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Policy Brief

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Regional Workshop on Civil Society and Political Dialogue in Mozambique



Hybrid Dialogue: Maputo (in-person) & Zoom (regional participation)

Executive Summary

On 9 December 2025, the Southern African Liaison Office (SALO) convened a Regional Workshop on Civil Society and Political Dialogue in Mozambique. The workshop was held physically in Maputo, with civil society actors from South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Swaziland joining in person and other regional and international stakeholders participating virtually via Zoom. Mozambican participants included civil society organisations, youth and women's movements, media practitioners, faith-based organisations, human rights defenders, and legal practitioners.

The workshop provided a structured space for regional and national civil society actors to take stock of Mozambique's National Inclusive Dialogue process, with particular attention to Phase One public hearings and consultations. Participants assessed the extent to which civil society, youth, women, and marginalised groups are able to participate meaningfully; identified risks undermining the credibility and inclusivity of the dialogue; and explored pathways for civil society engagement both within and beyond the formal dialogue architecture.

Discussions underscored that while the National Inclusive Dialogue is politically significant, it is unfolding in a context of low public trust, unresolved trauma, and constrained civic space. Participants emphasised that without robust, coordinated, and sustained civil society intervention - nationally and regionally - the dialogue is unlikely to deliver reconciliation, accountability, or meaningful reform. The workshop itself functioned as a diagnostic space, a platform for collective reflection, and a starting point for more strategic, solidarity-based civil society action going forward.

Chaired by Munjodzi Mutandiri, SALO Senior Programme Advisor, and Lwazi Somya, SALO Manager of Policy, Advocacy and Stakeholder Engagement and Senior Researcher, alongside Swazi activist Lungile Mnisi, the hybrid workshop brought together Mozambican civil society, youth, and faith-based actors in person in Maputo, while connecting with participants in South Africa and the broader SADC region via Zoom. Speakers included Dr. Wilker Dias, Executive Director of Mozambican CSO focused on monitoring democratic processes, Plataforma para Democracia, Cidadania Direitos e Estudos (DECIDE); Jonathan Nhancale, of Mozambican Youth-led CSO, Inclusão; Ferosa Zacharias, Executive Director of the National Forum of Community Radios (FORCOM) & President of the Human Rights Commission of the Mozambican Bar Association (CDHOAM); Melania Munguambe, of Mozambican CSO Association of Youth for Gender Equality and Education (AMJIGE); and Thabo Masuku, Executive Director of the Foundation for Socio-Economic Justice (FSEJ) Swaziland

Context and Importance

Mozambique's National Inclusive Dialogue has emerged in a politically charged and socially fragile context shaped by post-electoral unrest, violence, and widespread public disillusionment with political institutions. While the dialogue is presented as a home-grown mechanism to stabilise the political environment and advance reform, civil society participants emphasised that it is unfolding against a backdrop of unresolved grievances, economic hardship, and deep mistrust between citizens and the state. As one Mozambican civil society participant remarked during the workshop, "the crisis did not start with the elections - the elections only exposed deeper problems." In this context, the credibility of political dialogue is not determined solely by its formal architecture, but by whether it meaningfully engages the lived realities that gave rise to unrest in the first place.

Participants repeatedly questioned whether the current configuration of the dialogue adequately addresses the root causes of mobilisation and protest, including poverty, unemployment, exclusion from decision-making, and experiences of repression. Representatives from legal and human rights organisations noted that discussions around reform appear to be advancing in the absence of a clearly articulated reconciliation and accountability track. One participant cautioned that "you cannot legislate reconciliation after the fact," warning that technical reform processes risk losing legitimacy if social trauma and demands for justice remain unaddressed.

Participation emerged as a central test of the dialogue's credibility. Evidence presented by the DECIDE Platform (a Mozambican civil society platform focused on human rights, democracy, and governance, including monitoring electoral and post-electoral processes), based on monitoring of Phase One public hearings and consultations, highlighted stark geographic and structural disparities. While provinces such as Sofala and Zambézia demonstrated relatively diverse engagement, consultations in Maputo, Gaza, and parts of Nampula were characterised by restricted access, elite dominance, and a climate of fear. According to DECIDE monitors, "many people attended, but very few felt safe to speak," underscoring the gap between presence and meaningful participation.

