



## Strategic Security Analysis

# Mozambique: A Classic Case of Mediation in Modern Times

Neha Sanghrajka





## The Geneva Centre for Security Policy

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Photos in cover collage: Maria Iobakina, *Flag of Mozambique*, Shutterstock.com, and Peace Process Secretariat (PPS); *Leader of Renamo, Ossufo Momade hands over the final weapon to the President of Mozambique, Filipe Nyusi, in a symbolic gesture marking the end of the disarmament and demobilisation stage of the Maputo Accord. Vunduzi, Sofala Province June 2023.*



## Key points

- Mozambique's journey towards definitive peace has been paved with challenges. The 1992 peace agreement and attempts at mediation and implementing agreements between 2012-2016 failed to end persistent low-level violence or produce tangible results.
- In late 2016 the president of Mozambique, Filipe Jacinto Nyusi, and the then leader of Renamo, Afonso Dhlakama, made the decision to focus on national efforts and engage in direct negotiations. The subsequent mediation and negotiation process, which was based on peace listening, culminated in the signing of the Maputo Accord in 2019.
- The work of mediators should be informed by discretion, should create a bespoke process design characterised by agility and flexibility, and should focus on facilitating a conducive environment for dialogue to allow national actors to find solutions through dialogue and building trust.
- Mozambique's peace process demonstrates that the traditional mediation approach, which places political parties at its centre and embraces innovative approaches relevant to a specific context, continues to be relevant in modern times.



**Photo 1:** Mozambique president Filipe Nyusi and Renamo leader Ossufo Momade sign the Maputo Accord for Peace and National Reconciliation.



Mozambique's recent experience with building peace offers a novel and dynamic approach that was flexible, innovative, and nationally led.

## Introduction

On 6 August 2019 the Maputo Accord for Peace and National Reconciliation (Maputo Accord) was signed in Mozambique, ending a period of low-level violence that had erupted seven years earlier between government security forces and armed elements of the Resistência Nacional Moçambicana (Mozambique National Resistance, or Renamo).<sup>1</sup> Since independence in 1975, Mozambique has been on a prolonged journey to peace and reconciliation. A protracted civil war ended in 1992 with the signing of the General Peace Agreement (GPA) between the government and Renamo.<sup>2</sup> However, Mozambique returned to small-scale armed hostilities in 2012. This was due to Renamo's dissatisfaction with the ongoing political situation and implementation of the GPA. Discontent with access to pensions, decentralisation and perceptions of a lack of full inclusion remained.<sup>3</sup>

Following the outbreak of violence in 2012, mediation efforts to return Mozambique to peace can be divided into three periods: (1) National Mediation (2013-2015), including faith leaders and a university rector; (2) the Avenida process (2016), which involved a high number of external mediators and actors; and (3) the post-2016 process, which led to the signing of the Maputo Accord. This third period took stock of the failures of the first two processes and adopted a new approach based on trust and national ownership.<sup>4</sup> This process was led by the principals, the President of the Republic of Mozambique, Filipe Jacinto Nyusi, and Renamo leaders, the late Afonso Dhlakama and Ossufo Momade. They were supported by a mediation team comprising Mirko Manzoni, then Swiss ambassador to Mozambique; Neha Sanghrajka (the author of the current document) from Kenya; Jonathan Powell from the United Kingdom; and Eduardo Namburete, from Mozambique.<sup>5</sup>

This Strategic Security Analysis (SSA) analyses the features of this third period of mediation that led to the signing of the Maputo Accord. The approach adopted shows the ways in which agility, adaptability, trust-building, and dialogue can establish an environment conducive to sustainable peace, as well as the value of implementing partial agreements while negotiating full agreements as a confidence-building measure. While it advocates for a bespoke, tailored approach to mediation, several examples of the ways in which traditional elements of mediation were adapted and made fit for purpose are discussed.<sup>6</sup>

In a global context characterised by ever-increasing threats emerging against the backdrop of the closure of several UN peace operations in recent years, work to improve traditional forms of maintaining peace and security has become more important than ever. Mozambique's recent experience with building peace offers a novel and dynamic approach that was flexible, innovative, and nationally led.

The findings of this SSA are based on the author's direct involvement in the mediation process and peacebuilding in Mozambique since 2014. It draws on insights from engagement with individuals involved in the process at all levels, including years of shuttle diplomacy involving 35 missions to Gorongosa district<sup>7</sup> in central Mozambique, a journey of approximately 1,000 km from Maputo city; countless telephone conversations; and face-to-face meetings between the principals.



