Pro-Cívico & Direitos Humanos
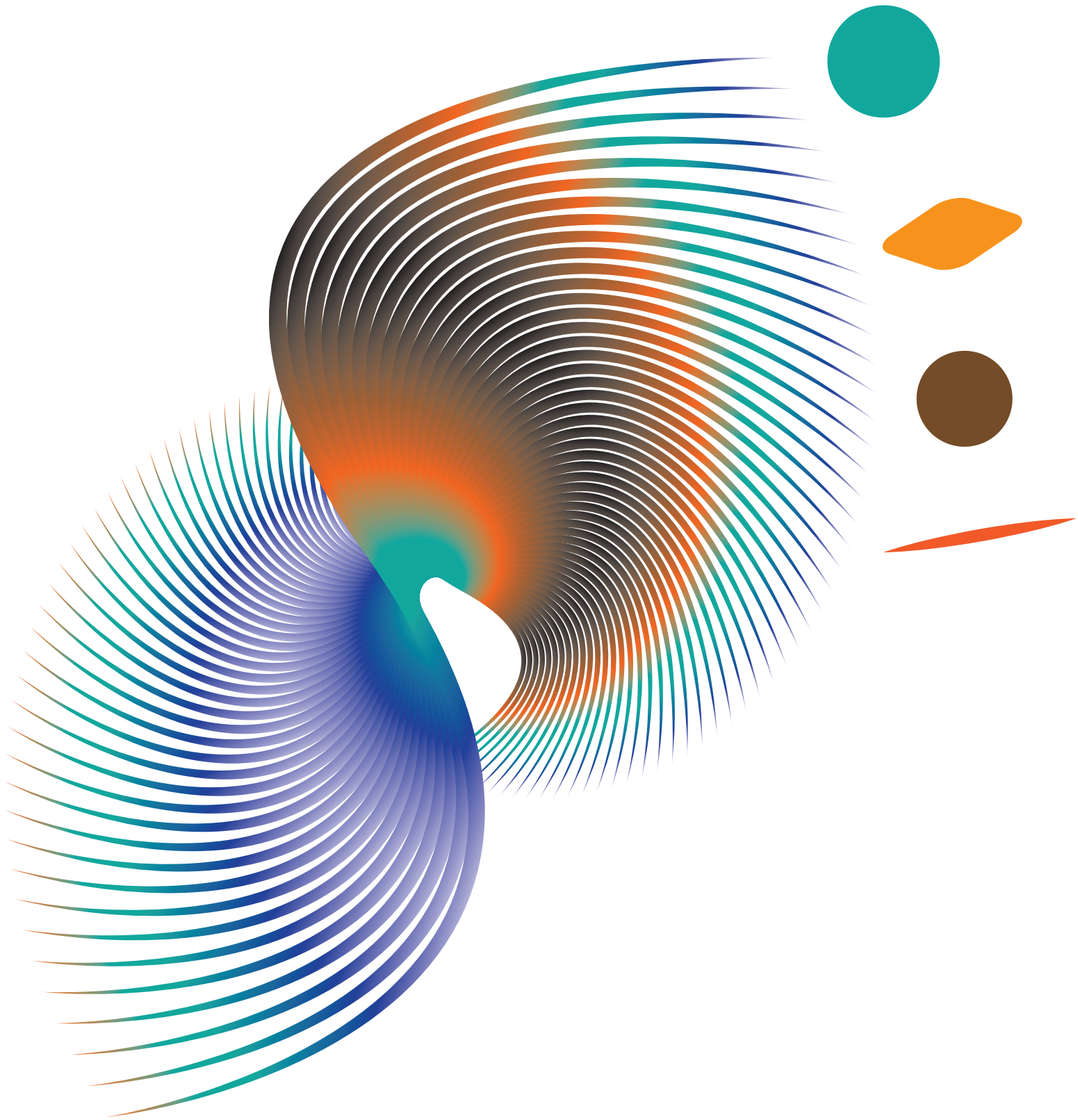
IMD

INSTITUTO PARA DEMOCRACIA
MULTIPARTIDÁRIA

National Forum on Civic Space in Mozambique

Dialogue Between Government and Civil Society Organizations for the Development of Civic Space in Mozambique

The civic space is "the oxygen for democracy".[1]

[1]Justino Tonela, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Justice, Constitutional and Religious Affairs, during the opening session of the National Forum on Civic Space in Mozambique.

