Public Debt Integrity Series

The role of parliament in overseeing public debt management in Mozambique

Mozambique

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Executive summary

The Mozambican economy has historically been characterised by high levels of external dependence, coupled with corruption and low productivity. This situation compels the state to seek support mechanisms from both domestic and international creditors to finance its governance projects. However, resources obtained through national indebtedness do not always exclusively serve development projects. The most notorious instance of this was observed in the “hidden debts” scandal[1], amounting to USD 2 billion, which is equivalent to 12% of the national gross domestic product (GDP).

The unveiling of this debt, without parliamentary approval, altered the paradigm of development support, causing several international partners to cut direct budgetary aid to the state. This scenario arises amid a regime with tendencies towards reinforcing authoritarianism, consequently stifling political plurality opportunities.

Based on empirical data, semi-structured interview and literature review, the study explores the role of parliament in overseeing public debt in Mozambique. To this end, it bases its analysis on a path dependency perspective, questioning the extent to which the authoritarian legacy of the one-party regime continues to have an impact on current political dynamics, relegating parliament to a marginal role in overseeing the country’s public debt.

The parliament, predominantly controlled by the ruling party FRELIMO, has been unable to exert adequate pressure on the executive to enhance transparency and accountability. It has largely confined itself to superficial discussions on matters related to public debt, compounded by a weak opposition that lacks significant initiatives to promote public debates on public debt issues. Meanwhile, civil society organisations serve as an alternative channel to mediate and apply pressure on the government regarding debt management mechanisms.

KEYWORDS: PARLIAMENT, EXTERNAL OVERSIGHT, PUBLIC DEBT, MOZAMBIQUE

[1] Public Integrity Center/Centro de Integridade Pública - CIP; Fundação MASC, Institute of Social and Economic Studies/ Instituto de Estudos Económicos e Sociais - IESE, Rural Environment Observatory/ Observatório do Meio Rural - OMR, 2016; Mills, 2021.

1. Introduction

The proper management of public finances plays a crucial role in promoting good governance and supporting public investment by states. Effective control of the use of public resources, including public debt, is a key component of this process. This question is usually formulated as asking whether the outstanding public debt and its projected path are consistent with those of the government's revenues and expenditures, that is, whether fiscal solvency conditions hold (D'Erasmo, Mendoza and Zhang, 2016). In this sense, public debt, whether external or internal, must not only be incurred according to legally established procedures but also ensure acceptable levels of sustainability. Those responsible for overseeing the budgetary process, including debt management, play a vital role in the dynamics of state borrowing (D'Erasmo, Mendoza and Zhang, 2016).

It is important to note that public debt management is not merely about borrowing or refinancing debts. It involves a government-driven strategic vision, ensuring market stability. In this context, International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions - INTOSAI (2021) states that public debt management aims to achieve the following objectives: i) Meet the government's financing needs; ii) secure loans at the lowest possible cost over the medium and long term; iii) maintain a prudent degree of risk in the debt portfolio; and iv) fulfil any other objectives the government may have set, such as developing and maintaining an efficient market for public debt securities.

The immediate implication is that countries with high debt must act quickly and decisively to address their fiscal problems. The longer-term lesson is that, to build the fiscal buffer required to address extraordinary events, governments should keep debt well below the estimated thresholds (Cecchetti, Mohaty and Zampolli, 2011). Historically, Mozambique has faced challenges in fully financing its state budget, with the reliance on debt servicing as a fundamental component of the continuous state financing, both for operational and investment purposes. At the beginning of the 1980s, the country experienced a significant deterioration in its economic and social conditions, resulting from both internal factors such as the civil war, cyclical crises (natural disasters: floods, droughts), inefficient public policies imposed by the one-party regime, and external events that impacted the national economy, such as regional dynamics, the oil crisis of the 1970s, the collapse of the Soviet Bloc, and the necessity for Mozambique to reposition itself on the international stage regarding strategic allies (Manning, 1998; Pereira and Shenga, 2005; Sumich, 2008; de Brito, 2019).

The prevailing poverty context is accompanied by low production levels in the country, where GDP growth generally does not translate into improved living conditions for the population. Although Mozambique has seen considerable growth in its Human Development Index (HDI) since 1990, with an increase of 2.04%, over in the decade 2015 to 2025, this growth has slowed to 1.04% (UNDP, 2022).

The study by Mills (2021), titled 'Expensive Poverty: Why Aid Fails and How It Can Work', demonstrates that between 1991 to 2021, donors have allocated a little over USD 1.2 trillion in development assistance to sub-Saharan African countries since the end of the Cold War. With this amount of aid, sub-Saharan Africa would have the capacity to build approximately 62,000 kilometres (km) of new paved roads, including motorways. In contrast, sub-Saharan Africa currently has a road network of about 2.8 million km, of which only 800,000 km are paved. Out of this network, 50% are damaged or in poor condition (Mills, 2021).

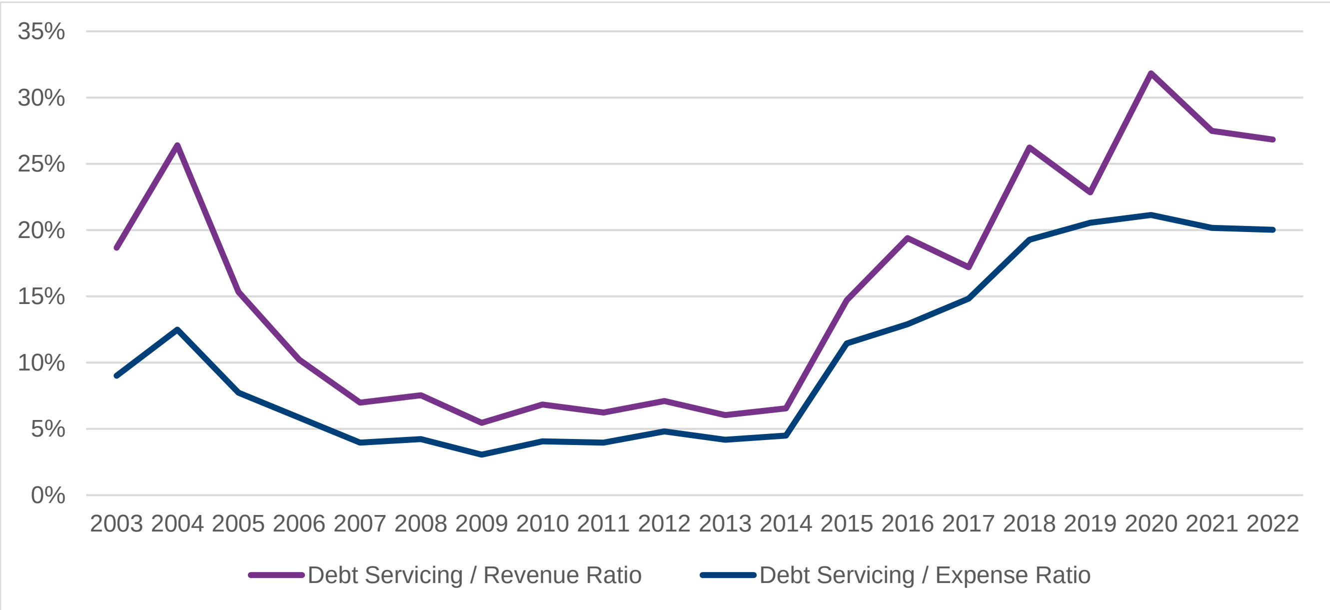
Previous studies have associated the inefficiency of aid with factors such as the logic of the projects themselves and financing criteria that contribute little to poverty reduction (Moyo, 2010). Other researchers focus their reflections on factors related to the lack of transparency in the allocation of resources, as well as the prioritisation of key sectors (Mills, 2021). This paper places greater emphasis on this latter dimension, specially focusing on the role of parliament and its interaction with civil society organisations and the press in overseeing public debt in Mozambique.