Youth participation was identified as a particularly acute gap. Mozambican Youth-led organisations, including Inclusion, AMJIGE, and the Youth Parliament, described how young people were central actors in recent protests and political mobilisation, yet remain largely absent from formal dialogue spaces. One youth organiser noted that "young people are invited to listen, not to shape decisions," reflecting widespread scepticism toward institutionalised participation. Engagement in parallel initiatives - including surveys capturing the views of over

one thousand young people and community-based forums - was framed less as an expression of optimism than as a strategy to create a record for future accountability.

Women's organisations reported similar patterns of exclusion. Representatives from women-led civil society networks emphasised that women remain under-represented in formal dialogue spaces, despite their active roles in community mobilisation and peacebuilding. Engagement strategies have therefore focused on parallel consultations, digital platforms, and networks with rural and community-based organisations. As one participant observed, "women are consulted after positions are already decided," pointing to structural barriers that limit influence rather than access alone.

Constraints on civic space further shaped the operating environment of the dialogue. Media practitioners and community radio representatives stressed that local radio remains one of the most accessible platforms for public engagement, particularly through the use of local languages. However, broadcasters reported political pressure, intimidation, and restrictions on programming related to the dialogue. Human rights lawyers also highlighted ongoing detentions, prosecutions, and the lack of effective pardoning mechanisms, raising questions about whether the dialogue meaningfully responds to victims' needs. A legal practitioner warned that "dialogue without protection is an empty invitation."

The regional framing of the workshop enabled these dynamics to be situated within broader Southern African experiences of political dialogue. Civil society practitioners from Zimbabwe and Eswatini reflected on dialogue processes that were used to legitimise political elites or defuse pressure without delivering reform, while participants pointed to Lesotho as an example where clearer mandates and dedicated implementation bodies supported more substantive outcomes. These comparative insights reinforced the importance of regional civil society solidarity and sustained engagement, including more strategic interaction with SADC mechanisms such as National Committees and mediation structures.

Finally, participants noted that the hybrid and multilingual nature of the workshop itself strengthened the quality of deliberation. Convening the dialogue physically in Maputo grounded discussions in Mozambican realities, while participation in person and via Zoom enabled regional actors to contribute comparative perspectives. Simultaneous Portuguese–English interpretation addressed a persistent structural barrier to participation, allowing Mozambican and regional civil society actors to engage on more equal terms. As one regional participant reflected, "for once, language was not the obstacle – politics was."

Policy Critiques

- The dialogue is unfolding in a context of deep public mistrust and unresolved trauma.
- Access to dialogue processes remains uneven, with protestors, rural communities, and informal actors frequently excluded.
- Information dissemination and feedback loops between consultations and decision-making are weak.
- There is a risk of elite capture and non-binding outcomes.
- Accountability, reconciliation, and victim-centred justice remain marginal within the dialogue architecture.

Policy Recommendations

- Civil society should intensify accessible information dissemination, including through community radios and local languages.
- Youth and women's organisations should consolidate demands into shared agendas to strengthen influence.
- Parallel civil society processes should be sustained to complement and monitor formal dialogue.
- Regional alliances should be strengthened to support advocacy, learning, and pressure, including engagement with SADC mechanisms.
- Milestones and commitments emerging from the dialogue should be tracked over time to enable accountability.

Conclusion

The Regional Workshop on Civil Society and Political Dialogue in Mozambique highlighted both the political significance and the substantial limitations of the National Inclusive Dialogue process. While the dialogue represents an important opening, it is unfolding in a context marked by low trust, restricted civic space, and unresolved grievances.

The workshop itself served as a diagnostic and strategic space, enabling civil society actors to share evidence, surface risks, and begin articulating more coordinated pathways for engagement. Participants agreed that disengagement would cede space to elite interests, and that sustained, collective, and regionally supported civil society action is essential if political dialogue in Mozambique is to become more inclusive, credible, and responsive to the needs of its citizens.

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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