1. Introduction

This document aims at systematizing a set of reflections on the dynamics and challenges of the civic space in Mozambique, from the perspective of civil society organizations and governmental institutions. The document is based on insights drawn from the contributions shared during the National Forum on Civic Space in Mozambique, held under the theme "Dialogue Between Government and Civil Society for the Development of Civic Space in Mozambique." The forum primarily sought to strengthen the foundations for improving dialogue, trust, and coordination between the Government and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs).

Moreover, the forum also served as an opportunity to discuss mechanisms to ensure citizen engagement in the decision-making process in Mozambique at all levels of governance. The forum brought together multiple stakeholders, including representatives from government institutions, civil society, political parties, academics, the private sector, and partners.

2. Context

One of the major advancements brought about by the approval of the Constitution of Mozambique in 1990 was the opening and flourishing of the civic space, progressively characterized by greater freedom of expression, press, and association. This milestone enabled more active citizen participation in the political and social life of the country. Indeed, the post-1990 Constitution period was marked by the emergence of various associations, private media outlets, civic movements, among other changes, which further deepened civic awareness and formally institutionalized human rights in Mozambique.

However, over the years, this trend of openness has been declining, with significant challenges to the quality of civic space. Three decades after the approval of this Constitution, Mozambique has been witnessing a gradual narrowing of civic space. National and international reports highlight weaknesses in Mozambique's democracy, especially concerning violations of fundamental rights, such as freedom of expression, press, and association.

The excessive actions of the police and the attitude of some

local government officials have been perceived as hostile towards Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), the media, and other social actors. Furthermore, there has been an increasing disconnection between the government and CSOs, limiting the ability of these organizations to play their role in advocacy and oversight for development, human rights protection, and democratic principles. This scenario not only undermines the vitality of Mozambique's democracy, but also threatens the effective guarantee of civil and political rights.

Similarly, there are several factors that constrain the activities of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), such as:[2]

▪ The incipient capacity of CSOs in the provinces compared to Maputo-city;

▪ Politically captured spaces for political and cultural participation;

▪ Limited openness of state institutions to CSO participation.

Therefore, despite having a Constitution and legislation that safeguard and recognize universal fundamental rights, there has been a growing restriction on the freedom of information, expression, press, assembly, and public participation.

On one hand, civil society organizations are important actors in determining the quality of governance; on the other hand, the government also has responsibilities to promote the expansion of civic space. The creation of civic participation mechanisms, such as Local Advisory Councils and Development Observatories, among other forums, demonstrates a positive evolution in promoting participatory democracy and expanding civic space in Mozambique. These models not only encourage active citizen participation, but also promote transparency and accountability at all levels of governance.

Thus, despite the persistent challenges, it is important to recognize and value the lessons learned and the good practices developed over time, which are essential for the continuous strengthening of civic space and democracy in Mozambique.

[2]Oxfam (2018). Space to be heard: Mobilizing the power of people to reshape civic space. Also available on: https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/policy-practice-oxfam-org-resources-space-to-be-heard-mobilizing-the-power-of-people-to-reshape-civic-space/

3. Civic Space in Mozambique: Challenges and Opportunities

3.1. Narrowing Civic Space vs. Violations of Civil and Political Rights: How to Turn Challenges into Opportunities?

A study conducted by IMD (2023)[3] indicates that, despite the recognition of the importance of CSO and citizen participation in the design and implementation of public policies, there is an increasingly consolidated perception among CSOs that civic participation space is being restricted and narrowed. Some of the related events include:

i. The withdrawal of direct support for the Mozambican budget by some international donors in 2014;

ii. The terrorism in Cabo Delgado and the consequent limitation of access to information, for example, regarding public spending in the defense and security sector; and,

iii. The securitization of civic space through the approval of a set of legislation that, although designed to address the phenomenon of terrorism in Cabo Delgado, ends up affecting the operational space of CSOs.

