ID*e*IAS

*Informação sobre **D**esenvolvimento, **I**nstituições e **A**nálise **S**ocial*

Population Ageing in Mozambique: Threat or Opportunity?

Gustavo T. L. Sugahara* & António A da Silva Francisco**

Introduction

Imagine if past generations had had the opportunity to consciously contemplate the initial moments of significant socio-economic and technologic changes, such as the Industrial Revolution that started in the second part of the 18th Century; the Green Revolution in different parts of the world throughout the 20th Century; and the financial crises in 1929 and 2008, among others. Furthermore, imagine if beyond the privilege of anticipating events of major societal impact, we had the opportunity to benefit from the experiences of other countries that had experienced similar processes of change. How privileged we would be, both in terms of understanding and above all the possibility to prepare ourselves in time for the consequences of such transformations?

Thinking about population ageing in Mozambique gives us exactly this possibility. The relevance and impact of demographic changes are frequently overlooked in the analyses that inform the design and monitoring of public policies. This neglect is mainly due to the fact that demographic transitions occur gradually and subtly. However, the very demographic phenomena ultimately impose themselves as objective phenomena that occur regardless of the subjective will of the people. Obviously, it would be better if policy makers consciously anticipated, whenever possible, the predictable events.

This note aims to contribute to raise the awareness of the threats and opportunities posed by population ageing while Mozambique has still the privilege to think and prepare in time to deal with the challenges of the changing population age structure. This text is part of a more extensive and thorough study, recently initiated by the authors, under the program of the Research Group (GdI) Poverty and Social Protection (PPS) at IESE.

In summary, the message shared in this paper comprises three main points: 1) Population ageing is one of the major

achievements of modern humanity, but its potential benefits to society in general are neither automatic nor guaranteed in advance; 2) The fact that Mozambique is still at an early stage of its demographic transition offers a unique opportunity. Will the Mozambican society seize this opportunity? 3) The answer to the previous question will depend on the awareness and what is done in the coming decades. Mozambique has much to gain if policy makers start now to take the consequences of the coming population ageing more seriously and seek to guarantee a dignified human security for the existing elderly population, as part of a long term development strategy.

Ageing as a Conquest and the Longevity Paradox

In general, we all want to live longer. In this sense the ageing population is an achievement *per se*. In technical terms it is a phenomenon that results from an increase in life expectancy at birth and decreased fertility in a population. It is not a new research topic, and its structural change is clearly visible in the age transition over time, as illustrated by the changes from the classical pyramidal structure to rectangular ones, resulting from the reduction in the younger age groups and increase in the size of older age ones (Figure 1).

The drastic reduction in the fertility rate, following or simultaneously with a significant reduction in mortality and an expansion of the longevity, has generated profound demographic changes from the bottom to the top of the population age structure, as illustrated in
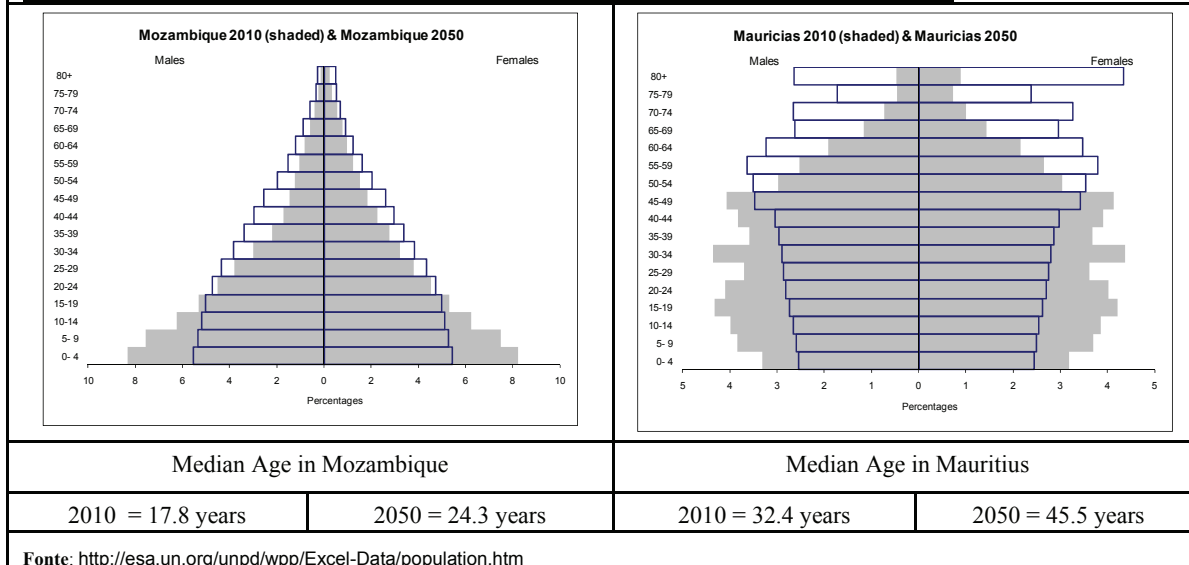
Figure 1, referring to Mauritius. These are global transformations that occur at different rates, observed in all regions of the world, over the past two and a half centuries.

