

## Budgetary constraints in the Education sector undermine the capacity to respond to challenges imposed by COVID-19

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Webinar: Budgetary constraints in the Education sector undermine the capacity to respond to challenges imposed by COVID-19

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=591501711770637>

### 1. Introductory note

The COVID-19 pandemic requires a constant review of the decisions being taken during the implementation of public policies. When the first signs emerged that the country might be affected by this pandemic, it seemed that it was the health sector that would have to be boosted on short notice, but over time, challenges arose in other sectors, bringing to the fore the government’s inability to respond in a timely manner to external shocks. The education sector is an example of this and will be the focus of this note, with special attention to primary education.

In 2003/2004 the government opted to abolish school enrolment fees for primary education in order to stimulate the school enrolment rate<sup>2</sup> and with this action started to: provide school books free of charge, accelerate construction of classrooms, and train teachers, among other actions (UNESCO, 2019)<sup>3</sup>. The policy itself is not bad but suffers from implementation problems and is affected by exogenous shocks every year, requiring flexibility from its executors to achieve results.

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<sup>2</sup> In 2000, the net school enrolment rate in EP1 (1st to 5th grades) was 54% and in EP2 (6th and 7th grades) 23.2%. Source: Plano de Acção de Redução da Pobreza I (2001 to 2005).

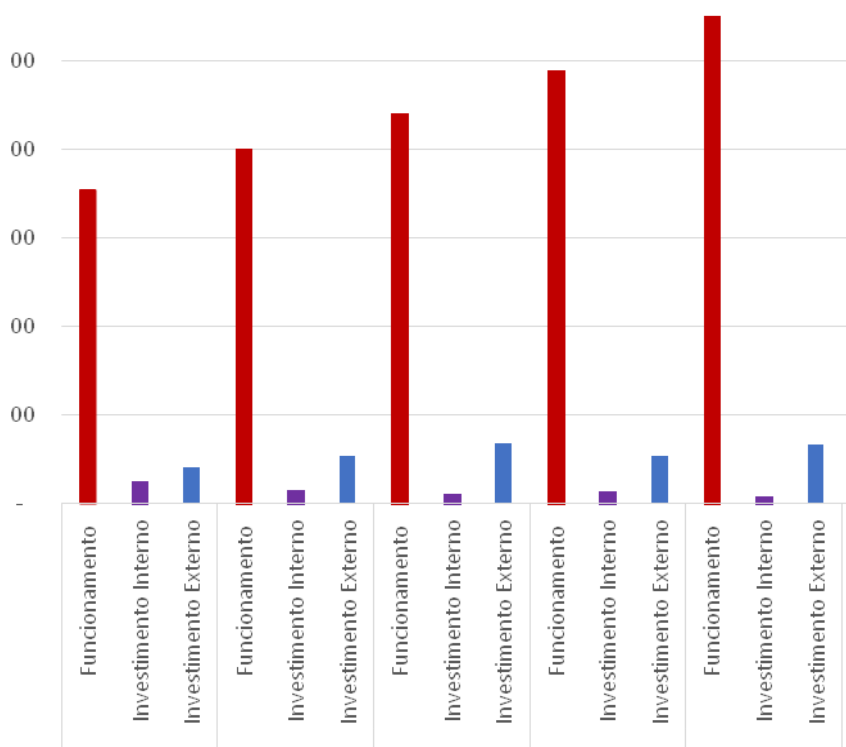
<sup>3</sup> <http://www.mined.gov.mz/Documents/Politic%20Educa%20ionais.pdf>

One of the issues affecting its implementation are the structural problems of public finance management, i.e. the slow monitoring of allocation priorities (especially in the social sectors), with population growth; poor mobilization of resources; as well as lack of transparency<sup>4</sup> in the implementation of expenditure and management of public debt, all of which have constrained the resources made available to the education sector (and other sectors) for the implementation of its policies.

