their part, the youths were desperate and concerned at the lack of jobs and the high cost of living which has obliged them to subsist on green vegetables. The women interviewed not only point to the lack of employment and the low wages, but also referred to the shortage of money to deal with the constant rise in food prices (fig.5).

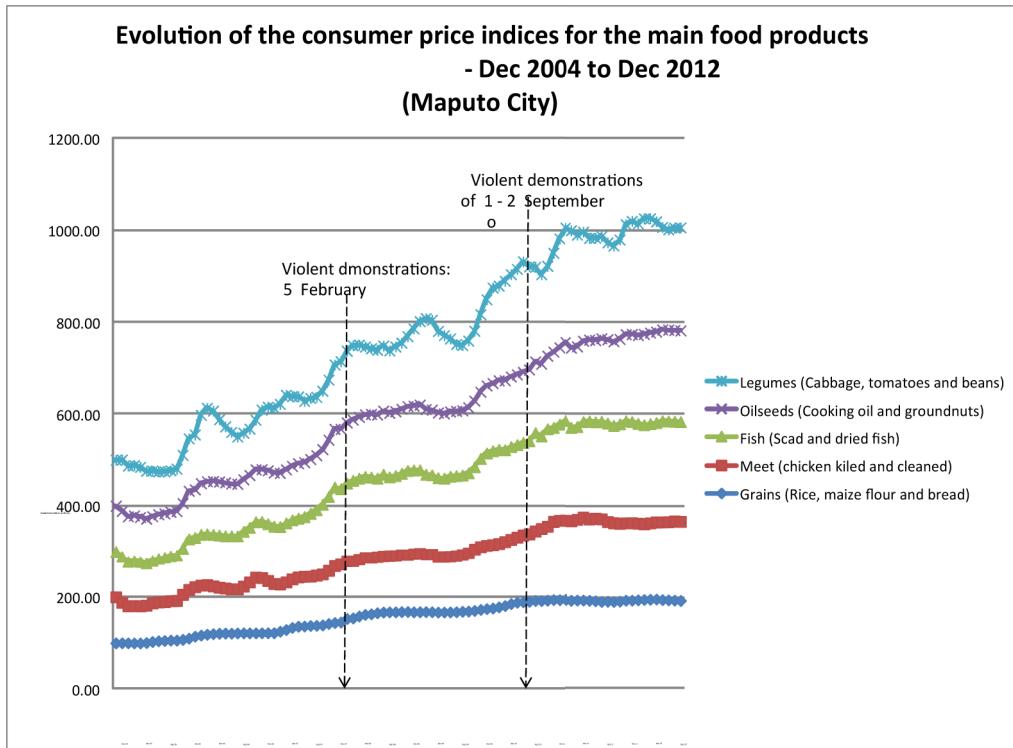


Figure 5: Variation in the Consumer Price Index by type of product – Maputo City (Source: INE Data on the CPI – series of elementary indices for Maputo)

As can be seen in figure 6 A and B, data from the Household Budget Survey of 2008/09 show that most of households' income is spent on foodstuffs, in both urban and rural areas. This aspect is all the more important when, as shown by Wuyts (2011) and as can be seen in figure 7, the annual average rate of growth of the Consumer Price Index (which is the basis for determining the rate of inflation) is clearly higher for foodstuffs than for other products as from 2007. In practical terms, this means that the poorest households (because they spend a larger part of their income on food) suffer a greater impact from inflation (for them inflation is higher than the official average inflation) than do medium and high income households.

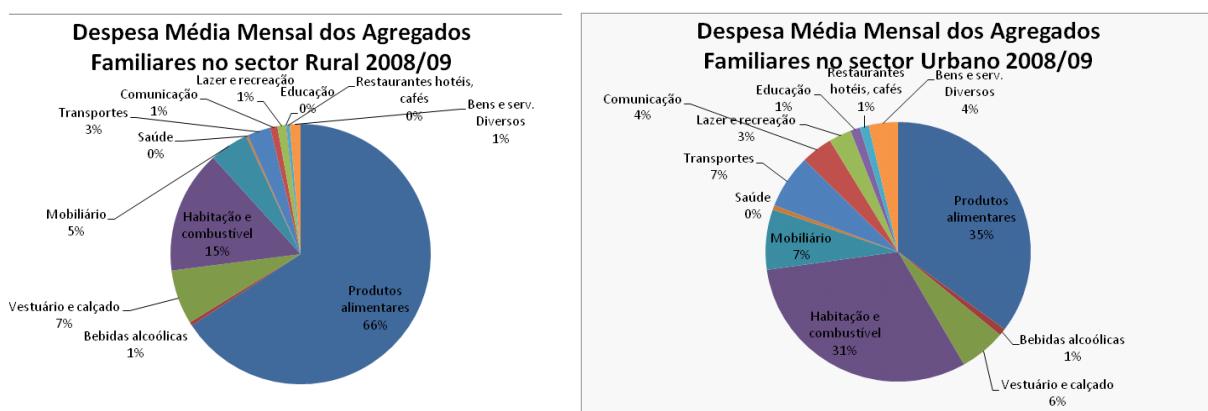


Figure 6: A and B: Monthly average expenditure of urban and rural households 2008/09. Source: IOF 2008/09

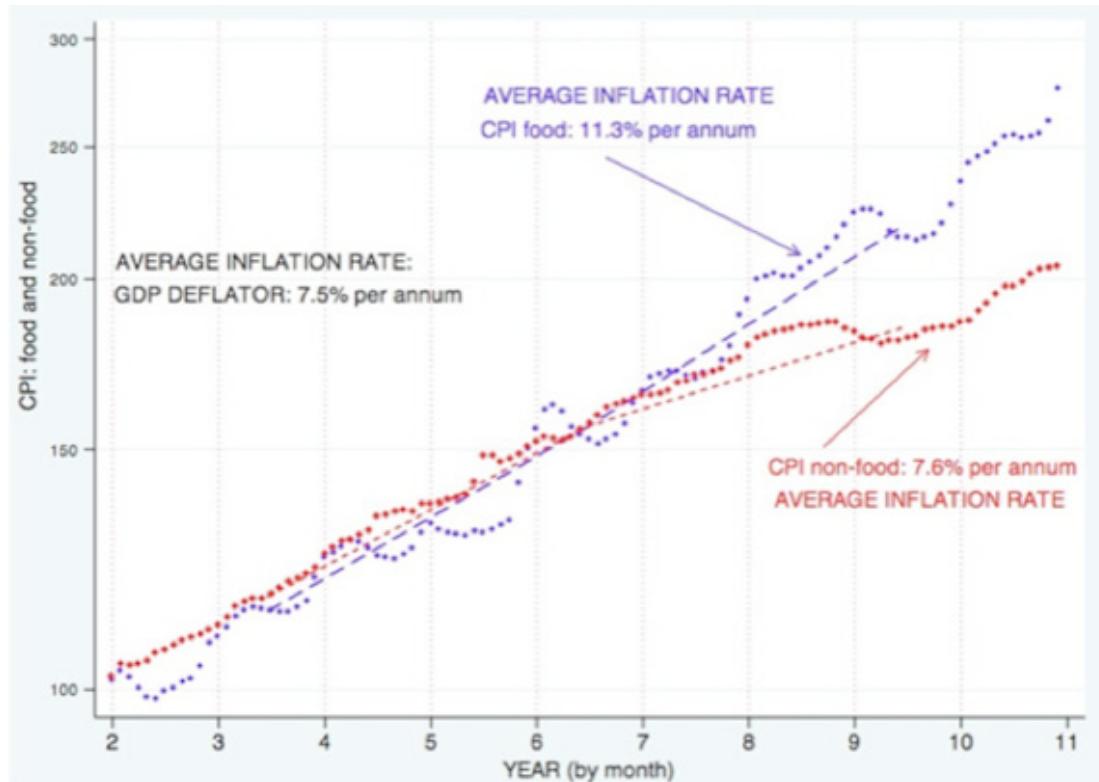


Figure 7: Consumer price index for foodstuffs versus other goods (January 2002 to December 2010) Source: Wuyts, 2011

The average monthly expenditure in the urban sector was assessed, at current prices, at about 5,333 MT, and the main expenses in descending order were: food (35%), housing and fuel (31%), transport (7%) and furniture (7%), followed by communication and miscellaneous goods and services with the same weight of 4% each.

