



# Reflections on Mozambique's National Dialogue: Progress and Challenges



## **1. Introduction**

Mozambique's National Dialogue of 2025 represents both a moment of promise and a test of resilience for a country long burdened by historical legacies of colonialism, civil war, and fragile peace. The dialogue cannot be understood as a neutral or purely procedural exercise. It is deeply entangled with questions of power, exclusion, and accountability, and must be assessed through the lens of human rights, peacebuilding, inclusion and democratic participation. To speak of dialogue in Mozambique is to confront the uneven distribution of political voice, the silences imposed on marginalized communities, and the tension between official narratives of reconciliation and the lived realities of citizens still grappling with insecurity and exclusion.

## **2. The rationale and significance of the national dialogue**

The official National and Inclusive Dialogue was formally initiated in March 2025, when President Daniel Chapo and representatives of nine political parties signed the Political Commitment for an Inclusive National Dialogue. This was followed by the appointment of twenty one (eighteen from political parties and three from civil society) members to the National Technical Dialogue Commission (COTE) in May, tasked with overseeing implementation and embedding reforms into institutional structures. The dialogue was officially launched in September 2025, with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) providing technical assistance, logistical support, and guidance on transparency and gender inclusion. Anchored in law and supported by international partners, the dialogue is envisioned as a mechanism to rebuild trust, strengthen accountability, and foster reconciliation in the aftermath of the disputed 2024 elections. The rationale of the national dialogue was clear: Mozambique needed a credible platform to address long-standing issues of corruption, weak accountability, and insecurity in northern provinces. By bringing together ruling and opposition parties, civil society, and international partners, the national dialogue sought to create a broad-based foundation for reform and social cohesion. The process commenced against a backdrop of lack of trust in institutions, post electoral violence, an insurgency in the northern provinces and worsening socio-economic conditions underscoring the importance of a dialogue process that is genuinely inclusive and transformative.

## **3. Civil Society Reflections Convened by SALO**

Parallel to the official process, the Southern African Liaison Office (SALO) convened a series of dialogues between October and December 2025. These civil society engagements provided a structured space for Mozambican actors, youth representatives, faith leaders, and regional partners to interrogate inclusivity, trust-building, and reform. While distinct from the state-led dialogue, SALO's series complemented it by amplifying citizen voices and fostering regional learning. The December session, titled *Mozambique's National Dialogue: Civil Society Perspectives from a Multi-Stage Engagement Series*, was particularly significant, bringing together Mozambican civil society leaders and regional experts. Their contributions

underscored the importance of civic trust, youth agency, and inclusivity in shaping Mozambique's reform trajectory, ensuring that citizen perspectives and priorities should inform and guide the broader national dialogue process.

#### **4. Progress and challenges noted by CSOs**

The CSOs noted that the shadow of the disputed 2024 elections hung heavily over Mozambique from the commencement of the dialogue. The country was still grappling with deep political divisions, fragile trust in institutions, and insecurity in northern provinces. Against this backdrop, the dialogue was understood as more than a procedural exercise, it was a response to crisis, a chance to reset the political landscape, and an opportunity to confront long-standing questions of inclusion and accountability. SALO's civil society dialogues captured this window of opportunity with striking clarity. Participants asked difficult but necessary questions: Was the national dialogue genuinely inclusive? Could it move beyond symbolic gestures to deliver real reform? And what conditions were required to ensure that citizens' voices were not drowned out by elite interests? These reflections gave the discussions urgency and honesty, reminding all involved that dialogue is only meaningful when it translates into substantive change.

Early sessions in SALO's series focused on the origins and design of Mozambique's official National Dialogue. Contributors unpacked its legal and institutional framing, recognising the importance of anchoring dialogue in national law (a regional lesson for dialogues) and formal structures. This gave the initiative legitimacy and signalled a serious commitment to reform. Yet participants were quick to caution that structure alone could not guarantee success. A dialogue without clear reform pathways or sustained public engagement risked becoming little more than a symbolic exercise. Civil society voices were particularly insistent on this point. They argued that credibility would only be achieved if dialogue outcomes were embedded into governance structures and translated into tangible reforms. Without institutional follow-through, the danger of unmet expectations loomed large, threatening to deepen the already low public confidence.

