

## Is living longer living better?

Gustavo Sugahara<sup>1</sup>, António Francisco<sup>2</sup>, Peter Fisker<sup>3</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

The indicators of wealth, poverty, well being and human development, among others, are and will certainly continue to be controversial. No wonder. These indicators seek to quantify realities simple and familiar, but when subjected to a closer look, reflect enormous complexity social relations as well as convey various political and moral values, more or less subjective.

Science exists precisely to deal with the complexity of life and find answers to their puzzles, creating instruments of analysis and measurement. This is precisely the aim of a number of well known international indicators that are converted into tools for monitoring and evaluation of policies, which impact directly affects the lives of people.

In Mozambique, the indicators of social change have attracted increasing interest and heated debate, especially when they raise doubts about the quality and direction of the observed changes, as well as the impact and performance of public policymakers. A good example of this happens every year, when the famous Human Development Index (HDI) is published internationally by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Every year the release of the HDI rekindles the debate about whether the data and methods used influenced or not the dismal performance of human development in Mozambique.

Another example, also controversial, concerns the problem of estimating poverty, arguably one of the most debated issues in Mozambique. About Mozambican poverty, its causes and determinants, and especially policies that may contribute to its reduction, numerous papers have been written, and this is even the focus of a major programmatic documents of the Government of Mozambique (GoM) and its international partners, called the Action Plan for the Reduction of Poverty (PARP) (GdM, 2011).

Despite efforts in producing social indicators representative and reliable, many gaps remain regarding the quality of data, approaches and methodologies in the analysis of poverty and human development at the national level, but especially the more disaggregated levels for specific areas and groups.

Following several articles on aging published previously (Sugahara and Francisco, 2012), in the first half of this year IESE developed a research on the living conditions of the elderly

population in Mozambique, through a research partnership with HelpAge International, whose report final will be released shortly. Inspired by the results of this research, this brief paper discusses an idea, simple but relevant: "We all want to live longer".

Regardless of the conditions of life that humans manage to achieve in the course of life, all people are driven by the same impulse to survival and aspiration for a longer life. This is the most basic instincts of life, not just humans, but any living organism, with the difference that humans developed the ability of perception and rationalization of concepts such as "value" (good or bad, right or wrong, etc.), beyond mere sensory skills of pleasure or pain found in other organisms. Unlike other living beings, humans also developed the ability to transform into reality the aspiration for a longer life. Therefore, the indicator of life expectancy was converted into evidence of human

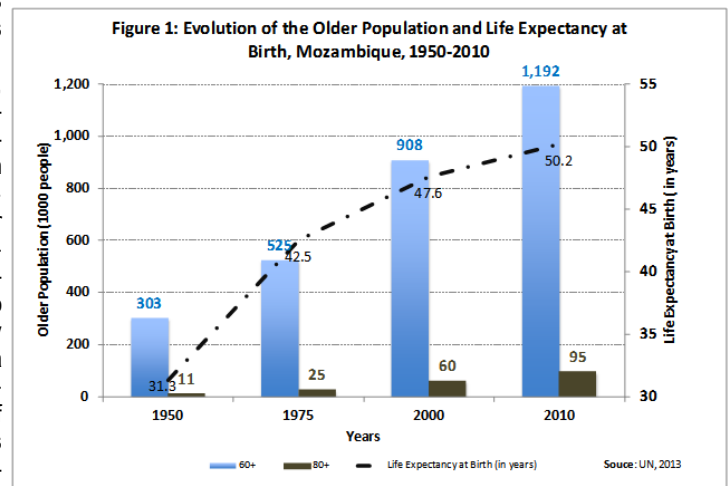
development. It is precisely in the spirit of the celebration of the triumph of human longevity, the UNFPA and HelpAge International's joint (2012) report elected the aging population as one of the most significant trends of the XXI century.

However, the increase in human longevity has generated new challenges never before faced by humanity, by their profound implications for the organization of social, economic and cultural development of societies. Thus, this brief text draws attention to the important issues arising from his main title: "We all want to live longer, but what does this imply? Does the increase in life expectancy of Mozambicans is being accompanied by improvements in the welfare of the elderly?" The answers to these questions take into account previous studies, but in particular the recent results of the above research IESE (Francisco et al., 2013).