Curiously, in the rural sector, where households produce and consume the greater part of their food, the data from the IOF 2008/09 show that 66% of the expenditure of these households goes on foodstuffs, which is almost double the weight of food expenditure for households in urban areas (fig. 6 A). But this percentage might be misleading, because the total average monthly expenditure of rural households, estimated at 2,466 MT is less than half the average for urban households. Of this sum, 1,621 MT is spent on foodstuffs, compared with the 1,876 MT spent on food by households in the urban areas. This means that the rural households, even though they have greater access to land and produce part of their own food, also buy some of their food, which makes them vulnerable to food price shocks (FAO, 2008).

In many cases, rural households, although they produce some of their food, sell a significant part (particularly perishable crops) and re-acquire them later through the market, in the same way that they acquire other foodstuffs which they do not produce, and the price of which is rising. This situation tends to make the prices of agricultural goods produced locally go up both in urban and in rural areas,<sup>1</sup> even if their costs of production have not varied. In part, this explains the trend to rising prices of all foodstuffs illustrated by figure 5.

<sup>1</sup> This is the phenomenon known as induced inflation: when the prices of goods rise, accompanying the rise in prices of other necessary goods even if their costs of production have not initially varied (at the time the higher prices were fixed, though they may vary later).

Access to food in both urban and rural areas has thus been declining due to feeble growth in domestic production and the rises in food prices. However, this reduction in access to food is more serious in the urban areas because of the weak, or non-existent, production for auto-consumption which forces households into near total dependence on acquiring food by purchasing it. This situation makes the urban poor more vulnerable to price shocks. For their part, and also in the urban areas, those households which depend solely on fixed wages and salaries are relatively more vulnerable than those who live off small scale trading activities in the informal sector, for the latter have a certain capacity to adjust income through re-adjusting their own prices (though in the medium term they remain vulnerable and victims of price rises).

## 5. POPULAR REVOLTS

Since 2007, Mozambique has experienced several explosive episodes of popular mobilisation (2008, 2010 and 2012) in which factors behind the revolt have been, together with the cost of transport, the growing feeling of inequality and ever more visible corruption, and the increase in food prices. Although they spread, with less intensity, to other cities, the birthplace and main stage for the protest was greater Maputo, a metropolitan area covering the capital, Maputo, and the satellite city of Matola, with a population of about two million.

In early 2008, the Mozambican government decided to increase the price of fuel to compensate for the increased prices of imported liquid fuels.<sup>2</sup> This decision caused the operators of private passenger transport vehicles (known as Chapa 100) to increase their fares by between 33% and 50%. In this same period, there had already been an increase in the price of some foodstuffs, notably bread, the price of which had gone up by about 12.5%. After several days in which mobile phone text messages circulated widely calling for “a strike”<sup>3</sup>, these measures resulted, on 5 February, in a wave of violent popular protests (blocking the main roads with various obstacles and burning tyres, looting shops, particularly of food, and the burning or stoning of vehicles in the places with the largest concentrations of protestors). The riots completely paralysed the cities of Maputo and Matola for three days.<sup>4</sup> The protests ended when the decision was taken to keep the transport fares unchanged, which was possible after the government negotiated a series of compensatory benefits with the transporters, notably the removal of the 17% VAT (Value Added Tax) on diesel.<sup>5</sup>

On 1 and 2 September 2010, after text messages circulated calling for “a strike”, just as had happened in 2008, the second major episode of street protests occurred,<sup>6</sup> this time against the rise announced in the price of bread and other basic products. The price of bread was to rise by 17%, electricity by 13.4%, water by two meticais per cubic metre, petrol by 8%, and domestic gas by 7.9%. Foodstuffs such as rice, tomatoes and onions, among others, were also undergoing significant rises, as were

<sup>2</sup> The price of diesel was increased by 14%, that of kerosene by 19% and that of petrol by 8,1%.

<sup>3</sup> The term “greve” (“strike”) was frequently used by participants and by ordinary citizens to describe the protests. Evidently it was not a strike in the classic sense, but the use of the word can be understood as expressing the nature of a movement which made claims upon a “boss”, namely the government (just like the boss of a company in relation to its workers) who was responsible for guaranteeing all citizens the minimum conditions for a decent life.

<sup>4</sup> Protest initiatives which broke out in some other cities were immediately repressed and stifled by police action. Although there are no exact statistics, it is thought that at least 10 people died in the police action and that the cost of the damage was in excess of 100 million meticais.

<sup>5</sup> In principle, this measure applied only to operators who could prove they were licensed, had their tax situation regularised, and recorded their fuel consumption. It is not clear how it was effectively applied to the large number of transporters whose situation was not fully regular. Apparently, the practice of “route shortening” (interruption of the agreed journey before reaching the terminal), which has been growing since then, was the method the transporters found for compensating for the frozen fares.

<sup>6</sup> In terms of places, the media showed that the demonstrations were generalised in Maputo and Matola. There were protests on the main streets leading to the centre of the two cities: the Xiquelene area, Chamanculo, Benfica, Magoanine, Zimpeto, Malhazine, Missão Roque, Bagamoyo, Lhanguene, Drive In, Laulane, Hulene, Infulene, Inhagoia, Nkobe, Praça dos Combatentes, Praça da Juventude, Praça da OMM, Praça 21 de Outubro, Jardim, Kilometre 15, Luís Cabral, the toll-gate area, Zona Verde, T3, Manduca, Machava, Liberdade, Quinze, Santos Markey, BIC area, Matola, Matola Santos, among others. Outside of Maputo and Matola, they occurred, but without serious repercussions in Beira (Chipangara Roundabout. Av. Armando Tivane, Av. Samora Machel, TVM Building and Sofala Provincial House of Culture), Chimoio (Francisco Manyanga Market, Quedas, Chimoio Tambara 2), Manica, Nampula, Chibuto, Macia, Maxixe, Xai-Xai. In the case of Chókwè, they occurred at the entry to the city alongside the Senta-Baixo market on national highway no. 205.

fuels. Once again the scenario of violence recorded in February 2008 was repeated, this time with around ten deaths, and hundreds of people injured, quite apart from the heavy material damage. And, just as in 2008, the government ended up revising its decisions, freezing prices and announcing subsidies, among other measures.

On 15 and 16 November 2012, Maputo city was paralysed again, this time for a day and a half due to the threat of riots following an announced increase in transport fares. However, the habitual situations of violence did not recur, since the police was strengthened and present at all the critical points. Furthermore, the mobile phone companies restricted communications, thus making it difficult to broaden a movement which could have slipped out of police control at any moment.

## **Why Maputo?**

In a large city, where the level of education and access to information are clearly higher than the national average,<sup>7</sup> unemployment, poverty and inequalities, apart from the blocking or non-existence of mechanisms for dialogue between citizens and the government authorities, contribute towards citizens feeling obliged to adopt violent protests as a means of expressing their frustration at the inefficiency of government policies in protecting them from the effects of sharp rises in the cost of living. One notes that, in addition to the best average statistics in terms of indicators of development and well-being, greater Maputo has, above all, the largest concentration of poverty nationally. Indeed, the study by Paulo et al (2008) had already shown the paradox between the relatively superior conditions of Maputo in terms of employment, income, education and health, on the one hand, but on the other a high poverty count based on consumption and poor nutritional indicators. The authors put forward three explanatory hypotheses:

*“The current insecurity and instability of employment and income, both formal and informal, which affect the options of people in strategic planning and expenditure. A second explanation is the real increase in the costs of basic needs such as land, housing, water, electricity and transport, which has forced people to spend less of their income on food. A third possible explanation which cannot be properly tested within the limits of the present study, are the high poverty rates in the neighbouring provinces, which have led to an increase in the migration of the rural poor to Maputo and to a reduction in access to rural foodstuffs by the urban poor.”*  
(Paulo et al, 2008, p. 4).

