



International liaison, dialogue and research

Reg no: 2006/020285/08

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Policy Brief

11 December 2025

Zoom Online Platform

SALO Public Dialogue on Mozambique's Political Dialogue Process



Executive Summary

The Southern African Liaison Office (SALO) hosted a public dialogue titled “*SALO Public Dialogue on Mozambique’s Political Dialogue Process*” in partnership with Norwegian People’s Aid on 11 December 2025. This was SALO’s third and final dialogue in a series examining Mozambique’s National and Inclusive Dialogue process and the implications for civic space within the country and the broader region. It sought to take stock of the Dialogue’s first phase and consider the work of the Technical Commission for National and Inclusive Dialogue (COTE). It further aimed to assess progress, identify remaining challenges, and consider opportunities for deepening engagements. The discussion also sought to gather insights from non-state actors on how participation can be strengthened. It provided an opportunity for members of the Mozambican diaspora to share their experiences and expectations of this process. A further objective was to situate Mozambique’s Dialogue within a regional context and examine how it could inform or link with similar initiatives in Southern Africa.

Chaired by Tebogo Lekubu, SALO Senior Researcher and Manager: Knowledge Production and Learning Development, and Fowzia Davids, SALO Senior Researcher, the dialogue convened regional analysts, youth representatives, faith leaders, and civil society representatives from Mozambique, South Africa, and the SADC region. Speakers included Bishop Manuel Ernesto, Mozambican Anglican Bishop; David Fardo, President of Parlamento Juvenil de Mocambique (Youth Parliament of Mozambique); and Munjodzi Mutandiri, SALO Senior Programme Advisor.

Context and Importance

Overview of the Dialogue Process

In September 2025, President Daniel Chapo launched Mozambique’s National and Inclusive Dialogue aimed at resolving the October 2024 post-election crisis. A major objective is to prevent future violence by fostering reconciliation, strengthening and reforming democratic institutions, and addressing key issues such as insecurity, electoral justice, and human rights.¹ The process involves consultations among Mozambicans, including youth, women, people with disabilities, and communities abroad. Civil society actors are actively monitoring the process and advocating for deeper engagement.

Regarding the nature and structure of the Dialogue, Bishop Manuel Ernesto noted that it is “*clearly a state and presidential initiative*” that seeks a consensus-driven solution. COTE, which serves as the operational body supporting the entire Dialogue process, comprises 21 members. Several speakers noted that of these 21 members, 18 are political party functionaries, emphasising the Dialogue’s politician-driven nature. The Dialogue is structured around four phases: public consultation; proposal drafting;

¹ Fauvet, P. 2025. Chapo Launches “National Dialogue”. Agência de Informação de Moçambique. 11 September. Available: <https://aimnews.org/2025/09/11/chapo-launches-national-dialogue/> [29 December 2025].

consensus-building; and submission for possible legislation. Currently, it is still in the first phase.

Assessing the First Phase of the Dialogue

Bishop Ernesto noted that while the Dialogue's first phase has had a limitation of time, space, and actors, several perspectives have emerged from it. Many Mozambicans, particularly women, have expressed their wish for national unity, peace, and stability in a similar manner as the collective demand for peace in 1992. Additionally, some have stated that peace could be achieved through national consensus rather than a truth and reconciliation commission, like the one during South Africa's democratic transition, or court processes such as the post-1994 Rwanda genocide tribunal. *"Then comes the question of whether we can sacrifice [justice] so that we can have peace"*, noted Bishop Ernesto.

There is also a strong call for non-partisan security forces, electoral reform, and decentralisation of power as preconditions for peace and reconciliation. The need for greater inclusivity beyond political elites has also emerged from the public consultation phase, particularly from the youth, women and other marginalised groups. There is a divergence of views on whether political leaders should steer the Dialogue or there should be broader leadership involvement beyond COTE, which is seen as the operational arm of the process. Some have proposed the inclusion of national elders and senior citizens to guide the process.

Civil Society Perspectives on the Dialogue Process

A highlight of the discussion was the need to strengthen civil society participation in the Dialogue by mapping civil society organisations (CSOs). This is because some *"...have disappeared, others have emerged, and they all have different roles,"* Bishop Ernesto explained. Mapping would ensure greater CSO inclusion and recognition of their respective contributions.

Munjodzi Mutandiri urged civil society in Mozambique to develop a clear understanding of the Dialogue's process and expected outcomes so that there is greater unity of purpose, drawing on lessons from CSOs in Swaziland following the 2021 massacre. He further observed that while some CSOs are participating within COTE, others are engaging in parallel processes of gathering views, such as the Bar Association. Jonathan Nhancale added that both approaches could ultimately put more pressure on COTE to include all perspectives gathered during the public consultation phase. Additionally, speakers raised the importance of CSO awareness of the interests of other actors in the process. This would enable them to engage more meaningfully.