In recent years, there has been a significant rise in public debt. The primary drivers of this debt are investments in infrastructure projects, such as roads and ports, alongside the financing of social programmes and the broader public sector (Ministry of Economy and Finance - MEF, 2023). However, it is important to highlight that this debt expansion is also a result of both internal and external borrowing.

According to Bank of Mozambique (2020), debt servicing consumes a substantial portion of the national budget, thus reducing the resources available for investments in areas such as health, education, infrastructure, and social development. This situation poses significant challenges for the country's fiscal management, as the government needs to balance its obligations to honour commitments to both external and internal creditors with the demand for necessary investments to drive economic growth and reduce poverty. The lack of transparency in debt contracting and management, along with the government's inability to meet debt servicing, has further exacerbated the situation.

From Figure 1, it is observed that there is an increasing trend in the ratios between debt service and revenue, as well as between debt service and expenditure, indicating a rise in the financial burden associated with the payment of state debts. This phenomenon has significant implications for the economy, as it reflects greater pressure on available resources for productive investments, public services, and other essential areas (Blanchard, 1999; Panizza and Presbitero, 2014). Simply put, when the debt service ratio to revenue increases, it means that a larger proportion of the revenues generated by the economy, or the government, is being used to meet debt obligations. This can result in reduced budgetary flexibility to finance other priority areas such as education, healthcare and infrastructure, thereby compromising long-term economic development. Furthermore, it may limit the government's ability to make new appointments in the public administration, as well as to implement career advancements and promotions.

Figure 1: Debt service historical series (debt service / revenue and debt service / expenditure ratios usd)



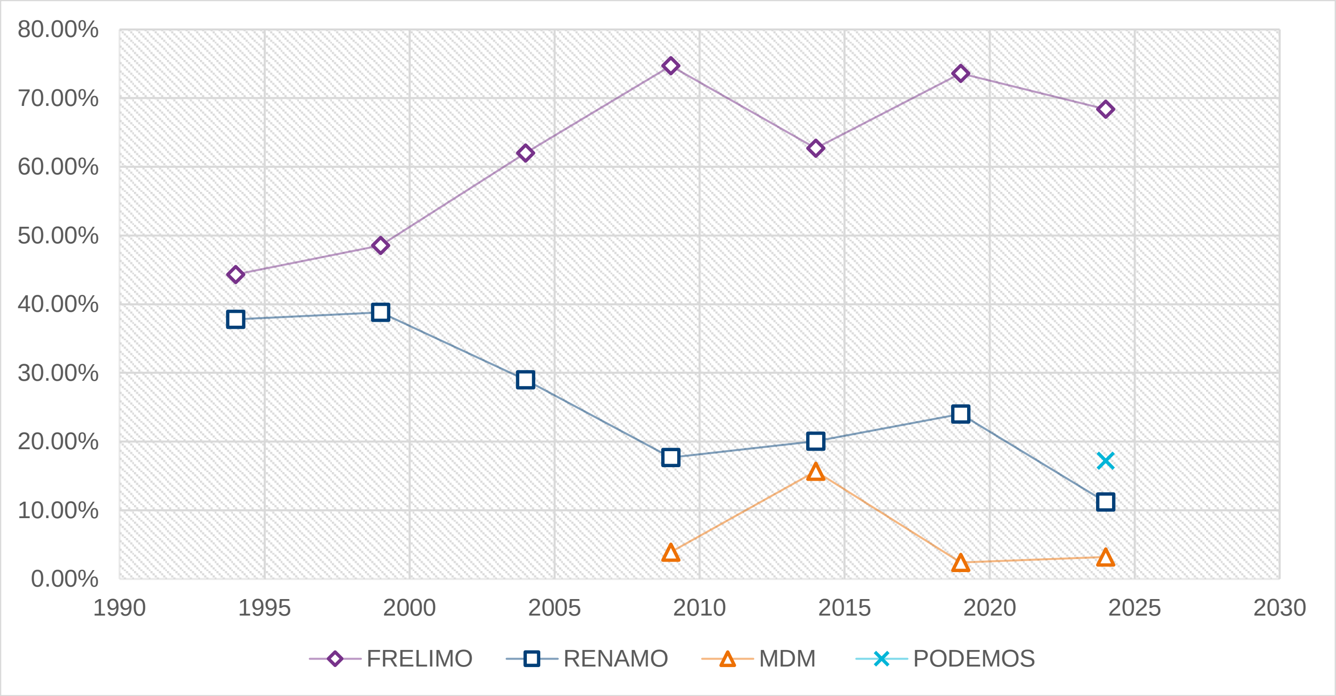
Source: MEF database (2023).

Additionally, the rise in the ratio between debt service and expenditure suggests that a larger portion of expenditure is being allocated to debt repayment, which may affect the efficiency of public spending. In extreme situations, this phenomenon may lead to the implementation of austerity measures or an increase in the tax burden to ensure financial obligations are met, which could have negative impacts on economic growth and the confidence of economic agents (Blanchard, 1999; Checherita-Westphal and Rother, 2012; Panizza and Presbitero, 2014;).

In summary, the increase in debt service ratios is an indication that debt sustainability is being compromised, which requires a careful analysis of fiscal policies and financial management to avoid adverse effects on the economy in the long term. In this context, the Mozambican parliament and civil society organisations play a crucial role in monitoring the evolution of public debt, contributing to preventing a collapse of the national economy.

The authoritarian legacy of the single-party era is a significant factor in the argumentation of this study. The FRELIMO party's control over the state remains entrenched and appears to strengthen considering electoral outcomes that reinforce its parliamentary majority (Sumich, 2008; Macamo, 2014; Chaimite, Forquilha and Shankland, 2021). This dynamic, in turn, constrains the separation of the three fundamental branches of power: executive, judiciary and legislative. On one hand, the Assembly of the Republic dominated by one party, has functioned more as an advocate for the government rather than effectively serving as a body that represents citizens in overseeing the actions of the executive.

Figure 2: Legislative elections in Mozambique (1994-2024)



Source: Mozambique's National Election Commission (CNE).