So rates of poverty in the capital are high. After an increase from 47% to 53% between 1996/7 and 2002/3, in contrast with the overall trend for a reduction in the urban and rural poverty rates which, over the same period, fell from 62% to 51% and from 71% to 55%, respectively, in 2008/09, the official poverty rates in Maputo were still around 36%. At the same time, in Maputo there are substantial differences in income and expenditure between those who are in a better situation and the poor. The total Gini coefficient is 0.7 and although the top quintile had a per capita income of

<sup>7</sup> With regard to education and literacy, Maputo has a higher school attendance rate than the rural areas and other urban areas. While the average illiteracy rate is 48.4% in the urban areas, against 81.1% in the rural areas, in Maputo it is about 40.3% (Paulo et al 2008). While the national average of citizens with full primary education is 32.4% and only 5.8% have secondary or university education, in Maputo, these rates rise to 45% and 14.1%, respectively (INE, 2007). Furthermore, most of the media (public and private) are based in Maputo, from radio and television stations to newspapers, some of whose coverage is limited to this city. Data from the Maputo municipality for 2010 indicate that at least 18% of the inhabitants of the capital have access to a computer, internet or cell phone, which is no less relevant, particularly in an era when information technologies are gaining ever greater importance, including in popular mobilisation.

4,315 MT, the figure for the bottom quintile was 388 MT, very low in a marketised scenario such as Maputo (Tvedten et al, 2013). It is precisely because it is marketised that employment and access to money are basic conditions for survival in Maputo city:

*"Perhaps the most distinctive characteristic of life in Maputo is the extent to which money is essential to meet basic needs, and to establish and maintain vital social relationships. The poorest have problems in maintaining relations with members of the extended family who often live in rural areas or in other parts of the city: they have little to offer in other personalised reciprocal relations; they have problems in obtaining jobs and in creating their own sources of income; and often they lack the necessary social capital and the 'entry ticket' for relations with state and civil society institutions." (Paulo et al, 2008, p. iii)*

The poorest strata in Maputo city are also characterised by high levels of dependency and by their inability to maintain links with their rural areas of origin and to take part in urban-rural exchange, regarded as central in the survival of the population (Tvedten et al 2013). As noted by Tvedten et al, weak mobility between the categories and the perception of this, "of being trapped in poverty and of being unable to take part in what the city has to offer, is at the heart of the current dissatisfaction among poor people in the poor neighbourhoods of Maputo" (2013, p. 4). It is in neighbourhoods such as Inhagoia, Chamanculo, Benfica and Magoanine that popular revolts are most intense. It is in these neighbourhoods that those regarded as trapped and cornered by poverty are found. But in these same neighbourhoods it is above all young people who are most involved in the revolts. These are youths mostly in waithood, a kind of "[...] prolonged adolescence or an involuntary delay in attaining the adult state" (Honwana, 2013, p. 5). They have no formal employment, or have precarious jobs, they are unable to build, buy or rent a house. They are unable to marry, and form and feed a family, etc.

## **Protests, Mobilisation and Participants**

The popular protests always had an anonymous origin. Mobilisation was achieved through text messages which circulated virally across the mobile phone networks and in the social media (facebook). These are means of communication and expression which are undergoing rapid development in Mozambique. They cover practically all social strata (particularly access via text message), and their very nature makes it difficult for the government to control.

It is the common opinion that text messages played a strong role in the popular mobilisation for what was initially called a "strike". Apparently, from what can be deduced from one young man interviewed, the text messages began to circulate after some debate in the social networks:

*"Bad news travels fast. It so happens I received it by a text message. But if you ask me where the message came from, I won't know how to answer. I just received the message. That is to say there was a means of spreading people's spirit of dissatisfaction via messages. We also have the social networks. You have to know that these means are great platforms for spreading information. And the people, in these social networks, give their opinions about the cost of living. At the time in Mozambique, Facebook didn't have much weight, but there were*

*other means such as “msn” and “mig33”, where people exchanged messages, and talked. In my opinion, this also generated great dissatisfaction”. (Interviewee from Chamanculo).*

Days before the demonstrations, messages announcing the “strike” began to circulate in the social media and through text messages. In 2008, the authorities were taken by surprise because they were not expecting a revolt, particularly in a region where political sympathy for the ruling party, Frelimo, had historically been very strong.<sup>8</sup> In 2010, the government paid greater attention to the announcement of a “strike”. This time there was quicker police reaction, although it was still confused and poorly executed. In 2010, for example, the Ministry of the Interior, on the eve of the events, tried to calm people down, or demobilise them, saying that the supposed “strike” was not legitimate. There had been no notification of a demonstration, as required by law, hence it would not take place. This position was also shared by the road transport operators. Although there was a discourse from the authorities linked to power appealing for calm, and urging people to go to work and continue their normal activities, the feeling prevailed that the demonstrations were the only way of claiming from the government the right to better living conditions:

*“the spirit of the messages threw stones at the current government, the government of the day, and this same government of the day, I won’t cite any names, they said it was a government of intransigent, intolerant individuals who had nothing to do with the cause of the people or with democracy, because one of the pillars of democracy is full respect for human rights. The right to health and the right to food are part of human rights. This being the case, it was said that this is a state that does not respect human rights” (Interviewee in Chamanculo).*

The question of whether or not it was a strike was evident in the popular discourses. It is true that the demonstrations had, in the collective imagination, the idea of a strike. But in the way the protest unfolded, it cannot be identified with a strike in the classic meaning of the term. It should be understood on the scale of demands raised. The media used a great variety of terms for the events – namely strike, popular demonstrations, protests, revolts, popular uprisings, social movement, disturbances, social upheaval, demonstrations, riots, rebellion, insurrection, turbulence, tumults, agitation, social earthquake, vandalism.

The authorities considered some protest songs, particularly by the Mozambican musician Azagaia, as incitement. The weekly paper Savana, for example, strongly criticised the public prosecutor’s office, accusing it of trying to hinder the exercise of freedom of expression, when this institution accused Azagaia of instigating the demonstrations with his song “Povo no Poder” (“Power to the People”), which deals with the difficult situation experienced by the Mozambican people faced with the increase in the cost of living. The lyrics of this song, recorded after the demonstration of 2008, were published in full by Savana in 2010 (Savana, 3/9/2010). They include the following verse:

Mr President, you left the luxury of your palace

You finally noticed that life’s not easy here

Only now did you call a meeting of your Council of Ministers

But the people haven’t been sleeping, we came together a long time ago

<sup>8</sup> From the first multi-party elections (1994) up to the elections of 2004, Frelimo always obtained around 90% of the vote in Maputo and Matola.

We've barricaded the streets  
 We've halted the minibuses  
 No one is getting past  
 Even the shops are shut  
 If the police are violent  
 We'll respond with violence

Although the mobilisation was strong, both in 2008, and in 2010, it seems clear that in neither case was there an organised leadership, as one interviewee stated:

*"It is impossible to work out who was the head of the demonstration here in the neighbourhood, it is impossible to detect the face of the demonstrations, to say that the key to the demonstration is this or that person." (Chamanculo interviewee).*

The interviewees said that, directly or indirectly, a sizeable number of residents in the places that were the foci of the demonstrations took part in them. The discourses also indicate that many households benefitted for some time from the foodstuffs looted from shops and warehouses. From the fact that the residents approached said they were hungry, largely because of the government which did nothing to minimise the situation (for example, by creating jobs for young people, and balancing workers' wages with the cost of living), joining the demonstrations seemed a momentary solution to the problem of lack of food, as can be seen from these two comments:

*"There are households here who went for months without buying rice, because they stole a lot of sacks. And some households sold the stolen rice at a cheaper price (...) I bought two 50 kilo sacks for 1,400. So they looted and sold at a ridiculous price. Lots of things. This just showed that the price had to drop. But it's not easy." (Interviewee from Ferroviário).*

*"I didn't take part (...) Some brothers took part. Youths, women, kids, lots of kids, took part" (Interviewee from Ferroviário).*

Given the difficult situation of urban poverty, it wasn't just ordinary people who took part in the demonstrations. There were also policemen, who ought to have been guaranteeing public law and order, who participated and took advantage of them:

*"This area was full of things. Sacks, you saw people carrying them! There were people who carried a double freezer, full of things, meat (...) the police are also human. They see that the people are right. It's the situation (...) There are others who even went into these houses, took off their uniforms and became normal, because they saw there was no way. This is the reality. Some policemen also stole, because they needed to. This is bad. Don't you see simple cops in their grey uniforms walking around? They're also doing badly. they suffer too, They're really doing badly." (Interviewee from Ferroviário).*

## 6. DISCOURSES AND REPRESENTATIONS ABOUT THE POPULAR PROTESTS

While the participants went onto the streets to demonstrate their dissatisfaction at their difficult living conditions, much of the media gave visibility and public notoriety to their actions and contributed to the formation of the public debate on the question. However, the public media (controlled by the ruling party) in general followed the government line, which denounced the movement, not only as illegal and illegitimate, but also as a hindrance to the country's development.

