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The Southern African Liaison Office (NPC)

Regus - Black River Park
1st Floor, Block B, North Park, Black River Park
2 Fir Street, Observatory, Cape Town, 7925

Email: info@salo.org.za
www.salo.org.za
@salo_info

Policy Brief

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Multi-stakeholder Dialogue: *Mozambique's National Inclusive Dialogue: An Opportunity for Democratic Consolidation?*



Executive Summary

On 5 February 2026, the Southern African Liaison Office (SALO) convened a virtual public multi-stakeholder dialogue titled “*Mozambique’s National Inclusive Dialogue: An Opportunity for Democratic Consolidation?*” The session brought together a diverse panel of Mozambican civil society actors, researchers, and regional experts to critically reflect on the outcomes of Phase One of Mozambique’s National Dialogue process and to assess prospects for Phase Two.

The dialogue took place against the backdrop of Mozambique’s National Inclusive Dialogue process, launched in response to political tensions following the contested October 2024 general elections. Speakers included Dr. Euclides Gonçalves (IESE), Mr Jonathan Nhancale (INCLUSÃO), Ms Ferosa Zacarias (CDHOAM), Ms Júlia Wachave (PROMURA), Ms Melânia Munguambe (AMJIGE), Dr João Pereira (Tibverane Foundation), and Ambassador Mandisi Mpahlwa (Former High Commissioner of South Africa to Mozambique).

Discussions highlighted that Phase One of the dialogue process marked an important, though incomplete, step toward reopening civic space and fostering multi-stakeholder engagement in Mozambique. Participants acknowledged progress in broadening participation beyond historically elite-driven or bilateral political negotiations, particularly through the inclusion of youth, women, and diaspora voices. However, concerns were consistently raised regarding the depth and quality of inclusivity, with many marginalised communities remaining underrepresented or insufficiently informed about the process.

Overall, the discussion framed Mozambique’s National Inclusive Dialogue as both a critical opportunity and a contested process, whose ultimate contribution to democratic consolidation will depend on the extent to which it moves beyond consultation toward credible, inclusive, and implementable reform.

Context and Importance

Mozambique’s National Inclusive Dialogue was launched in the aftermath of the contested October 2024 general elections, which precipitated widespread political tension, protests, and a renewed questioning of the country’s democratic institutions and governance systems. The National Dialogue was initiated as a mechanism to manage these tensions and to provide a platform for engagement between state and non-state actors on pathways toward national reconciliation, reform, and democratic consolidation. The conclusion of Phase One, centred on national and diaspora consultations, marks an important, though preliminary, step in reopening civic space and facilitating broader participation in public discourse.

At the same time, the dialogue must be situated within Mozambique's longer trajectory of political settlements and consultative processes, many of which have historically been elite-driven and limited in their capacity to produce sustained institutional reform. As such, the current process reflects not only post-electoral tensions but also deeper structural challenges related to governance, representation, and socio-economic inequality.

Historical Context and Structural Drivers of the Dialogue

A key point of convergence throughout SALO's dialogue was the need to locate the National Inclusive Dialogue within a broader historical and institutional context. As articulated by Dr. Euclides Gonçalves, the post-electoral crisis should be understood less as the root cause of the dialogue and more as a catalyst that exposed longstanding institutional weaknesses and governance deficits. These include persistent concerns around the credibility of electoral processes, the functionality of state institutions, and the broader crisis of public trust.

Mozambique has a well-established history of dialogue processes, ranging from political negotiations between the government and opposition actors, including successive agreements with RENAMO, to development-oriented consultations such as the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) and national strategic planning frameworks. While these processes have contributed to moments of stability and policy articulation, they have often struggled to translate into durable institutional transformation.

This historical continuity underscores a critical challenge for the current National Dialogue process: how to avoid reproducing patterns of 'consultation without implementation'. It also raises important questions about institutional learning, particularly regarding how previous processes have managed issues of inclusion, accountability, and follow-through. The present dialogue, therefore, carries the burden of both addressing contemporary tensions and overcoming the limitations of past engagements.

