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## The education sector in Mozambique

From access to epistemic quality in primary education

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**Abstract:** From the early days of national independence in 1975, the central aim of the educational policy in Mozambique has been to ensure that all school-age children have access to school and can remain there until they have completed their basic education. In the pursuit of this aim, the extension of access to primary education was achieved relatively successfully, given that it reached a net rate of school coverage of almost 100 per cent. However, the impressive increase in school attendance rates has not been accompanied by a corresponding improvement in the quality of learning, and there are worrying signs of a considerable setback in relation to this aspect. Using this observation as a starting point, the study identifies and analyses the variables in the institutional context behind ‘schooling without learning’. The results of the study point to (i) weak state capacity; (ii) excessive dependence on external aid; and (iii) poor community involvement and participation in school management, as being factors with a major influence on the poor quality of education in primary schools.

**Key words:** state capacity, dependence, education, participation, quality of education

**JEL classification:** H11, H75, I21

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**Note:** This is a translated version of the original paper in Portuguese, which is available [here](#) (disponível em Português).

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## 1 Introduction

Universal access to education, under the aegis of the international development agencies, is an educational policy objective which has spread all over the world, most particularly in the nations listed as ‘developing countries’. In this group of countries, the belief that education is one of the main factors in socioeconomic development gave a certain impetus to the reforms in education, many of them aimed at increasing school coverage rates (Birchler and Michaelowa 2016). Mozambique is one of the countries that has been implementing a set of reforms in its national education system, aiming at more access to education.

In 1974, a year before its independence, Mozambique had an illiteracy rate of around 97 per cent of the adult population (Mário and Nandja 2006: 3), the result of a colonisation process characterised by social and political exclusion of the majority of the population (Mondlane 1975). With the advent of independence in 1975, the new government of an independent Mozambique decided to nationalize education and expand the school network, with the aim of increasing access for the majority of the population. This measure resulted in a significant increase in the number of pupils, which in only four years (1975–79) went from 600,000 to 1.2 million, with an annual rate of increase of the primary school population of around 22 per cent in Level 1 Primary Education (EP1) and 43 per cent in Level 2 Primary Education (EP2) (Mário et al. 2002: 5).

In the framework of the reforms begun in the early years of national independence, parliament approved the first National Education System (SNE) in 1983, through Law No. 4/83, of 23 March. Originally, the SNE had the following main goals: the eradication of illiteracy through compulsory universal education for seven years; the assurance of access to professional education for schoolchildren aged fifteen or over; and the promotion of scientific and pedagogical education and training for teachers. However, the implementation of the SNE suffered major setbacks due to the spread of the armed conflict that had broken out two years after independence (Abrahamsson and Nilsson 1995), during which around 68 per cent of the primary school network was destroyed or remained inactive. As a result of the 16 years of instability and destruction caused by the war, there was a significant decline in the education sector in relation to the gains achieved in the early years after independence.

When the conflict ended, in response to the new multi-party political context established in the Constitution of 1990, the SNE was readjusted. Law No. 4/83, of 23 March, was repealed and the new SNE Act (Law No. 6/92, of 6 May) was approved, introducing some changes to the structure, organisation and operation of the educational system, including the participation of players other than the state in the provision of formal education. These amendments were followed by the abolition of school fees and other direct costs in access to schools in 2005, as well as free distribution of schoolbooks to all seven years in primary schools. Since then, the path followed by the education sector has been one of increasing the supply, with the aim of ensuring that all school-age children have access to and remain in school until they have completed their primary school education.

Notwithstanding the significant increase in access to education, there are still challenges in terms of keeping the pupils at school and the quality of learning. On the one hand, the rate of concluding primary schooling is still under 50 per cent (UNICEF Mozambique 2016), which means that over half of the pupils enrolled do not complete their primary education. On the other hand, the assessment of school education showed that the percentage of 3rd class pupils able to read nationwide was only 6.3 in 2013, having fallen to 4.9 in 2016 (INDE 2017; UNESCO Mozambique 2017). These results indicate the existence of what Hossain and Hickey (2019) call the ‘education

crisis’ or ‘schooling without learning’ to describe situations where governments are able to assure that a large part of the population have access to education without its quality showing any kind of improvement.

The factors behind this ‘education crisis’ that is being observed in developing countries have been extensively dealt with in the literature (e.g. Kingdon et al. 2014; Jones 2016; Masino and Niño-Zarazúa 2016; Hossain and Hickey 2019). Here, there is a general consensus that while the reforms aimed at improving quality are not very appealing to politicians due to their lack of visibility for winning over voters, the reforms aimed at increasing access are relatively easy to implement and gauge, thereby generating political gains for the incumbent, as instruments of distribution of benefits to the voters, namely: expansion of job opportunities for teachers, administrators, support staff, construction workers, book publishers and producers of other school supplies (Hossain et al. 2019; Williams 2019; Kjaer and Muwaanga 2019, Ridell and Niño-Zarazúa).

In this article, we will attempt to contribute to the analysis of the ‘education crisis’ using the tools of institutional theory for this purpose. Thus, through an extensive review of the literature, documentary research and carrying out semi-structured interviews with players selected intentionally, the paper analyses how the different factors associated with *state capacity*, *external influence*, *voice and participation* have influenced the quality of primary education in Mozambique. To this end, we have chosen to structure this paper in four parts. The introductory section is the first of these parts. In the second part, we conceptualize the institutional dimensions that will serve as the basis for analysing aspects related to the quality of primary education in Mozambique. In the third part, we characterize the primary education system in Mozambique, with the main focus on the description of the material and pedagogical conditions of teaching and learning. In the fourth part, we relate the quality of learning with the institutional dimensions. Lastly, we draw our final conclusions.

## 2 Conceptual framework

In the analysis carried out in this study, we used an Institutional Diagnostic Tool approach to the education sector in Mozambique, taking primary education as a support case.

For the purpose of this paper, we take institutions to be formal or informal rules of the game that are expected to be followed, individually and collectively, by political, social and economic players (North 1990). We have derived three institutional dimensions from the institutionalist approach, which will serve as the basis for the analysis of the quality of primary education in Mozambique, namely: *state capacity and independence from private interests*; *sovereignty and independence*; and *voice, participation and political accountability*.<sup>1</sup>

### 2.1 State capacity and independence from private interests

State capacity is a complex dimension with several inter-related components that are sometimes confused with other dimensions, such as the *rule of law* (Cingolani 2013; Hanson and Sigman 2013).