#### **5. Civic participation, trust, youth agency, and inclusion**

Across SALO's dialogues, the themes of civic participation, trust, youth agency, and inclusion converged into a powerful reflection on what Mozambique's National Dialogue must achieve if it is to be credible. SALO's civil society actors insisted that participation cannot be tokenistic but must carry genuine influence over outcomes, particularly in a country where public trust in institutions has been eroded by contested elections and insecurity. Building that trust, they argued, requires transparency, rights protection and responsiveness, without which dialogue risks being seen as symbolic. Young Mozambicans brought urgency and vision to the discussions, reminding participants that reforms must reflect the aspirations of future generations. Women, rural communities, and other marginalised groups highlighted both their indispensable role in peacebuilding and the barriers that still prevent full engagement.

Underpinning all these perspectives was a shared recognition that civic space itself must be safeguarded, since freedoms of expression, association, and assembly are the bedrock of any meaningful dialogue and the foundation on which trust and legitimacy can take root.

## **6. Engagement with regional actors**

The regional dimension of SALO's engagement added depth to these reflections. The hybrid workshop held in Maputo in December brought together in-person participants and regional civil society actors joining virtually from across Southern Africa. With Portuguese–English interpretation ensuring inclusivity, the workshop became a space for comparative learning, where participants identified recurring challenges in national dialogues across the region, such as elite capture, exclusion of grassroots voices, and weak implementation of agreed reforms. These comparative insights underscored that Mozambique's dialogue is not unique in its challenges, but part of a broader regional struggle to make dialogue meaningful, inclusive, and transformative.

From a human rights perspective, the Mozambican dialogue must be evaluated against its capacity to protect and expand civic freedoms, ensure equal participation, and deliver accountability. The right to participate in public affairs, enshrined in international human rights law, requires that citizens are not only consulted but empowered to shape outcomes. The right to freedom of expression and association demands that civil society actors can speak and organise without fear of reprisal. The right to equality obliges that women, youth, and rural communities are not sidelined but actively included. These rights are not abstract principles; they are practical conditions for building trust and legitimacy in dialogue processes.

The progress of Mozambique's National Dialogue lies in its formalisation, its legal anchoring, and its recognition and support by international partners. These elements provide a framework for reform and signal a commitment to reconciliation. Yet the challenges remain profound. Without genuine inclusivity, transparency and institutional follow-through, the dialogue risks becoming a symbolic gesture rather than a transformative process. Civil society's reflections remind us that dialogue is meaningful not when it is declared, but when it delivers tangible reforms that protect rights, strengthen accountability, and foster social cohesion.

## **7. Conclusion**

In conclusion, Mozambique's National Dialogue of 2025 embodies both promise and paradox. It offers a chance to rebuild trust and confront deep divisions, but only if inclusivity, transparency and reform are real. Civil society's engagement through SALO's multi-stage dialogues demonstrates the indispensable role of citizen voices in shaping national processes. The dialogue must therefore be understood not as an end in itself, but as a means to realise human rights, strengthen democratic governance and secure peace. The lessons from Mozambique and from the region are clear, they show that dialogue must be grounded in

rights, driven by participation, and measured by its capacity to deliver justice and accountability for all.

*The Dialogue Online*, is an online extension of SALO's national, regional and international consensus-building dialogues (typically workshops, seminars and small meetings) on Peace and Security, Development, SA Foreign Policy, Gender (including LGBTI rights), Natural Resource Governance, Human Rights and the rights of migrant communities through *weekly written articles and/or commentary*. It is a channel through which critical issues raised during dialogue events are synthesised and shared with wider audiences. By taking the dialogue 'online', the conversation is enabled to continue beyond the limits of space and time and to a wider audience.

Since SALO's central focus is peace and security, *Dialogue Online* articles focus primarily on this theme, but drawing attention to the nexuses with development, natural resource governance, human rights and gender, mediation, environment and climate change.

Preference is towards articles that speak to international development and peace building policy and practice, raise awareness about conflict situations and the gender dimensions thereof and provoke fresh thinking and policy debate. Contributions are drawn from SALO's pool of experts, peace building and development practitioners, activists, academics, former and current diplomats and workshop participants.

***Please note that the articles represent views of respective contributors and do not necessarily reflect SALO's view or position.***

Interested contributors are welcome to email articles of 750 to 1000 words in length to [info@salo.org.za](mailto:info@salo.org.za) for consideration.

#### 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.