In addition, the fact that the country is plagued every year by natural disasters has undermined efforts in terms of infrastructure construction. In the last 4 years 7.322 classrooms have been destroyed but only 4.526 have been built.<sup>5</sup>

In terms of resource distribution, between 2015 and 2019 the education sector received, cumulatively, around 222.9 billion meticais (MMT) for general education and 36.3 MMT for higher education, totaling 259.2 MMT. This is on average of 51.8 MMT per year (around 21% of total expenditure in each of the years in question), making education the social sector that receives the most resources in this group in nominal terms, although in the same period the average per-capita resources for the provinces did not exceed 2 meticais.<sup>6</sup>

**Figure 1: Resources channeled to general education**



Source: CGE (2015-2019); Budget Law 2020

Considering the large number of damaged classrooms, this draws attention to the need to increasingly opt for the construction of infrastructure resistant to climatic events, because the investments made have not translated into sufficient quantitative and/or qualitative progress in the sector.

In the last 5 years, investment expenditure has been well below current expenditure (which accounts for around 86% of the total) and resources directed to investment have been mostly foreign (around 89%), which implies insufficient efforts by the government to expand and improve the quality of infrastructure in this sector.

**During this period, only about 11% of the sector's domestic public resources were channeled to**

<sup>4</sup> The Open Budget Index 2019 was 42/100, well below the minimum desirable level of 60/100.

<sup>5</sup> Report of the Balanço do Plano Económico e Social (2016 a 2019).

<sup>6</sup> Calculations by the author, based on total resources allocated to the provinces (2015 to 2019) versus population per province

investment in general education, showing little effort to ensure accelerated expansion of infrastructure that would now have been useful to address the COVID-19 pandemic, and could even have been used as auxiliary health centers.

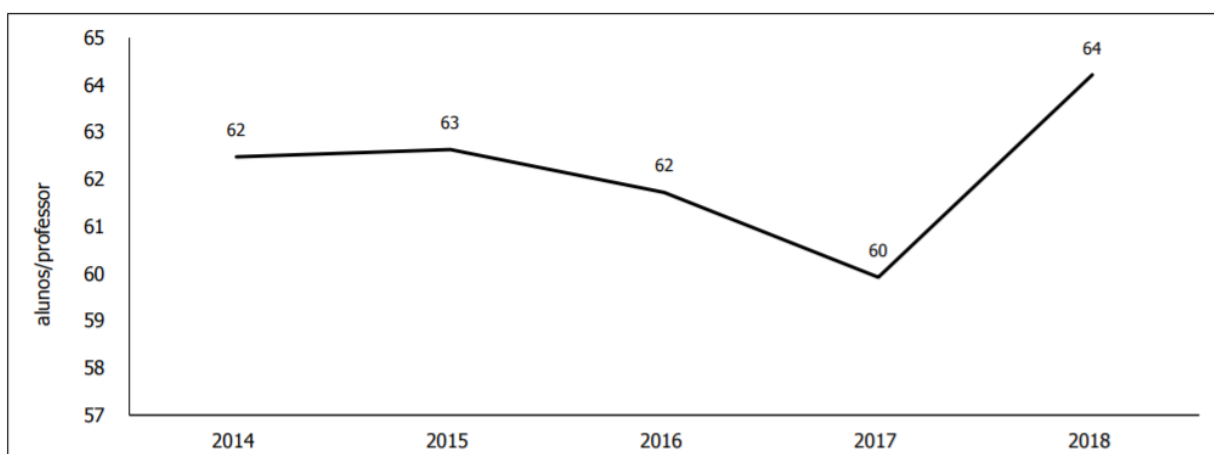
## 2. Primary Education

This section looks at the student/teacher ratio, which is influenced by the insufficient number of teachers hired in relation to new admissions. In addition, other sector targets are presented below that show a differentiated implementation (between positive and negative) of the economic and social plans.

