

DISTRICT ELECTIONS ARE IN EVERYONE'S INTEREST

Nyusi should launch a debate on the viability of district elections in 2024 for all Mozambicans, not only for Members of Frelimo

● A year after Celso Correia (the influential Central Committee member and Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development) proposed postponing the holding of district elections in 2024¹, this time it is the President of Frelimo who (re)launches the proposal. In a veiled way, of course. The stage is the same. Inside the Frelimo bodies. Celso Correia launched the debate in the fourth session of the Frelimo Central Committee, held in May 2021. Filipe Nyusi did the same: he proposed a reflection on the sustainability of moving towards district elections in 2024² at the closing of the fifth session of the Frelimo Central Committee. Last May.



¹ <https://evidencias.co.mz/2021/05/26/frelimo-ensaia-nova-revisao-da-constituicao-para-acomodar-terceiro-mandato/>

² <https://www.opais.co.mz/sim-ou-nao-as-eleicoes-distritais-em-2024-nyusi-remete-a-discussao-publica/>

In 2021, when Celso Correia launched the proposal, there were three years left before 2024, the year in which the first district elections are foreseen, from which the decentralized district governing bodies will emerge, namely District Assembly, District Administrator, District Executive Council. The debate had no repercussions. Neither inside nor outside the Party. Time is getting tighter, since there are only two years until 2024. It was necessary to relaunch the debate. And this time by the powerful voice of the President of Frelimo.

Filipe Nyusi said that the “Government, the Parliament, the political parties, and civil society are called upon to reflect whether, under the current conditions in the country, it would be feasible and sustainable to move forward with the elections of the district assemblies in 2024, as provided for in the Constitution, or whether we would need some more time to consolidate decentralized provincial governance.” Nyusi launches the invitation from the Frelimo pulpit, but the debate on decentralization is of interest to all Mozambicans, regardless of party affiliation or ideological inclinations.

The invitation should be made by the President of the Republic or by the Assembly of the Republic, sovereign bodies that enjoy broad democratic legitimacy, because they are elected by direct universal suffrage. It is true that, in the case of the President of the Republic, it would be the same personality who would make the invitation. But Filipe Nyusi would be speaking as President of the Republic, that is, Head of State, and President of all Mozambicans. And not just the members of the Frelimo Party. By launching the debate on the 2024 district elections in his capacity as President of the Republic, Nyusi would be acting as the guarantor of the Constitution of the Republic and of national unity. And not only of the cohesion of Frelimo members.

In his speech to the members of the Frelimo Central Committee, Nyusi acknowledged, albeit discreetly, the errors of the provincial (and district) decentralization model adopted, namely the attribution of superpowers to the figure of Secretary of State in the Province (appointed by the President of the Republic), to the detriment of the Province Governor, elected by universal suffrage. “Decentralization is not a linear, nor a finished process. It is up to us, the central and provincial bodies, and the



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other living forces of society, to deepen the functional analysis in order to maximize the opportunities of this figure and reduce the potential overlaps in the attributions and competencies of the bodies of provincial governance and those of State representation in the province³.”

Indeed, in 2018, when Filipe Nyusi, and former Renamo leader Afonso Dhlakama, agreed to introduce a new provincial and district decentralization package as a solution to the armed conflict, the opposition had a strong chance of winning the provincial elections and governing some provinces in the center and north of the country. Fearing a Renamo victory, Frelimo “emptied” the executive bodies of provincial decentralized governance, leaving the provincial governor without any effective powers, and gave “superpowers” to the Secretary of State in the province.

In the rush to secure political control of the decentralized governance territories, including in the provinces where, in a transparent and fair election, Renamo would emerge victorious, Frelimo led by Filipe Nyusi did not assess either the financial costs or the potential (now real) competence disputes that would result from the creation of two executive structures in the province: the Provincial Executive Council (headed by the Provincial Governor) and the Council of Provincial State Representation Services (headed by the Secretary of State in the Province).

Frelimo “won” in all provinces, but the “victory” did not eliminate the potential for

power disputes between Governors and Secretaries of State in the Province. And these disputes began months after their assumption of office. Some managed quietly and others not so much. This was the case of Pio Matos, Governor of Zambézia who, in September 2020, launched harsh criticism of the decentralization process and demanded more powers. “Decentralizing is not easy business. I have it, but I have to give it to the other. Do you think it’s easy to give power away? Do you think it’s easy? Then the central power resists”⁴.

