



## Mozambico: the pearl of the Indian Ocean

### Location and historical context



Mozambique is a Country located in sub-Saharan Africa. Located in southeast Africa, it borders Tanzania (to the north), Malawi (to the northwest), Zambia and Zimbabwe (to the west), South Africa and Swaziland (to the southwest), as well as the Indian Ocean (to the east). Administratively, it is divided into 11 provinces divided into 33 municipalities.

A former Portuguese colony, Mozambique gained independence on 25 June 1975. Portuguese is the official language, spoken

by only 40% of the population. The country is part of the Community of Portuguese-speaking countries (CPLP).

The economy of the country is based on the primary sector. The main sources of income come from fishing (especially shrimp), agriculture (sugar cane, cotton, cassava, etc.), mining (bauxite, gold and precious stones, coal), natural gas extraction, logging, and tourism. Also relevant is the industrial sector, which operates in the beverage and tobacco segments.

The territory is very rich in natural resources. Despite this, the local population has a low rate of development and a high level of social inequality. The country's Human Development Index (ISU) is 0.446. The life expectancy of the inhabitants is only 42.2 years; illiteracy affects more than 55% of the population; the infant mortality rate is 86 deaths per thousand live births.

A 16-year civil war has killed over 1 million people. Another negative consequence of this conflict was the destruction of infrastructure, with direct consequences on the national economy.



**On the flag of Mozambique** there is a drawing of an open book, a hoe, and a modern firearm, symbolizing the conflicts for the independence of the country.

#### **General information about Mozambique:**

- Official Name: Republic of Mozambique
- Area: 801,590 km<sup>2</sup>.
- Location: sub-Saharan Africa.
- Capital: Maputo/ Climate: tropical.
- Government: Mixed Presidential Republic.
- Population: 32,080,000 inhabitants.
- Population density: 29 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>.
- Average annual population growth rate: 2.3%.

- Population living in urban areas: 37.65%.

- Currency: Mozambican metical.

Religions: traditional beliefs 49.9%, Christianity 56% (Catholics 21.3%, Protestants 12.6%, others 5%), Islam 18%, others 0.2%, no religion and atheism 0.6%.

Population: Macuas 46.1%, Tsongas, Malavis, and Chonas 53%, other 0.9%.

## **Mozambican culture**

Mozambican culture includes aspects of typically African, Arab, and Portuguese populations. The country has several ethnic groups, which have important cultural peculiarities, such as language and religion. The cultural production of Mozambique is recognized all over the world thanks to its renowned artists, such as Maimuna Adam, especially for the wooden artifacts and popular masks, as well as for its work with art paintings. Another cultural fact is the dances Nhau, Mapico, Xigubo, and Tufo.

On a gastronomic level, the most popular dishes are cassava, corn, chestnuts, and French bread. As for sport, the passion of the local population for soccer stands out.

## **Facts about Mozambique**



The use of mussiro, a white cream made from local plants, is very common among the country's female population. On the face of Mozambican women, it is common for its therapeutic properties.

Surrounded by unique nature, Mozambique boasts one of the main reserves of typically African flora and fauna. The Gorongosa National Park, Mount Binga, located in the most mountainous part of Mozambique, is about 2440 meters high and is the highest geographical point of the country. The Chapel of Our Lady of Baluarte, dating from 1522, is one of the oldest Portuguese architectural buildings in the south of the world. Cahora Bassa hydroelectric power plant is Africa's largest electricity supplier.

## **Brief history of the Catholic Church in Mozambique**

The Catholic mission in Mozambique began more than 500 years ago, when on 11 March 1498, the first Mass on Mozambican soil was celebrated by the chaplains of the fleet of Vasco de Gama, on the island of São Jorge, then called Goa island, opposite the island of Mozambique, in the north of the country. In 1505, the embassy of Pero Anaia arrived in Sofala and, after having handed over the gifts sent by the king of Portugal to King Yzusuf of Sofala, went to choose the site for the fortress and the church. This was probably the first church in Mozambique and its first vicar, Father Bartolomeu Fernandes, began teaching the faith to the locals and in 1506, the first baptisms were celebrated in Sofala.

The Jesuit Father Gonçalo de Silveira and his companions, Father André Fernandes and Brother André Costa arrived in 1560 in Tongue, in the kingdom of Gamba (probably the present Mucumbi) and in the kingdom of Mwenemutapa. In the latter kingdom, after seven weeks of catechesis, they converted the king and queen, who were solemnly baptized together with about 400 people.