Figure 2 illustrates the FRELIMO party's dominant position in terms of seats in the Assembly of the Republic. Its parliamentary majority has been consolidated since 1994, while the opposition has experienced stagnation, with a continuous decline in parliamentary representation. Until the 2024 elections, the RENAMO party was the second-largest opposition force, but it lost this position to the PODEMOS party, which rose to become the second-largest opposition force in the country. Despite this, the combined seats of the three main opposition parties are not enough to form a coalition capable of blocking the proposals put forward by the ruling party. This often results in superficial debates on public finance matters. When issues are not superficially addressed, they are frequently approved by FRELIMO's majority vote, eliminating the possibility of reaching decisions based on consensus. Alternatively, civil society organisations have been gaining prominence in exerting pressure on the executive regarding various matters, particularly focusing on public finances[2].

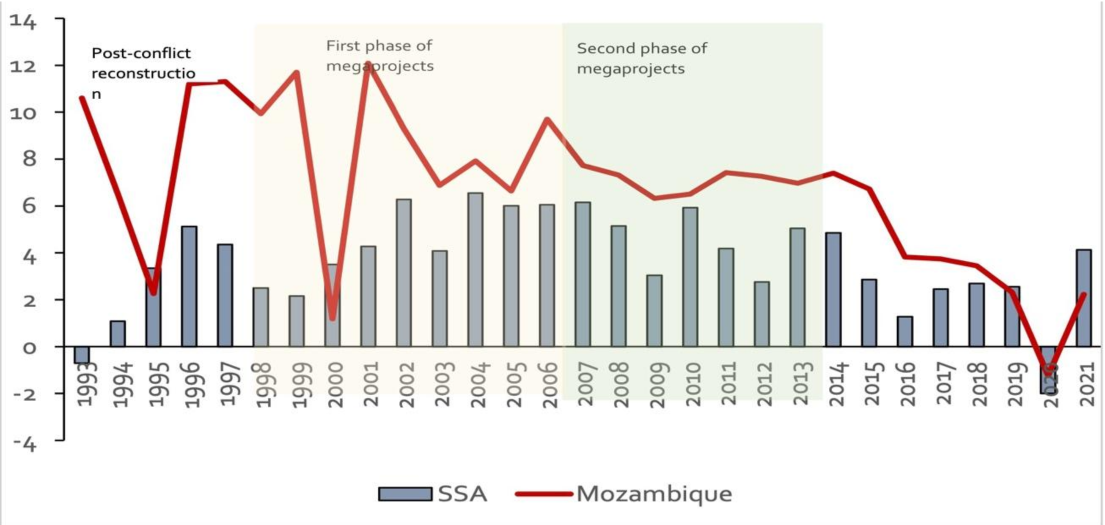
Therefore, this study aims to analyse the extent to which the authoritarian legacy of the one-party regime continues to influence current political dynamics, relegating parliament to a marginal role in overseeing the country's public debt, as well as briefly discussing how civil society is involved in oversight and public debate on budgetary matters.

[2] Interview with journalists and civil society activists (2024).

2. Background of the evolution of public debt in Mozambique

In the post-conflict period, the mozambican economy experienced a significant setback in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth, resulting from various factors, including the destruction caused by the 16-year civil war and the low levels of foreign direct investment. During the first phase of the mega-projects, the GDP showed slight recovery and stabilisation, but this progress was undermined in the period from 2015 to 2020 due to successive economic shocks. According to the World Bank (2023), growth declined from an average of 8% between 1993 and 2015 to just 3% between 2016 and 2019 (Figure 3), due to a series of factors, including the hidden debt crisis, tropical cyclones, and, to a certain extent, the insurgency in northern Mozambique. As a result of moderate growth and a strong population increase of around 3% per annum, per capita income declined sharply. The COVID-19 crisis struck the country at a time of already slowing economic activity, further exacerbating the situation. However, post-pandemic economic recovery has recently gained momentum, with GDP growth reaching 4.1% in 2022 (12% in per capita terms), compared to 2.3% in 2021, despite the worsening global economic context.

Figure 3: Mozambique real GDP growth performance (%)



Source: Mozambique real GDP growth performance (%) available in World Bank (2023), *Poverty Reduction Setback in Times of Compounding Shocks - Mozambique Poverty Assessment (English).* Washington, D.C. : World Bank Group. http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/099091123142528718.

This debt scandal, valued at USD 2 billion – equivalent to 12% of the GDP of one of the world's poorest countries – had severe repercussions. It is estimated that this corruption scandal's collateral damage may have cost Mozambique around USD 11 billion – nearly the entire GDP of the country in 2016 – thus driving almost 2 million people into poverty (Public Integrity Center - CIP, 2021). The direct costs associated with these loans, mainly past and future interest and repayments up until 2019, totalled USD 674.2 million, in addition to the USD 3.93 billion the country will need to service the hidden debt until 2031.

According to documents held by the London Court of International Arbitration (LCIA) concerning the debt scandal in Mozambique, a shipbuilding company and a French-Lebanese businessman made substantial payments, including to Filipe Nyusi, the former president of Mozambique[3] and other senior officials following the negotiation of government contracts (Mills, 2021; Nhamirre, 2022). The case was linked to loans taken out by Mozambique from various banks, including Credit Suisse, in 2013 and 2014. Ostensibly, these were intended to finance coastal protection system and a tuna fishing fleet, which is moored and inoperative in Maputo harbour (Mills, 2021).

As a part of the discovery of hidden debts, donors ceased to provide direct support to the state budget, choosing to reduce external aid to the country from 2016 onwards, starting with IMF but quickly followed by another partners (Cortez and others, 2019). Some donors and creditors countries have maintained cooperation and funding for specific projects (rather than direct budget support to the state), particularly in sectors that most affect the lives of the poor (education, health, access to water, and other basic goods and services). Other donors and creditors kept the bulk of co-operation and credit lines. Economic interests, in the context of so-called economic diplomacy and realpolitik, dominate these governments' choices. (Foundation MASC, IESE, CIP, OMR, 2018)[4]. This led to significant fiscal and monetary instability, with profound social repercussions. The government was compelled to reduce public investment in social sectors that significantly impact citizens' lives, particularly in health and education, with annual cuts of USD 10 million and USD 7 million, respectively.

At the same time, since 2016, there has been a notable deterioration in the perception of corruption in Mozambique, with a significant decline from 31 to 27 points on a scale of 0 to 100, eventually stagnating at 25 points between 2023 and 2024 (Transparency International, 2025)[5]. This decline reflects not only an increase in the perception of corruption but also suggests potential shortcomings in public policies and anti-corruption measures, thereby contributing to the sustained erosion of trust in the country's institutions, and hidden debts cannot be overlooked as a factor influencing these results.

Over the past five years, Mozambique's public debt has shown a significant increase of 29.0%, rising from approximately MZN[6] 754.1 million (USD 11.8in 2019 to MZN 972.4 million (USD 15.2 in

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[3] Filipe Nyusi was President of the Republic of Mozambique between 2015 and 2025. The current President of the Republic is Daniel Chapo, who took office on 15 January 2025.

[4] For more details visit: https://omrmz.org/wp-content/uploads/Comunicado-regresso-cooperação.pdf. Fundação MASC - https://masc.org.mz/en/ or https://www.facebook.com/mascmoz/; Instituto de Estudos Sociais e Económicos – IESE - https://www.iese.ac.mz ; Centro de Integridade Pública – CIP - https://www.cipmoz.org/pt/ ; Observatório do Meio Rural – OMR - https://omrmz.org .