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<sup>1</sup> Under the scope of the Economic Development and Institutions (EDI, <https://edi.opml.co.uk/>) research project, two other institutional dimensions are also taken into account: *rule of law and judicial independence* and *political instability, violence, and the legitimacy of the state*. Notwithstanding their relevance for the conditions underlying social life, our assessment is that their influence is not seen directly on the education sector in this case.

Cingolani suggests the following components/capacities: coercive, fiscal, administrative, transformative, relational, legal and political. Hanson and Sigman focus on three of these: *fiscal*, *coercive* and *administrative*.

Fiscal capacity has to do with the efficiency and effectiveness of the state in attracting the financial resources that will allow it to operate; this efficiency could be extended to public expenditure, i.e. the state's capacity to do more with fewer resources.

Coercive capacity is centred on the state's capacity to be an agent for the defence of the *rule of law* (particularly through the security forces and the judicial power) and assure *territorial sovereignty* (particularly through the use of the defence forces), which is dependent on the state's capacity to hold the monopoly on violence. It is important to mention here that strong coercive capacity in a state with a weak rule of law can lead to abuse and violence by those who are empowered as public safety, security and defence agents.

Administrative capacity refers to the processes of policy implementation, the provision of public services, as in our example of education, and the regulation of private activities, pursuant to the law. The strength of this component of state capacity depends on a set of factors: the competence, independence, reliability and professionalism of state officials; the existence and effectiveness of monitoring and coordination mechanisms; and effective territorial service coverage (presence of state infrastructures, sometimes used as in Acemoglu et al. [2015] as an instrument for measuring state capacity). We argue that the other capacities, reviewed by Cingolani (2013), while important, have less relevance in the discussion of our case.

As the evidence is undeniable that the weaknesses in state capacity referred to above compromise the more fluid operation and growth of the economy, so too do they affect access to public services, such as health and education, and human welfare (Halleröd et al. 2013). However, as Halleröd et al. have found, sometimes, and remarkably in the case of education, if the weaknesses in the capacities of the state are significant, they could in themselves be caused by the low economic performance of countries. As previously mentioned, the lack of state capacity to capture resources, in this case because of the low fiscal base, can be a decisive factor for the creation and reinforcement of other capacities of the state.

To sum up, the level of state capacity, particularly in its fiscal and administrative capacity and coercion capacity, is clearly apparent in the capacity of the education system to serve the entire population, without leaving anybody behind. We believe it is evidence that state capacity thus defined is a key factor with serious implications for the quality of education and keeping pupils at school.

## **2.2 Sovereignty and independence**

In the reality of cooperation for development, there is major discussion on the merits and limits of external intervention. In the education sector, the indisputable fact that international cooperation does not have a sovereign mandate, or even a partial one, over the countries where they operate, can delay the transformation processes they wish to contribute to. Focusing on the transitional administration period in East Timor by the United Nations (UNTAET) after independence, Millo and Barnett (2004) clearly illustrate how the mitigated legitimacy of UNTAET, as an external player temporarily tasked with managing the country's administration, delayed and weakened educational reform after independence. In this case, the Timorese were alienated by the transitional political and legal powers of UNTAET and the financial power of the World Bank. A similar example is presented by Strutt and Kepe (2010) in the context of the Ghana National Education Campaign Coalition (GNECC), which aimed at implementing the Education

for All (EFA) agenda. Here too, the authors note in their analysis that the GNECC, a coalition begun through external initiatives, ended up operating only as a national NGO for implementing activities. It was linked to external donors but had very weak ties and funding at local level.

As added support for this, Miningou (2019) shows that, given the institutional weaknesses in the education sector nationwide, development aid loses its efficiency and this loss could well be total. The results of this study comparing technical efficiency between countries show that factors like good governance, political stability and national commitment (which also implies the existence of fiscal capacity) reinforce the efficiency of external support to the development of education.

In short, development support, due to the limited legitimacy of a sovereign mandate that is evidently external to the country supported, is insufficient for stimulating development in the education sector. It can, however, be damaging, whether through alienating the fundamental stakeholders at local and national level or by inverting the nexus of accountability of the initiatives promoted, of the citizens to the international cooperation players that finance the initiatives.

### **2.3 Voice, participation, and political accountability**

As discussed by Gaventa (2002), the possibility of having a voice and participating actively in social processes and interaction with public service providers and companies is an essential component of citizenship. The existence of effective communication and accountability of national and local governments in response to the voices of the citizens is one of the characteristics that defines 'good governance'. As stated by Paul (1992), political accountability processes are the set of approaches, mechanisms and practices that allow the stakeholders to ensure performance and the correct level of public service provision. Of these stakeholders, Gaventa (2002) calls particular attention to the people who face economic hardship and marginalised people. Citizenship, whether in legal or sociological terms, is only experienced if the people feel they have the right to participate in social and political processes, if they are recognised as players who build and shape the services they use, and not just users or beneficiaries of these services. Gaventa (2002) stated that citizens' rights to health cannot be exercised if the citizens cannot exercise their democratic right to take part in the decision-making process about the services that are provided. This principle applies naturally to education. The way participation space is given to citizens and the degree of inclusion of disadvantaged or marginalised people or those not necessarily belonging to social groups close to power, determine the degree of voice, participation and accountability that exists.

The actual agents of the educational system, with different levels and responsibilities, must be allowed to feel that they are participants and feel that their voices are recognised (Smith and Benavot 2019). Regarding the concept of *structured democratic voice mechanisms*, Smith and Benavot discuss and illustrate the need for teachers, local leaders and pupils to be able to state their position on political initiatives or reforms. If the democratic expression of the voice of the local community, the pupils or teachers cannot be expressed directly, one alternative could be through independent representatives drawn from civil society (Mungiu-Pippidi and Dusu 2011; Smith and Benavot 2019). This voice can only be effective if the central and provincial government system of education and even the governing bodies of each school are open to relinquishing part of their decision-making power. An exercise in voice promotion that is merely consultative, without recognition of authority, weakens its effectiveness. However, if it is actually implemented, it allows for the intersection of the interests of the fundamental players in the education system.