The discourse of the demonstrators developed essentially around two themes: the cost of living and the relationship between citizens and the state. Regarding the cost of living, the interviews show that the motivation for revolting against the government resulted from dissatisfaction at the cost of living and of the wage imbalance when compared to this:

*"trying to get into the spirit of the individuals, whom Minister Pacheco called vandals in his speeches, I think what was behind this vandalism is dissatisfaction (...) People were feeling the pressure. That is, a man who earns 2,800, has five children and a wife! This wage is tiny to sustain his family, and he saw no other way but looting to minimise a bit the situation at home. If we look at it, people were trying to take foodstuffs, they looted sacks of rice, vegetable oil (...) goods such as computers they just smashed and left behind. They only took the food. What I'm trying to say is that behind this is the food crisis which led people to demonstrate." (Interviewee from Chamanculo)*

It should be noted that in the initial demonstrations, begun on 5 February 2008, although the demonstrators were basically protesting against the rise in transport fares, that same year there had been increases in food prices, and also the announcement of a future rise in one of the basic items in the popular diet, bread. In September 2010, the demonstrations concentrated mainly on the increase in the price of bread, and also of other basic products. In both cases, people felt the need to demonstrate because, according to most of the interviewees, "they had already been protesting against the rise in fares, bread, cooking oil, electricity, water among others. Faced with this situation, they thought that the government should present a concrete solution, controlling the hikes in the prices of basic goods and services, and correcting the current imbalance between workers' incomes and prices:

*"This was aimed at the government itself, so that it would take measures, so that it would see that what it's doing is all screwed up. It's true, it was to force the government to take measures. When we did that, it was for the government, it was for the government to relax the prices, because it's the prices that are killing here in Mozambique. It's the chapa, the rice,*

*the charcoal. Basic things that are very expensive. It's complicated, it's not easy. It's also not easy to work, and you receive a wage with which you can only manage the basics. This isn't easy (...)." (Interviewee from Ferroviário).*

Many members of the public expressed a sense of frustration and exhaustion at the lack of responses from the government to their problems, particularly those that have been expressed through the block chiefs and neighbourhood secretaries. Hence the frustration of the most vulnerable and the total loss of confidence in government institutions, including the electoral system. Observation on the ground made it possible to note the reality of the miserable food conditions, about which many citizens gave their opinions during the conversations and interviews. In general, it can be noted that over the years there has been a change in food habits forced by the financial inability to provide food. This consists in reducing the three basic meals (breakfast, lunch and dinner) into just one heavy meal at dinner time. The other two meals were practically eliminated, with the partial survival of a lunch composed alternatively of leftovers from the previous day's meal, known as "xiquento", and bread, salad or tea, when possible. This is because there is no money to buy more decent and balanced meals, given the high prices of food in the markets. For most of the interviewees, there was an obvious contradiction between this difficult situation of poverty and the promised "better future" extolled during the election campaigns of the ruling party.

In their relationship with the government authorities, the interviewees showed they have no knowledge about how to discuss public policies related with the food question; or how to make use of their rights and express their dissatisfaction at this lack of knowledge. With regard to the rise in food prices, for example, there were many allegations about a communications gap between the government and the public at large.

*"It's logical to justify the rise in prices, but transparency is needed (...) Once I heard on television the Planning Minister, Aiuba Cuereneia. He's trained in economics, but I'm not sure. He explained, he brought in economic concepts to explain price rises .He spoke about inflation, several technical terms used in economics. He spoke about macro and micro economic growth, about the redistribution of wealth, various things. Now it's necessary to take this information (...) leave everything in simple terms. These things have to be clarified for the people, because we have a majority who are not well schooled. It's difficult for a person who's not well educated to understand this stuff about inflation. These things have to be explained, down to people living in remote areas." (Interviewee from Chamanculo).*

Popular dissatisfaction, expressed through protests, coincided with the two latest terms of office of Frelimo and Armando Guebuza (from 2005 until today). Members of the public think this period has seen sharpened social frustration due to class divisions between the poor (the majority of the population, those who work so that they can sustain their families, but whose situation of poverty is tending to worsen) and the rich (people linked to political power and with good chances of prospering). Furthermore, the popular discourses point to a reduction in job opportunities, as well as to an absence of dialogue between the people and the government. These members of the public blame the government – and particularly President Guebuza – for doing nothing concrete for their welfare and they show nostalgia for the governance of Joaquim Chissano (and even of Samora Machel, in the case of older people), periods when the cost of living was not alarming:

*"In Chissano's time, things were calm. Since this President Guebuza came in, things have been expensive. Even wages are falling (...) the economy isn't falling. There's a lot of wealth, but they're eating it. A little group! Not even this money they give, 7 million, in the neighbourhoods, they give it among themselves. It's the neighbourhood chief, the block chief who gets it. Nobody else gets anything (...) The cost of living, people used to murmur, now they don't even murmur (...) The majority live by selling oranges, selling bhajis. There are no jobs." (Interviewee from Chamanculo).*

*"That's why one day Mozambique will really catch fire. Ah, it's true. The people are waiting for someone to take the initiative. The people are fed up, they're fed up. They're fed up because it's complicated (...) He's only just taken over, our comrade, it's complicated. He came in to undo everything. Speaking seriously (...) Scarcely had our comrade Guebuza, come in, and in school education is automatic passage between grades. The kids don't know anything. He came in to thrust everyone into mental laziness. It's education, it's health, it's complicated. This isn't good. The country is developing, but there are certain things which are not right." (Interviewee from Ferroviário).*

The media played a significant role in the public debate aroused by the popular protests particularly during the demonstrations and in the immediately subsequent period.<sup>9</sup> The protests were a privileged moment for expressing the opinions of academics, of some politicians of opposition parties<sup>10</sup> and other political analysts with access to the media. Both journalistic articles and interventions in the debate of personalities from civil society clearly illustrated the cleavage between the public press dominated by the ruling party, which fundamentally sought to feed the idea of the illegitimacy of the movement, and that the demonstrators were being made use of, and the "independent" press, which was much more open to seeking explanations for the phenomenon.

In the media, the term most commonly used was "demonstrators", followed by "youths", to designate those who took part in the demonstrations. Other terms were also heavily used, such as "members of the public", "unemployed", "adolescents", "children", but also "vulnerable groups" and even "women". Also in general they all pointed to the difficult living conditions of the demonstrators, together with the high level of unemployment in the country and the galloping rise in prices, particularly food prices. The media close to power mostly used accusatory terms, since the demonstrators had placed themselves outside the law by resorting to acts of violence. So with greater frequency there appeared the terms "opportunists", "vandals", "individuals of doubtful conduct", "anti-social elements", "bandits", "rioters", "agents of destabilisation", "agitators", "evil-doers" and "adventurers", giving a vision of events which justified the violence of police repression. The independent media, for their part, frontally criticised the government and the police for the use of extreme violence, particularly the use of live ammunition, in addition to rubber bullets and tear gas, which caused a large number of victims. The criticisms also extended to the President of the Republic, against his indifference to the country's problems and his expensive "Open Presidencies". The weekly Savana, for example, was one of the few who, in 2010, sketched a political dimension to the protests, in reporting that in some places, alongside

<sup>9</sup> The following analysis reflects a generic perspective on the coverage of the demonstrations by 15 Mozambican papers: three daily printed papers (Notícias, Diário de Moçambique and O País), six electronic dailies (CanalMoz, Diário de Notícias, Ponto Certo, Vertical, Mediafax and Diário do País) and six printed weeklies (Canal de Moçambique, Savana, Zambeze, Magazine Independente, A Verdade and Domingo). In all, 163 articles were analysed.