## The breakdown of the peace process, 1992-2016

The incoming president, Filipe Jacinto Nyusi, was inaugurated on 15 January 2015 and called for a new governance dynamic, pledging to open constructive dialogue with Renamo.

Following the outbreak of hostilities in 2012, which led to Renamo reneging on the GPA in 2013, a negotiation process supported by five national mediators<sup>8</sup> produced a Declaration of Cessation of Military Hostilities on 24 August 2014.<sup>9</sup> This was followed by the signing of a peace agreement on 4 September 2014 that facilitated the peaceful conduct of the 2014 general election.<sup>10</sup> However, Renamo contested the election's outcome, in which the *Frente de Libertação Moçambique* (Mozambique Liberation Front, or Frelimo) secured the majority vote. The incoming president, Filipe Nyusi, was inaugurated on 15 January 2015 and called for a new governance dynamic, pledging to open constructive dialogue with Renamo. He held an in-person meeting with Dhlakama within one month of assuming office.<sup>11</sup> However, progress towards peace stalled again when a regionalisation bill presented by Renamo was blocked by Parliament. On 22 August 2015 Renamo withdrew from the process and Dhlakama returned to the party's military base. Attempts to revive the negotiations broke down following a standoff between Dhlakama and government forces at his home, leading to both parties losing trust in the process.<sup>12</sup>

Following the failure of these talks, stakeholders, including high-level representatives from the United States, European Union (EU), United Kingdom (UK) and the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD), held separate meetings with senior government and Renamo leadership in late 2015 and early 2016. Dhlakama agreed to engage in dialogue despite his initial reluctance, and the talks were held in the Avenida Hotel (which resulted in the process becoming known as the Avenida process).<sup>13</sup> The mediation structure involved a large number of entities, including the Catholic Church, the EU, South Africa, former presidents of Tanzania and Botswana, Inter Mediate, and HD.<sup>14</sup>

By August 2016 it became apparent that the EU's efforts to push the talks forward and build consensus on key points were causing confusion. This came to a head on 17 August, when a joint statement prepared by the mediators and signed by the members of the government and Renamo negotiating teams was seen by many as a concession by the government. It led to new conditions regarding decisions taken in the talks, including that they should be signed in a face-to-face meeting of the principals and approved by Parliament. Dhlakama expressed his frustration that the mediation team had met personally with Nyusi, but only spoke to him by telephone. He said if the mediation was to be effective, the mediators needed to come to the Renamo base in Satunjira, Gorongosa district. Despite Renamo proposing secure corridors to allow the meeting to take place, no such meeting transpired. The talks ended without tangible results in late 2016.



## Peace listening and the road to the Maputo Accord

By the end of 2016 it had become evident that while the parties had an appetite for peace, a new approach was needed. The principals requested Mirko Manzoni, the then Swiss ambassador to Mozambique; Neha Sanghrajka from HD and Jonathan Powell from Inter Mediate, who had both been involved in the Avenida process; and Eduardo Namburete, a Renamo member of Parliament, to support the new phase of negotiations.<sup>15</sup> Key to the success of the mediators is that no organisation was driving the process, but that they were acting as a team of individuals with different backgrounds and strengths. Taking stock of previous attempts, the mediators, together with the principals, developed a new process based on the principle that this was not a process based on peace talks, but instead on peace listening.

The mediators (Manzoni and Sanghrajka) engaged in extensive shuttle diplomacy between Maputo and the Renamo military base in Gorongosa. This type of close engagement enabled those involved to build strong relationships that allowed them to take significant leaps of faith, laying the groundwork for a culture of dialogue and trust throughout the process.<sup>16</sup> Whether it was in these early days of shuttle diplomacy or during the building of assembly areas close to Renamo military bases to be centres of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) activities, the mediators would *go to the parties*, rather than the other way around.

The essential factor here that allowed the process to move forward and succeed was the capacity of protecting the space for dialogue from any interference. The mediators flipped the gratitude narrative by emphasising that this process was led by and for Mozambicans. It was therefore the mediators who were grateful to be allowed into this sensitive space. The focus on listening, discretion, building trust and national ownership was crucial in creating space for dialogue that allowed for open discussion on contentious issues that ultimately broke deadlocks. The mediators had different backgrounds and profiles, whether in terms of age, gender, or nationality, but shared a vision for the process based on national ownership and trust.

The features that emerged from this process that differentiated this period and led to the process's ultimate success were: (1) its bespoke and agile structure (2) the progressive implementation of partial agreements as a confidence building measure; (3) achieving the impossible: the case of pensions; (4) strategic inclusion; and (5) the flexible approach to mediation and its challenges.

