***Participedia Exercise:*** *Increased cost of living in Mozambique*

Between the years of 2008 and 2012, citizens in Maputo, the capital of Mozambique, protested against the rising cost of living, including as food, fuel, and water [1]. During 2008, Mozambique protests became a wave of “hunger riots” leading to six deaths [1]. This paper will explore this protest – its history, the involved parties, the impact and the ideology behind it.

**Problems and Purpose**

The triggering elements that set off the violence were the rising cost of food, fuel and water [2]. Given that this was a reaction to scarcity by citizens, to avoid future uprisings in Mozambique, it is necessary to address poverty, expand domestic food production, and ensure governance and political accountability [3]. Berazneva explains that a one-point decrease in the Home Price Index decreases the likelihood of riots by 6%, and a ten point decrease in the Food Production Index can decrease it by 31% [3]. Additionally, helping small-and medium-scale farmers raise their agricultural production would result in expanding food supplies, generation of jobs, and a decreased national vulnerability to fluctuations in the world economy, due to a decreased dependency [3]. These strategies are needed in order to address the underlying factors that were causing frustration with joblessness and poverty [3].

**Background History and Context**

The lack of room for democratic rights has severe consequences for a nation. When citizens feel they are restricted in being able to create space for ‘social negotiation’ it impacts their democratic experience. This includes limiting political mobilizations such as petitions,

boycotts, strikes or marches [4]. Under such circumstances, the effects of abrupt rises in the cost of living, mostly impacting the lower income urban population, tends to lead to violent street demonstrations [4]. This occurs without a formal leader that organizes such events.

Although these riots are part of a wider movement that has impacted many nations since 2008, namely the rise and great instability of food prices on the world market, the protests can be seen as a reflection of local economies and a consequence of the exclusion and marginalization of the poorest urban citizens in Mozambique [4]. Mozambique, since 2007, has experienced a great deal of volatile incidents of popular mobilization [4]. In the years of 2008, 2010 and 2012, the cost of transportation, the rise in inequality, and clearly evident corruption combined with rising food prices has overwhelmed citizens [4]. Although the riot spread is not as intense in other cities, the original main start for the revolt was in greater Maputo, a metropolitan area including Maputo and Matola [4].

The initial demonstrations started on February 5th 2008, and although the protestors were mainly speaking out against the rise in transport fares, there had been increases in food prices in that same year [4]. As well, there had been a declaration of a future rise in bread, one of the basic items of the popular diet. The demonstrations that occurred in September 2010 mainly focused on the rise in the price of bread, and of other basic products [4]. Many felt that it was necessary to demonstrate because, according to most of the interviewees, they had already protested against rises in essential goods such as cooking oil, electricity and water [4]. Dealing with this situation, they expected the government to provide a solid solution, and take control over the rise

in the costs of basic goods and services, and fix the disparity between workers’ incomes and prices. A protestor explained:

*“This was aimed at the government itself, so that it would take measures, so that it would see that what it’s doing is all screwed up. It’s true, it was to force the government to take measures. When we did that, it was for the government, it was for the government to relax the prices, because it’s the prices that are killing here in Mozambique. It’s the chapa, the rice, the charcoal. Basic things that are very expensive. It’s complicated, it’s not easy. It’s also not easy to work, and you receive a wage with which you can only manage the basics,”* [4]

In general, the population and the least wealthy social groups especially, did not have a chance to voice their distress regarding commodity prices, due to a lack of strong representation politically [4]. Their views remained unknown to the government and were not included or considered in their programs and plans. Under these circumstances, informal, sometimes violent protests, appeared to be the only method of grasping the government’s attention. This is the framework in which it is important to examine the 2008 and 2010 uprisings in the cities of Maputo and Matola which was later followed by small demonstrations in cities such as Chókwe, Chibuto and Chimoio, among others [4].

**Organizing, Supporting, and Funding Entities**

\**To be added later in the future with more information*

**Participant Recruitment and Selection**

\**To be added later in the future with more information*

**Methods and Tools Used**

The popular protests have always had an unclear etiology. In the Mozambique case, mobilization was accomplished through text messages which went viral across cellular networks

and across social media, such as Facebook [4]. These methods of communication extend across social strata, specifically access via text message. The means and scale made it quite complicated for the government to obtain control [4]. As protesters sent text messages using “pay-as-you-go” SIM cards that were bought from informal street vendors, it was nearly impossible for the government to recognize senders or receivers. During the 2010 strike, 95% of mobile phone users in Mozambique used such street-bought SIM cards and did not have to register their information [5].

It is commonly believed that text messages played a significant role in the popular mobilization for what was at first known as a “strike” [4]. Accordingly, one man interviewed claimed that the text messages began to circulate after a debate on a social networking site. It had started days before the demonstrations, in which messages declaring the “strike” started to go viral in social media and eventually spread into personal text messages [4]. It was not clear if it was indeed a strike or not [4]. Although it is accurate that the revolts had, in the ‘collective imagination,’ the thought of a strike, it cannot be pin-pointed as a strike in the way that the demonstrations unfolded. The media made use of multiple terms to describe the events – “strike, popular demonstrations, protests, revolts, popular uprisings, social movement, disturbances, social upheaval, demonstrations, riots, rebellion, insurrection, turbulence, tumults, agitation, social earthquake, vandalism” [4]. The scale, the perspective the protests were seen from, personal involvement and political beliefs shaped how it was described.