[5] https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/mozambique

[6] Metical is the Mozambican currency. For the reader's better understanding, we have decided to convert the amounts into USD.

2023, representing about 73.0% of GDP. This stock marked a nominal growth of around 5.2% compared to 2022. The growth was primarily influenced by an increase in domestic public debt, which registered a nominal growth of approximately 11.5% compared to the year 2022 (MEF, 2023).

Although domestic public debt has been growing rapidly in recent years, external debt continues to constitute a larger proportion of total public indebtedness. By the end of 2023, approximately 67.7% of the debt was composed of external debt, while domestic debt accounted for 32.3% (MEF, 2023).

Figure 4: Composition of public debt % (2020-2024)

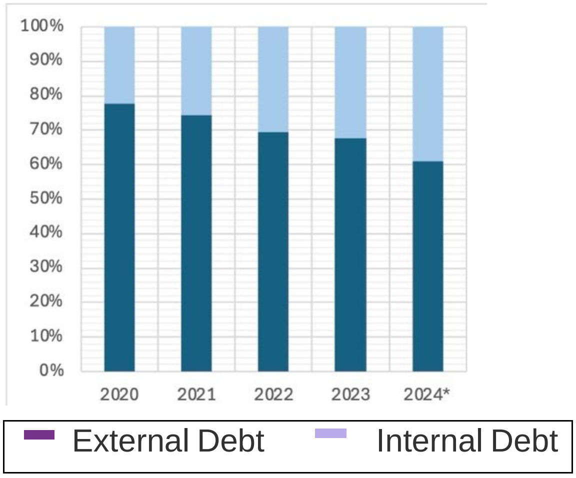
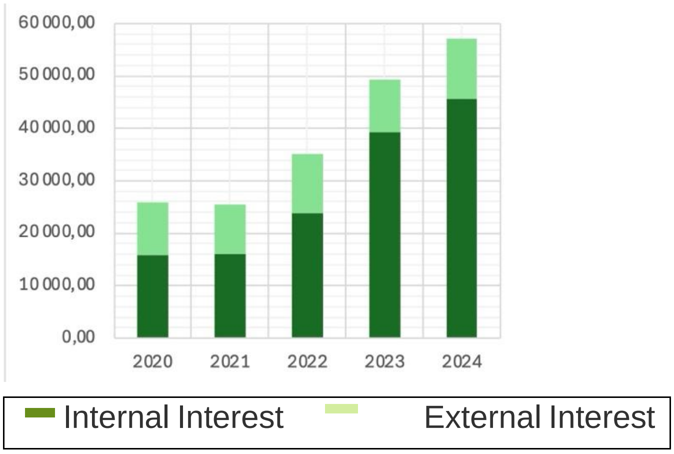


Figure 5: Composition of the debt charges in millions of meticais (2020-2024)[7]



Source: Boene (2025), 'Dívida Pública Moçambicana Atinge 1 trilião de Meticais. Reflexos da Instabilidade e Urgência de Reformas Fiscais', Edição nº03, Centro de Integridade Pública (CIP), pages 1-7. https://www.cipmoz.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/DIVIDA-PUBLICA-MOCAMBICANA.pdf.

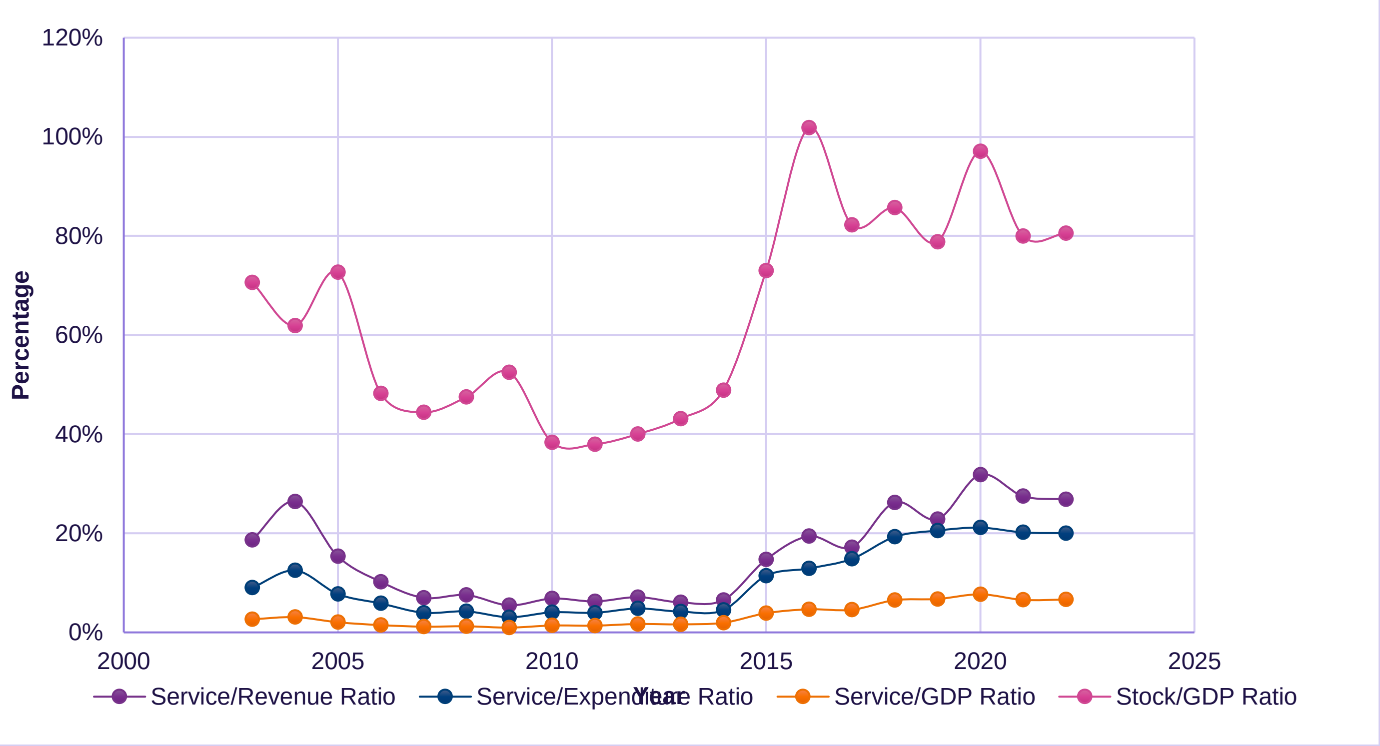
Figure 4 shows that, although external debt remains high, there is a progressive rise in internal debt, with this phenomenon being more pronounced in 2024. Regarding interest rates, as mentioned earlier, their impact is greater on debts contracted internally. In other words, although internal debt has accounted for an average of 30% of total public debt over the last five years (2020-2024), the associated charges remain the highest, totalling approximately 28.1 billion meticals – MZN (USD 164.9 million), compared to about 10.5 billion meticals - MZN (USD 440.6 million) for external debt. This means that around 72% of debt servicing costs are linked to internal debt (see Figure 5). The accelerated growth of this debt and the heavy charges associated with it present a significant obstacle to achieving public finance sustainability (Boene, 2025).