### LONGEVITY: ASPIRATION AND REALITY

Mozambique has one of the youngest populations on the planet, a median age of 17 years, corresponding to 16 years for the rural population, and about 19 years for the urban (INE, 2010, p. 7).

In the last half century, the increase in life expectancy at birth in Mozambique, although slow but real, in conjunction with national population growth (average annual rate of 2.2% in 50 years), has resulted in a marked acceleration of growth of the older population (Figure 1).



A total of just over 300,000 seniors in 1950, the older population over 60 years exceeded 500,000 in 1975, and is currently estimated at about 1.2 million; this represents about 5% of the total population, estimated 23.9 million in 2010 (UN, 2013). In turn, the group aged 80 or more years old has risen from just 11,000 people in 1950 to 95,000 in 2010 (UN, 2013) (Figure 1).

The current effective of older Mozambicans already represents the third largest group of older people among the Southern Africa. To get an idea of their relative weight in the Mozambican context, it is worth noting that the total number of older people is not much less than the total of the paid labour force in Mozambique, estimated at about two million people (Francisco et al., 2013).

On the other hand, about 17% of households have at least one older person, although their geographical and social distribution varies widely in the country. A higher proportion of older people is in households in the southern part of the

1. Associate Collaborator of IESE and Associate Member of Lisbon University Institute (ISCTE-IUL), DINÂMIA'CET-IUL, Lisbon, Portugal.

2. Research Director at the IESE, Associate Professor of Economics at the University Eduardo Mondlane (UEM), Ph.D. and MA in demography from Australia National University (ANU) and a degree in economics from the Faculty of Economics at UEM.

3. Independent Consultant.

country. In the provinces of Gaza and Inhambane, for example, about 30% of households have at least one older person, versus 14% in the Northern provinces (Niassa, Nampula and Zambezia). These differences are most apparent in administration, where almost 50% of households in the south have older people.

The same could be said of other characteristics, such as gender differences. Although they are not the focus of this text, it is worth noting, for illustrative purposes, the fact that although women represent more than 50% of the total population, less than a third of households are headed by women, but the gap between men and women living alone is even more significant, about 11% of women and only 4% of men living alone.

### LIVE LONGER... BUT HOW?

Demographic indicators above show a clear achievement: Mozambicans are actually living longer. It is true that the gap between the life expectancy of Mozambicans and average life expectancy worldwide is still huge (50.2 vs. 70 years, respectively), but there is no doubt that people in Mozambique are also extend their longevity.

How to explain that achievement? While an extensive answer to this question is beyond the scope of this paper, it is at least possible to highlight the role of one of the most commonly used indicators of living standards, the incidence of poverty.

Is the increasing longevity of Mozambicans accompanied by a reduction of poverty among the elderly? The answer to this question, provided by IESE's recent research (Francisco et al., 2013). Consistently, in the sense that combines various methods and indicators, applied to the best and most up to date statistical data available on the well-being and poverty in Mozambique.

Here we highlight just one of the methods, possibly the most controversial but also most used and exposed to the debate related to the incidence of poverty based on consumption. This is the method chosen officially by the Government of Mozambique (DNEAP, 2010), based on a set of regional poverty lines, which has the merit of being easily calculable, but as some authors have shown has important weaknesses (Alfani et al., 2012; Boom, 2011).

Figure 2 compares the official poverty headcount ratios at the national poverty line for three years: 1997, 2003 and 2009. Although there was a

reduction of households living below the official poverty line, 69% in 1997 to 55% in 2009, the difference in poverty levels and variation between households with and without older people is statistically significant. elderly members. In other words, the official poverty indicators show that the older Mozambicans are poorer than the rest of the population.

