

Policy Brief I

Urban space and poverty in Maputo, Mozambique



Photo: Bjørn Enge Bertelsen

This is the first of a series of policy briefs relating to a research project, “The Ethnography of a Divided City: Socio-politics, Poverty and Gender in Maputo, Mozambique” (2012–2015), funded by the Norwegian Research Council. The objective is to contribute with ethnographic knowledge and ‘views from below’ to on-going urban development and poverty reduction efforts in Mozambique.

WHAT THE STATISTICS SAY

Urbanisation and urban poverty are central aspects of contemporary Africa. While urban areas account for an increasing part of the continent’s positive macro-economic growth and provide opportunities for many, they are also witnessing emerging conditions of inequality and poverty, environmental problems, political instability, violence and crime.

The most recent urban population figures show that Mozambique is in an intermediate position in sub-Saharan Africa, with 31 per cent estimated for 2010 and 36 per cent for 2025, but the country has one of the highest urban (50 per cent) compared to rural (57 per cent) poverty rates. With reference to Maputo, the official poverty rate decreased from 53.6 per cent to 36.2 per cent between 2002/03 and 2008/09, primarily due to increases in employment among construction

and security companies, although it probably also relates to advances in the informal economy.

At the same time, there are substantial differences in income and expenditure between the better off and the poor in Maputo. The overall Gini-coefficient is 0.7, and while the highest quintile has a per capita income of MZN 4315, the equivalent figure for the lowest quintile is MZN 388, which is very low in a commoditised setting like Maputo.

Households in the wealthiest quintile spend 37.6 per cent of their income on housing, 23.6 per cent on ‘other expenses’, and only 17.8 per cent on food. The poorest households, on the other hand, spend nearly 50 per cent of their income on necessary food and another 32.1 per cent on housing – with very little left for other expenditures and investments in the future.

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In addition, these general figures on poverty and well-being in Maputo conceal significant variations among the different urban areas, as evidenced in the table below, which provides information on the city's five urban districts (see also Map).

CURRENT POLICIES

Governments and donors in Mozambique have demonstrated a rather ambiguous attitude towards urban development over time, and urban poverty is not singled out as a special issue in the National Poverty Reduction Strategies (PARPA I and II and PARP). In addition, very few donors see urban development and poverty reduction as priority areas, with the World Bank, Switzerland and Germany being partial exceptions.

The policy area is further weakened by overlapping responsibilities that make coherent planning difficult among national institutions such as the Ministry of State Administration, the Ministry for Coordination of Environmental Affairs (MICOA), the Ministry of Public Works and Housing, and the Ministry of Planning and Development (MPD).

The first Urban Poverty Reduction Plan was introduced by the MPD in 2010, as a direct response to the urban riots in Maputo in September that year. The Plan outlines the special characteristics of urban poverty, and advocates employment creation and social protection measures for the very poorest.

In 2011, MICOA produced a 'National Strategy for Interventions in Informal Settlements in Mozambique', analysing the current situation and outlining possible interventions based on the formalisation of rights and popular participation.

The Maputo Municipality Five-Year Development Plan (2009–2013) does not offer a specific analysis of urban poverty *per se*, but emphasises the importance of physical infrastructure for development, such as roads, water, electricity and waste collection.

The World Bank's Maputo Municipal Development Programme II (2010–2015), which is the main donor intervention, emphasises 'broad institutional and financial reform', with

the current second phase focussing on basic services, land management and public/private sector cooperation.

Finally, a 'Strategy for Intervention in Informal Settlements' was produced by the Maputo Municipality in 2010. This argues along the lines of the National Strategy (see above), and concrete Urban Development Plans (PPUs) are currently being developed for formal as well as informal settlement areas.

In line with hegemonic discourses, the policy In line with current thinking, the policy documents make a clear distinction between 'formal' and 'informal' urban space, and have an overarching aim to 'formalise' the 'informal'. The National Strategy, however, makes the case for people's active participation in the informal settlement, and that 'occupation in good faith' should be a basic principle for settlement rights.

ETHNOGRAPHIC CONTRIBUTIONS

In order to understand urban poverty, it is necessary to complement the notion of 'formal' and 'informal' urban spaces with a focus on the lived realities and everyday practises among the inhabitants of Maputo's *bairros* (neighbourhoods).

Urban poverty is multifaceted and in many ways more 'dramatic' than rural poverty because of the anxiety-inducing socio-economic context, the heavy reliance on cash income and the vulnerability of social relationships in towns and cities.

Urban social formations are also marked by a high degree of visible inequalities among people living in different kinds of urban space: differences in housing, infrastructure, clothing, and commercial outlets, for example, are continuous reminders to the poor about their 'failure' as urban residents.