[7] The amounts in the chart 5 converted into USD: 10.0 billion MZN (USD 156.7 million), 20.0 billion MZN (USD 313.1 million), 30.0 billion MZN (USD 469.6 million), 40.0 billion MZN (USD 626 million), 50.0 billion MZN (USD 782.4 million), and 60.0 billion MZN (USD 938.9 million) - Currency conversion based on the website - https://www.xe.com/currencyconverter/ on 8th April 2024.

It is important to note that the extent of growth in internal debt could have adverse effects on the economy. In the short term, this growth strains the capital market, resulting in higher interest rates and, consequently, an increase in inflation. The interest rate for securing loans domestically is considerably higher than those imposed by donors. In response to this situation, the Mozambican government has turned to borrowing to service existing debt. Without an increase in domestic production, the risk of economic collapse remains significant.

In this regards, figure 6 analyses four fundamental dimensions for understanding the impact of debt servicing on the economy: the service/revenue ratio; the service/expenditure ratio; the service/GDP ratio; and the stock/GDP ratio, unlike Figure 1 which only looks at the first two dimensions, respectively. Generally, the literature considers that the increasing trend in the ratio between debt service and gross domestic product (GDP) suggests an intensification of the financial burden faced by the state due to the payment of its debt obligations. This indicator reflects the proportion of the national GDP allocated to debt service, including interest and principal repayments, and reveals growing pressure on the country's economy (Panizza and Presbitero, 2014; Reinhart and Rogoff, 2010).

Figure 6: Historical series of public debt in Mozambique (2002-2022)



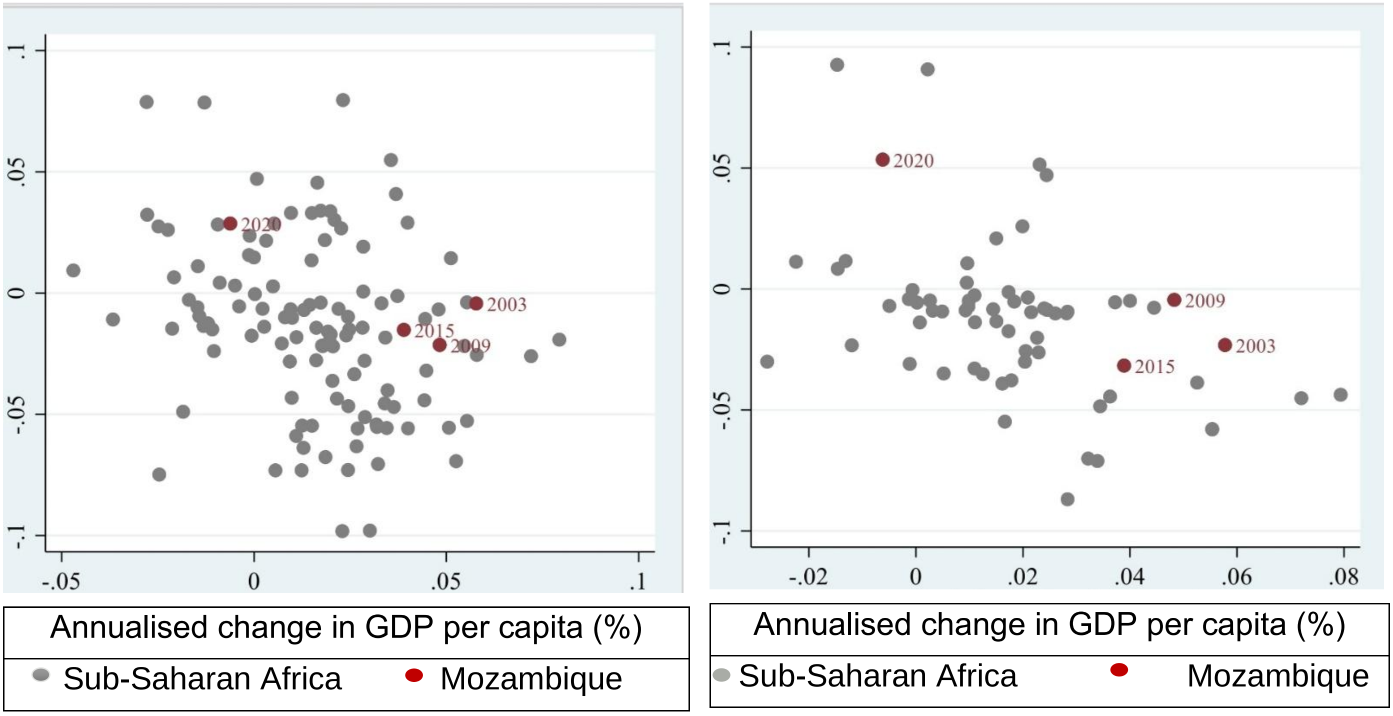
Source: Compiled by the author based on data from the Ministry of Economy and Finance of Mozambique (MEF Report, 2023)

According to the graph above, there is an observed trend of GDP growth recovery from 2021 onwards. However, this growth is challenged by the debt stock approaching insolvency. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that, for instance, in 2021, the revenue collection target was not met, necessitating financing beyond what was expected. With the fiscal deficit financing strategy leaning towards the domestic market, budgetary activity was characterised by an increased volume of internal debt operations and transactions. This situation becomes a source of rising costs and risks for the public debt portfolio in the short and medium term:

- Bond issuances increased by 69%
- Debt servicing (capital amortisations and interest payments) worsened by more than 50% compared to the previous year, reaching an amount of USD 1.23 billion in internal debt
- The stock worsened by 24%, closing the year 2022 at USD 4.41 billion, which for the first time positions the metical as the most representative currency of the central government's debt, surpassing the US dollar (MEF, 2023)

With indications of a decline in net credit flow to the government, the central government's debt stock closed the year at USD 14.5 million, reflecting an increase of only 4%, a smaller rise compared to the previous year (2021). The expansive dynamic of internal debt did not proportionately affect the total stock, as external debt, which still represents 70% of the portfolio, continues to have a greater impact on the profile of Mozambique's public debt (MEF, 2023). In this case, despite the external debt stock contracting by 3% in 2022, it is still insufficient to counterbalance the expansive effect of internal debt and its impacts on the national economy.

Figure 7: Comparison of poverty changes and growth in sub-Saharan Africa and Mozambique 1990-2020



Source: Comparison of poverty changes and growth in sub-Saharan Africa and Mozambique 1990-2020 - World Bank (2023), *Poverty Reduction Setback in Times of Compounding Shocks - Mozambique Poverty Assessment (English).* Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group. http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/099091123142528718.

As a result of the economic climate characterised by extreme indebtedness and low productivity, the elasticity of economic growth in relation to poverty in Mozambique indicates that from 1996 to 2020 the country underwent periods of economic growth. However, this growth did not consistently lead to a proportional reduction in poverty, as illustrated in Figure 7. Despite robust GDP growth in certain years, poverty levels remained high or decreased only marginally, indicating a lower elasticity of growth concerning poverty reduction (World Bank, 2023, 42).