This study also confirmed the existence of three types of participatory spaces, namely:

i. spaces created by CSOs – characterized by their plural nature, where CSOs invite government institutions and local CSO networks. This has provided an opportunity to discuss a set of common issues or interests; however, the main challenge lies in the sustainability of the space due to the costs associated with its creation, maintenance, and consolidation.

ii. Invited spaces – characterized by regular and predictable nature, where CSOs are invited by the government at the central, provincial, and/or district levels. Examples include the Development Observatory.

iii. Spontaneous spaces – where anonymous citizens come together based on a perceived loss of political, economic, and social assets, forming spontaneous and informal popular movements to make their voices heard and demand the restoration of their rights. However, the biggest challenge is related to intimidation and violence from law enforcement agencies.

Regarding the challenges, the study shows that there is a scarcity of formal and mandatory mechanisms for engaging CSOs in the governance process, leaving them at the mercy of the current government. There is also a noticeable trend of securitizing participation, whereby all politically related issues are transformed into security matters, leading to CSOs being regarded as high-risk entities prone to terrorism financing and money laundering. Another challenging aspect is the limited access to information and resources, particularly financial resources.

3IMD (2023). Ponto de Situação sobre a participação das OSCs e Cidadãos nos processos de tomada de decisão sobre Políticas Públicas. https://imd.org.mz/index.php/centros-de-recursos/publicacoes-do-imd/ponto-de-situacao-sobre-a-participacao-das-oscs-e-cidadaos-nos-processos-de-tomada-de-decisao-sobre-politicas-publicas/download

Together we are stronger[4]

■ *Borges Nhamire* – **CIP**[5] **Researcher.**

Freedom of the press, expression, the right to information, and others are fundamental ingredients for civic participation, transparency, and overall democratic development—principles recognized in the international and regional declarations concerning human rights of which our country is a part.

■ *Ernesto Nhanale* - **Executive Director of MISA.**

Still on the challenges of the CSO and the closure of civic space, some international reports regarding democratic quality and respect for citizens' civil and political rights, namely the Freedom House Index; Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index; Mo Ibrahim Index of African Governance, show that, despite each of them using relatively different indicators, they all agree in pointing out that Mozambique tends to recede with regard to the promotion of civic space and has characteristics presented more conducive to authoritarianism than to democracy, especially from 2016 onwards.

The long journey undertaken by the country and the gains made for the opening of civic space since the 1990 Constitution were only possible because there was, at that time, political will from a group of government leaders interested in ensuring that this space was safeguarded. However, there is a widespread perception that there are currently groups within the same government, the 'movers and shakers,' who have been making efforts in opposing directions, contributing to setbacks that result in the exponential closing of civic space. The aggravating factor in this situation is the lack of checks and balances between the powers of the state, as the Parliament and the Judiciary appear to act in collusion with the government by almost never taking a stand regarding the serious acts of violations against civic space.

To transform some of these challenges into opportunities and enhance the level of engagement and participation of CSOs in local governance, the following suggestions are put forward:

- Strengthening the resilience of CSOs in promoting development, social justice, and civic participation;

- Maximizing opportunities for promoting inclusive dialogue platforms;

- Regulating the mechanisms for CSO participation in invited spaces/forums and adopting a Code of Conduct for CSOs;

- Training public institutions on the role of CSOs, in addition to the training currently offered to CSOs;

- Encouraging representation in CSOs/CBOs (Community-Based Organizations) in dialogue and capacity-building platforms (youth, women, persons with disabilities and others);

- Promoting coordination among CSOs (enhancing impact through synergies and networked actions);

- Capacity-building for CSOs and CBOs in digital marketing strategies;

- Consolidating training in public policy and evidence-based advocacy;

- Promoting connections between CSOs and research institutions;

- Deepening the internal governance mechanisms of CSOs;

- Uniting different actors—media, civil society, and government; and,

- Reinventing intervention methods and using digital space as platforms for dialogue and reflection.