Inclusivity, Representation, and Civic Engagement

The question of inclusivity lies at the heart of the current National Dialogue and remains one of its most contested dimensions. While the shift from bilateral political negotiations to a multi-stakeholder framework has been widely welcomed, participants in this SALO dialogue consistently emphasised that formal inclusion does not necessarily translate into meaningful participation.

Youth actors, as highlighted by Jonathan Nhancale and Melânia Munguambe, have played a dual role in the process, both engaging within formal structures and mobilising communities externally to contribute to the National Dialogue. These efforts have included community workshops, consultations, and the development of policy submissions aimed at influencing the Technical Commission for Inclusive National Dialogue (COTE). However, despite these initiatives, a significant level of scepticism

persists among young people, particularly regarding the National Dialogue's ability to deliver tangible socio-economic improvements, such as employment opportunities and economic inclusion.

From a gender perspective, Júlia Wachave and Ferosa Zacarias underscored the ongoing challenges faced by women in accessing and shaping the National Dialogue. While women's platforms and networks have been mobilised across provinces, gaps remain in terms of information dissemination, local-level organisation, and sustained engagement with communities. In regions such as Cabo Delgado, these challenges are further compounded by insecurity, historical marginalisation, and fear of engaging in politically sensitive processes.

More broadly, speakers highlighted that the inclusivity of the National Dialogue is constrained by structural factors, including linguistic barriers, uneven access to information, and the concentration of participation among political, civil society, and media elites. As noted by Dr João Pereira, these dynamics raise important questions about who is ultimately represented in the process and whose voices are prioritised in shaping its outcomes.

Transparency, Trust, and the Political Environment

Closely linked to issues of inclusivity are concerns regarding transparency and trust, both of which are central to the legitimacy of the National Dialogue process. Participants repeatedly pointed to a lack of clarity regarding the structure, sequencing, and timelines of the Dialogue, particularly in relation to the transition between Phase One and Phase Two.

Ambiguities around whether consultations have formally concluded, alongside the continued acceptance of submissions by COTE, have contributed to confusion among stakeholders and undermined confidence in the process. These procedural uncertainties are further exacerbated by broader deficits in communication, including limited public awareness of the National Dialogue's objectives, thematic areas, and mechanisms for participation.

At a deeper level, the political environment within which the National Dialogue is unfolding poses significant challenges to its credibility. Concerns were raised regarding the continued detention of individuals linked to post-electoral protests, as well as legal and regulatory frameworks perceived to restrict freedoms of expression, association, and assembly. These conditions raise fundamental questions about whether the Dialogue is taking place in a sufficiently open and enabling environment to allow for genuine participation and dissent.

As emphasised by Ambassador Mandisi Mpahlwa, the legitimacy of a National Dialogue is intrinsically linked to its ability to operate as a genuinely people-centred process, rather than one that is perceived to be controlled by political elites. Without addressing these foundational issues, there is a risk that the Dialogue may produce

limited or superficial reforms that fail to address the underlying drivers of conflict and dissatisfaction.

Managing the Transition to Phase Two

The transition from consultation to reform is one of the most critical phases of the National Dialogue process. While Phase One was primarily concerned with gathering inputs from across Mozambican society, Phase Two is expected to focus on the systematisation of these inputs and their translation into policy proposals and legislative reforms.

This shift introduces a range of technical, political, and institutional challenges. The volume and diversity of submissions collected during Phase One place significant demands on COTE, which must synthesise these inputs into coherent and actionable recommendations. As noted by several speakers, this process will require not only technical expertise but also sustained collaboration with research institutions, civil society organisations, and other knowledge actors.

At the same time, there are concerns regarding the scope of the National Dialogue and the feasibility of achieving comprehensive reform within the proposed timeframe. Dr João Pereira's recommendation to prioritise key thematic areas, namely electoral reform, decentralisation, and national reconciliation, reflects a broader recognition of the need to balance ambition with practicality.