The urban riots in 2008 and 2010 were palpable expressions of popular dissatisfaction with developments in Maputo, but they also relate to the dearth of viable platforms of communication between the *bairro* populations and the national and municipal governments. In the latter, Frelimo dominates the scene down to the smallest quarters (*quaterões*) and blocks

SOCIO-ECONOMIC INDICATORS, MAPUTO DISTRICTS

Urban District	Economically active population %	Poor housing %	Life expectancy Years	Secondary education %
KaMpfumu	56.1	12.6	67.6	45.6
KaMaxaquene	51.5	84.1	52.2	15.4
Nlhamankulu	53.9	61.5	55.5	17.9
KaMavota	53.5	80.5	54.1	17.5
KaMubukwana	52.2	74.2	56.7	18.0

(*dez casas*), and effectively obstructs diversified forms of popular participation.

People in the *bairros* have clear opinions about the different 'levels of development' in Maputo's urban spaces. These opinions are primarily based on perceptions and experiences of levels of material poverty and wealth, land demarcation, housing standards, employment opportunities, and crime and security.

The most affluent *bairros* in the *cidade* ('city of cement'), such as Bairro Central, Polana Cimento, Sommershield, Triunfo and Costa do Sol – with their high-rise buildings, shopping-centres, hotels, restaurants, villas and gated communities – are seen as largely unattainable urban spaces for the majority of the population. Many would not even consider going there – for employment, commercial activities or leisure purposes.

In the 'old' central *bairros* or *suburbios* such as Alto Maé, Malanga, Chamankulo, Xipamanine and Micandjuine, the population increase and the central location have led to an 'informalisation' of economic activities, a saturated housing market, and increased crime and insecurity. These areas are regarded as properly urban but also as densely inhabited, perilous spaces. Among people who do not live there, they are primarily coveted for their commercial opportunities.

Finally, the 'peri-urban' *bairros* such as Zimpeto, Malhazine, Inhagoia, 25 de Junho and Magoanine are regarded as having a mixed socio-economic

composition and, as such, they are regarded as permeable. These areas are also undergoing rapid change: for those with the necessary resources, there is scope for agency and social mobility; the poorest, however, risk expulsion under these kinds of circumstances.

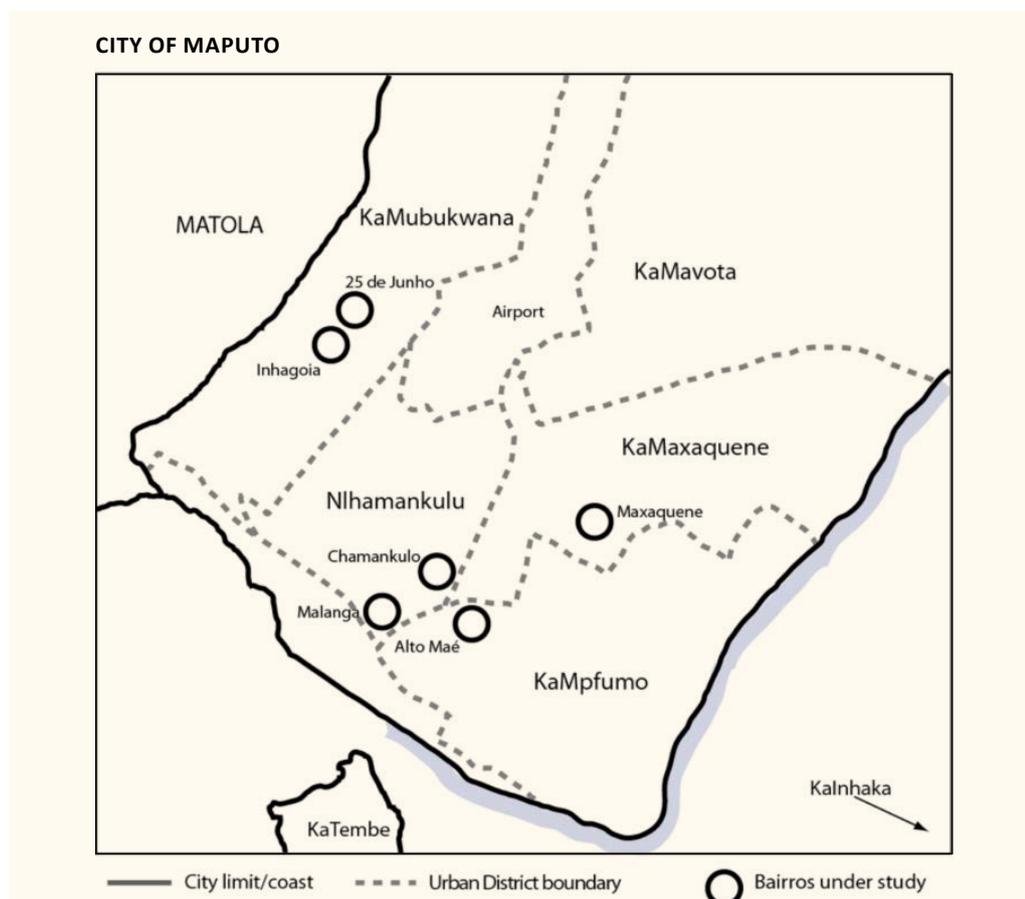
This division of urban space into three types of area highlights the kinds of dynamic processes that impinge on people's urban strategies. Assessing the 'potentiality' of urban space in this way, many opt to stay in 'their' *bairro*, despite its informality, in order to pursue 'realistic dreams' within what they regard as a combination of structural limitations and a need for belonging and security.