What the citizens and players inside a system, for example the education system, do with the voice and participation they are allowed is also important for institutional quality. Véron et al. (2006) indicate that democratic decentralisation and community participation are often recommended as instruments for controlling corruption. However, reflecting on the case of a social protection

mechanism in the rural areas of East Bengal and Bangladesh, these suggest that not only are the communities not homogenous, but key members of local communities can themselves be accomplices or perpetrators of corruption. In this case, rather than combating corruption, decentralisation can make it take on decentralised forms. This is perhaps an example of where weaknesses in the rule of law converge with weaknesses in the voice and participation mechanisms, making it difficult to respond to problems such as the corruption that can be seen in public service bureaucracy, thus undermining performance.

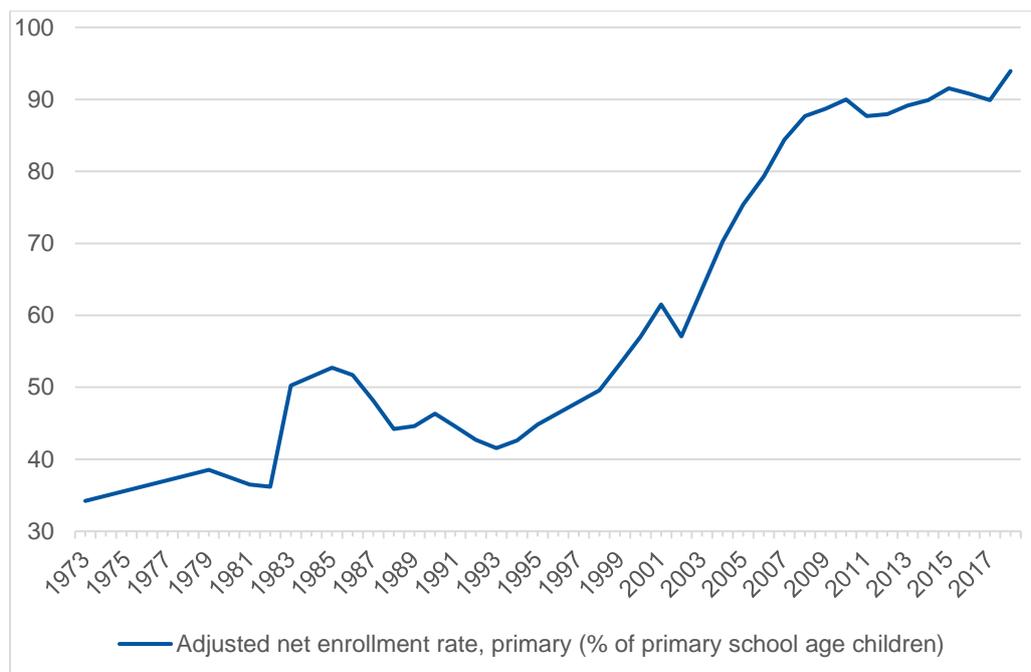
In short, voice, participation and accountability mechanisms are necessary in the education system, not only to monitor its operation, but also to lead to improvements and adjust reforms through combining the contextualised perspectives of its players, including pupils, teachers and local communities. However, the inequalities and dynamics of power and the fact that institutional weaknesses reinforce each other must not be forgotten: the weaknesses and capacities of the state can weaken the effectiveness of measures for promoting voice and participation, corrupting the actual accountability mechanisms.

In the next section, we will present the case of primary education in Mozambique, which, after it has been described, will be discussed in the light of the interpretation key we have presented.

### 3 The case of primary education in Mozambique

Overcoming the negligence to which the Portuguese colonial administration consigned the education of Mozambicans, Mozambique quickly extended access to primary education. From little more than 30 per cent of school-age children in the year it gained independence, enrolment in primary school reached a rate of close to 100 per cent (see Figure 1) in 2018. This remarkable expansion, particularly in the last 30 years, was the result of policies from successive governments of Mozambique that deliberately and systematically favoured the expansion of education.

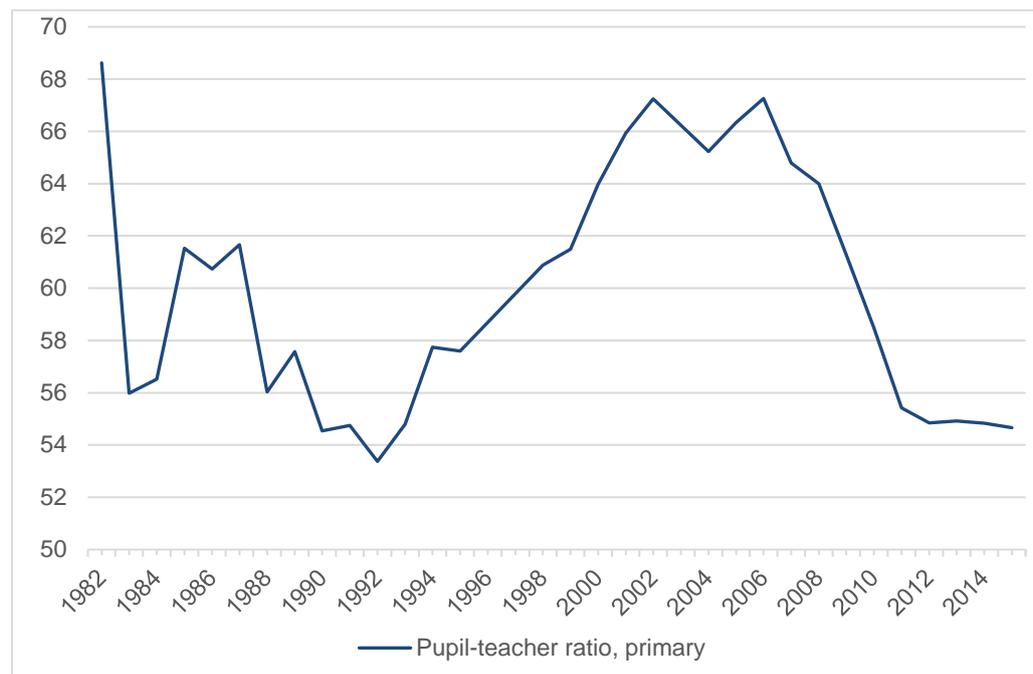
Figure 1: Primary Education Enrolment 1973–2018 (%)