### A bespoke and agile structure

The mediation structure was based on the specific needs of the context in question and was designed to best facilitate trust, discretion, and efficiency. The Avenida process had 12 mediators, including high-profile individuals, and lacked a clear leadership structure that could leverage their various strengths. The mediation team for the Maputo Accord process recognised that the nature of the conflict in Mozambique, which was characterised by two clearly defined parties to the conflict (government/Renamo) and strong leadership in each party (President Nyusi/Dhlakama/Momade), meant that there was a clear need to ensure both parties' buy-in to the process. To secure national ownership in the design of the process, the leaders of the two parties, Nyusi and Dhlakama, had to take charge and lead from the front. This entailed setting up the architecture, agenda, timelines and

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expectations of the process. In late 2016 the mediators established direct dialogue channels between the principals.

This new process was designed to be guided by Mozambicans, with the mediators focused on providing strategic guidance and acting as “fixers” when needed. As a result, the government and Renamo oversaw the drafting and implementation of all agreements. For example, the two commissions established in 2017 to develop proposals on the key issues of decentralisation and military affairs had equal government and Renamo representation, ensuring that the structure itself was a modality to foster a sense of full inclusion.

Recognising the need for technical and administrative support, a lean, discrete and nationally owned Peace Process Secretariat (PPS) was established with the approval of both parties in 2017. Modalities of support were also adapted according to the unique demands of the process. Firstly, the process was bilaterally supported by the Swiss government through the then Swiss ambassador to Mozambique, Mirko Manzoni. This allowed for discretion and the bringing in of a small number of donors. The process then moved to multilateral support via the good offices of the Personal Envoy of the UN Secretary-General (UNPESG), Mirko Manzoni, who was appointed to this post a month before the signing of the Maputo Accord, with a Basket Fund for the PPS administered through the UN Office for Project Services to support technical implementation. This strategic and agile approach to international support for the process based on the buy-in of the principals paved the way for a more effective and enduring structure. This well managed movement between bilateral and multilateral support, based on the needs of the process, was key to its success and serves as a model that could be replicated in other processes.

### **Progressive implementation and building trust**

A defining feature of mediation in Mozambique was the use of a system of “implementing while negotiating”, or “progressive implementation”. Key to the rebuilding of trust was the dedication shown by both sides to the use of dialogue and confidence building measures throughout the mediation and implementation phase. Confidence building measures became a strategic approach to moving the parties at the negotiating table towards the resolution of the conflict. This involved a mutual willingness to take calculated risks, which required openness, cooperation, and gestures of goodwill. Flexibility and willingness to take these risks particularly by the mediation team and the principals allowed the peace process to proceed despite numerous challenges.

As a starting point, the mediators emphasised that negotiations should not continue while conflict was still under way. A phone conversation between President Nyusi and Dhlakama on 26 December 2016 led to Dhlakama announcing a temporary ceasefire, which was extended indefinitely in May 2017. In the first year of mediation following the ceasefire, the government security forces withdrew from several locations in Gorongosa district, and the two leaders held their first in-person meeting in three years.<sup>17</sup> The meeting marked a historic moment, with Nyusi going to the bush to meet with Dhlakama, which many considered to be a demonstration of both principals’ commitment to the process. Despite the sudden death of Dhlakama, on 23 May 2018 Parliament unanimously approved a revision of the Constitution to deepen decentralisation, and a Memorandum of Understanding on Military Affairs was signed in August of the same year.

On 29 July 2019 Parliament unanimously passed an amnesty law, which President Nyusi stated was necessary for effective, lasting and definitive peace. On the same day, registration for the demobilisation of the first group of DDR beneficiaries took place. This was followed on 1 August 2019 by the



A key aspect of “implementing while negotiating” for the Mozambican process was that the same mediators who supported the negotiation phase also facilitated the implementation phase.

principals signing the Agreement on the Definitive Cessation of Military Hostilities, while on 6 August 2019 they signed the Maputo Accord for Peace and National Reconciliation,<sup>18</sup> which committed both parties to ending all political and military hostilities and implementing the legislative package on decentralisation and DDR.

A key aspect of “implementing while negotiating” for the Mozambican process was that the same mediators who supported the negotiation phase also facilitated the implementation phase. To ensure continuity and consistency, on 8 July 2019 the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, appointed Swiss Ambassador Mirko Manzoni as his Personal Envoy for Mozambique, whose role was to provide good offices in facilitating the dialogue between the government and Renamo and to facilitate progress towards the signing and subsequent implementation of a peace agreement between the parties. The inclusion of the mediators (Manzoni and Sanghrajka) in the implementation of the Maputo Accord allowed challenges to be addressed and resolved in a timely manner, ultimately keeping the peace process on track. By June 2023 all 5,221 former combatants were disarmed and demobilised and have returned to communities of their choice across the country.