[4]Juntos somos mais fortes.

[5]Centro de Integridade Pública.

3.2. Barriers and Challenges to the Participation of Vulnerable and/or Marginalized Groups in Governance

The study by Simione and Chagnazaroff (2017)[6] on participatory governance highlighted that this process remains challenging, as it requires the establishment of an organized civil society capable of articulating around local political issues and thereby positioning itself as an actor that influences, contests, and positively intervenes in the decision-making process. It demands greater commitment from the government regarding the potential actions that these spaces present for contributing to good governance, which should be enhanced through greater capacity-building for their members to reduce informational asymmetries and ensure quality integration among the actors that interact within them.

CSOs advocating for the human rights of marginalized groups, such as persons with disabilities (PwD), youth, and women, have also faced challenges in participating in decision-making processes. First, regarding PwD, there are two aspects to consider when discussing barriers to their participation in governance: the political and legislative environment. In the political environment, for example, the 1990s created a favorable political atmosphere for PwD, as it allowed for the creation of legislation and a constitutional framework for their participation in the public and private spheres of the State. However, in recent years, this environment has been negatively affected. A notable example is the recent unexplained dissolution of the National Council for Disability, which brought together not only organizations of PwD but also state institutions (such as the Ministries of Health, Education, Public Works, and others) to discuss the cross-cutting issues related to disability.

In the legislative realm, Mozambique has witnessed significant improvements with the approval and ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (PwD). However, although there is the Decree 53/2008 of December 30[7], commonly known as the "Accessibility Decree," the country is still far from upholding the inclusion principles outlined in these normative instruments. For instance, in electoral processes, many PwD are unable to access both registration and voting stations due to the

inaccessibility of the buildings prepared for these purposes. Those who do manage to access them often have their privacy violated due to their type of disability and the need for assistance. Behind the barriers to the participation of PwD at various levels lies the education system, which also remains unable to meet the demands of PwD.

Regarding women's participation in the Mozambican context, various efforts have been made to promote, facilitate, and maximize women's integration into political processes and decision-making. The country has one of the highest numbers of parliamentary representations in the Southern Africa region (IMD, 2019). Mozambique is part of the second group of countries with the highest presence of women in Parliament globally, with 42% compared to 37% in the previous legislature. However, although the integration of women is formally recognized and supported in political discourse, challenges persist regarding women's effective exercise of their political rights to freely participate in political processes and influence decision-making, particularly concerning a gender agenda.

Regarding the barriers to women's participation in governance, notable challenges include difficulties in legalizing associations, especially at the local level; limited capacity to mobilize funds and resources; the persistence of early marriages; and labor exploitation, among other issues. There is a need for a reinvention of civil society to include influential social groups in their actions; women should increasingly engage in political processes to secure their space and overcome various political, economic, social, and cultural barriers. Awareness-raising actions should be intensified to encourage women's participation in the political life of the country; efforts should be made to improve women's knowledge, skills, and willingness to run for political office; and inclusive, participatory public policies and laws should be enacted regarding the diverse groups in society, including women, youth, and persons with disabilities (PwD).