<sup>10</sup> Strangely enough, on none of the three occasions (2008, 2010 and 2012) did the popular movement arouse more than simple positions of support or rejection on the part of the main Mozambican political actors, which confirms the real disconnect between these actors and the great majority of the population.

the popular barricades, people had burnt and trampled on posters bearing the image of President Guebuza (Savana, 17/09/2010).

Although these were ephemeral, unorganised phenomena, which did not result in any form of organisation, it seems evident that the way in which these revolts unfolded expresses the incapacity of the political system to guarantee a genuine space for negotiating the social interests of the poorest strata of society. In this sense, they can be seen, in addition to their dimension of raising immediate claims, as a new form of political expression. They constitute new elements in the repertoire of political action in Mozambique (Chaimite, 2014).<sup>11</sup>

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11 This is also the line of argumentation developed by Bertelsen (2014).

## 7. THE POLITICAL RESPONSE: FROM CONFRONTATION TO ACCOMMODATION

In 2008, as in 2010 and 2012, the popular protests, in an initial phase, provoked repression on the part of the government, in an attempt to stifle them. Thus the first reaction of the government was to consider them illegal and to mobilise the police to restore “public order”, as shown by the speech of the President of the Republic on the occasion of the popular revolt of 2010, reflecting the conception and orientation of the government authorities about the legitimacy and the actors of the protest movement:

*“Fellow countrymen, I want to urge you to remain calm and serene and not to join any kind of agitation. We also urge all our countrymen to dissuade the naive, to remain vigilant and to denounce to the authorities the agitators and the preparation or undertaking of acts which constitute an assault against life or against order and against public tranquillity. We are all involved in increasing productivity in our sectors of activity, thus continuing to make the struggle against poverty our individual and collective agenda” (Armando Guebuza, “The Government is aware of the situation in which our marvellous people is living”, 1/10/ 2010).<sup>12</sup>*

The speech of the then Minister of the Interior, at the beginning of the 2010 revolts, was on the same lines:

*“My first reaction is of repudiation and condemnation of these acts, which are illegal, violent and in no way contribute to the effort in which all Mozambicans are engaged in the fight against poverty”, and he added that the Mozambican authorities would not yield to pressure from “adventurers, unemployed and bandits who don’t put themselves forward, but use innocent citizens, mostly children (...)” (O País, 2/09/2010).*

In the same speech, José Pacheco referred to the relationship between the cost of living and the price of fuel, by stressing that the fuel price would not fall:

*“At the same time, there is a package of economic measures which the Government has been taking, in the framework of controlling prices, and incentives so that citizens may be reassured in this great pressure from the increase in the cost of living, which has to do with fuel. Fuel prices are not going to fall, we don’t have any oil well where we can hitch up a tanker truck and draw out petroleum” (Ibid.).*

Though the statements transcribed above refer specifically to the movement of September 2010, they mirror well the first attitude of the government authorities to the protests, regarded as the work of anti-social elements. They help us understand the motives for extremely violent police repression (with tens of deaths and hundreds of injuries in 2008 and 2010) and the attempt to restrict the

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12 Available on [http://armandoguebuza.blogspot.com/2010\\_09\\_01\\_archive.html](http://armandoguebuza.blogspot.com/2010_09_01_archive.html).

development of the protests through controlling communications.

Both in 2008 and in 2010, text messages, anonymous but widely shared, were fundamental in the popular mobilisation. Before the demonstrations, the call went out through messages such as the following:

*"Mozambicans, prepare yourselves for the general strike 01/09/2010. We protest at the rise in the price of bread, water, electricity and others. Send to other Mozambicans. Wake up". (Text message of 31/08/2010).*

Text messages were also used during the protests, seeking above all to galvanise the demonstrators to continue, given the reluctance of the government to yield to popular pressure: the following text was sent after the speech by the President of the Republic, on the night of 1 September 2010, condemning the demonstrations and appealing for calm:

*"Mozambicans, Guebuza [Armando Guebuza, President of Moçambique] and his lackeys are lying as they have always lied. We will not stop the strike until the government adopts measures to reduce the cost of living. The struggle goes on".*

In an attempt to reduce the impact of the protests and their potential to spread to new areas, the government decided to order the operators to suspend the mobile phone pre-paid text message service. And some days later, it made it obligatory to register, with identification, the owners of cell phone numbers within a period of two months, otherwise the numbers would be definitively blocked.<sup>13</sup> According to the document announcing this measure, compulsory registration was intended "to promote the responsible use of SIM cards, thus contributing to maintain public order and tranquillity" (article 4 of Ministerial Diploma no. 153/2010, Boletim da República, 1st Series, no. 37, 15/09/2010).

This measure, announced by the government as irreversible, was criticised, not only because the deadlines for registration were unrealistic, because, according to the operators themselves, it would be almost impossible to register the around 7 million users of mobile phone services in the country in just 60 days, but also as an attempt at " (...) repression of the freedom of expression which potentially contests social inequalities" (Law Observatory no. 1, CIP, 2010). After the extension of the final deadline for registration, from 15 November 2010 to 7 January 2013, this was (unofficially) extended indefinitely, but without any SIM cards really being blocked. This happened again in 2012, when there were new threats of protests, after the rise in public transport fares in Maputo.

But, faced with the strength of the streets and the evidence – impossible to ignore – of the impact of the cost of living on the poorest strata, at each moment of crisis, the government switches from a strategy of confrontation to an attempt at accommodation through concessions and announcing new policies.

#### Price freezes and Subsidies

In 2008, for example, the new fares for the "chapas" were cancelled, and the government promised to compensate the transporters, provided they showed their operating licence, regularised their tax

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<sup>13</sup> Although this practice is common in many countries, the timing and the context of the decision to apply it in Mozambique leaves no doubt about the intimidatory and potentially repressive character of the measure.

situation and registered their fuel consumption. The 2010 concessions were more comprehensive than those of 2008. In addition to holding back the rise in the “chapa” fares, by subsidising the transporters, the government expanded the subsidies to bakers, announced a freeze on the wages and allowances of leaders of the state, of companies in which the state participates, and members of the boards of directors of public companies. The government also announced the introduction of a “basic basket” of subsidised goods, the expanding of the District Development Fund (FDD – commonly known as “the 7 Million”) to the urban districts, the reduction of customs duties on the import of third grade rice and of sugar, and announced it would promote the production and consumption of bread made from cassava flour.

*“It was in this context that various measures were taken to contain the impact of these crises on the lives of citizens, notably through subsidies on fuel and imported wheat. Also in this area, the government has been implementing the Food Production Action Plan and in general stepping up its actions in the fight against poverty in the cities and the countryside. Progress has been made in implementing this food production plan, as well as in water supply, sanitation, transport and communications, health and education and in improving access roads. (President of the Republic, Armando Guebuza, in O País, 2 September 2010).*

Price freezes were always achieved by the use of subsidies. The price of bread in 2010-11, for example, was held steady by raising the subsidy on wheat flour, which rose from 200 to 300 meticais on a 50 kilo sack, as from 1 February 2011, as a consequence of the rise in the price of flour at the milling companies from 1,050 to 1,150 meticais per 50 kilo sack.

But the government not only subsidised bread but promised to extend this subsidy to a range of basic products included in what it called the ‘basic basket’, while maintaining the subsidy for public passenger transport.

The “Passenger Transport Subsidy Programme” (PSTP) is part of the “Package of Measures to Mitigate the Cost of Living”, approved by the Council of Ministers, on 29 March 2011. According to this document, the PSTP is part of a wide-ranging government strategy which, in line with the entire economy, intends “(...) to liberalise gradually the transport fares paid by passengers, but seeking to protect the most vulnerable strata of the population, and/or the productive functions which could suffer from an increase in fares”, ceasing to subsidise the transporter directly, as it currently does. The same document says that the current subsidy model is not only out of date but also

*“(...) is not directed at those who need it most (...) it covers everyone, from the student or worker going from home to work and back to the passenger going to the beach or going shopping. This distorts the economy and could destabilise the macro-economic environment which determines growth and harmonious development of the country in all its dimensions, (...) even putting at risk justice in the distribution of income.” (p. 21).*

The alternative model which it was intended to introduce with the PSTP is that of directed subsidies, benefitting not only those included in the social programmes and the elderly envisaged in other similar programmes, but also all workers and students, as long as they are not on holiday and/or outside the hours of going to and from work and school, and they have not been allocated a car, or the employer or school does not provide transport between their home and the workplace or school.

