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Decentralisation reforms and agricultural public services in Mozambique: Why do the challenges persist?¹

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In the 1980s, several sub-Saharan African countries began a series of public sector reforms seeking, among other objectives, to confront the crisis of the State, which was essentially expressed in two dimensions – namely political regulation, and the provision of public services. Since then there have been three generations of public sector reforms (Kiragu, 2002; Crook, 2010). The first generation ran from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s and was focused on Structural Adjustment Plans; the second generation was prominent in the mid-1990s, with a strong component of technical assistance to the reform programmes; Finally, the third generation of reforms began in the late 1990s and the early 2000s, marked by the linkage of the reforms with the Poverty Reduction Strategies (in the case of Mozambique, the PARPAs and PARP) and a focus on decentralisation and on improving public services. What results have these reforms brought in terms of the provision of public services?

The literature on public sector reforms in sub-Saharan Africa shows that, despite the volume of financial, material and human resources invested over the last thirty years, the results are modest (Booth, 2010; Crook, 2010; Batley, McCourt & McLoughlin, 2012). The case of Mozambique is no exception. The two surveys held in 2009 and 2010, in the context of the Public Sector Reform Programme, show serious problems in the quality of the services (UTRESP, 2009; CEEI/ISRI, 2010). This article, while recognising the importance of the question of quality, analyses the problematic of the provision of public services from a perspective that is still relatively little explored, namely the dynamics at work in the service provision process: how does the service provision process happens? Who are the main actors involved? Under what conditions do these actors operate? How is the state bureaucracy organised and how does it function in service provision? What kind of state exists in the service provision process? In short, to what extent do the public sector reforms implemented over the past thirty years, and enshrined in the decentralisation reforms, affect the provision of public services?

In this article, the discussion of the above questions is undertaken based on the dynamics of the

agricultural sector. Why the agricultural sector? For two main reasons: the first concerns the fact that this is the sector which, since independence, has been considered, in political discourse, as extremely relevant for the development of the country, despite the incoherence of the politicians and the practice of implementing sector policies; the second reason concerns the fact that this is one of the sectors which has undergone important reforms, expressed in policies, strategies, plans, programmes, etc., in which decentralisation is repeatedly mentioned.

When we look at the various documents from the agricultural sector in Mozambique, we find that the main challenges facing the sector are well identified. For example, the document of the Strategic Plan for the Development of the Agricultural Sector – PEDSA 2010 – 2019, which undertakes an x-ray of the agricultural sector in Mozambique, mentions, among others, the following challenges: limited infrastructures and services for access to the market; inadequate use of natural resources; limited institutional capacity and need for greater policy coherence, etc. (MINAG, 2010). Specifically on public services, PEDSA indicate as challenges, for example, insufficient coverage of the extension services and their inadequate links with the research services; serious problems of access to the market by the family sector. So the problem does not lie in any lack of knowledge about the challenges of the sector. From this, two important questions arise: a) What factors explain the persistence of these very well-known challenges in the agricultural sector? b) Why have the decentralisation reforms, expressed in the Law on Local State Bodies (LOLE) and in the policies, strategies, plans and programmes of the sector not proven effective so that these challenges can be overcome? The answer to these questions lies in analysing the dynamics of how the state functions at all levels in the provision of agricultural services, particularly at local level. This is what we shall analyse in the following lines.

Decentralisation reforms and the agricultural sector in Mozambique

Mozambique embarked upon decentralisation in the 1990s without any decentralisation policy and

strategy. Important questions such as “why?”, “what?”, “when?” and “how?” to decentralise, indispensable at the start of the process, were simply not asked, or if they were, not in enough depth to structure a deep debate on decentralisation as a whole, particularly at sector level³. It was in this context of the lack of a policy and strategy that the legal framework for the implementation of the decentralisation reforms was approved, taking shape in the laws on municipalities (Law 2/97) and on local state bodies (Law 8/2003). What is important to note is that the various sectors, including the agricultural sector, did not wait for the approval of a decentralisation policy and strategy before implementing sector reforms with a focus on decentralisation (Weimer, 2012). This is visible in various sector documents which embody the reforms. For the case of the agricultural sector, for example, one could mention the Agricultural Policy and the Strategy for its Implementation, 1996; PROAGRI I and II; the Green Revolution Strategy, 2007; the Food Production Action Plan, 2008 – 2011; the Strategic Plan for the Development of the Agricultural Sector, 2010 – 2019; the Master Plan for Agricultural Extension, 2007 – 2016; the National Agricultural Extension Programme, 2012 – 2017; etc. Although there is a noteworthy effort to refer to decentralisation in all these documents from the reforms, the absence of a decentralisation policy and strategy brought a series of consequences which weakened the sector reforms themselves, notably incoherence in inter-sector coordination; incoherence in the planning process (sector or territorial)⁴; incoherence in the allocation of financial, material and human resources; weak coordination between the sector programmes of national scope, etc.