Source: authors' illustration based on the World Development Indicators (World Bank 2020)

Note that the efforts made to assure access to primary education for all children of school-going age were carried out at the same time as, and under pressure from, high population growth (around 2.8 per cent per year). This corresponded to an increase in the number of children in primary schools from 578,000 in 1973 to 6.6 million in 2018 (World Bank 2020), i.e. over ten times more. During the same period, the number of primary school teachers increased from 8,300 to 118,700. Moving out from under such a heavy colonial burden, with so few people able to read and write, it would have been practically impossible for the number of teachers to keep up with the pace of growth in the school-going population. This gave rise to tensions in the challenge to adjust the primary education available to the increasing demand, as is clear from the pupil-teacher ratios presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Pupil-Teacher Ratio 1982–2014 (%)



Source: authors' illustration based on the World Development Indicators (World Bank 2020)

Such a high number of real and potential users, associated with the fact that education and schoolbooks were free in both cycles of primary education and the constant expansion of the school network, could not but put enormous pressure on the services provided by the education sector. There were also other challenges in terms of the sustainability and equity of the expansion, keeping pupils at school and quality of learning. We focus in particular on this last aspect.

There are worrying data regarding the quality of learning and evidence of a rate of concluding primary schooling of under 50 per cent (UNICEF Mozambique 2016), which means that over half of the pupils enrolled do not complete their primary education. Moreover, there are other strong indications of a low level of learning by primary school pupils, such as those shown in the results of independent research carried out in Mozambique by the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ).

Table 1: Results of the SACMEQ II and III studies—proficiency of 6th class pupils

Mathematics				Reading					
Level	2000	2007	Δ	2000	2007	Δ	Level		
1 Pre-Numeracy	0.4 %	5.1 %	4.6 %	2.3 %	6.7 %	4.4 %	Pre-Reading	1	
2 Emergent Numeracy	12.6 %	27.7 %	15.1 %	3.9 %	14.8 %	10.9 %	Emergent Reading	2	
3 Basic Numeracy	41.7 %	41.4 %	-0.3 %	11.2 %	22.0 %	10.8 %	Basic Reading	3	
4 Beginning Numeracy	32.1 %	20.9 %	-11.2 %	28.8 %	25.0 %	-3.8 %	Reading for meaning	4	
5 Competent numeracy	11.4 %	3.9 %	-7.5 %	32.7 %	17.9 %	-14.8 %	Interpretive Reading	5	
6 Mathematically skilled	1.7 %	0.8 %	-0.9 %	16.1 %	10.7 %	-5.4 %	Inferential reading	6	
7 Concrete problem solving	0.1 %	0.3 %	0.2 %	5.0 %	2.7 %	-2.3 %	Analytical Reading	7	
8 Abstract problem solving	0.0 %	0.0 %	0.0 %	0.1 %	0.3 %	0.2 %	Critical Reading	8	

Source: authors' calculations based on data from the SACMEQ II and III studies published in (SACMEQ 2020).

As is clear from the data in Table 1 and discussed in Magaia et al. (2011), in 2007, from a universe of structured questions at eight levels of numeracy, only 41.4 and 20.9 per cent of 6th class pupils achieved positive results in basic numeracy and beginning numeracy questions, respectively. In the reading test, only 22.0 and 17.9 per cent of pupils achieved positive results in basic reading and interpretive reading questions, respectively. Between 2000 and 2007, the quality of education deteriorated. Magaia et al. (2011: 3) attributed this fall to factors related to the rapid expansion of the education system.

Table 2: Performance of 3rd class pupils

Reading/Portuguese			Mathematics		
2013			2016		
Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
82.8 %	43.6 %	6.3 %	83.2 %	43.8 %	4.9 %

Note: reading/Portuguese levels are: (1) recognising the alphabet; (2) reading words and sentences; (3) reading and text comprehension and analysis. Mathematics levels are: (1) counting numbers and identifying geometric figures; (2) reading numbers and basic arithmetic; (3) problem solving.

Source: authors' illustration based on data from INDE (2017).

More recent data from a report on the assessment of 3rd class pupils (INDE 2017), confirm the previous indicators and once again show low levels of skills acquisition. They also point to a deterioration in Portuguese learning between 2013 and 2016.

Given these results, it is important to bear in mind the facts behind them. Several factors can be pointed to as being the origin of the low levels reported. Under the scope of this paper, we will be focusing on the following:

### a) Deficient allocation of time for teaching and learning tasks

The reform of the basic education curriculum, whose implementation began in 2003 (INDE 2003), highlights the acquisition of reading and writing skills as the fundamental pillars on which the acquisition of skills in the other levels and classes in the education system are based on. A large number of Mozambican schools teach three daily rounds of classes, which means that children are only in school doing teaching and learning tasks for three hours a day. This reality, which is quite common in public schools in Mozambique, both in urban and rural areas, where the majority of the population lives, when associated with the long distances most children have to travel between

home and school, allows us to understand how limited the time these children have for reading and writing tasks is, both inside and outside of school.

### **b) Overcrowded classes and very high pupil-teacher ratios**

One of the direct consequences of the increase in numbers at primary schools and the absence of a sufficient number of teachers and facilities was the need to extend the absorption capacity of the schools, which fact gave rise to overcrowded classes. Although the number of primary schools and teachers has shown a substantial increase, the first cycle EP classes and the pupil-teacher ratios remained practically unchanged between 2013 and 2018. In fact, a large number of EP2 schools are a result of the transformation of EP1 schools into full schools (EP1+EP2) without the addition of classrooms. Thus, in 2018, the average pupil-teacher ratio in full primary schooling (EP1+EP2) was around 55.27, compared to 64.2 in the beginners' classes (EP1). The highest ratios were in Zambezia, Nampula, and Cabo Delgado provinces (over 70 pupils per teacher). This fact, combined with the lack of time for learning tasks both inside and outside the classroom shows how limited the capacity of teachers is to deal with the learning needs of all the pupils in the areas of reading, writing and arithmetic, especially pupils with special needs.