Youth in Mozambique make up 34% of the population and 59% of the projected electoral population for this year's elections (2024). In addition to being the majority of the electoral population, they are present in political parties, electoral bodies, and participate throughout the electoral cycle, particularly in the most critical

[6]SIMIONE, Albino Alves; CKAGNAZAROFF, Ivan Beck (2017). Governança Participativa em Moçambique: Dinâmicas do Envolvimento dos Cidadãos na Gestão Municípal na Cidade de Xai-Xai. APGS.. Available on: https://periodicos.ufv.br/apgs/article/view/5025

[7]Regulamento de Construção e Manutenção dos Dispositivos Técnicos de Acessibilidade, Circulação e Utilização dos Sistemas de Serviços e Lugares Públicos à Pessoa Portadora de Deficiência Física ou de Mobilidade Condicionada.

phases of the process, such as voter registration, campaigning, and voting. However, this demographic group is primarily focused on operational tasks. In electoral bodies, they serve as polling station members, registrars, civic education agents, and so on. Within political parties, they are mostly mobilizers during the electoral campaign and are integrated as monitors of electoral operations. Electoral observation missions and platforms also seek a large portion of their observers from among the youth. Political participation is a sine qua non condition for any democratic progress , and young people play a key role in this regard. Currently, the role of youth continues to be recognized, yet it is intentionally marginalized, as young people remain at the forefront of various initiatives. For example, young people make up the military and police forces, are present in production fields, and engage in civic campaigns and electoral activities, among other arenas. However, when it comes to participating in key decision--making processes, they are excluded, and arguments about irresponsibility take center stage.

Regarding youth participation in the civic space in Mozambique, the following challenges stand out:

- Monopolization of the political space by adults/seniors – There is a tendency to relegate political participation to the older generation, with youth being intentionally labelled as irresponsible and, therefore, incapable of participating and contributing to democratic development.

- Constant violations and restrictions of fundamental rights such as access to information, the right to assemble and associate, freedom of expression, among others.

- Social inequalities, including extreme poverty, high illiteracy rates, and digital illiteracy, leading to political exclusion – which, in their view, are perpetuated by the government, as there are no concrete and serious measures taken for their eradication.

- Persecution and intimidation of activists and threats to the integrity of civic spaces.

- Weak, if not non-existent, representation of youth and other vulnerable groups in decision-making processes and spaces.

3.3. Strengthening CSOs at the Local Level: Challenges and Opportunities

It is essential to recognize the vital role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in promoting democracy and defending human rights. They are the ones who amplify citizens' voices and work tirelessly to ensure that the needs of the most marginalized groups are heard and met. A healthy and vibrant democracy thrives when citizens are fully engaged, informed, and empowered to make a difference in their communities.

However, CSOs often face significant obstacles in their work, including restrictions in civic space and a lack of responsiveness from government officials and decision-makers to their legitimate demands. Many CSOs report a closing civic space and a deterioration in trust relations with the government, coupled with a less tolerant, more hostile, and intimidating environment for advocacy and campaigning, especially during election years. Reports from FDC (2007) and JOINT (2015) highlight weaknesses in Mozambican democracy, illustrating structural constraints that reflect in the civic space. These constraints are related to violations of fundamental rights, particularly freedom of expression, press, and association. This scenario is even more troubling at the local level.

As one moves to the local level, there is a gradual and significant reduction in the capacities of civil society organizations. This situation contrasts with that of central-level CSOs, considering their level of "sophistication" in terms of systems, structures, and procedures, as well as their leadership capacity. Central-level civil society organizations could mobilize resources, establish partnerships, and operate robustly at the local level, remaining "sustainable." However, despite the large constellation of local civil society organizations, they still lack sufficient visibility to be perceived as capable of accomplishing their own missions. That is the reason why donors tend to prefer placing funds where they can be assured that they will be effectively applied toward the expected outcomes.

At the external level, local civil society organizations are often instrumentalized, as they are urged to implement pre-conceived programs, delaying the execution of their own plans, strategies, and priorities. The scarcity of funding, as well as funding that is not based on long-term strategies and is limited to small activities, also contributes to these challenges. Finally, the environment in which local civil society organizations operate has become increasingly hostile under a trend of persecution of such organizations

dedicated to defending human rights and citizenship, alongside a trend of constraining the space for exercising citizenship, including the co-optation of organizations that align themselves with the current regime.