It is not clear whether such global transformations in age structure started as a result, or conversely, were one of the causes of the industrial revolution, urbanization, increased female labor participation, and numerous advances in modern medicine. Due to the fact that the demographic transition has often occurred simultaneously with economic growth, it is commonly assumed that it is a consequence of economic growth, a perspective that has been called into question (Dyson, 2010).

Although the proportion of elderly in the total population is substantially higher in developed countries, the pace of the observed changes in developing countries has been quite rapid. In the second half of the 20th Century, the Latin America and Asian regions experienced rapid and profound changes in vital rates, reaching recently fertility levels close to those observed in more developed countries. Sub-Saharan Africa is the only continental region that remains at an early stage of the demographic transition, albeit large intra regional variations; but when considering the disaggregated data for African countries, an increasing number of them are already experiencing the ageing population phenomenon (Francisco 2010:31, 2011:48; Sandell 2004).

Figure 1 illustrates the difference between the populations of Mozambique and Mauritius. If the UN projec-

Figure 1: Comparison of the Age Pyramid of Mozambique and Mauritius in 2010 and 2050

Median Age in Mozambique		Median Age in Mauritius	
2010 = 17.8 years	2050 = 24.3 years	2010 = 32.4 years	2050 = 45.5 years

Fonte: http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/Excel-Data/population.htm

* Associate Member of
  ISCTE-IUL, Dinâmia-CET and recently also Associate collaborator of IESE – gustavo.toshiaki@gmail.com.

tions (medium variant) are confirmed, the median age of the Mozambican population will increase from 17.8 in 2010 to 24.3 in 2050. In turn, the population of Mauritius is already visibly more adult and aged with a median age of 32.4 years in 2010, expected to increase to 45.5 in 2050 (UN 2011).

Changes resulting from the demographic transition have direct impacts on the composition and organization of the family units, as well as in the relationships between labor and other production factors, working conditions and different forms of social protection, leading to a confrontation between the achievement of increased human longevity levels, and an "ideal" of "eternal youth", a phenomenon described by Sugahara (2009:38-61) as the "longevity paradox".

Towards a Mozambican Analysis: Ageing before or after getting richer?

In contrast to most developed countries, where the elderly population already represents a significant share of the total population, Mozambique is still at the very beginning of its demographic transition (Arnaldo 2007; Francisco 2011). According to INE (2010:10) the median age of the Mozambican population is 17 years, while the group of people aged 60 years and above represents 4.7% of the total population (around one million people).

At first glance it may seem out of sync or premature to promote a thorough reflection about population ageing in a country where the available demographic projections suggest that the proportion of elderly in the population will only increase slowly over the first half of the current century (Francisco 2011:52; INE 2010).

However, only reckless naivety or irresponsible ignorance, would call into question the early consideration of a phenomenon as predictable and important as ageing population Is. Indeed, despite the fact that the population ageing of Mozambique is still in its early stage, in fact, it is already in progress, resulting from a transition from high to low levels of mortality. This mortality transition has resulted in an immediate acceleration of the population growth. As long as the fertility transition is not generalized throughout the entire country, rapid population growth should override the ageing population, but then the latter will eventually overtake the former (Francisco 2011; Dyson 2010).

An increasing number of countries are now in the challenging situation of having aged faster than grown richer. That is the case of countries such as China, Brazil and many others that experienced rapid demographic transition processes in the second half of the 20th Century. "Getting older before getting richer?" was the question posed by Brito (2010), in his analysis of the Brazilian case.

Figure 2 shows that the speed of population ageing in developing countries tends to be faster than in developed countries. The same Figure 2 shows that the time required for the population aged 65 and above to increase its proportion from 7 to 14 per cent and from 14 to 21 percent varies significantly between countries. For instance, in France the increase of the elderly population from 7 to 14 percent took about one hundred years, but in only 40 years their proportion rose to 21 per cent of the total population. In countries like Brazil, China

and South Korea, the change in proportions were very different, and in some cases even reverse of what happened in France or Sweden (Vos et al.2009).

In Mozambique, although the pace of growth of the elderly population is relatively slow, the question raised by Brito is relevant and should be taken into account, while contextualizing the debate about population ageing in Mozambique. The question of the "rhythm" of this transformation is also worth a systematic and thorough analysis. As Arnaldo (2007) has done in his work on the proximate determinants of fertility in Mozambique, one must also understand the main determinants of mortality among older age groups. And the focus does not need to, nor should be restricted only to the demographic aspects.