Table 1: Projection of internal debt growth

Description/Year	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027
Amortisation	21, 913.4	44, 140.2	38, 285.3	45, 939.2	19, 960.9
Interest	37, 839.7	41, 309.8	41, 072.0	40, 447.3	10, 652.8
Total debt service	**59, 753.1**	**85, 449.9**	**79, 357.3**	**86, 386.6**	**30, 613.7**
Total debt service (in USD)	926.5	1, 325.0	1, 230.5	1, 339.5	474.7

Source: Ministry of Finance report (2023), adapted by the author.

Despite the worsening public debt scenario, in 2023 the Mozambican government presented a debt projection up to 2027. The public debt projection presented by the government in 2023, although optimistic, proved to be vulnerable due to the lack of key elements in its analysis. Firstly, Table 1, provided by the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF, 2023), omits crucial information about annual disbursements expectation, making it impossible to visualise the balance resulting from the difference between disbursement and debt amortisation. Secondly, the Mozambican government placed great confidence in controlling debt by focusing on the energy sector, an area that, despite generating substantial revenues, is subject to fluctuations in international markets. Furthermore, the fact that some clauses in the exploration contracts have not been made public and, consequently, have not been widely debated in Parliament, prevents citizens and other relevant actors from conducting a thorough analysis of the issue.

Indeed, the current trajectory of the debt appears to be heading in the opposite direction to that initially projected by the government. As Boene (2025) points out, the Balance of the Economic and Social Plan and State Budget/*Balanço Económico e Social e Orçamento do Estado* (BdPESOE) for 2024 indicates that Mozambique's public debt reached the 1 trillion meticais mark in 2024, representing an increase of 8% compared to 2023, when it was valued at around 967.2 billion meticais. This increase is justified exclusively by the high growth in domestic public debt, which in the period in question was 29.7 per cent. It totalled 407.0 billion meticais. In the same period, external debt fell by 2.9 per cent. Boene (2025) considers that the accelerated growth of public debt, mostly domestic debt, is partly the result of political, economic and social instability and the lack of effective implementation of measures aimed at fiscal consolidation. Although domestic debt will represent 39 per cent of the total debt in 2024, the costs associated with it remain the most onerous, at around 45.6 billion meticais compared to 11.3 billion meticais for external debt.

A continuous rise in the ratio between debt service and GDP may also affect investor and economic agent confidence, as the increasing allocation of resources to debt repayment may be seen as a sign of economic weakness. The literature on debt sustainability, as highlighted by Panizza and Presbitero (2014), suggests that this increase in the ratio could result in a higher perceived risk by investors, which could lead to an increase in interest rates demanded for new loans and undermine confidence in the country's economic stability. To mitigate these risks, it is essential for the government to adopt responsible fiscal policies that promote sustainable economic growth and seek to balance the need for debt repayment with investments that foster long-term national development (Blanchard, 1999; Celasun and others, 2006).

Moreover, the private sector faces constraints due to the high interest rates imposed by commercial banks, compounded by ongoing complaints from private enterprises that the Mozambican government is often experiencing significant delays in settling debts for services rendered by private entities. This situation severely limits the potential for national economic growth, thereby perpetuating a reliance on both internal and external credit.

3. Public debt: Actors and oversight challenges

In terms of budgetary and financial execution in Mozambique, according to clause I) of paragraph 2 of Article 178 of the Constitution of the Republic, it is the responsibility of the Assembly of the Republic to deliberate on the major options of the Economic and Social Plan and the State Budget/ *Plano Económico e Social e Orçamento do Estado (PESOE)* and their respective execution reports. As stipulated in Article 131 of the Constitution of the Republic of Mozambique, the annual execution of the State Budget is overseen by the Supreme Audit Institution, the Administrative Tribunal/ Tribunal Administrativo (TA), and the Assembly of the Republic (AR), which, considering the opinion of the TA, reviews and deliberates on the General State Account/ *Conta Geral do Estado (CGE).*

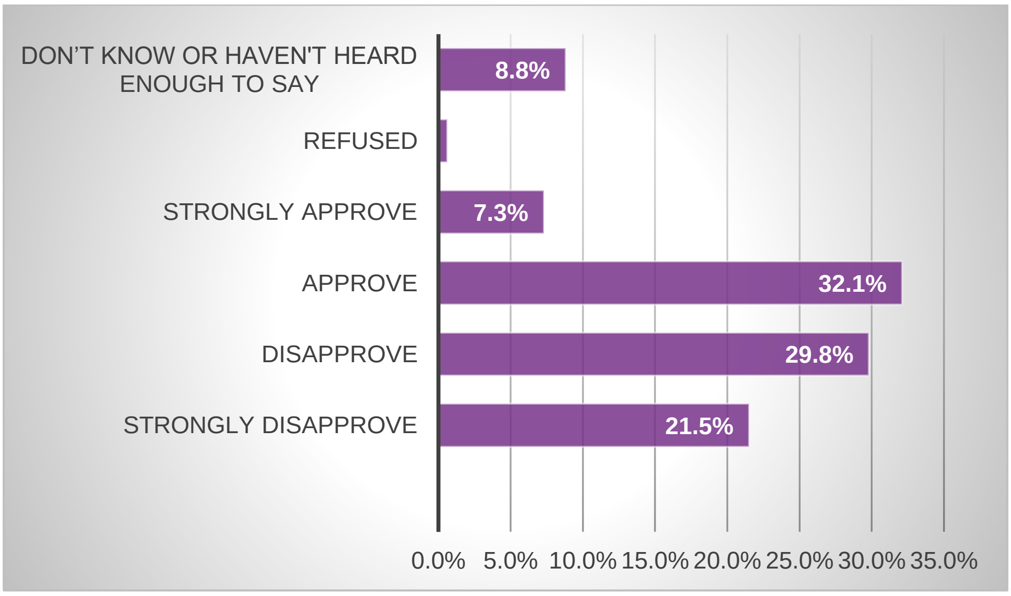
According to paragraph 1 of Article 60 of Law number 14/2020, of 23 December, which establishes the principles and norms for the organisation and operation of the State Financial Administration System/ *Sistema de Administração Financeira do Estado (SISTAFE),* public debt comprises financial obligations assumed by virtue of laws, contracts, agreements, and the undertaking of credit operations. Under paragraph 1 of article 62, the government must include in the semi-annual and annual report on the execution of the PESOE information on the debt incurred and guaranteed, as well as the specific terms of the loans entered, and submit this to the Assembly of the Republic.

Therefore, one of the primary functions of the legislative power is to scrutinise the executive on how public programs are implemented and how public funds are utilised to ensure that national interests are adequately served (Aregawi, 2012; Jahan and Amundsen, 2012). The international debate on budget oversight is framed as a tension between the functions of democracy and technocracy. It is universally recognised that the executive initiates and drafts the budget, and the legislative power approves it (Krafchik, 1998). Thus, legislators ensure interaction with the executive.

