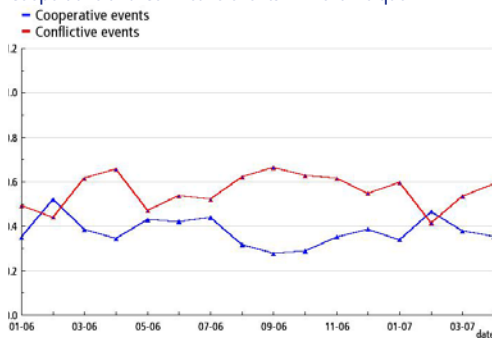


MOZAMBIQUE | Trends in Conflict and Cooperation

POLITICAL

On 22 March according to official sources, the explosion of an armory in the area of Malhazine in Maputo killed 105 and injured 515 people, leaving 80 orphans and destroying at least 1000 homes, littering more than 4'000 unexploded ordnances over residential areas. This was the second armory explosion since January. It sparked mass panic and triggered an unprecedented wave of public indignation (which contributed to a jump in conflictive

Cooperative and Conflictive events in Mozambique



Source: FAST event data

events depicted on the graph) because the Ministry of Defense had evidently failed to comply with the decision to move the armory away from residential areas. The protest was supported by unusually harsh editorials in the state press and open letters by senior Frelimo members calling for the resignation of Defense Minister Tobias Dai – brother-in-law of president Guebuza –, a rigorous assessment of the responsibilities and compensation for the victims. However, the police rudely dispersed a citizen's protest demonstration on 31 March in front of the parliament. Six individuals were arrested, including an independent journalist who was released two days later following pressure from the Human Rights League and the Attorney General. The president declared three days of mourning and quickly established an independent inquiry commission. Their official summary report released on 11 April considered "human error" as one among other causes, yet revealed "manifest irregularities" regarding storage and

inspection procedures, while dismissing allegations of sabotage. A previously released report by the Institute for Security Studies noted clear violations of the SADC Firearms Protocol to which Mozambique is party. The defense minister who did not consider stepping down announced that USD 24 million were needed to safely re-store all remaining armories. The government promised to disburse USD 12 million in aid to victims and only reluctantly on 10 April appointed a commission to set up a compensation office. Meanwhile, the victims formed a pressure group and the Bishop's Conference, for its part, stressed the need for formal compensation. The prime minister who had initially declined the need for compensation for the "accident" seemed to be hopelessly overpowered by the situation.

In March parliament re-opened with a full agenda, which included the urgent approval of the legal framework for the provincial and local elections. After re-discussing diverging positions between Renamo and Frelimo, both laws were passed on 22 March and 11 April despite disapproval from the opposition parties. Only in May – after extending the ordinary session period – did the parliament appoint five of the 13-member National Election Commission (CNE). The eight civil society members, which will for the first time be part of the CNE, still need to be chosen from 15 candidates who were selected by an 8-member jury set up by the Electoral Observatory.

Both Frelimo and Renamo have agreed to hold elections before December 2007; however, no electoral schedule has been defined so far. In early May, the Technical Secretariat of State Administration (STAE) recommended postponing provincial elections to January 2008. This would be during the rainy season when most voters would not be able to reach their voting stations. Another important difficulty is the fact that no donor seems willing to supply the budget (estimated at USD 45 million) for the elections. Some local observers go as far as to question the usefulness of provincial assemblies given the experience of unresolved conflict between local councils and local administrations.

Despite having accepted participation in provincial elections, Renamo leader Dhlakama threatened in March to place members of his former rebel movement near ballot boxes to prevent Frelimo officials from cheating. He went as far as to threaten killing policemen if they sought to obstruct his men from stopping fraud. These unfortunate remarks by the Renamo leader were taken up by Ya-Qub Sibindy, the leader of a self-styled Islamic party (PIMO) and founding member of a so-called "Bloc of Constructive Opposition," who on 28 March filed a complaint at the Supreme Court against Dhlakama on the grounds that he had incited violence.