The PSTU was to be implemented through a system of passes grouped into four categories: annual, which would enjoy a discount of 75% of the market price and a total of 566 journeys; six monthly, with a discount of 55% and 280 journeys; quarterly with a 35% discount and 140 journeys, and monthly with a 15% discount and 48 journeys. The programme should have covered all municipalities with public transport systems, road, rail and river, and the responsibilities would be shared between the municipalities, the government and the employers:

*"The Transport Development Fund (FTC) will be the body responsible for the management of the PSTU, but it may tertiarise this responsibility in whole or in part. The employer will acquire the pre-paid pass or ticket at the PSTU management body, and at the moment of acquisition will pay the cost of issue plus 25% as the employer's contribution to the subsidy. When passing the ticket on to the worker, the latter will pay only the subsidised cost of the journey, in accordance with the type of pass. To facilitate matters for the worker, the employer will advance the total cost of the journeys agreed and will every month deduct from the wages what has been agreed between himself and the worker. The amount disbursed by the employer, corresponding to 25%, should be considered as deductible for tax purposes. The government and the Municipalities, in accordance with the number of journeys issued, will pay the FTC in advance their contribution to the subsidy, The FTC will pass in full to the transporter the real cost of the journeys. In an initial phase, the transporters shall present regularly to the management body the stubs of the tickets received. In a later phase, when the electronic system is established, there will be a direct debit from the bank account of the management body or its agent to the bank account of the transporter, and this will take place when the passenger validates his pass at the moment of boarding."* (p. 25)

It was envisaged that the initial implementation of this very complex system of subsidies would occur between May and December 2011. But it never went beyond intentions, and up to now the previous model has prevailed, under which the compensation is channelled to the transporters, a system which has been criticised by the Maputo Association of Road Transporters (ATROMAP):

*"In an initial phase, the compensation even worked. Note that the compensation is in force because the price of fuel and accessories remain high in comparison with the fares we are charging (...) but there came a point when the Government, although continuing to subsidise, found another way of giving the subsidy and taking it back again. That's why nowadays people don't go to claim the compensation, they no longer fill out the forms necessary to obtain the compensation. So it's been going through many phases. There was a phase when the transporter really did feel grateful for this compensation. But there is this phase where he understands he was paying so much through taxes because now it's proportional. You have to pay a very high tax to obtain a reasonable compensation. So it becomes a process whereby you take money out of one pocket and put it in another. So people are now not interested in the compensation." (Baptista Macuvele, Deputy Chairperson of Atromap, interviewed in Maputo, 29 November 2013).*

## The “Basic Basket”

The subsidy for the basic basket was one of the measures adopted by the government, in March 2011, to face the increased trend towards rising grain and fuel prices, resulting from price rises on the international market.<sup>14</sup> Like the passenger transport subsidy, this was among the series of measures initially announced shortly after the demonstrations of 1-2 September 2010 and later approved by the Council of Ministers at its meeting of 29 March 2011. The low income strata, identified as the beneficiaries of the basic basket subsidy, were initially defined as formal sector workers living in the eleven provincial capitals who earned a wage equal to or lower than 2,000 meticais. Shortly afterwards, this group was expanded to include all workers of the informal sector and all those who received a wage no larger than 2,500 meticais. The measure envisaged that the beneficiaries could buy, at subsidised prices, a series of basic goods - namely, rice, maize flour, vegetable oil, second grade fish, butter beans, sugar and bread.

There were countless criticisms of this measure, and here we point to just two, While for some the basic basket subsidy was an inconsistent and unsustainable measure, since the exact number of beneficiaries was unknown and no viability study had been undertaken, for others it was, above all, discriminatory and partisan. Since it would only benefit the inhabitants of the urban areas, regarded as the epicentres of the demonstrations. Given this scenario, plus the alleged non-occurrence of one of the pre-conditions for its implementation – that of increased grain and fuel prices after its approval – this measure was completely forgotten. In fact, despite the relative stabilisation of fuel prices on the international market, the price of grain and of transport in Mozambique has gradually risen, without, however, reactivating either debate on the measure or its application.<sup>15</sup>

## *Wheat and cassava bread*

Wheat is the main ingredient for making bread, and variations in the price of bread have a significant impact on the lives of Mozambicans in general, and on the poorest strata in particular, contributing in part, to the occurrence of revolts. In Mozambique, wheat is traditionally imported and domestic production is insignificant. In 2008, a Food Production Action Plan (PAPA)<sup>16</sup> was drawn up with the goal of increasing food production in the country and making it less dependent on imports and thus on price variations on the international market. According to this plan, national wheat production should have increased fivefold by the 2010-2011 agricultural campaign, thus reducing the wheat deficit from 95% to 20% of total consumption. At the same time it was also hoped that cassava production would increase fivefold over the same period. There was also the idea of developing a technique to bake bread from a mixture of wheat and cassava flour.<sup>17</sup>

14 Ministry of Industry and Trade, Manual de Procedimentos Do Subsídio à Cesta Básica, Maputo, April 2011.

15 Since then there has been a clear trend to avoid large and sudden price rises, which may also explain a greater possibility of gradual adaptation of households to the cost of living and a reduction in the potential for conflict.

16 PAPA was approved in June 2008, by the Inter-Ministerial Commission on Prices, consisting of the Ministers of Planning and Development, of Finance, of Agriculture, of Industry and Trade, of Science and Technology and of Transport and Communications. Its objective is “(...) to concentrate efforts to increase the production and productivity of particular crops and products considered fundamental for the consumption of Mozambican households, namely maize, rice, wheat, cassava, potatoes and oilseeds (sunflower, soya, cotton seed and groundnuts).” (PAPA Final Document, p. 16).

17 However, there are still some doubts about the duration and resistance of cassava flour and there are also no guarantees that the price could be lower. Despite these uncertainties, the government has been encouraging the production and marketing of cassava while deeper studies are under way, both about the quality of the bread baked by mixing cassava and wheat flour, and about its profit-

To attain the PAPA targets, the government was to undertake a series of activities, notably publicising agricultural technologies, supporting the private sector by making production equipment available, opening lines of credit to the agricultural sector (agro-business), encouraging livestock farming (direct distribution of animals and animal traction instruments), capacity building and raising the awareness of producers and extensionists with particular stress on fighting pests, use of pesticides, etc. However, despite this important package of measures, the production both of wheat and of the other grains advocated in PAPA, has remained virtually unchanged in recent years.

Indeed, according to the National Director of Trade, the deficit in producing wheat, just as in the case of rice, is still minimised through donations, notably from the USA and Japan:

*"In fact, we have been receiving commercial food aid from Japan and the United States, in wheat and in rice. Because these are goods where we are still heavily dependent on the outside world. So Japan has been granting rice, and the amounts vary from one year to another and from one period to another. And the United States of America, through USAID, and the Department of Agriculture, has been donating wheat, via World Vision. But this aid is commercial aid, it's not free. In the case of rice, it is sold through the commercial network and the funds generated go to the public treasury to finance projects; economic and social development projects. When the rice reaches the port, the Ministry does not deal with the product, take it or store it. No. Everything has been processed before the rice arrives. When it arrives, each trader takes the amount he asked for, First, we make an announcement so that the companies can express their interest. We publish it in the media. Then we analyse the announcements, the bids and we award these goods. When the rice arrives, each company goes and takes it directly from the port to its warehouses and sells it. They pay a part beforehand and pay the rest later. That's the faculty we give them. Now for wheat the funds don't go to us, because World Vision is an NGO. So the funds will finance the programmes of NGOs in Mozambique who work together with World Vision. (A. Muianga, National Director of Trade, Interview, 4/12/2013, Maputo)*

According to A. Muianga, despite the donations which enter the commercial circuit, the deficit remains, and is minimised by direct imports by the traders:

*"They decide what they have to offer. They now know what our deficit is. (...) They, in accordance with what they have to give, decide what they will give. And this minimises the deficit. As for the other part of the deficit, which is not covered, the operators import. The deficit is covered, partly by domestic production (...) this deficit is covered in two ways: imports and food aid. But food aid is only for these two products. The remaining products are imported to cover the deficit, they are normal imports by the operators, which they can import so that they can sell them on the market. We just facilitate the licensing, through the customs service (...) we give licences to the companies. But (...) donations are never sufficient to satisfy the needs of the market (...) they are sold at market prices". (Ibid.)*

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ability. The increase already recorded in production arises from the fact that cassava is raw material for brewing beer, as part of an experimental project undertaken in Nampula over the last two years.