Besides criticizing, Pio Matos demanded more power to govern and said that the Zambezians want to be masters of their destinies. “We, the Zambezians, want to be the masters of our destinies. We want to govern in Zambézia province.” The Governor of Zambézia used several examples to demonstrate his frustration with the fact that he is always taking orders from Maputo (read central government) in a province in which he was elected by universal and direct suffrage. “What we want is the policy of local problem - local solution. We don’t want a local problem and then ask Maputo to come and solve it. How long will it take? Is it going to come this year? No”⁵.

Pio Matos even compared the central power to a father who does not want to emancipate his son, even though he knows that he is of age. And he insisted once again on the idea that the Governor of the Province should take care of development issues, leaving State issues to the State. “The State will continue to control the Police, it

³ <https://www.opais.co.mz/sim-ou-nao-as-eleicoes-distritais-em-2024-nyusi-remete-a-discussao-publica/>

⁴ <https://cddmoz.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/PIO-MATOS-CRITICA-DESCENTRALIZAC%CC%A7A%CC%83O-E-EXIGE-PODER-%E2%80%9CNo%CC%81s-os-zambeianos-queremos-ser-os-donos-dos-nossos-destinos%E2%80%9D.pdf>

⁵ <https://cddmoz.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/PIO-MATOS-CRITICA-DESCENTRALIZAC%CC%A7A%CC%83O-E-EXIGE-PODER-%E2%80%9CNo%CC%81s-os-zambeianos-queremos-ser-os-donos-dos-nossos-destinos%E2%80%9D.pdf>

will continue to control the courts, it will continue to control the Army, it will continue to control Migration. State services will be controlled by the state. We want to take care of our development, we want to develop Zambézia,” he declared it, speaking at a session of the Zambézia Provincial Assembly in September 2020⁶.

Two years later, it is the President of Frelimo who comes to defend the need to deepen provincial decentralization, reducing “the potential overlaps in the attributions and competencies of the provincial decentralized governance bodies and those of state representation in the province. But the terms of reference of the debate should be clear: What is the debate about? Postpone the district elections scheduled for 2024? Postpone them to when and on what basis? Or to review the provincial and district decentralization model, giving more powers to the Province Governor and District Administrator, and reserving to the Secretary of State in the Province and District the exclusive functions of state sovereignty?

In essence, the district decentralized governance bodies are a replica of the provincial decentralized governance bodies, and the Frelimo leadership has already realized that the serious problems arising from the lack of clarification of the powers and scope of action of the Provincial Governor and the Secretary of State in the Province, including protagonist disputes, will also be notorious in the districts, especially in the relationship between the District Administrator and the State Representative in the District, should the district elections go ahead in 2024.

To inform the debate on the feasibility of district elections in 2024, the Government should release the findings of the evaluation by consultants on provincial decentralized governance and the prognosis on district decentralization. In 2020, the Govern-



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ment launched an international tender to select a consulting firm that would conduct the functional analysis on the organization and functioning of provincial decentralized governance bodies and state representation in the province. The objective was to identify the strengths to be capitalized on and the weaknesses to be improved⁷.

In the same tender, the Government also asked the consultants to make a prognosis on what the decentralization process will be in 2024, the year in which district elections are scheduled to take place. With the prognosis, the Government wants to know whether it is worthwhile to continue with the decentralization process along the lines agreed in 2018. The results of the consultants' evaluation were expected in February 2021. It turns out, however, that the Government has not yet released the findings of the consultants' evaluation of provincial de-

centralized governance and the prognosis on district elections in 2024.

In its transitional provisions, the Law for the Punctual Revision of the Constitution of the Republic (Law 1/2018, of June 12), states, in paragraph 3 of article 4, that the first district elections take place in the year 2024. In paragraph 4 of the same article, Law 1/2018, of 12 June, states that until the first district elections are held under the terms of paragraph 3, the District Administrator is appointed by the Minister who oversees the area of Local Administration of the State, in consultation with the Governor of the Province. These provisions clearly show that postponing the holding of district elections in 2024 will entail the punctual revision of the Constitution of the Republic. Therefore, the debate on district elections in 2024 is urgent and must be opened, inclusive, and frank.

⁶ <https://cddmoz.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/PIO-MATOS-CRITICA-DESCENTRALIZAC%CC%A7A%CC%83O-E-EXIGE-PODER-%E2%80%9CN%CC%81s-os-zambezianos-queremos-ser-os-donos-dos-nossos-destinos%E2%80%9D.pdf>


⁷ <https://cddmoz.org/governo-deve-divulgar-resultados-da-avaliacao-da-governacao-descentralizada-provincial-e-da-viabilidade-das-eleicoes-distritais-em-2024-2/>



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