### AWAKENING TO THE LONGEVITY REVOLUTION

This text highlights only the official version of poverty used by the Mozambican government and its international partners. It should be noted that the official approach on poverty has been revised, due to the realization that data limitations and methodological options of certain official approach resulted in a standard poverty counter-intuitive and dubious (Alfani et al., 2012; Boom, 2011; DNEAP, 2010). Recent versions of the same, but corrected statistical data sets have questioned the official conclusion that urban poverty has fallen less than rural poverty. Research conducted by IESE on the elderly corroborates these corrected versions, this time also making use of a different methodology, which focuses on durable goods rather than consumption. Similarly, the above-mentioned research recently conducted by IESE on the elderly corroborates the corrected versions, using a method of durable goods instead of consumption, a subject that deserves to be taken on another occasion (Francisco et al., 2013).

In previous articles we advocate the need to carefully rethink the relevance of the older population, overcoming the misleading perception created by the fact that their proportion is much lower than the other population groups (e.g. children, youth and adults). Initially we spoke of the need to anticipate the major structural changes expected for the Mozambican population, but strictly speaking, such changes are already underway.

Mozambique, like the rest of the world, comprises the radical change that the researcher Alexandre Kalache (2013) called "the longevity revolution". Although more slowly than in the rest of the world, Mozambique managed to break overcome the precarious and stagnant low life expectancy (at only 30 years old), which remained stubbornly low for hundreds of years. Over the past 50 years, Mozambicans conquered another 20 years of life, eleven of which were gained between 1950 and 1975, and nine between 1975 and 2012.

However, a great contradiction is increasingly taking root dangerously in Mozambican society. The achievement of a longer life is not being accompanied by an improvement of living conditions in order to enable older people to enjoy a dignified old age. If we do not begin

to think and act at the outset to invert this situation, the youth of today who will be part of about 10 million seniors, within half a century, run the risk of also living in precariousness and misery. In other words, it is urgent that Mozambicans awaken to the implications of the conquest of longevity, if not for reasons of intergenerational solidarity, at least do so for the selfish motivation to ensure a decent standard of living in their old age.

### REFERENCES

- Alfani, F., Azzari, C., D'Errico, M., Molini, V., 2012. Poverty in Mozambique: New Evidence from Recent Household Surveys (SSRN Scholarly Paper No. ID 2156797). Social Science Research Network, Rochester, NY.
- Boom, B. van den, 2011. Analysis of Poverty in Mozambique: Household poverty status, child malnutrition and other indicators 1997, 2003, 2009. Centre for World Food Studies, VU University.
- DNEAP, 2010. Pobreza e Bem-estar em Moçambique: Terceira Avaliação Nacional. Direcção Nacional de Estudos e Análise de Políticas (DNEAP), Ministério da Planificação e Desenvolvimento (MPD), Maputo.
- Francisco, A., Sugahara, G., Fisker, P., 2013. Dinâmicas de Bem-estar e Pobreza da População Idosa Moçambicana - Sumário dos Resultados Preliminares Apresentados no Seminário do IESE de 15 de Maio. Instituto de Estudos Sociais e Económicos (IESE), Maputo.
- GdM, 2011. Plano de Acção para Redução da Pobreza (PARP) 2011-2014. Governo de Moçambique (GdM), Maputo.
- INE, 2010. Projecções Anuais da População Total, Urbana e Rural, Moçambique (2007 – 2040) [WWW Document]. Portal do Instituto Nacional de Estatística. URL [http://www.ine.gov.mz/populacao/projeccoes/proj\\_pop\\_moz/](http://www.ine.gov.mz/populacao/projeccoes/proj_pop_moz/) (accessed 6.17.11).
- Kalache, A., 2013. The Longevity Revolution - Creating a society for all ages, Adelaide Thinker in Residence 2012 - 2013. Government of South Australia.
- Sugahara, G.T.L., Francisco, A., 2012. Idosos em Moçambique: Romper a Conspiração do Silêncio, in: Brito, L. de, Castel-Branco, C.N., Chichava, S., Francisco, A. (Eds.), *Desafios Para Moçambique 2012*. IESE, Maputo, pp. 295–331.
- UN, 2013. World Population Prospects, the 2012 Revision [WWW Document]. United Nations (UN). URL [http://esa.un.org/wpp/unpp/panel\\_indicators.htm](http://esa.un.org/wpp/unpp/panel_indicators.htm)
- UNFPA, HelpAge International, 2012. Ageing in the Twenty-First Century: A Celebration and a Challenge. UNFPA and HelpAge International, New York.