Considering these and other challenges, there are still opportunities that have not been adequately explored. Among these, we can highlight the need to change the approach toward i) localizing national and global agendas at a more local level, which would stimulate greater ownership, freedom of association, and sustainability if there were investments in the capacity building and inclusion of local organizations. Another approach would be to strengthen the capacity of local-level CSOs and community-based organizations (CBOs). To this end, a database should be created for organizations that have already benefited from training and resource transfers, to reduce the duplication of efforts in this area and allow local organizations the opportunity to apply this knowledge in their areas of operation, ultimately producing more results.

There is a constraint related to the ongoing competition for access to resources between international and national organizations at the central level, which is further exacerbated when it comes to transferring those same resources to grassroots organizations. Therefore, there is a need to develop a study that maps the types of skills that CSOs lack to develop a more realistic strategy that aligns with the demands of the current context.

Regarding the idea of strengthening civil society, four dimensions need to be considered, namely:

▪ **Internal Governance** – It is essential to have policies, procedures, and strategies in the internal management of civil society organizations that engage with local dynamics and demands.

▪ **Robustness of local civil society organizations** – local civil society organizations need to become robust both financially, with appropriate resource management, and programmatically, ensuring the delivery of quality products and results. Improving the monitoring of implementation and the capacity to manage resources well is essential to breaking the cycle of limited trust in national-level organizations.

▪ **Resource Provision** – Ensuring that there are mechanisms for resource provision or clear mechanisms for mobilization and distribution of resources at all levels.

▪ **Sustainability** – Creating mechanisms for local organizations to maintain their day-to-day actions and not limit themselves to the sporadic activities and needs of national-level organizations.

In terms of proposed solutions and opportunities, the following should be highlighted: the financing approach and cooperation model of both donors and central organizations should be designed considering the operational specificities of grassroots organizations; and initiatives for reinforcement based on local needs should be created, building resource mobilization capacities.

Additionally, some interventions using digital platforms have already succeeded in mobilizing resources and continuing to implement local actions; therefore, it is possible to make tailored interventions.

3.4. Threats and Risks to Civil Society in the Fight Against Terrorism

In the context of combating terrorism, civil society faces threats and risks of any kind that can negatively impact its functioning and freedom of action. Governments around the world implement stringent measures to prevent and combat terrorism, often resulting in increased scrutiny and control over Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). This environment of heightened surveillance and regulation can lead to a series of undesirable consequences, such as: restrictions on civic space, stigmatization and distrust, and threats to the safety of human rights defenders

In this challenging context, it is crucial to find a balance between the need for security and the protection of the fundamental rights and freedoms of civil society. This is where the role of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) comes into play.

The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is an intergovernmental body established in 1989 by the G7, aimed at developing and promoting national and international policies to combat money laundering and the financing of terrorism. Government interpretations of FATF tools may be contributing to an increased risk of closing civic space. The reference documents are:

i. FATF Recommendations;

ii. Interpretive Note to Recommendation 8 (INR8, 2016 as updated in 2023); and,

iii. Best Practices Paper on Combating Abuse of Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs) for Terrorist Financing (BPP, 2016 updated in 2023).

The FATF is concerned about some Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs) that may potentially be used/abused in various ways to finance terrorism. To prevent and protect the sector from such use/abuse, the FATF has a recommendation (R8) dedicated to NPOs. FATF Recommendation 8 and Immediate Outcome 10 require countries to first:

i. Identify which subset of organizations meets the FATF definition of Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs);

ii. Identify the characteristics and types of Non-Profit Organizations that, due to their activities or characteristics, may be at risk of terrorist financing abuse; and,

iii. Identify the nature of the threats posed by terrorist entities to NPOs that may be at risk, as well as how terrorist actors might abuse these NPOs.