**What Went On: Process, Interaction, and Participation**

Although the participants went onto the streets to demonstrate their distress at the difficult living conditions, the media gave visibility and ‘public notoriety’ to their actions. This helped generate debate in the field [4]. However, the media coverage, which is regulated by the ruling party followed the ‘government line,’ which criticized the movement as “unlawful” and “illegitimate,” and as a slowing factor to the country’s development [4]. Many protestors conveyed a sense of frustration and exhaustion at the very minimal action from the government to provide solutions to their issues when expressed through the block chiefs and neighbourhood secretaries [4]. Interviewees did not have a full understanding of how to discuss public issues with the government, regarding food concerns or how to use their political rights [4]. For instance, in regards to the increase in food prices, there were many assertions about a gap in communication between the government and the public. The media most commonly used the terms “demonstrators” and “youths” to appoint those who participated in the demonstrations [4]. Other terms were also used numerous times, such as “members of the public”, “unemployed”, “adolescents”, “children”, and “vulnerable groups” as well as “women” [4]. As well, they all generally pointed towards the difficult living circumstances of the protestors, with the great level of unemployment in the country and the expansion in food prices [4].

Any element of ground involvement made it simple to comprehend the reality of the terrible food conditions, that the citizens were distressed over. Popular dissatisfaction, expressed through protests, occurred during the terms of Frelimo and Armando Guebuza [4]. Members of the public believe that this period has been marked by intense social frustration between the poor, who are the majority of the population working to support their families and seeing poverty

worsen, and the rich, citizens associated with political power and with high chances of success systemically [4]. The popular concern was that there was a reduction in opportunities with a complete absence of dialogue between the government and struggling citizens [4]. These members of the public put blame on the government, particularly President Guebuza, for failing to take concrete action for their welfare and expressed nostalgia for prior periods when the cost of living was not so burdensome [4]. The demonstrations, while a citizen-lead event, were also a ‘privileged moment’ for conveying the opinions of academics, some politicians of opposing parties and other political analysts who had access to the media. Journalistic articles and involvements in the discourse of personalities from civil society depicted a split between the public press controlled by the ruling party, which essentially sought to encourage and convince the idea of the illegitimacy of the movement, and that the protestors, although other parties had their say as well [4].

**Influence, Outcomes, and Effects**

Depending on one’s perception, the 2008 and 2010 demonstrations may be viewed as having been ‘successful’ in the sense of accomplishing instant goals, such as managing increased costs for basic commodities and services [5]. However, if one views this on the analytic level, the revolts created new groups of individuals and a different perspective on political authority. It is complex to discover what the long-term effects of such consistent meetings between protestors and state officials will be in terms of an increase in state accountability, political authority, the political opposition’s fate or police actions [5]. However, while the potential of new technology is rising in Mozambique in the form of viral messaging and live media coverage, the

demonstrations required a much more direct confrontation with the state, its equipment, and its realm than many recent North American and European protests [5]. By taking actions such as by blocking roads, attacking police stations and looting, the strikes “unsettled, least momentarily, the apparatus and elite of the post-colonial state” [5]. While the future impact may not be wholly clear, it was an impactful moment in time when the authority and power shifted away from the government.

**Analysis and Lessons Learned**

This report has attempted to portray that even though the grievances of citizens in Mozambique in 2008 and 2010 (and threatened to do so again in 2012) were part of a wider global pattern, triggered by an increase in food basics and issues on the global market, above all, they were “a reflection of local economic dynamics” which came about because of a social class that felt excluded and ignored by government powers [4].

It is crucial to consider how these protests have revealed a “moral economy” in Mozambique, meaning a relationship between the state and the citizen which has powerful emotional underpinnings. These protests may have created a new accountability for the government [4]. It will appear to be seen whether this will be informal, how stable it will be, and whether it will be institutionalized in political systems.

**Conclusion**

Actions by citizens similar to in this case could lead to more empowered citizen participation. The way I imagine it is that it would be important to build a political dialogue with

the government and to ensure that media coverage is sympathetic to the cause. As discussed above, in order to avoid future riots in Mozambique, it is essential for governments to consider citizens’ concerns and address poverty, domestic food production issues, and political accountability. If the government fails to address these elements, various forms of citizen protests will have to intervene in order to ensure that good living standards are granted to each citizen [3]. In addition, the February 2011 floods and heavy rains that had occurred during the food production season across central Mozambique again highlights the significance of how a loss of essential resources and the poverty that results can be a tipping point for citizens in a country with about half of the population of 20 million living under the poverty line [3]. Citizens will mobilize using the technology and resources that they have in order to advocate for their needs.

**Reflection**

Doing research on this specific case was an interesting experience. By investigating a new case that I had never heard of, I had the opportunity to expand my knowledge about political grievances within an African country. After completing research on this case, I had noticed that although some of the readings I had found were sufficient enough for me to cover the key details that were required for this exercise, there were still some gaps in my paper that were difficult to pull from individual readings. For instance, I had the most difficulty finding information that was accurate and unbiased on the historical background and context. I also struggled to find clear data on the funding, organization, and supporting entities. Lastly, I had to search further to understand the cultural context of participant recruitment and selection. The method that I used

to find my sources was looking for keywords in the academic sources and attempting to use them in searches to find relevant information that would be useful for my case. Highlighting key parts of each academic source was the most helpful in finding relevant information for my case and it

helped focus my search. There are still some questions that have been unanswered in the exercise, however looking for relevant sources and using the provided assigned article helped to cover most of the assigned questions.

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