While there are variations among modern democracies, a specialised budget committee that functions as an audit committee is commonly found in parliaments worldwide. Access to financial information for legislators is generally more robust in modern, industrialised democracies (Kasdin, 2017). According to Wehner (2017), there has been a recent shift towards broad parliamentary oversight of public finances. For example, France initiated a reclassification of the public budget to enhance parliamentary power to modify public expenditure. Another good example is the Brazilian experience where democratisation in the early 1980s granted congress the power to amend the budget (Coghill, 2010).

However, other studies yield contrasting findings. For example, Sheldon (2016) highlights that parliament exercises minimal oversight regarding the outcomes of actions taken by the executive on behalf of the nation. In South Africa, the budget committees within parliament lack the authority to make amendments regarding budgetary matters or public budgets due to significant constraints such as lack of time, information and capacity (Krafchik and Wehner, 1998). In most African countries, executive powers tend to be dominant, while parliaments are typically weak (Tar, 2010).

Figure 8: Performance: National Assembly

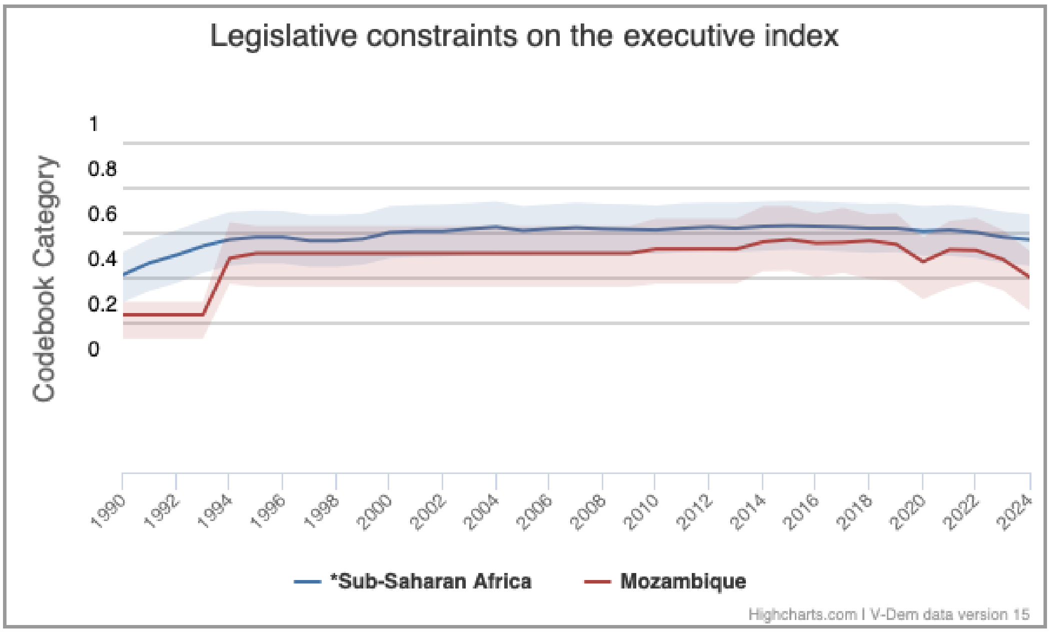


Source: Afrobarometer database, hwww.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis/

According to the 10th round of Afrobarometer, the aggregated data on the performance of the National Assembly indicates that, in Africa, the approval of this legislative body's performance is low among citizens. Only 7.3% of respondents strongly approve of the legislative bodies in their countries, while 32.1% express simple approval, placing the level of satisfaction with the body below the 50% average. The disapproval rate is relatively high, with 29.8% of citizens disapproving of the performance and 21.5% strongly disapproving. These results suggest that the performance of the legislative body is largely viewed negatively by the African population.

When examining the relationship between parliament and the executive, V-Dem data also points to a poor performance of parliament, further reinforcing the perception that its functioning is unsatisfactory. The data provided by V-Dem (Figure 7), indicates that both in Mozambique and sub-Saharan Africa in general, the capacity of the legislature to constrain the government is low. In both contexts, the index falls below the average on a scale ranging from 0 (low) to 1 (high). These indicators reinforce the perception that parliament exercises limited control over the actions of the executive, and in the specific case of public debt management, this reality appears to hold true as well. The Mozambican system of government, by granting extensive powers to the executive, creates a scenario where its initiatives are rarely rejected by parliament, highlighting a political dynamic characterised by an imbalance of power between the two branches. This concentration of power in the executive, therefore, limits the effectiveness of parliamentary oversight, weakening the system of checks and balances that should exist in a democratic state.

Figure 9: Codebook category - legislative constraints on the executive index in Mozambique versus sub-Saharan Africa



Source: V-Dem, v-dem.net/data_analysis/VariableGraph/

Presidential domination over legislators poses a major governance challenge (Amundsen, 2010). These African parliaments are ineffective in law-making, representation, debating national issues, and scrutinising executive activities (Sakuru, 2015).

In Mozambique, there is a significant deficit of systematic studies on parliamentary performance in overseeing public debt. Existing information predominantly consists of position papers from civil society organisations.

Factors influencing parliamentary oversight of public debt

The discourse surrounding the factors that determine the parliament's capability to effectively exercise its oversight functions has garnered significant interest within academic circles. In African nations, one prevalent criticism regarding the engagement of parliamentarians with the public is that, once elected, politicians tend to lose interest in local concerns. Consequently, serving public interests is often not given serious consideration post-elections (UN Economic Commission for Africa, 2012).

The 2023 Open Budget Survey[8], which evaluates the budget transparency and public resource management of 125 countries, reports the following scores for Mozambique: Budget Transparency (47/100), Public Participation (15/100), and Budget Oversight (41/100). In the overall ranking, Mozambique is placed 68th out of 125 countries. This survey serves as a crucial tool for local civil society organizations to assess and benchmark the transparency and effectiveness of government use of public funds.

While Mozambique has shown slight improvement in its overall score, increasing from 45 points in 2021 to 47 points in 2023, its position in the global ranking has declined. Specifically, Mozambique experienced a 3-point drop in the 'Budget Oversight' pillar, primarily due to a reduction in oversight by the National Assembly/ *Assembleia da República*, which is attributed to the non-publication of key documents and delays in their release.

The importance of legislative committees is crucial to the budget process, as it facilitates specialisation and the enhancement of legislative knowledge, playing a significant role in monitoring budget execution. Legislative committees, including a specialised audit committee, assist in detecting implementation deficiencies and improving compliance (McGee, 2002). Sheldon observed minimal parliamentary oversight by the executive branch attributed to the limited time available to parliament (Sheldon, 2016). Thus, adequate time for oversight and a well-structured committee design enable parliamentary scrutiny over budget execution.

Naturally, there are additional variables that may be considered. According to Johnson (2005), the managerial and technical capacity of parliament is crucial. In many developing countries, the effectiveness of budget scrutiny is influenced by the capacity, knowledge, and understanding of public budget content (Sheldon, 2016). However, an executive monopoly over budgetary information discourages parliamentary access to the budget and reduces legislative scrutiny. The budgetary process requires access to accurate, comprehensive and timely information. Additionally, updates on revenues and expenditures, audit reports and performance evaluations are important information to support the documentation and legislative oversight of budget execution (ibid).

