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Policy Brief

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Zoom Online Platform

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# SALO Public Dialogue: Civic Participation, Youth Engagement, and the National Dialogue Process in Mozambique



## Executive Summary

On 28 November 2025, the Southern African Liaison Office (SALO), in partnership with Norwegian People's Aid (NPA), convened a public dialogue examining Mozambique's ongoing National and Inclusive Dialogue and its broader implications for civil society participation, democratic governance, and

regional stability in Southern Africa. The dialogue was held against the backdrop of post-election violence, widespread youth-led protests, and long-standing governance challenges, including the protracted conflict in Cabo Delgado.

The discussion underscored that while the National Dialogue presents an important opportunity to address political, constitutional, and socio-economic grievances, its credibility and effectiveness depend on meaningful inclusion, transparency, and implementation. Speakers highlighted persistent gaps in youth representation, risks of symbolic participation by civil society, and uncertainty regarding decision-making criteria within the Technical Commission for National and Inclusive Dialogue (COTE). At the same time, the Dialogue demonstrated the emergence of innovative youth-led platforms and regional solidarity that could strengthen the process if adequately supported.

Chaired by Munjodzi Mutandiri, SALO Senior Programme Advisor, and Tebogo Lekubu, SALO Senior Researcher and Manager: Knowledge Production and Learning Development, the dialogue convened regional analysts, civil society actors and youth representatives from Mozambique and the SADC region to reflect on Mozambique's Inclusive National Dialogue process, and its broader implications for the region. Speakers included David Fardo, President of Parlamento Juvenil de Mocambique (Youth Parliament of Mozambique); Francisca Noronha, Mozambican Association of Youth for Gender Equality and Education (AMJIGE); Sheila Nhancale (Human Rights Watch Mozambique); and Zimbabwean activist Takura Zhangazha.

## **Context and Importance**

Mozambique's National Dialogue emerged in response to contested elections and widespread post-election violence, particularly youth-led protests that resulted in significant loss of life, injuries, and arrests. These events exposed deep-seated frustrations linked to political exclusion, unemployment, electoral integrity, and governance failures.

The Dialogue is unfolding alongside a prolonged and complex security crisis in Cabo Delgado, underscoring the interlinked nature of political legitimacy, human security, and development. While Mozambique's context is specific, similar dynamics have surfaced across the Southern African Development Community (SADC), where disputed elections and shrinking civic space have increasingly prompted calls for dialogue as a conflict-management tool. This raises critical questions about the effectiveness, limitations, and long-term value of dialogue processes in addressing structural political crises.

## **Technical Commission for National and Inclusive Dialogue**

The National Dialogue is led by the Technical Commission for National and Inclusive Dialogue (COTE), composed of 21 members, including representatives from political parties and a limited number of civil society actors. COTE oversees ten thematic working groups addressing areas such as constitutional and electoral reform, governance, public finance, natural resources, security, justice, reconciliation, and decentralisation.

While the establishment of COTE represents a formal mechanism for structured engagement, speakers noted significant limitations in representation, particularly of youth and grassroots actors. In response, youth-led organisations have established the Commission for Youth Observation and Participation in the National Dialogue (COPJ), bringing together over 50 youth-led civil society organisations. COPJ conducts consultations, roadshows, and trainings aimed at consolidating youth perspectives and submitting collective proposals into the dialogue process. This parallel mobilisation reflects both the opportunities and shortcomings of the formal dialogue architecture.

## **A Perspective on the Youth of Mozambique**

Young people have been central to Mozambique's recent political upheavals yet remain underrepresented within formal dialogue structures. Speakers emphasised that youth -particularly young women - have historically been marginalised from peace agreements and political decision-making, despite being at the forefront of mobilisation for change.

Youth organisations have articulated their demands through surveys, position papers, conferences, and community-level consultations, consolidated into a Youth Agenda for 2025–2029. Key priorities include employment and economic inclusion, education and technical training reform, peace and security (including Cabo Delgado), and guaranteed youth participation in decision-making processes. The absence of young people within COTE and its thematic groups raises concerns about the legitimacy and responsiveness of dialogue outcomes to the realities faced by the majority of Mozambique's population.

## **The Process of Mozambique's Ongoing National and Inclusive Dialogue**

The Dialogue framework outlines four levels of consultation - central, provincial, district, and diaspora - suggesting an ambitious participatory roadmap. However, civil society actors highlighted a lack of public clarity regarding COTE's mandate, methodologies, accountability mechanisms, and decision-making criteria.

Concerns were raised about civic space restrictions, including intimidation, surveillance, and reprisals against activists, journalists, and protesters. Without robust safeguards for freedom of expression, access to information, and protection of human rights defenders, participation risks becoming symbolic. Transparency in how public inputs are evaluated, integrated, or excluded is essential for building trust and ensuring the Dialogue's credibility.

## **Dialogue as a Solution to Election Disputes in the Region and Its Challenges**

Regional perspectives highlighted that national dialogues in Southern Africa often emerge reactively after disputed elections rather than as proactive mechanisms for inclusive governance. Generational shifts, economic exclusion, and eroding trust in electoral institutions have intensified political contestation across the region.

Lessons from Zimbabwe's Government of National Unity underscored the risks of elite-driven settlements that prioritise political accommodation over people-centred economic reform. Without clear accountability mechanisms and ideological clarity, Dialogue outcomes may fail to address the socio-economic grievances that fuel repeated electoral crises. Mozambique's process presents an opportunity to avoid these pitfalls, but only if civil society engagement remains coordinated, vigilant, and sustained.

## **Policy Critiques**

- Weak implementation of existing constitutional and legal frameworks, particularly electoral laws.
- Limited inclusivity of COTE and its thematic working groups, especially regarding youth and grassroots representation.
- Persistent deficits in electoral integrity, undermining public trust in democratic processes.
- Insufficient transparency in decision-making criteria and the handling of public submissions.
- Risks of symbolic civil society participation without meaningful influence on final outcomes.

## **Policy Recommendations**

- Clarify COTE's mandate, procedures, and decision-making criteria, and communicate these widely in accessible formats.
- Strengthen safeguards for civic space, including protections for activists, journalists, women, and youth.
- Institutionalise meaningful youth and civil society participation, ensuring their

inputs shape final policy proposals.

- Integrate Cabo Delgado as a core national priority within the Dialogue framework.
- Place people-centred economic reform, employment, and livelihoods at the centre of Dialogue outcomes.
- Establish post-Dialogue monitoring and accountability mechanisms with strong civil society involvement.

## Conclusion

The SALO public dialogue highlighted both the promise and fragility of Mozambique's National and Inclusive Dialogue. While the process offers a critical opportunity to address political exclusion and rebuild trust, its success depends on genuine inclusion, transparency, and implementation. The Mozambican experience carries important lessons for the wider SADC region, where similar challenges persist. SALO remains committed to supporting spaces for informed, inclusive, and regionally connected dialogue that advance peace, democratic governance, and human security.

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*The analysis and recommendations included in this report do not necessarily reflect the view of SALO or any of the donors or conference participants, but rather draw upon the major strands of discussion put forward at the event. Participants neither reviewed nor approved this document. The contents of the report are the sole responsibility of SALO and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the donors who provided financial assistance for this policy dialogue session.*

**About the Southern African Liaison Office:**



The Southern African Liaison Office (SALO) is a South African-based not-for-profit civil society organisation which, through advocacy, dialogue, policy consensus and in-depth research and analysis, influences the current thinking and debates on foreign policy, especially regarding African crises and conflicts.

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