According to the report on the Outturn of the Economic and Social Plan 2019 (BdPES), the average pupil-teacher ratio<sup>7</sup> in primary education in the 1st grade<sup>8</sup> (public daytime education) was 65.1, which represents non-compliance with the target of 62.7 planned for that year.

Analyzing this indicator by province, Nampula (75.7) stands out for having the worst ratio (which by the way is the province with the most active COVID-19 cases), followed by Cabo Delgado (72.9), Zambézia (70.3), Niassa (68.2), Tete (64.0), Sofala (63.9) and the remaining provinces with above average scores, the best (46.9) being found in Inhambane.

**Figure 2: Pupil-teacher ratio (primary school)**



Source: INE (Anuário Estatístico 2018)

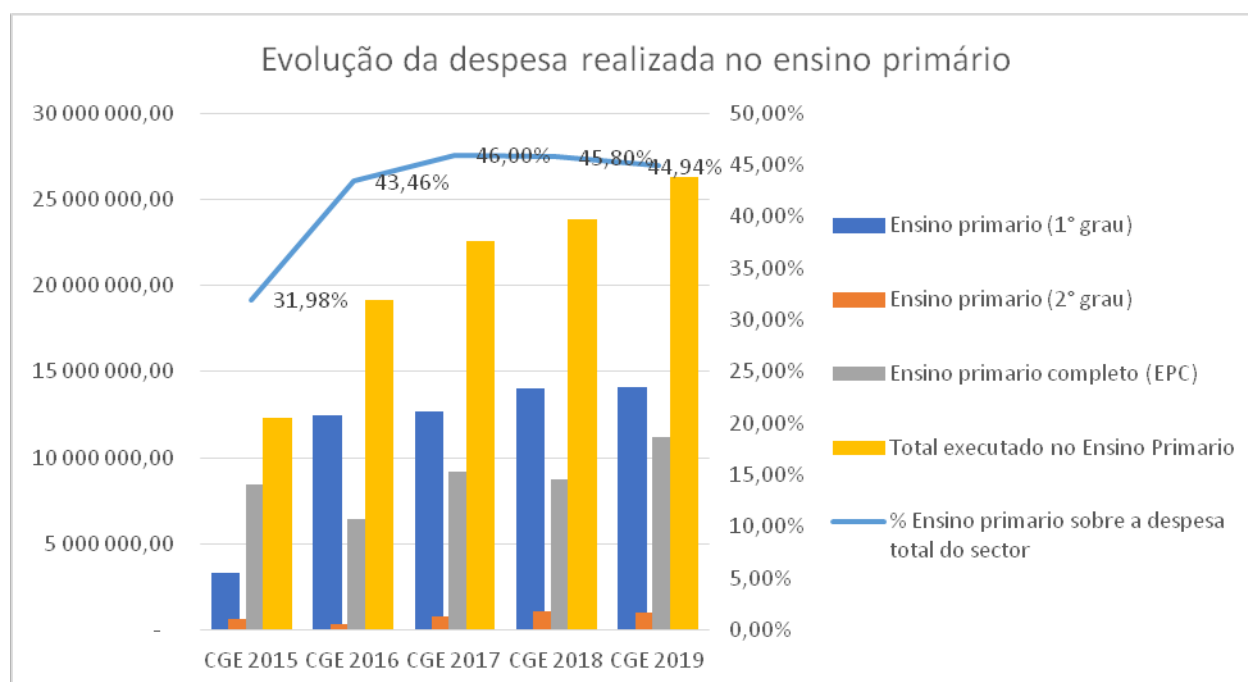
Statistical data compiled for the period 2014 to 2018, the most recently available, show that this ratio for primary education (1st and 2nd<sup>9</sup> grades) has declined notably in 2018 after showing a relative improvement between 2014 and 2017, meaning that the pace of new admissions has not been matched by government investment in human resources. The financial crisis caused by the hidden debt scandal may have influenced this disinvestment.

