

**Invitation for contributions to a dossier of the magazine *Politique africaine*  
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Issue coordinated by Luís de Brito

**Mozambique after “socialism” and war: a “success story”?**

Independent since 1975, Mozambique is today regarded as a “success story” by donors, for whom examples of efficiency and good results of development aid are rare. Converted to the virtues of the market economy since the second half of the 1980s, after the failure of the “building of socialism”, and emerging in 1992 from a long and destructive civil war, this country, which had become one of the poorest in the world, experienced a very high growth rate and noteworthy political stability over the past decade. But is it really justified to talk of success?

Two major axes are proposed for the attention of authors who wish to contribute to this issue of the magazine, the objective of which is to undertake a critical reflection on the dynamics and processes of transformation under way in Mozambique.

***From service economy to aid economy. What “development”?***

The colonial economy of Mozambique developed since the end of the 19th century in an atypical fashion: as a supplier of raw materials to the industries of the metropolis and as a protected market for Portuguese exports. At the same time, Mozambique developed very strong economic ties with the countries of the hinterland, particularly with South Africa and Rhodesia. Most of the goods handled by the main ports and railways were in transit to or from these countries. Furthermore, there developed a broad movement of Mozambican migrant labour to these same countries. Equilibrium on the balance of payments was thus guaranteed by the export of labour and by the provision of rail and port services. But this balance was suddenly ruptured with independence. Under the Marxist inspired regime set up by Frelimo, the massive and rapid exodus of the settlers led to the abandonment of many factories and trading and other services, and also to the emptying of the state bureaucracy. At the same time, Frelimo’s solidarity with the liberation movements fighting against the South African and Rhodesian regimes, provoked strong hostility from those regimes, particularly expressed in support for opposition forces, from which Renamo was born as an armed rebel movement.

Faced with these challenges, the economic bankruptcy of the new independent state was practically inevitable. Neither the independence of Zimbabwe in 1980, nor the Nkomati Accord, signed with South Africa in 1984 led to the end of the armed conflict with Renamo or prevented the decline of the economy. Due to the war, which spread to all provinces in the country as from 1983, the economic liberalisation carried out under the aegis of the IMF and the World Bank produced few results until the second half of the 1990s. The peace re-established in 1992 allowed the take-off of the economy, sustained by massive reconstruction aid and later by some major industrial investments, which had a noteworthy impact on the indicators for two digit economic growth, but which created only a few thousand jobs, and very little tax revenue for the state. The state budget remained dependent on foreign aid for over 50% of its expenditure.

It was in this period that the formation of a national bourgeoisie picked up pace, benefiting, directly or indirectly from the privatisation, from opportunities for mediation/alliance with foreign investors,

and sharing with staff and employees of the NGOs most of the benefits from international handouts. "Poverty" has become an excellent "export product" which in itself justifies the continuation of foreign aid.

The benefits of economic growth do not reach most Mozambicans. Broad sectors of rural society and of the urban strata are suffering a real loss of income, and are in a situation of great vulnerability faced with inflation, particularly the increase in food and transport prices. Faced with a state that promises everything but does little for the mass of the people, indifference begins to give way to expressions of violent revolt, similar to the "bread riots" known from other African countries. This poses the question of the relationship between citizens and state power, and with democracy.

### *The difficult construction of democracy*

In the political sphere, the successes seem still more modest than in the economic field. Frelimo has managed to remain in power through winning all the presidential elections (even though there are doubts about the 1999 results) and by obtaining absolute majorities in parliament, but it has not proved capable of making a clean break with the tradition of the one party state. The clear political legitimacy of Renamo, expressed since 1994 in the vote of millions of Mozambicans is still systematically denied by Frelimo, which continues to refer to its origins and past links with the racist regimes of Rhodesia and South Africa. Under these conditions, elections organised under Frelimo control without great transparency have been losing importance in the eyes of a growing number of voters. Indeed, after the great mobilisation aroused by the first multi-party elections (with an 87% turnout), the renewal of political life that was expected from instituting a competitive political system did not occur, and the following elections showed the disillusion of the electorate with the abstention rate growing from 33% in 1999 to about 50% in 2004.

Another political reform, decentralisation, also aroused great expectations. But the decentralisation policy sketched in the 1990 Constitution, based on local elections in the districts was abandoned, after the results of the first general elections showed that the opposition might win control of a significant number of district governments, and it was replaced by a model of municipalisation limited to 33 cities and towns. This municipalisation should gradually reach new places, but ten years after the first municipal elections, the government has decided to create only ten new municipalities for the next elections. This was the terrain on which the country experienced its first change in political power, because Renamo candidates were elected as mayors in five municipalities (including Beira, the country's second largest city) and a majority in the municipal assemblies in four of these cities and towns. However, the value of this democratic exercise was affected by the poor voter turnout (an average of 23% for the 33 municipalities taken together), Under these conditions, those elected cannot be considered to have acquired great legitimacy.

To a weak system of political representation, we can add an equally weak civil society. The trade unions set up during the period of the one party state remain mostly linked to Frelimo. Furthermore, the economic and political context is not favourable for worker mobilisation, given that workers face a high rate of unemployment and are concerned above all not to lose their jobs. Although there are a large number of other non-governmental organisations in Mozambique, these were mostly set up thanks to the availability of funds from international aid, and play a role as instruments for the redistribution of this income. With some rare exceptions, they do not contribute towards expanding the democratic space.

The two thematic lines proposed here in a synthetic and provocative manner do not prevent authors from submitting draft articles on other themes.

The drafts should be sent by 30 June 2008 to [luis.brito@iese.ac.mz](mailto:luis.brito@iese.ac.mz). The final versions should be submitted by 30 November 2008.