Based on the third point, countries must define risk mitigation measures aimed at protecting the NPO sector, based on five principles: 1) "risk-focused," 2) "proportional" to the risks, 3) "risk-based," 4) "not disruptive" to legitimate activities, and 5) "effective" in terms of resources and capacity.

In the case of Mozambique, a risk assessment process was initiated, culminating in the preparation of a risk assessment report for CSOs concerning terrorist financing. The assessment of terrorist financing risk was guided by FATF Recommendation 8. The report concluded that the risk in the sector is low, stemming primarily from acts of terrorism linked to AL-SUNNI-WAL JAMA (ASWJ) and its connections to ISIS. This is associated with Mozambique's geographical location, geostrategy, and geopolitics, meaning that the existence of mineral resources, porous borders, and Mozambique's positioning regarding the maritime coast are factors that create vulnerability to the misuse of organizations.

Regarding the nature of the threat, it was understood that there is a risk of:

i. Using NPOs as vehicles to receive financial resources from abroad to be channeled internally through banking services and then distributed in cash and/or through untraceable and/or hard-to-trace financial channels for terrorist purposes;

ii. Utilizing religious institutions such as mosques and madrassas for recruitment and logistical support; and

iii. Supporters of terrorism may falsely present themselves as humanitarian aid agencies to conceal their activities.

The working group did not find sufficient evidence to conclude that Mozambican NPOs or those operating in Mozambique are abused for terrorist financing. However, there are factors that place NPOs at risk of terrorist financing, namely:

1. Inherent vulnerabilities that are likely to put an NPO "at risk" of terrorist financing abuse, including:

▪ Informal, untraceable, and/or cash transactions;

▪ Donations and connections with foreign entities;

▪ Operating in high-risk or neighboring areas; and

▪ Humanitarian and charitable organizations.

2. Structural deficiencies that inhibit the accurate identification of "at-risk" non-profit organizations, which include:

▪ Poor and outdated information systems on NPOs; and

▪ Lack of operational mechanisms for monitoring and interoperability of suspicious cases throughout the chain of responsibility in combating terrorism.

If properly implemented, the FATF measures can contribute to:

i. Reducing distrust between the government and civil society organizations (CSOs) through mechanisms for joint work;

ii. Better registration and information about NPOs, which will consequently improve state databases and the training and awareness of state agents who deal with NPOs to understand the sector and the necessary measures; and,

iii. Greater transparency and accountability of NPOs, contributing to the promotion of self-regulatory instruments for the sector, as well as awareness and capacity building for NPOs.

In conclusion, combating terrorist financing through FATF measures presents both challenges and opportunities for civic space. The stringent requirements imposed on CSOs, while necessary for global security, can lead to the restriction of civic space, stigmatization, and distrust, as well as threaten the safety of human rights defenders. However, when well implemented, these measures can help reduce distrust between the government and civil society, improve registration and information about CSOs, and promote greater transparency and accountability. Ultimately, the balance between security and civic freedom is essential to ensure that CSOs can operate effectively without compromising national security.

4. Demands of Civil Society Regarding Civic Space

The main demands of civil society resulting from the national forum on civic space include:

- The need for the approval of laws (based on the principles of transparency and inclusion) to expand the operational space of CSOs.

- The necessity to value local knowledge, prioritize the sharing of experiences and information among different levels, with particular attention to the grassroots level.

- The need to define a concrete Action Plan that reflects the reality and local context to break the practice of presenting "ready-made agendas" that do not meet the actual needs of local beneficiaries.

- The need to create a forum for aligning interventions among different CSOs to ensure that organizations do not duplicate their efforts (promoting synergies).

- The necessity to uphold the principle of sustainability for organizations. Larger CSOs should have robust partnerships with grassroots organizations for effective impact replication.

- The need to value "indigenous knowledge" and to integrate it with conventional knowledge to achieve better results.

- The necessity to organize Annual Congresses of CSOs on funding perspectives, so these aspects can be discussed, and joint strategies can be developed, eliminating the structural distrust that has historically characterized relationships between CSOs and between CSOs and the government and other actors.