Inclusivity and Representation Gaps

So far, there have been concerns about inclusivity and representation within the Dialogue process. Speakers noted that while nine political parties are participating, the National Alliance for a Free and Autonomous Mozambique (ANAMOLA) is excluded. Its leader, Venâncio Mondlane, was the runner-up in the 2024 presidential elections on the Optimist Party for the Development of Mozambique's (PODEMOS) ticket.

ANAMOLA has only recently submitted documents to be included in COTE. There was broad support among participants for ANAMOLA and Mondlane's inclusion.

The discussion flagged another notable weakness in the process: while 70% of Mozambique's population live in rural areas, the process has taken place mostly in urban areas, among elites, and in venues that are often inaccessible to ordinary people, such as hotels. This has undermined the inclusion of Mozambicans in the rural areas. Bishop Ernesto suggested organising more consultations through faith and traditional leaders to enhance grassroots participation.

Youth Participation and Future Generations

David Fardo shared that the Youth Parliament, which comprises 55 youth-led organisations from across Mozambique, has established the Commission for Youth Participation (COPJ) to strengthen youth participation in the Dialogue. A major concern is that some young people in outlying districts are not aware of the Dialogue's objectives. Through COPJ, they have raised challenges such as unemployment and lack of adequate housing, health services, and roads. The security situation in Cabo Delgado has also forced COTE and its thematic groups to scale down consultations in the province, further limiting youth participation.

According to Nhancale, many young people do not trust the Dialogue process, but some still want to participate despite their mistrust.

Political will, power dynamics and accountability

A key point raised in the discussion is that a lack of political will could undermine the entire process, especially if the political elite is simply using the Dialogue to defuse the crisis without implementing meaningful reforms ultimately. Ambassador Mandisi Mpahlwa urged Mozambican civil society to be watchful in this regard:

"There's got to be a focus on ensuring that the Mozambican process is not just being used as a tool to manage society and state, stage-manage the outcomes, and to retain power at all costs."

Mutandiri urged civil society to explore mechanisms of holding the Dialogue's leaders accountable, noting that they have an obligation to ensure that the process succeeds

Economic Dimensions and Natural Resources Governance

Participants noted that the Dialogue could develop a governance framework for managing natural resources, thus defining Mozambique's economic trajectory. Therefore, civil society needs to be alert to counter vested interests that could shape the Dialogue's outcomes in their favour. *"Who is funding the process, and what do they intend to achieve from the process?"* - these are some of the questions civil society should be asking, according to Mutandiri.

Fardo, who is a member of COTE's natural resources thematic group, revealed that young people in Nampula have raised concerns about the bureaucracy involved in

obtaining licences to explore natural resources, and the role of multinationals in exploiting Mozambique's wealth.

Peace, Reconciliation, and Social Healing

Speakers from Mozambique reported that there are contending views on whether a peace/truth and reconciliation commission should be established or not. While some say such a commission has been postponed since 1992, others opine that a consensus-driven approach could achieve peace without the commission.

Bishop Ernesto cited the importance of healing through “special psycho-social” support of Mozambicans who have suffered the trauma of conflict, whether historical or the 2024 post-election crisis.

Regional and Continental Dimensions of Mozambique's Dialogue Process- Lessons for Peacebuilding and Governance in SADC

The failure or success of Mozambique's Dialogue could have major implications for the SADC region and the broader continent, Mutandiri noted. The process has received endorsement from SADC's Executive Secretary. However, beyond regional solidarity, civil society needs to explore the possibility of leveraging SADC's governance mechanisms, such as the Troika, to guarantee the Dialogue's success.

Furthermore, civil society linkages could be established through the African Union's Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) to ensure Dialogue monitoring and joint advocacy. Participants also raised the importance of drawing lessons from other dialogue processes in the region and continent.

Policy critiques

Inclusivity claimed but not yet practised:

- Participants highlighted that policy emphasises inclusivity, but its implementation favours urban, elite-heavy venues, formats, and timelines.
- This leaves rural populations, who are the social fabric of Mozambique, structurally disadvantaged in access and voice.
- Also, marginalised groups are present but lack representation in policy-making, as the process lacks clear guidelines for integrating their input.
- Youth participation in particular is largely symbolic and not integrated into national decision-making processes. The existence of the Youth Parliament highlights a disconnect in governance, where youth perspectives are outside rather than part of formal structures. There is no systematic way to guarantee that youth contributions from rural and non-urban provincial areas are regularly incorporated into national-level discussions.
- The dialogue lacks adaptive participation strategies for conflict-affected and humanitarian contexts, risking the exclusion of those most impacted by violence, such as in Cabo Delgado.

Opposition Engagement Remains Fragile:

- Participants highlighted that the failure to meaningfully integrate opposition voices may entrench parallel political narratives rather than reconcile them.
- This weakens the legitimacy, conflict-prevention and potential of the dialogue. As Bishop Manuel Ernesto stated:

“In the overview, there are many challenges to inclusivity, looking at those who were sidelined, such as opposition members, especially those coming from the new party called ANAMOLA and their leader, Mr Venâncio Mondlane.”