<sup>7</sup> See discussion of the optimal student/teacher ratio in: [http://www.mined.gov.mz/POEMA/MA%2055/58\\_o\\_número\\_ideal\\_de\\_alunos\\_por\\_profesor\\_um\\_assunto\\_controverso.html](http://www.mined.gov.mz/POEMA/MA%2055/58_o_número_ideal_de_alunos_por_profesor_um_assunto_controverso.html)

<sup>8</sup> EP1, grades 1 through 5.

<sup>9</sup> EP2, grades 6 and 7.

**Figure 3: Trend of expenditure on primary education**



Source: CGE 2015-2019

Meanwhile, in a context where there has been a continuous increase (in nominal terms) in the resources allocated to the education sector, with primary education receiving at least a 43% increase, the data show that, in real terms, the resources are insufficient to accommodate the needs of the sector and thus show that there has been a discontinuity in the implementation of policies to improve access to basic education.

The same occurred with respect to other goals of this sector, such as the construction of schools (classrooms) and acquisition of desks, which in some years show variations of more than 100% with respect to the plan and in others none at all (see table below), showing a lack of predictability regarding the achievement of the goals defined with the resources invested.

**Table 1: Monitoring of quantitative indicators**

	2016		2017		2018		2019	
	Plano	Realizado	Plano	Realizado	Plano	Realizado	Plano	Realizado
Taxa líquida de escolarização	82.5%	82.5%	86,5% (85,5% raparigas)	84,4% (83,9% raparigas)	85% (84% raparigas)	93,1% (92,5% raparigas)	93,5% (92,7% raparigas)	93,% (93,3% raparigas)
Nº de professores contratados	8 390	8 835	8 106	8 085	5 013	5 027	6 060	6 060
Nº de carteiras escolares distribuídas	70 000	38	60 325	62 249	65 608	136 052	225	269
Rácio aluno por professor no Ensino Primário do 1ºGrau (ensino público diurno)	62,0	61,7	60,0	59,9	59,0	64,0	62,7	65,1
Número de livros distribuídos	14 145 000	14 145 000	13 776 000	15 457 475	13 783 700	13 934 600	14 345 000	15 134 443
Salas de aula construídas	689	442	518	590	1422	2880	766	614
Salas de aulas destruídas (Calamidades naturais)		316		2 364		665		3 977
Variação líquida de salas de aulas		126		1 774		2 215		3 363

Source: BdPES (2016 to 2019)

The sector's quantitative indicators show that, while there has been a positive trend in the net enrolment rate, this was not accompanied by a hiring of teachers, as explained above.

One worrying aspect is evidenced by the net change in classrooms, which is measured by the difference between the number of classrooms built and destroyed each year. The net total for this indicator between 2016 and 2019 is negative, which means that even with annual investments in classrooms by the government, the

deficit is at least 2,796<sup>10</sup> classrooms, excluding additional current needs, which shows that in real terms there has been no progress in the quantitative aspects of infrastructure in this sector.

According to Water Aid<sup>11</sup>, 52% of schools in the country do not have basic coverage of sanitation services and 75% of schools do not have basic coverage of hygiene services.

### 3. Education versus COVID-19

#### (i) Sample needs for physical return to school <sup>12</sup>

In combination, the aspects described above invalidate any intention the government may have for a possible resumption of classes with a physical presence, without complying with at least the following measures:

- Class rotation/subdivision – with the assessment based on the student/teacher ratio of 65.1 on average, each class should be divided into at least 4 sub classes to permit observing the maximum allowed at present, of 20 people, in a given physical space;
- Increase the number of teachers to be hired (each new class grouping should have a new teacher to allow students to complete full shifts each day);
- Increase in the number of classrooms (each new class grouping should have one classroom to avoid crowding) - in this regard the education sector should consider the idea of identifying the number of pupils per square meter, taking into account the differentiation in terms of classroom characteristics;
- Increase in the number of school desks (new class groupings should be equipped, and double desks will be for one pupil only);
- Ensuring the availability of hygiene and disinfection products in schools (running water);
- Through the School Support Fund, finance projects to produce affordable masks for distribution to poor pupils.