### **c) Deficient preparation, allocation, and monitoring of the work of teachers**

It is not enough to introduce curricular reforms and increase the number of teachers in schools while maintaining the characteristics unaltered and/or allowing these to deteriorate. The implementation plan for the Basic Education Course Plan (INDE 2003) points to the teacher as a factor in its success. Recent studies (e.g. Díaz 2003; Makopa 2011; Sheerens 2004) which looked at the factors associated with the performance of the pupils, highlight the importance of qualifications and the equitable distribution of teachers. Meanwhile, Darling-Hammond et al. (2005), McColskey et al. (2005) and Rice (2003) go further and defend the existence of a strong connection between teacher qualifications and pupil achievements. Moreover, there is a global consensus that 'to improve the quality of education, it is first necessary to improve the recruitment, training, social status and working conditions of the teachers' (Delors et al. 1996: 131). In practice, however, this reasoning is far from gaining the agreement of the majority of the political decision-makers and donors in the education sector.

It can be said, without a shadow of a doubt, that there is no other sector of education in Mozambique that has been subject to so many changes over the 44 years of independence of this country as teacher training. In response to increasing pupil-teacher ratios, the government made the decision to reduce the number of years of training for primary teachers, changing the training models then in force (7th class + 3 years in Teacher Training Centres [CFPP] and 10th class + 2 years in Primary Teaching Institutes [IMAP]) and to introduce the new model, called the 'fast track training model' (10th class + 1 year). With this alteration, the education sector was able to train a total of 6,094 teachers between 2012 and 2018, around 80 per cent of whom were absorbed by the public sector (MINEDH 2018).

However, the introduction of the fast track model is an example of how decisions on educational policy based almost exclusively on assumptions of a financial or economic nature can have devastating consequences for the quality of education of one or more generations, if not the entire nation. Sources that we contacted from the education sector, with long and proven experience in management at different levels, were unanimous in suggesting that the main motivation behind the introduction of this teacher training model was most likely the 'excessive burden of salaries' on the sector's operating expenses in comparison to other expenses. According to these sources, this fact caused some important international partners to put pressure on the ministry in order to reduce the number of years for primary teacher training from three to just one, as a way of ensuring

the provision of the necessary teachers in a short space of time and stop the increasing salary expenses, given that the salary of a teacher with a 10+1 profile would be less than a 10+3 teacher.

Despite this effort, the decline in the quality of education has not stopped. The 10+1 training model contributed only to containing the increase in pupil-teacher ratios, but it was also shown to be totally incapable of providing primary teachers with the skills required in the areas of reading, writing and arithmetic and preparing them for dealing with very large classes. In addition to the problem of the deficient training of teachers, we have the perception of generalised non-compliance with teachers' contractual obligations and a lack of monitoring during school hours by the school managers, which results in frequent tardiness and unjustified absences during school time, not only by the teachers, but also by a large number of school principals.

The phenomenon of chronic absenteeism among teachers has become a serious problem in many developing countries (Carron and Chau 1996). UNICEF Mozambique has revealed that in Mozambique in 2014, many 'pupils were losing more than 50 per cent of the potential learning time as a result of late start times, early closing and extended recesses' (2014: 68). In a study prepared for the USAID, it is also pointed out that teachers are between 10 and 40 minutes late and 'considering that the first class of the day is often Portuguese, where reading is taught, it is easy to see how teaching time is reduced by teachers being late' (Raupp et al. 2013: 4). Altogether, these anomalies mean that pupils have less daily instruction time, with negative effects on learning to read and write. All told, according to estimates made by UNICEF Mozambique (2016: 2), the absenteeism rate for teachers is around 45 per cent, while for school principals, it is close to 44 per cent. If confirmed, these data indicate serious problems with school management and leadership and make us question the criteria for the selection and promotion of school principals and other holders of positions of responsibility at local and district level.

#### **d) Shortages of teaching materials**

The available literature indicates that the availability of and access to basic school supplies in the classrooms has a positive impact on teacher motivation (Carron and Chau 1996; Díaz 2003) and the performance of pupils (INDE 2017; Makopa 2012). Material conditions include school infrastructures, classrooms, desks, schoolbooks, teachers' guides, the blackboard, chalk, teacher's table and chair, cupboards, maps, display cabinets for science materials and other educational supplies. It is true that over the last 20 years, many schools and classrooms were built all over the country. However, there is no doubt that the construction of the schools and classrooms fell short of what had been planned and the expansion that took place in primary schools was at the expense of the 'adoption of three rounds of classes, an increase in the number of pupils per class and the existence of outdoor classes' (Duarte 2018: 41). In fact, the annual construction goal of 4,100 classrooms was later revised to 1,400 (CESO 2011: 11). This resulted in 'almost 56.6% of pupils studying in schools with no water and 72.8% in schools without electricity, while only 16% study in schools with a library. With the exception of Maputo Province, over 60% of pupils sit on the floor and only 25% of pupils have the same teacher until they finish 2nd class' (Duarte 2018: 42).

Similarly, data produced by the INDE (2017) reveal the existence of pupils who have classes outdoors. According to that study, the proportion of pupils having classes outdoors (outside the classroom) fell from 25 per cent in 2010 to 22.7 per cent in 2013. Despite this reduction, the situation is still worrying, given that, apart from studying outdoors, many of these children study sitting on the floor, with no physical support for their writing and arithmetic activities.

### **e) Poor involvement and participation of parents and the community in school management**

A large portion of the anomalies already pointed to, particularly with regard to absenteeism by the teachers and school managers, could be prevented and minimised through the involvement of the local communities in school management, through school councils (CEs). Given the limited capacity of the state, through the ministry responsible for the area, for monitoring the activities carried out in all the schools, the CEs are still seen as a platform through which communities, parents and guardians can demand accountability and put on some pressure for a change in direction towards the desired quality of education. However, there are indications that the performance of the CEs has fallen short of what was expected.

The education sector is structured in hierarchical levels. The Ministry of Education and Human Development (MINEDH) runs the sector at central level and below it are the provincial and district boards and, finally, the schools. However, between district level and the schools, there are what are called School Cluster Zones (ZIP), which are areas in the education sector that group together schools that are geographically close to each other in order to have pedagogical support between peers and promote teacher empowerment. At each one of the levels described above, there is a host of interested players, who mutually influence each other and are influenced by the system as a whole. At each one of the levels, the players develop specific dynamics as a result of the development of institutional practices or policies specific to the subsector they are attached to, and also as a result of institutionalised local practices.

