

By Marcelo Mosse

Corruption in Mozambique is made possible by the very nature of the Mozambican state, where the power of the ruling party overlaps with the state machinery. Despite massive fraud, especially in the privatization process, no senior government representative has ever been convicted, so corruption continues with impunity. In this small African country, pledges to strengthen transparency and integrity are easier said than done.

The history of how Mozambique's political elites have enriched themselves has been amply documented. It essentially resulted from the country's calamitous privatization projects and the squandering of bank resources. More than 10.4 trillion meticaïs (US\$400 million) disappeared from the banking system in the 1990s. The state was forced to repay the money.

One of the most notorious cases involved the 444 billion meticaïs (US\$17 million) Treasury loan to Portuguese businessman Antonio Simões in 1992. Simões received the loan to modernize the Mozambique Steel Company (CSM – *Companhia Siderúrgica de Moçambique*), as well as the wire-drawing company Trefil (*Companhia Moçambicana de Trefilarias*). However, the steel company only operated for a few months after its privatization, as Simões failed to import the raw materials needed or pay salaries. Public authorities never explained the collapse. A 2004 report from Mozambique's Administrative Court to the Parliament claimed that aid from Japan and the U.S. Agency for International Development—distributed by the African Development Bank and the World Bank—went to Mozambican companies without public tender or guarantees for reimbursement.

Allegations of corruption also come from foreign companies trying to invest in the country. For example, following the approval in December 2005 of a new procurement law, a French scanner-production company complained that a contract had been manipulated. Although customs authorities denied any corruption, the damage was done: Mozambique gained the reputation of a country manipulated by political elites. And the reputation is not undeserved. External investors are often forced to give shares and partnerships to ministers in exchange for license approvals. This deters internal, as well as external investment and limits commercial development. Alice Mabote, leader of the NGO Humans Rights League, said Mozambique's problems stem from the lack of accountability practices, particularly in the Parliament, which provides an incentive for corruption.

Corruption does not only flourish at the highest political levels in Mozambique, it also grows through bribes paid to traffic police, hospital workers and the sexual extortion that takes place in schools. Former Beira municipality Mayor Chivavice

Muchangage reportedly used state facilities for self-enrichment. Two studies on the perception of corruption have been conducted in Mozambique during the past five years.

The first study, by the anti-corruption watchdog *Ética Mozambique*, surveyed a sample of 1,200 individuals in the provinces of Maputo, Sofala and Nampula. It revealed that one in five respondents paid between 20 and 100 percent of the per capita GDP in bribes.

The 2005 National Research on Governance and Corruption study, which had a larger sample size, revealed that negative perceptions of corruption persisted. The study showed that 28 percent of public workers considered the level of corruption in the Mozambique government to be “very high.” Traffic police, who frequently stop motorists to demand bribes of 1,303 meticaïs (US\$50), were named the most dishonest institution.

“Why do people become corrupt?” asked Joana Pelembe, a nurse in Maputo Central Hospital, “I live in the suburbs and have four children. Two of them study in the city. Three of us need money for the bus every day, but my salary is only 1,600,000 meticaïs (US\$61). By the middle of the month, that money no longer exists. Now I ask: Do you think I can refuse the money offer?”

A laboratory technician, Moisés Langa, presented the following argument: “Sometimes others give money as a way of thanking our kindness and good treatment. For me, it does not constitute corruption.”

Doctors are not exempt from this behavior. Some use public facilities for their own benefit, for example to see patients from their private clinics.

Assessments of the judicial system paint a gloomy picture. Judges are paid to fix sentences; lawyers bribe clerks to advance a case; and prosecutors are paid to alter the course of an investigation. José Caldeira, one of most prominent lawyers in Mozambique, said that the credibility of the system of justice has been severely eroded by corrupt practices.

The problem is not a lack of laws, but that the laws are not applied. With the political liberalization of the 1990s, the state has taken steps toward re-designing the institutional framework, which could enhance its capacity for controlling corruption. Laws have been passed in an effort to guard against the use of state assets and official posts for personal gain, as well as to establish basic rules for transparency and the declaration of personal assets. However, none of these laws were enforced until 2006. The government approved an anti-corruption strategy this year, but there have been no signs of its implementation.

Ética Mozambique's Abdul Carimo said the country's legal framework, a fundamental instrument for fighting corruption, still needs improvement. Despite the media's repeated publication of the details of corruption scandals, Mozambique doesn't have a record of prosecutions. Ética Mozambique recently finished a project that recorded experiences of corruption by ordinary citizens. In the last six months, Ética received information on 28 cases of corruption and transferred them to the Justice Department, but only one has gone to trial. "It's frustrating," Carimo said.