Furthermore, the transition to a parliamentary process raises questions about the extent to which citizen inputs will be preserved and reflected in final legislative outcomes. Given existing power dynamics within political institutions, there is a risk that proposals emerging from the National Dialogue may be diluted or reshaped in ways that do not fully align with public expectations. This underscores the importance of ongoing monitoring, advocacy, and accountability mechanisms to ensure that the Dialogue's outcomes remain grounded in citizen priorities.

Regional Significance and Implications for Southern Africa

Mozambique's National Inclusive Dialogue carries broader significance for the Southern African region, where several countries are grappling with similar challenges related to electoral legitimacy, governance deficits, and socio-economic inequality. As noted during the discussion by Ambassador Mpahlwa, experiences from countries such as Zimbabwe, Swaziland, and the Democratic Republic of Congo highlight the recurring need for national dialogue processes as mechanisms for managing political crises and facilitating reform.

In this context, Mozambique's experience may serve as both a reference point and a learning opportunity for regional actors. Its emphasis on inclusivity, if effectively realised, could offer a model for expanding participation in political processes beyond traditional elites. Conversely, its challenges, particularly in relation to trust,

transparency, and implementation, underscore the risks associated with national dialogue processes that fail to address underlying structural issues.

The role of regional institutions, particularly the Southern African Development Community (SADC), also remains an important consideration. While SADC has been criticised for its limited engagement on political and electoral issues, its existing frameworks and mechanisms continue to provide potential avenues for supporting national processes and promoting regional stability.

Taken together, the context within which Mozambique's National Inclusive Dialogue is unfolding reflects a complex interplay between historical legacies, contemporary political dynamics, and future reform imperatives. Its importance lies not only in its potential to address immediate post-electoral tensions but also in its capacity to contribute to longer-term processes of democratic consolidation, institutional reform, and inclusive governance within Mozambique and across the region.

Recommendations

- I. Phase Two should prioritise a limited set of core reform areas, particularly electoral reform, decentralisation, and national reconciliation. Clear distinctions must be made between short-term, achievable reforms and longer-term structural changes, with corresponding timelines to manage expectations and enhance feasibility.
- II. The process should strengthen decentralised and community-level engagement by incorporating district-based structures, improving access to information, and utilising local languages. At the same time, efforts must be made to create an enabling civic environment by safeguarding fundamental rights and supporting safe participation across all sectors of society.
- III. A clear and accessible communication framework should be established, outlining defined phases, timelines, and procedural steps. Regular public updates and transparent reporting on how submissions are received, processed, and prioritised are essential to rebuilding trust and sustaining engagement.
- IV. Clear methodologies for consolidating and analysing inputs should be developed and made publicly available. Civil society and research institutions should be actively involved in this process to enhance credibility. Mechanisms for tracking how inputs are reflected in draft legislation should also be established to ensure accountability throughout the implementation phase.
- V. A structured integration of existing evidence, including datasets and prior studies, should inform the development of reform proposals. Strengthening

collaboration with academic and research institutions will enhance the analytical depth and policy relevance of the process.

- VI. Stakeholders should strengthen engagement with regional platforms to facilitate knowledge exchange and draw on comparative experiences. Leveraging regional mechanisms can support both the credibility and sustainability of national reform processes.

Conclusion

Mozambique's National Inclusive Dialogue represents an important opportunity to address both the ongoing effects of the 2024 electoral crisis, and the deeper structural challenges facing the country. While Phase One has opened space for engagement, the discussion highlighted that the success of the process will depend on whether it can translate participation into credible, inclusive, and implementable reforms.

The transition to Phase Two will be particularly critical in this regard, especially in ensuring that citizen inputs are meaningfully reflected in policy and legislative outcomes. At the same time, participants emphasised that many of the issues under consideration extend beyond the timeframe of the National Dialogue, requiring sustained engagement and realistic expectations. Ultimately, the value of this process will lie in its ability to move beyond consultation and support meaningful democratic consolidation in Mozambique, while offering lessons for similar processes across the region.

In convening dialogues of this nature, the Southern African Liaison Office seeks to create inclusive, multi-stakeholder platforms that connect local experiences with regional policy processes, amplify non-state voices, and contribute to more informed and responsive governance.

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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