At primary school level, which is at the centre of our analysis, the relevant players are the parents and guardians, the teachers, the school management body and the support service staff, pupils, and the community in general. There is a general consensus that the greater the involvement of these players, the greater the degree of effectiveness of the practices in the schools, with positive effects on keeping pupils at school and improving the quality of education. This is an aspect that is being formally recognised by the government, which is why the CEs have been revitalised as a participation platform for the different local players in school management.

As consultation bodies, the CEs are the main school body and their functions extend to monitoring and supervising school activities. The CEs, whose members are elected for two-year mandates, are made up of 13 to 19 members (according to the number of pupils in the school), representing the teachers, the administrative staff, parents and guardians, the pupils and the community.

The list of powers of the CEs includes, but is not limited to, approval of plans, regulations and projects and the feasibility of their implementation in the schools; participation in financial decision-making and supervision; monitoring the execution of the budget (including Direct Support to Schools – ADE); monitoring the performance of teachers and the school management board; giving opinions on educational performance; establishing mechanisms for resolving disputes, infractions and the accountability of the offenders. In addition, it is also up to the CEs to propose the dismissal of school principals to the competent authority.

However, the idea according to which the CEs constitute a body that assures community participation in school management needs more scrutiny, given that there are cases where the CEs are taken over by local elite groups, based on the power relations characteristic to the communities where the schools are located. As an example, there are indications of the existence of a high number of cases where members of the CEs are co-opted by school principals without being elected by the community, which limits the pressure of accountability on the management body. According to this logic, once CEs are co-opted by some members of the school board with the aim of ensuring that these members remain in the positions they hold for an indefinite period of

time, the CEs are no longer able to truly monitor teachers and the management body and hold them accountable. These practices raise questions as to the representative nature of the members of the CEs and their effectiveness in resolving school problems. Under these circumstances, the CEs serve only to rubber stamp what has been previously decided by the school principal and his/her cronies without the CEs being involved in the decision-making process. This results in a lack of transparency in the use of the funds allocated to the school, bringing perceptions of misuse of the ADE (or lack of evidence as to its correct use) and of other public funds allocated to the school.

Interviews with staff of the District Education Services in Meconta (Nampula Province) led us to understand that they had been expecting the ADE to serve for paying subsidies to the members of the CEs also. As this did not happen, the CEs lost their motivation to effectively participate in the CE sessions because they could not see any material gain in this, particularly as there had been a general perception that the ADE would tend to benefit the managing body of the school and the President of the CE. In the same district, there were also situations where members of the CEs had to travel long distances to get to the school in order to take part in the CE meetings, which discouraged their participation.

Similarly, data collected in Meconta and Murrupula district (interviews conducted by one of the authors in 2017) showed how the communities sometimes present a series of complaints regarding teacher absences and tardiness. These complaints are then forwarded to the local CEs by the community leader or through the parents and guardians. However, little change has been seen as a result of these actions by the communities, which also discouraged their participation. In addition, as mentioned by the president of the CE at one of the primary schools in Murrupula District, very often, when the presidents of the CEs are not part of the school administrative staff, they are advised not to interfere in internal school issues. Thus, if the lack of information on the actual role of the CEs works as an obstacle to their effectiveness on the one hand, on the other hand the absence seems to be felt of an appeals body the CEs can resort to if the school principal carries out his/her duties heavy-handedly. The net result of this situation is the lack of incentive for the members of the CEs to continue being involved in actively monitoring the school management activities. As a result, the problem of absences and tardiness of teachers and principals and the misuse of the scarce resources placed at the disposal of the schools, which could be resolved at local level, remain chronic and unaffected.

Cases of parents and pupils who fear reprisals from the teachers and school managers are frequently reported. On the one hand, pupil representatives barely have an active voice at CE meetings, given the power relations established, where the teacher has the educational authority the pupil does not have, hence the fear of reprisal. On the other hand, parents and guardians often fear that their children will suffer reprisals if they report cases of abuse of power by the management (in the cases where this happens) or the teachers (absences, tardiness, abuse, extortion, etc.) in a classroom context.

Thus, with regard to the involvement and participation of local players (parents and other community members) in school management, a kind of pseudo-participation is observed, as the CEs are very often used as tools, with their members being forced to accept what has already been decided by the school board. At best, community participation in school management is limited to participation in CE meetings only, but they have little power to influence decision-making processes. As a result, many schools are still facing chronic and apparently unsolvable problems, which include: unjustified absences and tardiness of teachers and school principals, a lack of transparency in the use of the ADE funds to improve material conditions in the schools, a high number of school dropouts (especially girls) before completing the 2nd cycle of primary education.

## **f) Weaknesses in external support to education**

Mozambique's ambitions for education, given the budget difficulties it experiences as a low-income country, cannot be achieved without external support. With a view to coordinating the flow of external aid to the education programmes in Mozambique, in the context of the continued increase in school numbers, the international cooperation partners of the then Ministry of Education (MINED) proposed a funding mechanism known as FASE – Support Fund for the Education Sector to the government, as mentioned above. This paradigm shift came as a result of the idea put forward in 2001 of adopting the so-called Sector-Wide Approach – SWAp to the education sector. This can be defined as a 'process where a sector strategy is formulated and budgeted, aligned with the available resources through an iterative process, converted into a working plan and formalised in agreements between the implementing agency and the funding sources' (Mário and Takala 2003: 6). The implementation of this approach, through FASE, implied the need to involve the partners in the different stages of implementation of the education programmes, i.e. the discussion and the development of the initial proposals for educational policy documents and the negotiation and harmonisation of the formal arrangements for the implementation of the programmes in Annual Review Meetings (RAR) and other support bodies (*ibidem*).

Through FASE, the Ministry of Education was able to cover a considerable volume of current expenses and investment in the education sector which would otherwise have remained without coverage or would have had inadequate coverage. In fact, FASE has made the purchase of schoolbooks for free distribution feasible, as well as the acquisition of laboratory materials, teacher training, district and provincial supervision and the construction of classrooms in the districts.