Therefore, an evaluation of the measures proposed above will change the planning and budgeting of the sector for 2020, which may require a revision of the State Budget for 2020, if it is decided to adopt the recommendations.

In this sense, taking into account that the context of each province is different, the time for compliance with these measures will also be different. Therefore, it is worth envisaging a possible cancellation of the school year, so that the second semester can be used to make feasible improvements, for a return in 2021.

#### i) Contingency plan disclosed by the government

The education sector is not included in the general contingency plan released so far by the government. In an analysis published by CIP<sup>13</sup>, it had already been suggested that the plan for dealing with the pandemic should be detailed and made public, so that civil society could monitor and provide advice with respect to its implementation.

The Minister of Economy and Finance, in general terms, stated that with the \$700 million requested from international cooperation partners to address COVID-19, the government would make its highest priority the construction of district hospitals. However, the current scenario and new prospects for the spread of

<sup>10</sup> Sum of the net change of classrooms from 2016 to 2019, calculated by the author. Source: BdPES 2016-2019.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.wateraid.org/mz/quem-somos/factos-e-estatisticas> (Accessed on 21 June 2020 at 10h12).

<sup>12</sup> Valid for private education, within the appropriate framework.

<sup>13</sup> <https://cipmoz.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Governo-deve-publicar-plano-1.pdf>

the coronavirus show that, in the short term, this priority should be reviewed and, in fact, the accelerated construction of classrooms should be made operational, as well as the hiring of teachers (at least four times the current number), so that the education sector may acquire the capacity to face the pandemic and not contribute to accelerating its spread.

This means that there is a need to review the priorities defined above, in the various sectors, as well as to adjust them to the resources available (including donations that the government has been receiving), reinforcing the idea that a review of the 2020 State Budget is urgently needed.

Specifically regarding the education sector (public primary education), it is important to rethink the sector's priorities for this year and envisage a possible cancellation of the school year. The idea behind this is to provide time to enable it to face this crisis and avoid an accelerated spread of COVID-19.

**In addition, CIP, once again, calls on the government to involve all active forces in society in the decision-making on measures to address this pandemic and in monitoring expenditure in the context of COVID-19.**

## 4. Conclusions and recommendations

The education sector, especially at the primary level, is not ready to resume classroom activities in 2020 because budgetary constraints have negatively influenced its ability to respond to the challenges imposed by COVID-19, even though it received, in nominal terms, around 21% of total expenditure executed between 2015 and 2019:

- In 2019, the student-teacher ratio in the first grade was 65.1, approximately 4 times the maximum number of people allowed in a physical space;
- Between 2015 and 2019, only 11% of the resources for investment in the education sector came from the State Budget, the remainder being covered by foreign funds. The largest portion of the resources applied in this sector (over 80%) was directed to operating expenditure;
- Between 2016 and 2019, 4,526 classrooms were built but another 7,322 were destroyed in the same period, meaning that the net change in classrooms was negative;
- A considerable number of classrooms in rural areas of the country do not have adequate water and sanitation conditions for the hygiene of students. In this context, CIP recommends that the government review the priorities described in their published contingency plan;
- A revision of the 2020 State Budget is urgently needed to allow for the reallocation and reinforcement of funds to meet current priorities;
- It is important to rethink the sector's priorities for this school year and envisage a possible cancellation, especially in primary education, in order to allow time to create minimum conditions in this second half of the year, to avoid an accelerated spread of COVID-19;
- It is crucial to promote a broad and open debate on the plan to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic in the other economic and social sectors.

**To gain the confidence of Mozambicans, the government should involve all the active forces of society in decision making and in monitoring expenditures made in the context of COVID-19.**





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