### **Achieving the impossible: the case of pensions**

One of the most important features of the Maputo Accord process occurred four years after the signing of the peace agreement: the passing of a historic decree on 23 March 2023 by the Council of Ministers extending pension rights to eligible DDR beneficiaries. While wording on pensions did not feature in the Maputo Accord, this significant achievement was mediated over a number of years by the UNPESG Mirko Manzoni. Not only was it a pivotal milestone towards ensuring socio-economic reintegration and a dignified return to civilian life for former combatants, but it was also a targeted effort to address an unfulfilled aspect of the 1992 peace agreement, thus fostering a sense of inclusion and political reconciliation and recognition. Given that the average age of former combatants at the time of demobilisation was 55, this important issue was articulated by former combatants as their top priority for reintegration from the outset.

Manzoni and Sanghrajka prioritised work on pensions from the early stages of the mediation phase in a strategic manner recognising that it would be a complex and politically sensitive endeavour. In addition to this, negotiations on pensions took place in parallel with the implementation of DDR. The work of the mediators was essential to maintain the commitment of both parties to advance with DDR against the backdrop of ongoing high stakes negotiations. In April 2022, a breakthrough was reached during a meeting between the principals when they agreed to set up a pensions working group with a clear timeline for jointly creating the conditions for eligible former combatants to be included in the national pensions system. The working group was composed of representatives of the Parties along with PPS and also engaged with representatives of international financial institutions to ensure financial considerations were aligned and coherent with the national context.

The commitment and persistence of those involved, including the mediators, allowed for the achievement of what had been considered by many as impossible with the pensions decree passed in March 2023. Reflective of the human-centred approach to DDR, following the end of disarmament and demobilisation activities in June 2023 efforts shifted to supporting DDR beneficiaries to apply for pensions. The pensions working group took on an operational role, hosting registration sessions in locations across the country that succeeded in reaching high numbers of DDR beneficiaries and guiding them through the application process. As of writing, 4,237 DDR beneficiaries and eligible family members have been registered for their pensions and 3,547





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are receiving their payments. It is a first for the world in terms of including DDR beneficiaries into the national pensions system.

### **Strategic and sustained inclusion**

The lean nature of the mediation team and the central role of the principals meant that bringing other actors into the process needed to be done in an incremental way. The two commissions that were established in early 2017 tasked with developing proposals on decentralisation and military affairs were presented with memorandums drawn up by several political parties and civil society actors. The inclusion of these actors at this stage was an important buy-in to ensure that the concerns of different segments of society found expression in the policy proposals that emerged. At the local level, the mediators supported the work of “peace clubs” that brought together religious and community leaders to promote non-violent means of conflict resolution. Peace clubs, which began in 2014, also played an instrumental role in helping returning combatants to reintegrate into society.

In order to facilitate international support that maintained national ownership, an International Contact Group, led by Ambassador Manzoni, was tasked with providing coordinated financial and technical assistance for the implementation of the process. The strategic engagement of international actors was also strengthened by the creation of a donor coordinator role for the Basket Fund, a position held by Canada since 2020. This role ensured that messaging among donors was coherent and unified and, most importantly, streamlined donor engagement, which allowed the mediators to focus on the core work at hand.

Since the signing of the Maputo Accord, a broad range of actors have supported the implementation of DDR activities based on a human-centred approach. Government agencies, the private sector, the diplomatic community, academia, and the wider society have played important roles in advancing reintegration and reconciliation. For example, the Ministry of Education has been driving efforts to incorporate peacebuilding materials into the national education curriculum, while the private sector supports employment and livelihood opportunities for DDR beneficiaries, their families and communities.

This approach was also essential for gender inclusion, which was integrated into the process in a strategic and holistic way. It was not pushed but was steadily built with the parties and principals. Efforts in this regard included the PPS leading by example (over 50% of staff were women) and ensuring that women’s roles in the process did not follow the usual gender stereotypes, including key ministerial positions relating to implementation being held by women (e.g. the minister for combatants was a woman). Similarly, almost one-third of the DDR beneficiaries reintegrated into the Police Force of Mozambique were women. The DDR process itself was gender responsive, e.g. separate hygiene and sleeping facilities were included in the assembly areas where disarmament and demobilisation activities took place. The continued buy-in of the principals to gender equity was evident when in 2022 Mozambique became the third country in Africa to have 50% or more women in ministerial positions.