## **Silos and Storage**

In 2008, the Government also announced a plan to build 39 silos, each with the capacity to store 1,000 tonnes, in Sofala, Tete, Zambézia, Nampula, Niassa and Cabo Delgado provinces, all considered as highly productive. The purpose of the silos is to store agricultural surpluses, particularly grain, thus contributing to improved efficiency in agricultural marketing in Mozambique and thus to food security. Although the building of the silos is supervised by the Ministry of Industry and Trade, they will be privately managed, in order to guarantee competitiveness and to favour the peasants in commercial exchange.<sup>18</sup>

The Strategic Urban Poverty Reduction Programme, 2010-2014 (PERPU)

Shortly before the demonstrations of September 2010, in August that year, the Ministry of Planning and Development, in partnership with the Ministries of Finance, Labour, State Administration, and Women's Affairs and Social Welfare, approved PERPU. However, this programme, which extended to the cities the District Development Fund (FDD), commonly known as “the 7 million”, was only implemented as from 2011. It had three objectives: to increase job opportunities; to improve the business environment and the employability of labour; and to improve the social protection system. For the 2011-2014 period, the creation of job opportunities and social protection were the two vectors prioritised.

The start of the implementation of PERPU in 2011, at a moment of great debate on the coverage, consistency and sustainability of the various measures to mitigate the impact of the rise in the cost of living, especially the basic basket subsidy, announced after the 2010 demonstrations, made it part of the government response to the popular protests.

## **Anti-riot exchange rate**

Taking into account the important of exchange rates in the formation of the prices of imported goods, particularly fuel, the government decided to take some macro-economic measures in order to ensure the stability of the metical against the dollar, the currency in which the country pays for its imports:

*“In fact, when the Metical appreciates against the US dollar, the main currency for importing fuel, the exchange rate enters into the formula for calculating the domestic price as a factor that mitigates the impact. When the Metical depreciates against the dollar, the exchange rate enters into the formula for calculating the domestic price as a factor that worsens the impact. (...) the demand for foreign currency to finance fuel imports is undertaken through financial intermediation guaranteed by a banking syndicate headed by BIM” (Council of Ministers, “Package of measures to attenuate the cost of living after the 1st quarter of 2011”, 29 March 2011).*

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<sup>18</sup> As usual, there is a large gap between the definition of policies and plans or programmes and reality. In this case, by 2012, only two of the 39 silos envisaged had been concluded (Gorongosa and Nhamatanda).

In 2010, the metical suffered a major depreciation (of about 14%) against the dollar, causing a very strong negative impact on the price of fuel on the domestic market. Faced with the resulting worsening of this unfavourable development, the Bank of Mozambique took responsibility itself for guaranteeing the foreign exchange needed to finance fuel imports at a more favourable exchange rate. This resulted in slowing down the exchange rate, which tended to stabilise: the metical/dollar exchange rate fell from 37 MZN/USD in late August 2010 to about 31 MZN/USD in March 2011.<sup>19</sup>

Since the country imports a large amount of the food it consumes, mostly from South Africa, the reduction and stabilisation of the exchange rate came to operate from then on as an important instrument to control food prices.

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<sup>19</sup> Among the package of measures, there stood out: 1) the increase in the Bank of Mozambique's interest rates for intervening in the money markets, namely the Standing Lending Facility and the Standing Deposit Facility, both by 100 base points, bringing them to 16.5% and 5% respectively, and raising the Compulsory Reserves Coefficient by 24 base points to 9.0%, as from the period of constitution that began on 7 February; 2) intervention on the Inter-Bank Exchange Market, providing foreign exchange to the market to a total of 162 million USD from the beginning of the year to 23 February. Of this sum, 57.1 million USD was destined to cover January's fuel invoice.

## 8. CONCLUSION

This report has sought to show that although the greves which shook Mozambique in 2008 and 2010 and threatened to do so again in 2012 were part of a broader global pattern triggered by food price rises and volatility on the world market, they were above all a reflection of local economic dynamics and resulted from the social and political exclusion to which the poorest urban strata in Mozambique have been condemned. In this concluding section, we reflect on whether these protests have revealed the contours of a contemporary ‘moral economy’ underlying relations between state, market and citizen in Mozambique, and the extent to which they have produced new accountability relations – whether informal and unstable or institutionalised in the formal spaces for debate and negotiation of the country’s political system.

We have seen how Mozambique – which had once seemed to be on a promising trajectory of import-substituting industrialisation – emerged from the socialist period and the terrible destruction of the civil war as a deeply impoverished and aid-dependent country. We have also seen how Frelimo changed the national class basis as well as the geopolitical orientation of its key alliances, while successfully sustaining its hold on power for almost four decades. And yet this dominant, all-pervasive Frelimo regime, steeped in an authoritarian tradition that had been consolidated over decades, was forced into concessions by spontaneous popular action when it passed on price increases in a way that was felt to violate deeply-held notions of justice. We have seen how the government failed to see the greve of 2008 coming, failed to find an adequate response to that of 2010 and ended up being forced to reverse the price hikes it had so imperiously decreed in both cases, before learning by 2012 to take a very different, more cautious and negotiated approach to passing on globally-driven cost increases – albeit one combined with intensified repressive measures. In other words, an authoritarian kind of responsiveness may be emerging in Mozambique from the encounter between global price volatility, national political systems and cultures and the popular moral economy.

During the research which we carried out in sites that had seen protests in 2008 and/or 2010 in Maputo and Chokwe, most of our focus group participants identified a number of government policy announcements and actions as having been a direct response to the riots. They were mostly dismissive of these measures’ ability to make a difference to everyday food security, and classified several of them as *mentiras* – ‘lies’ – that were never intended to be implemented. Nevertheless, people saw the fact that they had been announced at all as powerful evidence of the effectiveness of the greve as a political strategy – and of a wider sea-change in attitudes among both the citizenry and elites, with the former waking up to the power of mobilisation and the latter learning not to take the urban masses for granted.

People in these areas were outspoken in their contempt for the current ruling elite, but sharply differentiated it from previous incarnations of Frelimo rule – especially the heroic socialist period under Samora Machel, in which hunger was remembered as an experience that was shared by rulers and ruled, as government ration shops distributed the meagre food supplies that were available in an economy ravaged by civil war and agricultural collapse. The nostalgic refrain ‘in Samora’s day...’

was a recurrent one in our interviews and focus group discussions, used to refer a period that not only symbolised greater economic equality but also official intolerance of corruption and self-interest among government officials.

Another refrain was the popular phrase quem não trambuca não manduca – ‘those who do not work, do not eat’. The moral economy in both rural and urban Mozambique is strongly marked by a perception that food security is something to be earned through hard work by everyone except the very elderly or infirm. The government’s violation of this moral economy is perceived as lying not in a failure to provide food directly but in a failure to preserve the relationship between wages and food prices. The result of this failure is that the idle children of the elite grow fat while even the hardest-working semi-skilled labourer cannot earn enough to feed a family – a situation described by one of our interviewees in Ferroviário as a ‘psychological torture’ perpetrated by the government. Focus group participants recalled that food prices had also risen in the 1990s under another Frelimo president, Joaquim Chissano, but insisted that during that period wages had risen enough to keep pace, whereas since 2008 they have been outstripped by inflation. Labour union representatives interviewed during the study accused the government of short-changing workers by insisting that any wage rises should be linked to a complex measure of sectoral GDP growth rather than to the cost of a ‘basic basket’ of goods.

Although both the Mozambican government and the country’s weak and donor-dependent ‘food sovereignty movement’ have focused on agricultural production as the key response to hunger, popular perceptions overwhelmingly emphasise the link with wages – perhaps unsurprisingly, given that even in rural areas most people are net food purchasers and depend on wage labour or petty trading to supplement their own meagre harvests. A devastating war followed by years of under-investment in strengthening smallholder agriculture have left most of rural Mozambique in a situation of food deficit and acutely vulnerable to floods, droughts and other natural disasters that frequently afflict the country. The combination of price rises and difficulty in sustaining subsistence production meant that most households in both rural and urban research sites reported scaling back their food consumption to one main meal at the end of the day, with a few leftovers being carefully saved for breakfast.