Notwithstanding these positive developments, the sector approach via FASE faced (and continues to face) serious constraints. For example, the delays seen in the release of funds from the State Budget (OE) by the Ministry of the Economy and Finance, particularly during the first three months of each financial year, seem to have reinforced the perception of the role of bilateral funding projects as sources of flexible or 'emergency' financial support, especially for the provincial boards, the district boards and the schools, clearly going against the principles of SWAp (Mário and Takala 2003).

From 2014 to the present day, the amounts allocated to FASE by international partners have been decreasing steadily. For example, in 2014, the partners had committed to disburse USD149 million; in 2015, this had fallen to USD81 million and for 2016–18 disbursement commitments fluctuated between USD105 and 110 million per year (MINEDH 2015). However, in 2016, with the emergence of the 'hidden debt' crisis, the international partners found themselves confronted with the lack of measures to mitigate the risk of the flow of funds from FASE to the education sector, which is why they decided to suspend disbursements until the partnership instruments were revised and signed (MINEDH 2018). In 2017, disbursements to FASE were resumed but, that same year, a relatively low external investment budget was recorded (around 63 per cent), which was attributed to delays in contracting supervision for the construction work on classrooms (MINEDH 2018). Although it is a fact that the funds from FASE constitute the largest source of external resources available to the education sector, its contribution has never been able to break the 80 per cent barrier (MINEDH 2019).

Another point to be reflected on is how the reforms were implemented, clearly showing how dependence on external support can compromise the quality of the processes and the sustainability of the results. An example of this is the reform of the primary education curriculum (curricular plan for basic education) in 2003, which did not take into account the capacity to prepare, place and supervise the qualified teachers needed to carry out the reforms set out in the new curriculum.

Another example was the decision to abolish school fees and introduce free distribution of schoolbooks with the support of the FASE partners alone.

## 4 Institutional dimensions and epistemic quality in primary education

The description of the case in the previous section presents several instances where weaknesses were seen in the institutional dimensions that form the framework of primary education. Below, we will attempt to systematize these instances.

### 4.1 State capacity and external influence

Throughout this subsection, we will attempt to show that, along with limited financial capacity to respond to the increasing demand and sustain the pace of increases in school numbers, the operation of the education sector is severely curtailed by its limited human and administrative capacity. Given these shortcomings, international support is fundamental, making the primary education system susceptible to external influence.

The demographic pressure on primary education revealed severe shortcomings in the *administrative capacity* of the state, which is particularly evident in the lack of the classrooms and, mainly, of the teachers that the system so badly needs. We believe this weakness in state capacity results in overcrowded classes, very high pupil-teacher ratios and pressure on the learning process.

However, as discussed conceptually, we must not forget that these shortcomings in administrative capacities are closely related to the shortcomings in the *fiscal capacity* of the state. As we have shown, the Mozambican State's focus on education is clearly seen in terms of the percentage of the budget it has been devoting to this sector, but it is also clear that there is a lack of financial resources in low-income countries like Mozambique.

This has led to options that could compromise the *administrative capacity* of the state with regard to primary education, particularly: an insufficient number of new classrooms built; an increase in the number of classes taught without any increase in the number of classrooms; teaching in three daily rounds of three hours/day; and reduction of the training time required in order to qualify as a primary school teacher (the fast track training model).

We also found evidence of a weakness in the *coercive capacity* of the state, particularly in terms of administrative control and mitigation of absenteeism and other abuses by teachers. As we showed, this weakness in the control of absenteeism suggests the existence of leadership and school management problems, which are also linked to weakness in the *voice, participation and political accountability* dimension. The combination of weaknesses in the coercive and administrative capacity of the state extends to the process of selecting and promoting school principals and other holders of local and district management positions as well.

Weaknesses in state capacities which, like those we have found in primary education, can also be combined with other institutional dimensions. In particular, we have found clear interactions between the weaknesses of *state capacities* and the institution of *sovereignty and independence* in the way external support to the education sector operates. Given the limitations of the fiscal capacity of the Mozambican State, an initiative like FASE, as described above, is much needed and indeed admirable. Within the bounds of the limited legitimacy discussed in the conceptual framework, this initiative makes it possible to make up for financial shortcomings and even support the reinforcement of the administrative capacities of the educational system in the country.

However, the case of primary education reveals weaknesses too in the way external support can interact with central government structures. On the one hand, as mentioned above, the interaction with weaknesses in the *fiscal/budget capacity* of central public administration in releasing funds to the provincial and district administrations in good time gives rise to dependency mechanisms and alienation of fundamental national governance structures.

On the other hand, by making financial support to the education sector conditional on political decisions with long-term and uncertain effects, the international partners risk exceeding the necessary limits that respect for Mozambican sovereignty should imply. This is clear in the influence of international partners on the decision to adopt the fast track teacher training model in primary education. The discontinuity caused by the many teacher training models that have been introduced prevent the sector not only from learning about what works (or not), but also from building professional careers that will attract and retain the most talented young people in the teaching profession. As such, the imposition of giving financial criteria precedence over educational quality criteria by external partners fundamental for the actual funding of the education system proved to be problematic from the outset. Even more problematic is the imposition of a solution without others having been discussed openly and with the participation of players in the education system, in particular representatives of the school communities.

In the same way, the weaknesses that were probably behind the ‘hidden debt’ crisis were added to the imperative of being accountable to the external sovereignty entities that manage cooperation for development, creating problems for the support that FASE provides to education in Mozambique. Because Mozambique has ties to external sovereign entities, fundamental funds for reinforcing infrastructures, resources, and teacher training, aimed at improving the quality of learning, may then respond to the needs of the country in a disjointed manner.

To sum up, limitations and weaknesses in state capacities and sovereignty and independence affect the epistemic quality of primary education. The scarcity of financial resources to make sector policies feasible, the small number of highly qualified professionals (whether teachers or technical or administrative staff), the problems of intra- and inter-sector coordination and the limited capacity for monitoring, auditing and inspecting the sector policies are just some of the aspects arising from the weak administrative capacity of the state that have an impact on the quality of education.