In Mozambique, the deficiencies in parliamentary oversight of debt can largely be explained by the following factors:

a) Political trajectory from a one-party regime to multi-party democracy. The process was based on the recognition by the FRELIMO government and did not establish transitional institutions capable of breaking with the past and the existing hegemony of militarised

[8] For more details, see: https://internationalbudget.org/wp-content/uploads/IBP-OBS-Global-Report-2023-v4-Final-Artwork.pdf.

forces. In the post-independence period, with the institutionalisation of the one-party regime, the Mozambican Parliament came to be known as the People's Assembly. It met only once, from 31 August to 31 September 1977, with a provisional composition of 207 deputies chosen by the Central Committee of the FRELIMO Party. In this initial phase (1977–1986), the President of the Republic also held the position of President of the People's Assembly, with some members of the Assembly simultaneously holding governmental posts. Between 1986 and 1994, the position of President of the People's Assembly was created, separate from that of the President of the Republic. This was followed by a third phase, ushered in by the first general and multiparty elections held in 1994, following the Constitution of the Republic approved in 1990[9].

The entire transitional apparatus was designed to protect the interests of RENAMO in its process of reintegration and accommodation within the state, rather than to revise the rules and create a social and political dynamic through a model of negotiation and concessions between the country's political elites (de Brito, 2009; de Brito, 2019; Sanches, 2014). This allowed the Mozambican government to keep the public administration apparatus it had created and consolidated since independence practically intact, as well as to maintain and strengthen the police and security apparatus.

In this sense,

> *"The political transition resulting from the 1990 Constitution and the 1992 General Peace Agreement was, above all, a process of mutual concessions between the former belligerents, FRELIMO and RENAMO, rather than a deep reform aimed at strengthening the role of Parliament. As a result, the Parliament was often limited to superficial debates and, at times, lacked adequate technical expertise, particularly in matters related to public finances"[10].*

b) Conflicts of interest and legislative dependency on the executive. For example, FRELIMO's list of parliamentary candidates is endorsed by the party's Political Boreau/ *Comissão Política*. Some members of this body also hold positions in the government which leads to a difficult and subservient relationship. Parliamentarians, who in theory represent a sovereign body, are confronted with the need to show allegiance to those who placed them on the list of candidates – government members, effectively their bosses. Consequently, the capacity for effective accountability and transparency becomes diminished and almost non-existent.

c) Solidification of a dominant party system. FRELIMO's electoral dominance, which began in 1994, has been further consolidated since the general elections of 2004. Since then, the ruling party has maintained a strong majority in Parliament, including leadership over the largest number of parliamentary working committees. This dominance, stemming from its

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[9] For more details, see: https://www.parlamento.mz/?page_id=981.

[10] Excerpt from an interview with a member of civil society and journalist.

parliamentary majority, has to some extent contributed to a superficial and often closely aligned debate between Parliament and the Government.

In the Tenth Legislature, which commenced in 2025, the incumbent party chaired six of the nine most influential committees in the Assembly of the Republic, namely: the Constitutional, Human Rights and Legality Affairs Committee (1st Committee); the Planning and Budget Committee (2nd Committee); the Social, Gender, Technology and Media Affairs Committee (3rd Committee); the Public Administration and Local Government Committee (4th Committee); the Defence, Security and Public Order Committee (6th Committee); and the International Relations, Cooperation and Communities Committee (7th Committee). Meanwhile, PODEMOS and RENAMO chaired the remaining, relatively less influential committees: the Agriculture, Economy and Environment Committee (5th Committee) and the Petitions, Complaints and Grievances Committee (8th Committee), both chaired by PODEMOS party; and the Parliamentary Ethics Committee (9th Committee), chaired by RENAMO[11].

A study of 93 countries conducted by the International Budget Partnership, Ríos, Bastida, and Benito (2016), concluded that the legal framework, the type of legislature, and the institution responsible for public budget oversight are key determinants of the level of budgetary scrutiny.

Moreover, Mozambique’s Parliament has a unicameral structure. Scholarly literature suggests that bicameralism provides broader opportunities for balanced parliamentary deliberation. If members of a second legislative chamber are elected independently through a different voting system, the chambers may hold divergent views on budgetary legislation, and the second chamber may veto a budget already approved by the first. Available studies on this matter also indicate that the political affiliation of candidates influences their performance; for instance, newly demarcated constituencies tend to yield better outcomes than older ones (Lienert, 2005; 2013; Karyeija, 2019).

d) Lack of technical expertise in public finance matters. There is a perception that a considerable number of parliamentarians lack technical expertise in the specialised matters of the committees they are part of. Thus, the budgetary process tends to be “superficial and partisan”. This is mainly due to limited parliamentary scrutiny, which is hindered by a lack of administrative capacity, budgetary information and policy (Amundsen, 2010).

   Although the Mozambican parliament has implemented partnership programmes to strengthen its expertise, particularly in public finance matters, there remains a clear perception that, despite significant progress with each new legislature, challenges persist. Firstly, many parliamentarians face difficulties in renewing their positions on party lists, which would allow them to continue in their parliamentary duties. Secondly, the closed-list electoral system weakens the link between voters and their representatives, as MPs tend

[11] For more information and details on the working committees of the Assembly of the Republic in Mozambique, see: https://www.parlamento.mz/?p=11868

to focus more on consolidating their position within the party structure, often at the expense of improving their expertise and engaging with the citizens. Thirdly, parliamentary groups still lack greater awareness of the importance of professionalising parliamentary activities, resulting in debates that often focus on mutual accusations between parties, rather than fostering technically informed and substantial discussions. Finally, there is a noticeable lack of legislative initiative from parliamentarians, as a significant portion of legislative proposals comes from the government.

Conclusions

The growing evolution of public debt in Mozambique, particularly due to the increase in domestic borrowing, raises concerns about its sustainability in the medium and long term. This scenario underscores the need for more effective action by the Assembly of the Republic in fulfilling its oversight role. It is essential for parliament to strengthen its control mechanisms. Firstly, through reforms of its institutional structure or by creating mechanisms to maintain institutional memory by establishing a robust and permanent technical advisory body. Moreover, collaboration with civil society could be better leveraged, making better use of reports and positions from these organisations, as well as making better use of the media to disseminate reports on public debt, thus generating greater public debate.

Secondly, substantial institutional reforms are required to guarantee parliament's independence from the government. This initiative would foster a greater understanding and public discourse on the issue. Thirdly, it is vital to enhance the working conditions of MPs by offering specialised training in public finance. Lastly, it is crucial to appoint MPs with relevant expertise in the specific areas of their respective parliamentary committees.

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Annex 3: Public Debt Integrity series 2025

The role of parliaments in public debt oversight in Africa

This paper is published as part of the “Public Debt Integrity Series”, a joint knowledge building initiative of AFRODAD, the African Forum and Network on Debt and Development, and WFD. The papers in this series research different aspects of the role of parliaments in public debt oversight in Africa. The full list of papers is:

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