### **Flexibility in responding to challenges**

Flexibility and willingness to take calculated risks particularly by the mediation team and the principals allowed the peace process to proceed despite numerous challenges. It was built on the principle of not allowing the fear of challenges or failure to become an obstacle for peace. Instead, the mediators and parties utilised challenges as opportunities. Strategy was developed in the field, and constantly changed and evolved based on the



## Tangible evidence of the need for flexibility and resilience in the face of challenges was also evident in the mediators' response to the emergence of the self-proclaimed Renamo Military Junta (RMJ).

needs of the process. One key challenge to the process that was overcome with flexibility emerged in May 2018, when just before the passing of a constitutional amendment (on decentralisation) in Parliament, the Renamo leader, Afonso Dhlakama, died suddenly of natural causes. His death posed a major risk to the process, with some analysts suggesting that it would mark the end of the peace talks.

In response, as a mark of respect, President Nyusi granted Dhlakama an official funeral, which demonstrated the power of small but impactful gestures to bolster trust. The mediators worked to organise a face-to-face meeting between Nyusi and the newly appointed interim Renamo leader, Ossufo Momade, which took place nine days after Dhlakama's funeral. Shortly after this, Parliament approved the constitutional amendment.

Tangible evidence of the need for flexibility and resilience in the face of challenges was also evident in the mediators' response to the emergence of the self-proclaimed Renamo Military Junta (RMJ) in mid-2019, led by Mariano Nhongo, a former Renamo military officer. The RMJ called for the resignation of Momade over the way he was overseeing the implementation process, and carried out approximately 57 attacks in central Mozambique between August 2019 and December 2020. In order to protect the peace process and DDR, the UNPESG and the Senior Advisor engaged the government, Renamo leaders and the RMJ's senior members to support each side in finding common ground. These efforts led to President Nyusi's announcement of a ceasefire in October 2020 to allow RMJ members join the DDR process. This was followed by the RMJ's announcement of a ceasefire. In December 2021, following Nhongo's death in a confrontation with government security forces, the parties reached out to the remaining RMJ members to join the DDR process, resulting in a total of 90 members participating.

The COVID-19 pandemic was a third challenge that could have derailed the implementation of DDR. However, the UNPESG and Senior Advisor Sanghrajka spearheaded prompt and robust action to assist the principals by designing and agreeing on the Road Map for DDR, including working with smaller groups of former combatants for shorter periods of time to safeguard participating stakeholders, and in particular the DDR beneficiaries who were in the high-risk category for COVID-19. DDR activities safely resumed in June 2020, demonstrating the principals' unity and dedication to the successful implementation of DDR and the Maputo Accord.

This ability to respond to challenges throughout the implementation phase using the same agile structures became a confidence building measure in and of itself that mutually reinforced the principle of implementing while negotiating.



**Photo 2:** The President of the Republic of Mozambique, Filipe Jacinto Nyusi, and the former leader of Renamo, Afonso Dhlakama, meet in Gorongosa district in August 2017.



## Conclusion

The mediation and peace process in Mozambique from late 2016 to present was characterised by a unique, agile, and adaptive approach to peace negotiations and peacebuilding. This distinguished it from the previous processes, which were stop-start, had large and fixed structures, and lacked a shared strategic vision or commitment to discretion. The strategic design of the peace process afforded the principals, the mediation team, and various stakeholders the flexibility to think and operate using alternative perspectives. The process emphasised trust, discretion, dialogue, humility, and national ownership, and was guided by the leadership and commitment of the parties.

This process embraced confidence building measures to win trust between the parties and the confidence of the public, providing stakeholders with a sense of purpose, participation, and accomplishment. Additionally, the involvement of the same key mediators in all phases of the process enhanced continuity and kept implementation on track. The passing of the pensions decree served as an example of implementing while negotiating, demonstrating strategic thinking and perseverance in the face of what was considered an impossibility. These factors characterised a responsive process that allowed the parties the flexibility needed to overcome obstacles and challenges.

While no two conflicts and no two peace processes are the same, strategies and lessons from the 2019 Maputo Accord process as a nationally owned and nationally led process can be transferable to conflict and recovery efforts in other contexts, and should be considered by mediators, peacebuilding practitioners, implementers, policymakers, and other stakeholders as relevant to their local contexts around the world. Mozambique is a leading example of the ways in which nationally led peacebuilding can bring about sustainable peace.

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**Photo 3:** An aerial view of the Murrupula regional assembly area, where DDR beneficiaries participated in disarmament and demobilisation activities in Murrupula, Nampula province, in November 2021.



## Endnotes

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## Photos

**Photos 1-3:** Peace Process Secretariat (PPS)

# Building Peace Together

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