Even though governments may choose educational reforms aimed at access to school because these generate immediate electoral gain, it is recognised that improving the quality of learning in school is more costly and difficult than increasing the number of schools (Nicolai et al. 2014, cited by Hossain and Hickey 2019: 2). As such, states with weak capacities tend to focus more on increasing access to education and less on its quality (Harding and Stasavage 2014). On the other hand, weak state capacity to fund its educational development plans exposes it to the priorities set by the donors.

## **4.2 Voice, participation, and political accountability**

Although systems for the promotion of voice and participation of the different players in the school community have been put in place, the evidence found reveals important weaknesses.

The literature we reviewed states that voice, participation and accountability mechanisms are necessary for monitoring the operation of the education system, but also for leading to improvements and adjusting reforms, through listening to the school community, including pupils, teachers and local community representatives.

As we have seen, the CEs were set up and revitalised in order to be able to control and monitor the action of school management bodies, as well as teachers, with powers being assigned to them for resolving conflicts and holding them accountable. According to how they were designed, they should, in fact, be adequate voice, participation and political accountability mechanisms.

However, our study on primary education reveals clear evidence of the weakness of these mechanisms, as is the case with other cases discussed in the literature. Cases where members of the CEs are co-opted by school principals or by other members, in the pursuit of their own personal interests, reveal weaknesses in the legitimacy and transparency of these bodies. The lack of clarity as to the duties of the members of the CEs, expectations of payment in some instances and their lack of commitment to the public good undermine their operation. Consequently, the CEs do not fully carry out their duties of monitoring situations of absenteeism, the lack of punctuality of teachers and principals and the misuse of school resources, which all have a tendency to be perpetuated.

Finally, concerns are reinforced through evidence of a lack of mechanisms for the CEs to appeal to district, provincial or national bodies or the state or associations. This means that even those that operate correctly could be able to exercise effective coercion over teachers or principals who are negligent or engage in abuses.

As mentioned above, Hanushek et al. (2013) suggest that voice and participation mechanisms at local level can contribute to reinforcing the capacities of the state. However, for this to happen, the weaknesses found lead us to recommend that attention should be paid to the actual voice and participation mechanisms implemented in primary schools in Mozambique, the CEs. Otherwise, their weaknesses will only intensify the perceived weaknesses in the administrative and coercive capacities of the state under the scope of primary education.

## **5 Conclusion**

Throughout this article, it has been observed that, since the early years of national independence, Mozambique opted for expansionary measures in education, with the aim of providing access to school to the majority of the population, without discrimination as to race, colour, ethnicity, religion or social condition. To this end, a unified education system was set up and the school network extended to different parts of the country, both in the cities and in the countryside. Despite having suffered a huge blow in the 1980s as a result of a long and destructive armed conflict, over the last 30 years, the education sector has recovered and shown positive results in terms of school access and coverage. The net coverage rate for primary education (EP1+EP2) now stands at around 96.6 per cent. However, as referred to in previous sections, the expansionary measures implemented in the education sector have been at the expense of the quality of education. With less than 5 per cent of 3rd class pupils having developed reading skills and less than 8 per cent with the mathematical skills required for that level of education, the country is suffering from a chronic 'education crisis', characterised by a considerable increase in the number of primary school pupils and the reduction in the quality of learning over time. Behind this schooling without learning, there are factors related to the teaching conditions (absenteeism, poor preparation of the teachers, overcrowded classes, excessively high pupil-teacher ratios, etc.) and deficient material conditions for teaching and learning (not enough classrooms, desks, books, tables, etc.). In turn, these factors are also influenced by the institutional context the education sector operates in. Limited state capacity, high dependence on external support and deficient community participation in school life are the three factors in the institutional environment that have been shaping the characteristics of primary education.

The available data suggest that expansionary measures in a context of limited fiscal capacity, even with the support of donors, has had negative effects on the quality of education, on the lack of sufficient investment in building new classrooms and/or enlarging and equipping the existing ones. This is why there is still a high number of schools without water or electricity or a library and with over 60 per cent of pupils sitting on the floor. If on the one hand donors exercise enormous pressure toward a mass increase in access to primary education, making financial commitments to fund school infrastructures, on the other hand, donors do not fund a large part of the operating expenses that the expansionary measures involve, particularly staff salaries.

Given the scarcity of financial resources for the payment of the salaries for the primary teachers needed for the continuing increases in school numbers, the government's option, with the agreement of the donors, was to introduce the basic level (10+1) teacher training model in place of the one in force up to then (10+3). The net effect of this alteration was a proliferation of primary school teachers without the necessary skills to teach in essential curricular areas (including reading, writing and arithmetic) and incapable of dealing with large classes.

In addition to the state's weak fiscal capacity, which justifies and drives external aid for education programmes, there is also its deficient administrative quality, which is very often associated with the lack of qualified staff in the sector. This situation becomes more evident as we move down to the lower levels of the structure of the education sector (i.e. from national to provincial and from there to district level). The state's poor administration capacity is also plainly seen in the almost non-existent control over teacher attendance and effectiveness. The creation and/or revitalisation of the CEs, as a mechanism for ensuring community involvement and participation in the management and improving the performance of school is not unrelated to this reality. However, a large number of CEs are lethargic and there are many cases where school principals usurp the functions of the CEs, thus limiting the room for community participation in school management.

In short, we can conclude that some of the reforms introduced in the education sector since 1992 with support and supervision from MINEDH's international partners were either too ambitious and not very realistic, or there were no more than rhetoric from the political decision-makers, as human and financial resources were not assigned in sufficient quality for their implementation. In fact, as was already pointed out, some reforms did not even consider the possibility of the Mozambican State implementing them without recourse to aid from external partners. Involvement and participation by parents, community and religious leaders and other stakeholders in school life is an important step. This involvement will, in part, allow for the prevention and removal of obstacles to keeping an increasingly higher number of schoolchildren, particularly girls, at school, and the promotion of an effective improvement in the quality of learning, reporting and fighting absenteeism by school teachers and principals, the unlawful charges imposed on parents and guardians and gender-based violence, among other evils, and promoting the accountability of the leaders and school managers. The improvement in the quality of education also comes as a result of the reinforcement of state capacity, with the support of effective voice and participation mechanisms and external support mainly aimed at reinforcing this capacity, before moving on to new initiatives that put added pressure on the system.

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