From the institutional point of view, one of the results of the decentralisation reforms for the agricultural sector at local level was the abolition of the district directorates of agriculture, and the appearance of what are known as district economic activities services (SDAE), which cover not only agriculture, but also other sectors, such as industry and trade, tourism, fisheries and local development. Now while it is true that the creation of the district services seems to have rationalised resources (particularly financial and mate-

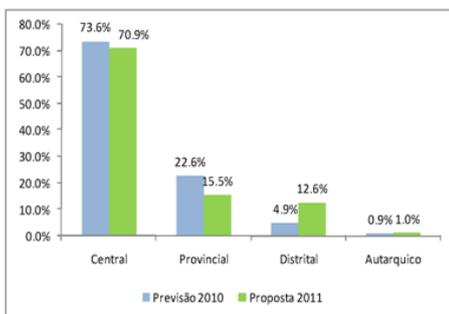
rial resources) by grouping and concentrating various services, it is no less true that the design of concentrated district services ended up by bringing constraints to the concrete activities of the sectors.

Regarding the agricultural sector, for example, interviews on the ground with provincial and district agricultural officials show that the creation and concentration of district economic services limit the room for manoeuvre of the provincial level agriculture officials, in that their concrete activity in the districts, in terms of guidance and management of sector policies and strategies, remains dependent on coordination with, on the one hand, the district authorities, represented by the district administrator, and on the other, with the provincial authorities of the other sectors represented in the SDAE. In this context, how does the agricultural sector function and what are the implications for the production of agricultural public services at local level? This is what we shall analyse, albeit briefly, in the following lines.

The reality of the production of agricultural public services at local level

In addition to the institutional limitations mentioned above, the agricultural sector, in its operations to produce public services, namely agricultural extension and agricultural marketing involving the family sector, also faces a shortage of material, financial and human resources⁵, which becomes ever more visible as one approaches the places where production really happens. Indeed, this situation reflects the structure of expenditure of the General State Budget (OGE), which shows that the central level consumes about 70% of the financial resources. What goes to the provinces and districts is just 30%, as Graph 1 illustrates.

Graph 1: Distribution of expenditure in the 2011 State Budget by levels



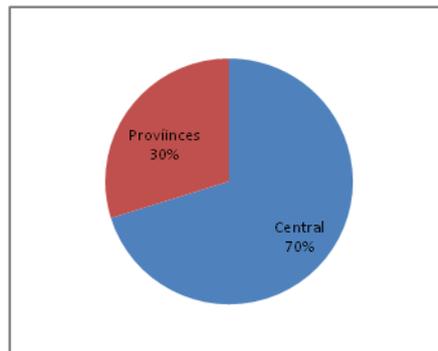
Source: MPD

1. This article is based on field work in Ribáuê district, in 2013, as part of a research project underway at IESE on "Governance, public services and construction of the State".
2. Researcher at the Institute of Social and Economic Studies – IESE.
3. The question of decentralisation policy and strategy was discussed between the Mozambican government and its cooperation partners for several years, in a process that was not very structured and not very inclusive, in that it left out important actors, notably civil society organisations who work on questions linked to decentralisation, and who could have made a valuable contribution to the debate. The decentralisation policy and strategy document was finally approved in 2012 through resolution 40/2012 of 20 December.
4. While the decentralisation reforms, under Law no. 8/2003, establish territorial planning at local level, in the sectors the logic of sector planning still prevails.
5. Data collected during the fieldwork in Ribáuê district show, for example, that the public agricultural extension network consists of only seven extensionists and lacks adequate resources to carry out its activities.

It is interesting to note that this scenario is reproduced in the agricultural sector. For example, an analysis of the expenditure of the agriculture sector by levels, based on the Annual Operational Plan of the Ministry of Agriculture, for the year 2012, shows that the central level of the Ministry of Agriculture consumes about 70% of the annual resources destined for the sector and only 30% goes to the local level (provinces and districts. See Graph 2).

Here there is clearly an incoherence in the allocation of resources, in that the resources are not channelled, as a matter of priority to the places where production really occurs, namely at the local level (provinces and districts).

Graph 2: Distribution of Ministry of Agriculture 2012 expenditure by levels



Source: Drawn up by the author based on the information contained in the Annual Operational Plan of the Ministry of Agriculture for 2012

Clearly the scenario of the distribution of expenditure, not only at State Budget level, but also at that of the Ministry of Agriculture itself, mentioned above, contradicts the political discourse of prioritising the decentralisation reforms and the agriculture sector in the development of Mozambique. One cannot speak of decentralisation reforms without the consequent channelling of resources to the lower levels, seeking to make results happen.

Conclusion

Although the agricultural sector in Mozambique is undergoing a series of reforms focused on decentralisation, the effect of these reforms on the provision of agricultural public services is weakened by two types of factors: a) Weak institutionalisation of the State, expressed in the lack of clarity in sector activity, and contradiction in the logic of allocating resources; b) Institutional incoherence, which consists in the absence of a holistic

approach to the challenges of the sector, which would make it possible to mobilise complementary actions from other sectors.

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