On 14 April President Guebuza launched the 70-member Anti-Corruption Forum. Private media critically commented on the Forum for being chaired by the prime minister – who is allegedly involved in corrupt practices, and brought the discussion on conflicts of interest by public office holders to the foreground with regards to President Guebuza's own business activities. On a positive note, the Forum in its closed opening session on March 30 decided on the suggestion of civil society and several deputies to open future sessions to the public. On the contrary, neither the attorney general's annual report on the state of justice to the parliament, nor the annual report from the Parliament's Petition Commission were presented publicly, which earned much criticism namely

from the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA). The attorney general in his 107-page report denounced intimidation and obstruction against lawyers of the Central Anti-Corruption Office in several investigations, including the audits of the Interior Ministry and the General Command of the Police. However, the report was widely criticized by CIP, opposition parties, private media and academics for lack of substance, especially concerning high-level cases. Moreover the report failed to account properly on progress concerning cases previously presented by the Administrative Court. MISA, the private media and CIP, which have been at the forefront in demanding public access to official information, also condemned the parliament's approval of a new law on the organization of the judicial courts on 27 April which bans all broadcasting from trials – thus contradicting a recent Supreme Court ruling that allows media coverage of trials in public interest –, and slammed the new press draft law currently under preparation as a serious setback for press freedom in Mozambique.

However, there are developments concerning the rule of law, which give some reason for optimism. In an unprecedented move the Constitutional Council ruled against a revision by the newly created Higher Authority for Public Service, which required all official state correspondence to end with a Frelimo party slogan (“decision taken, decision carried out”), by declaring it unconstitutional. More or less at the same time the Administrative Court ruled against Eduardo Mondlane University, whose former vice-chancellor had unduly sacked two academics who joined the Renamo opposition party. The significance of these developments lies in the fact that they challenge politically motivated decisions, revealing thereby strong indications of emerging social interests being asserted in the public sphere.

The 19 Program Aid Partners, despite reaffirming on-going donor support to the state budget after their annual joint review with the government, have voiced criticism regarding the slow implementation of the public sector and justice reform, expressing concerns over the funds allocated to the districts and the pending Banco Austral case and suggesting to step up the fight against corruption and support for agricultural producers. Donors were also found to have failed in reaching agreed targets, especially with regard to reducing the number of required meetings with government officials – so they can have more work time – and increasing the amount of program aid as opposed to project aid.

President Guebuza himself in the course of his “open presidency” provincial tour made contradictory statements concerning the performance of district governments. While admitting that district funds have been mismanaged, he promised to increase the funding level of currently 7 million Meticaís. In his most controversial statement, President Guebuza, who was speaking in mid-April in Zambézia province, blamed peasants for being “lazy.” This charge sparked off bitter criticism from the media which felt reminded of colonial discourse as well as Guebuza's controversial past as interior minister in the 1980's.

SOCIAL

On 15 April, the National Disaster Institute (INGC) declared an end to the emergency caused by the flood and cyclone Flávio in January and February. On 21 April the prime minister announced that no more free goods would be distributed to flood victims. However, the INGC and the government also admitted financial constraints hampered government assistance to flood victims, which had been estimated at USD 71 million.

OUTLOOK

While elections are unlikely to take place this year, there are reasons to believe that political forces in the country will be seeking to sharpen their profiles. Frelimo is as strong as ever, but due to its over-confidence appears to have underestimated the strength of public feelings concerning the arsenal blast and the defense minister's hold on his position and the unsustainable use of forest resources in the north of the country. The opposition was able to capitalize on these issues giving the government a very rough ride in parliament with articulate and well founded statements. Maria Moreno, Renamo's chief whip, is proving to be more than a match for government benches. While Renamo may be hampered by its own institutional disarray, Frelimo is not likely to fare any better, for it appears to be alienating its own traditional constituencies within the state apparatus. Highly anti-democratic remarks by two liberation war veterans, Marcelino dos Santos and Mariano Matsinhe, may be evidence of serious in-fighting within Frelimo. A further development to be watched carefully concerns the rule of law and the attitude of the institutions charged with upholding it, namely the Attorney-General's Office and the Administrative Court. While it is not to be expected that the former will change its operation and attitude towards the political establishment, the latter may come under increasing pressure from the party to watch its step. In this sense, the momentous times, which the country is undergoing, may depend on the Administrative Court's ability to resist such pressures. There are signs that interest in upholding the rule of law rests on a much wider constituency inside the country than ever before.

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