At the level of households and individuals, people's perceptions of urban poverty and well-being relate to notions of material poverty and social relationships and their urban strategies are closely connected with their class and gender.

The very poorest (*xiculungo* or 'destitutes') are largely imprisoned in their poverty with limited options for exploiting urban spaces. They often depend on informal economic activities in their own *bairro*, where income-earning opportunities are rare. They lack both necessary social networks and the money to invest in merchandise and transportation.

The poor (*xangamo* or 'chronically' poor) also struggle against many odds, but they are in a position (often through informal social networks) to move outside their own *bairro* and

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This brief is based on Tvedten et al. (2011), 'Xiculungo Revisited: Assessing the Implications of PARPA II in Maputo 2007–2010. CMI Report 2011:1. Bergen: Chr. Michelsen Institute, and Bertelsen, Roque and Tvedten (forthcoming 2013/14), *Transcending Dichotomies and Diversities: Discursive Dynamics of Maputo's Urban Space*. It is disseminated in cooperation with the Cities Alliance.

seek employment and income in wealthier and more populous suburbs and markets. Although the competition is tough, options for capital accumulation are better; however, they are also vulnerable both to material losses and to deterioration of their social conditions.

The wealthy or 'better off' consist of two groups: those who are regarded as having worked hard and who 'deserve' their wealth (*xantambuluku*), and those who are believed to have become wealthy through the exploitation of others (*xigogo*). The wealthy are generally considered to belong to the *cidade* and hence a different world, but they are also present in some of the sub-urban and peri-urban bairros.

While there are variations within each of these categories in terms of levels of poverty and well-being, moving between the categories is considered difficult. While the vigorous urban context holds many economic possibilities and options for social mobility, these are generally regarded as being unattainable for most people. The ensuing notion of being 'captured' in poverty, and not being able to take part in what the city has to offer, is at the heart of current dissatisfaction among poor people in Maputo's poor bairros.

POSSIBLE INTERVENTIONS

In order to accomplish further poverty reduction in Maputo, the point of departure must be a *combination* of formal planning processes to cover people's basic needs in terms of housing, water, electricity, sanitation and other infrastructure, and an appreciation of people's own perceptions of the constraints and opportunities inherent in their own *bairros* and beyond.

A precondition for viable poverty reduction interventions is to establish feasible platforms of communication with the local population. Maputo does not have strong, relevant civil society organisations, and Frelimo's political control in the *bairros* inhibits the free exchange of ideas and concerns. Forums for dialogue should preferably be established for the specific purpose of urban development.

A key concern of the urban poor is protection of usufruct rights to land and housing – for well-being, for security and as collateral for investments in economic activities. People have

trust in the current semi-formal system of land allocation in the informal settlements, and it is vital that this system is protected by defining zones where such land rights are endorsed. In the same vein, people must be allowed to build their houses incrementally without undue building regulations, taking into account the considerable toll that constructing a dwelling takes on the household economy.

The large majority of the poor depend on informal economic activities in production and commerce, but the informal economy is saturated with a restricted range of products with limited options for income. Interventions for poverty reduction should focus on broadening the scope of such activities, partly by promoting new forms of cooperation and partly by encouraging the development of new products through innovative design and manufacturing.

For most poor urban dwellers, lack of credit is a key impediment for investments in economic activities. Community-based rotating credit arrangements (*xitique*) are important for many, but funds are often inadequate and the arrangements often exclude the very poorest. The recently introduced Local Investment Fund is potentially important, but needs to be transparent and accompanied by training for the development of small-scale business plans.

One of the main constraints on economic entrepreneurship is transportation, which takes up a substantial part of household budgets. Improved roads and better means of transportation will make it possible for the poor to exploit opportunities by going to city spaces with more customers and the potential to charge higher prices. Improved roads and transportation out of the city will also facilitate urban-rural exchanges.

The very poorest will continue to be marginalised and left out, and systems of social protection will be vital. In addition to public social protection measures through the National Institute for Social Action – which reaches only a very small proportion of the eligible population – focus should be on support through civil society and religious organizations, community-based groups and philanthropists.