Figure 2 – Time required for the proportion of the population aged 65 years or over to increase from 7 to 14 per cent and from 14 to 21 per cent, selected countries.

Source: Extracted from Vos et al. (2008)
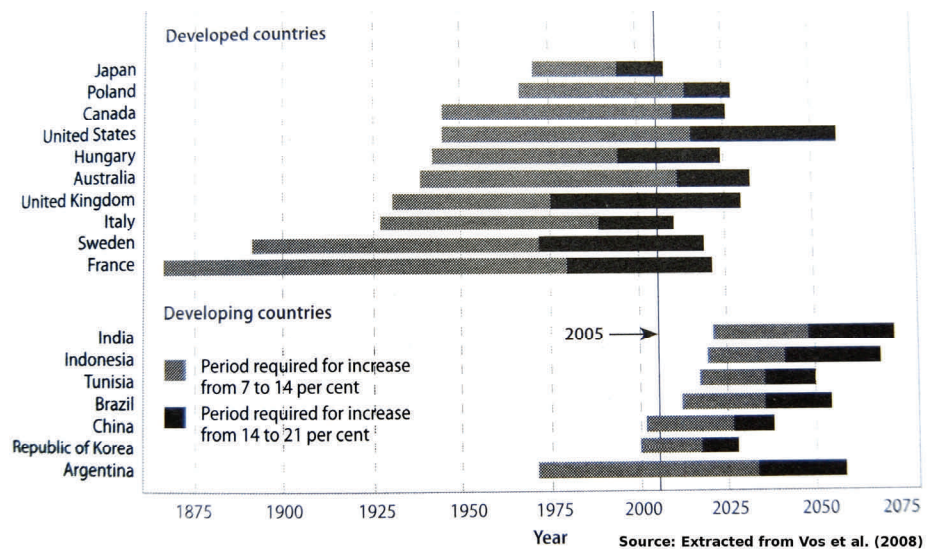
Ageing: Threat or Opportunity?

Strictly speaking, despite the fact that population ageing in Mozambique is still in its beginning, there are already more than one million Mozambicans aged 60 and above. This portion of the population, although small in relative terms, is not insignificant in absolute terms, especially if even for this number of people it is difficult to provide decent living conditions, participation and space for contributions to the society.

Mozambique is currently experiencing the initial period of a process that, in a more or less distinct future (depending on the pace of the fertility transition), will become what today is known as population ageing. The ability to monitor this process from its beginning, offers a unique chance for reflection. More importantly, it provides the opportunity for society to prepare in time for the anticipated structural changes in the demographic composition.

This current period is a great opportunity for scientific research, which results can be critical to the development of the country. As ageing is a highly interdisciplinary subject, the range of topics to be covered is vast and diverse. All the features of the Mozambican population ageing process, mentioned here, deserve more systematic and thorough studies.

This "historic moment" for countries like Mozambique is thus a valuable opportunity to build a better relationship

between society and its elderly population. Not only for what can be avoided, especially in relation to the construction of negative stereotypes and other barriers that prevent the real contribution of the elderly to society, but also for what can be learned from the existent relations, when the elderly is still a "rare figure" in the Mozambican society.

References

Arnaldo, C., 2007. *Fecundidade e seus Determinantes Próximos em Moçambique: Uma análise dos níveis, tendências, diferenciais e variações regionais*, Maputo: Texto Editores.

Brito, F., 2010. A Reinvenção da Transição Demográfica: Envelhecer Antes de Enriquecer? CEDEPLAR/FACE/ UFMG. www.cedeplar.ufmg.br/pesquisas/td/TD% 20401.pdf.

Dyson, T., 2010. *Population and Development: The Demographic Transition*, Zed Books.

Francisco, A., 2010. Enquadramento Demográfico da Protecção Social em Moçambique: Dinâmicas Recentes e Cenários Prospectivos. www.iese.ac.mz/lib/ publication/conf_oit/Antonio_Francisco.pdf.

Francisco, A., 2011. Enquadramento Demográfico da Protecção em Moçambique. Cadernos IESE, 6. www.iese.ac.mz/? __target__=publications_documents.

INE, 2010. Projecções Anuais da População Total, Urbana e Rural, Moçambique (2007 – 2040). Portal do Instituto Nacional de Estatística. www.ine.gov.mz/populacao/ projeccoes/proj_pop_moz.

Sandell, R., 2004. North Africa: Grappling with Demography. www.realinstitutoelcano.org/documentos/147/ Sandell147.pdf.

Sugahara, G., 2009. Cidades Criativas e Envelhecimento Populacional, Tese de Mestrado. ISCTE-IUL.

UN (United Nations), 2011. World Population Prospects, the 2010 Revision. http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/unpp/ p2k0data.asp.

Vos, R., Ocampo, J.A. & Cortez, A.L., 2009. *Ageing and Development*. London: Zed Books.