The major difference between rural and urban areas is that people in the latter rely overwhelmingly on bread, made from imported wheat (obtained both on the international market and via food aid) that is supplied to bakeries whose prices are under tight government control. Bread is usually eaten on its own or as a sandwich with a leaf of cabbage or slice of tomato – eggs, fish or chicken were considered rare and increasingly unaffordable luxuries. The traditional rural diet, based on maize and cassava, is rejected for both aesthetic and practical reasons: it is seen as rustic and unsophisticated, and also requires expensive charcoal and scarce time to cook, whereas bread can be eaten as soon as it is bought.

Although government spokespeople insistently tried to shift the blame for price hikes to international markets, the protestors insisted that the government itself was responsible for the resulting squeeze on their ability to travel to work by chapa and still afford a basic diet. Despite the fact that most former state-owned companies have been privatised and the vast majority of workers are in the informal sector, the fact that the protests were referred to as greves – strikes – suggests a popular imaginary that depicts the government as an employer refusing to allow its employees to earn a fair wage. Frelimo has undoubtedly fed this imaginary by trying to become omnipresent in social, political and economic spaces, by continuing to appeal to the legacy of the socialist one-party state and by its

leaders' tendency to make grand promises on which they have no ability to deliver – like the promise to quintuple wheat production made after the 2008 protests or the announcement after the 2010 protests that the urban poor would have subsidised access to a 'basic basket' of foodstuffs, neither of which produced any concrete results and both of which were described by focus group participants as mentiras.

In November 2012, the prospect of a fresh set of price hikes again triggered popular mobilisation for a greve, but the government managed to avert renewed rioting by using a three-pronged strategy. The first prong was macroeconomic policy: an 'anti-riot exchange rate' was used to moderate the impact of global price rises on the local prices of imported commodities such as wheat and fuel. The second prong was dialogue: the price rises were announced well in advance and in combination with specific mitigation measures, and officials used radio phone-ins to test the popular response to these measures before their official introduction. The third prong was repression: SMS services were again restricted, and potential flashpoints were flooded with riot police on the day that the increases took effect.

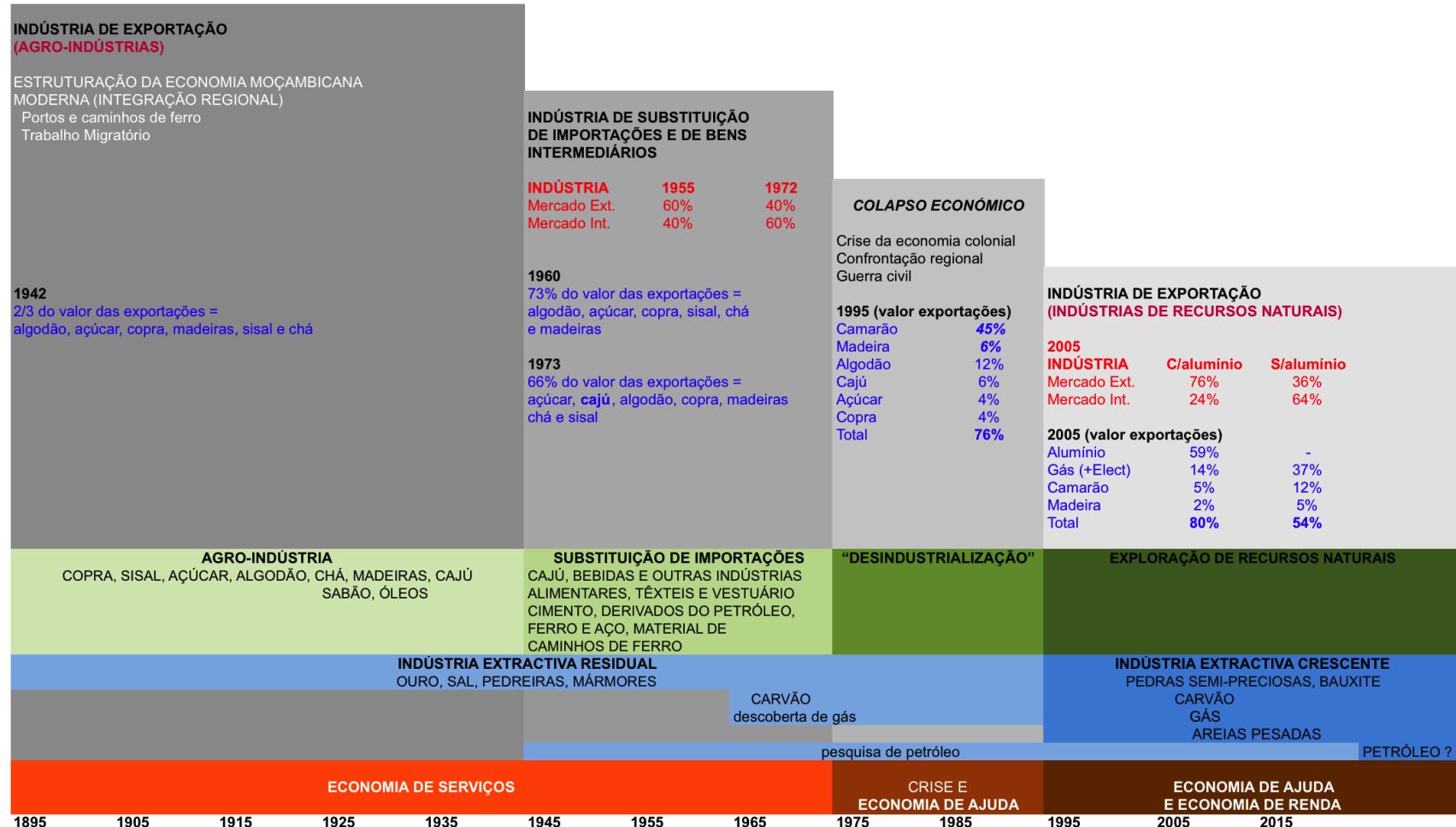
Thus, between 2008 and 2012, a form of authoritarian responsiveness seems to have come to the fore in Mozambique's politics of provisions, in which repression of protest is combined with increased sensitivity to the concerns of the urban poor. This is not a responsiveness mediated by democratic institutions: the way in which the revolts unfolded expresses the incapacity of the political system to guarantee a genuine space for negotiating the social interests of the poorest strata of society. Despite significant gains by the urban-based Democratic Movement of Mozambique (MDM) party in the 2013 municipal elections, neither the MDM nor any of the other opposition parties has incorporated concrete measures to tackle the rising cost of living into their political platforms, and the 2014 Presidential campaign was notable for its paucity of serious debate on causes of and responses to food insecurity in Mozambique. Mediation of the interests of the poor by civil society was similarly ineffective. Despite the popular classification of the protests as greves, or strikes, actual trade union-led protests have been muted (with the exception of relatively privileged groups such as doctors in the government health system, who staged an unprecedented strike in 2013). Donor-supported NGO efforts to build a sustained campaign on food security issues came to nothing, as the draft bill on the right to food was shelved before making its way through Parliament.

There is therefore little sign that the protests have led Mozambique to overcome its longstanding failure to consolidate a repertoire of peaceful and democratic modalities of citizen-state dialogue on poverty and food insecurity. Even the channel of citizen-state communication inherited from the period of one-party rule (in which people seek redress upwards through the system of block chiefs and neighbourhood secretaries) was perceived as failing, after many years of being used largely to transmit messages from above rather than to capture concerns from below. Nevertheless, the government's changed behaviour between 2008 and 2012 seems to reflect an awareness that its previous cavalier disregard for the impact of price rises on the food and livelihood security of the urban poor is no longer tenable. As the country prepares for the inauguration of a new President, from the same party but a different generation, it remains to be seen whether this awareness will be translated into the more effective policy response and more respectful dialogue that Mozambique's frustrated citizenry are increasingly prepared to demand.

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# APPENDIX I- PERIODISATION OF THE MOZAMBICAN ECONOMY



**FOOD  
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RIGHTS**

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