- The need to continuously and systematically analyze the interventions of CSOs and opportunities for improvement, increasingly involving local partners. Regarding local partners, a study should be conducted to assess the types of gaps, and based on the results, create targeted and adaptable packages that sustainably eliminate these gaps.

- The necessity for Local Advisory Councils to operate with the effective participation of CSO representatives.

- District governments should adopt their own alternative mechanisms for interaction with civil society; thus, in the scope of their action strategies, they should include training on planning instruments and legislation regarding civic space to ensure a unified understanding.

5. Next Steps and Ways Forward

The aspects to consider contributing to the greater opening of civic space are:

01 **Greater Coordination** - Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) must work together and, with courage, can influence politicians to operate in ways that align with the goals of citizens in general.

02 **Institutional Development** - Improvement of strategies and joint actions, denunciations of human rights violations at national, regional, and international levels.

03 **Permanent and Institutionalized Dialogue** - Between CSOs and the Government.

04 Approval of a Code of Ethics for Civil Society.

05 **Annual Congresses of CSOs** - Focused on funding

06 **Inclusion of Youth** - Government bodies, CSOs, and other actors need to adopt a stance that includes youth as partners in change and decision-making.

07 **Collaborative Approach** - Between organizations, capitalizing on the intellectual strength each possesses.

08 **Regular Reports on Civic Space** - Such as a Civil Society Transparency Index and Civic Space Barometers.

09 **Agenda Setting and Monitoring** - Of government policies and programs by CSOs.

10 **Strengthening Civil Society** - Especially regarding the decentralization of financial resources at the local level.

11 **Continuing to Identify and Support CSO Actors** - To be catalysts for change in opening local civic space, defending them against threats perpetuated by local government power structures.

12 **Creating and Establishing Commitment** - To the visibility of local civic spaces through concrete action plans for satisfactory

13 **Strengthening Protection Mechanisms** - For social activists against intimidation and violations of their rights while exercising their activities.

6. Final Considerations

This document aimed at reflecting on civic space in Mozambique, bringing forth a discussion on the challenges, opportunities, and demands of civil society. It also sought to capture the government's position and reflect on the next steps and pathways to promote greater protection of civic space and maximize the role of CSOs in the country's development, as well as strengthen democracy.

Regarding civic space in Mozambique, it has been demonstrated that significant challenges still exist. Although the Constitution of the Republic of Mozambique (CRM) and specific legislation recognize and safeguard universal fundamental rights, there is a growing trend of restrictions on civil and political liberties. These setbacks and violations require a collaborative and proactive approach, and the dialogue forum was an opportunity for the government and CSOs to share their experiences, perspectives, and work together to seek solutions to the challenges currently faced.

The meeting was timely in identifying several challenges related to the concerning erosion of civic spaces, with increasing restrictions on fundamental freedoms, freedom of expression, and freedom of association. It is important to note that these challenges are not limited to national borders but are also a global issue, thus requiring a collective and multidimensional response.

Some risks, particularly arising from the implementation of legislation against terrorism and money laundering, reinforce the level of distrust toward CSOs as potential financiers of terrorism. Fortunately, the results of the risk assessment report for CSOs regarding terrorism financing exonerate these civil society actors from such practices. Therefore, there was insufficient evidence to conclude that Mozambican nonprofit organizations or those operating in Mozambique are being misused for terrorism financing. From this meeting, it also became evident that there is a need to revive certain practices, such as:

▪ The consolidation of permanent dialogue platforms with multiple actors, including CSOs and the government;

▪ The promotion of greater coordination and synergies among CSOs, that is, investing in a collaborative approach among organizations to capitalize on the intellectual strength that each possesses;

▪ Conducting studies, barometers, and indices related to civil society or civic space;

▪ The approval and implementation of a civil society code of ethics; and

▪ Institutional development and strengthening of technical, financial, and internal governance capacities at the level of CSOs.