Absence of a Permanent Peace and Reconciliation Architecture:

- Lack of a National Peace and Reconciliation Commission leaves peace dependent on political goodwill rather than institutional continuity.

Technical Commission Challenges:

- The Technical Commission’s limited mandate and lack of a clear institutional afterlife raise concerns about the sustainability of peacebuilding efforts.
- There is more political dominance within COTE. This has restricted civil society influence, illustrating the imbalances within the national dialogue.

Addressing the Profound Historical Resonance:

- Peace without tangible dividends is fragile. In order to avoid disputes and guarantee sustainable peace, structural inequity must be addressed.
- Rural populations, women, and young people are still denied access to political and economic advantages. As Mr David Xavier Fardo noted:

“Most of the events were organised through some conference or hotel meetings, and we know that more than 60% of the Mozambicans are living in the rural areas.”

Lack of Collective Leadership:

- This has undermined unity of purpose and neutrality, as opposition actors may view the process as consultative theatre rather than genuine power-sharing.

Lack of Political Will:

- Many laws, according to participants, are well constructed but poorly implemented. They are concerned that the dialogue process may ultimately be the same. As Bishop Manuel stated:

“The challenge with these previous processes was that, while we could design good laws, in terms of implementation with respect to those laws, it was quite challenging.”

Lack of Public Understanding of the Dialogue Process:

- This undermines the collective action needed for reform and peace. Munjodzi Mutandiri noted:

“I don’t think that colleagues in Mozambique, particularly non-state actors, are on the same page in terms of the expected outcomes of this dialogue process.”

Policy Recommendations

The speakers offered suggestions for addressing challenges within the progress of the Mozambique National Dialogue.

- There must be a more collaborative environment among stakeholders to strengthen open dialogue on critical reforms.
- A *“national commission of peace and reconciliation should be created”* to ensure that civil society networks and government structures lead the Dialogue effectively and lay the foundation for peacebuilding.
- Faith leaders and traditional leaders must be actively integrated into the process instead of being symbolically part of it.
- Mozambique needs national healing, moral repair, and social reconciliation.
- Expand the National Dialogue beyond urban, hotel-based formats to community-level spaces, especially rural areas.
- Political will in the Dialogue process must be strengthened, and civil society must guard against political actors using the Dialogue to manage societal outcomes for power retention.
- The Dialogue must produce electoral system reforms that will improve efficiency and reduce costs by combining municipal and general elections. As stated by Mr Fardo, *“It’s best to save money and maybe join all of them in the municipal elections and the general elections... differentiated using different ballots.”*
- All political actors must participate in the process, including those initially excluded, like ANAMOLA.
- Civil society must participate in capacity-building efforts to help common citizens understand how dialogues work and what realistic outcomes are achievable. It should be closely monitoring the inputs submitted versus the proposals released by COTE. As Jonathan Nhancale noted:

“The next phase of this dialogue in Mozambique is the crucial phase, because we as civil society should pay attention, even inside and outside, to see if the contribution that we as civil society are making will be on the proposals that the COTE is going to share with the broader society.”

- By using community-based systems that include grassroots voices, participation could be intentionally shifted towards conflict-affected and economically marginalised areas. This could further ensure that more young people, people with disabilities and women are represented and heard at the Dialogue.

- COTE must establish legally binding consultative procedures and rebalance representation to guarantee that civil society input significantly influences Dialogue outcomes. COTE authorities must actively seek out youth, rather than waiting for youth to self-mobilise.
- There must be transparency regarding natural resource governance in the Dialogue's agenda. Additionally, there should be transparency about the Dialogue's financing sources.
- Civil society must leverage SADC mechanisms, including the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Affairs as well as the Women, Peace and Security Architecture, to help reinforce accountability.

Conclusion

This was the third in a series of public dialogues SALO hosted on Mozambique's National and Inclusive Dialogue process. By hosting such dialogues, SALO aims to enhance open engagement, deepen understanding of the Dialogue process, foster informed judgments on progress made, and inform policy debates. This dialogue achieved these objectives successfully. Participants assessed the Dialogue's first phase and provided feedback from the public consultations. Key concerns that emerged include limited inclusion and representation of rural communities, young people, and women, as well as the need for political will for this process to succeed. Other challenges include insecurity in Cabo Delgado, which has restricted participation in the Dialogue, and a focus on urban areas to the detriment of rural communities.

To drive progress, participants suggested a more inclusive, transparent, and representative Dialogue encompassing the youth, diaspora, and non-state actors. The process must also have a broader regional perspective and must strengthen cooperation among leaders. Participants expressed hope about the process, noting that if agreements are met and participation increases, it could foster democratic governance, expand civic space, and rebuild confidence. Additionally, speakers noted that lessons could be shared within the SADC region on dialogue processes, maintaining peace and democratic resilience, inclusive peacebuilding strategies, strengthening regional solidarity, and learning from various contexts.

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.

SALO would like to thank Norwegian People's Aid (NPA) for their direct support