At that time, in terms of canonical jurisdiction, Mozambique belonged to the diocese of Goa, created by Pope Clement VII on 31 January 1533. However, because of the long distance between Mozambique and Goa, in February 1562, Pope Pius IV authorized the

king of Portugal to appoint an ecclesiastical administrator for the kingdoms of Ornum, Mozambique, and Sofala, and so Licenciado Manuel Coutinho was appointed the first ecclesiastical administrator of Mozambique.

The most significant period for the mission in Mozambique was 1940, with the signing of the Concordat and the Missionary Agreement between the Portuguese government and the Holy See. This agreement facilitated the entry of missionaries to Mozambique.

With the bull *Solemnibus conventionibus* of Pope Pius XII, dated 4 September 1940, the first three dioceses were created: Archdiocese of Lourenço Marques (Maputo), with the suffragan dioceses of Beira and Nampula. The first bishops appointed to govern these dioceses were: Msgr. Teodósio Clemente Gouveia, prelate of Mozambique since 1936; Msgr. Teófilo de Andrade; and Msgr. Sebastião Soares de Resende. Since 1940, in the light of the Concordat and the Missionary Agreement, the number of male and female religious congregations entering the territory has increased considerably.

The Second Vatican Council, with the decree *Ad Gentes*, opened new paths to the mission. It is a matter of helping people to participate in the mystery of Christ, through a full presence of the Church, access to faith, to freedom, to the person of Christ, on the part of all persons and of all peoples.

With the proclamation of Mozambique's independence, the Church in Mozambique has become more deeply rooted in the life of the people and has sought to be missionary within it, working to build and consolidate the Kingdom of God among the Mozambican people.

The history of systematic evangelization began with the foundation of the three dioceses of Maputo, Beira, and Nampula (1940). Throughout history, particularly in the 1980s, the dioceses of Beira and Nampula were transformed into metropolitan centers and their pastors became Archbishops.

In 2015, the three metropolitan archdioceses of Maputo, Beira, and Nampula celebrated the 75th anniversary of their foundation. The dioceses of Inhambane, Xai-Xai, Quelimane, Tete, Chimoio, Pemba, Lichinga, Nacala, and Gurué are suffragans because they were subsequently dismembered by the metropolitan sees or ecclesiastical provinces of the south, central, and north respectively.

## **Social and ecclesial situation**

Mozambican society has changed significantly. There are many social contrasts. A large gap separates the rich from the poor, the situation of rural communities and the contrast with large urban centers, modern culture with its technological tools and new values and traditional culture.

The diocesan clergy has grown in number, the missionaries, although of different extraction than in the past, continue to make an important contribution to evangelization and a good number of Mozambican priests and religious collaborate with the mission in other countries.

## **The arrival of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians**

The signing of the 1940 Concordat between Portugal and the Holy See gave new impetus to missionary activity in Mozambique, which, among other things, entrusted to the Catholic Church the exclusive right to indigenous education and recognized the right of diocesan

bishops to call religious institutes on the territory, provided that they were recognized by the Portuguese government as missionary corporations.

It was during the administration of Mother Linda Lucotti, between 1945 and 1957, a period marked by the post-war period, that there was the renovation, the works resumed, and new educational and missionary activities began. Mother Linda oversaw the internal development of the Provinces and in 1952, in Africa, she thought of Mozambique.

After signing the agreement with the government, **the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians arrived in Mozambique in two waves. The first on 21 September 1952:** Sister Carla Baietta (Italian), Sister Palmira Ferreira, Sister Maria Dolorinda Ferreira, and Sister Francelina Bastos (Portuguese), and the young laywoman Adriana Pais. They were accompanied by Mother Maria Valle, Provincial of Madrid, to whom the Portuguese reality still belonged. The group was welcomed by the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary.

On 24 September, the four sisters took possession of John of God Institute in **Namaacha**, where they were charged by the Portuguese government to manage the official elementary school with 160 pupils, all poor and most of them without a family. In addition, they established a vocational training course for women, where language courses, typing and shorthand, embroidery, sewing, cooking, women's formation, etc... In 1965, towards the end of the colonial era, also in Namaacha, they opened the Maria Ausiliatrice College, a preparatory cycle and secondary school.

## **Missionary Expansion**

**The missionary expansion phase began in 1961.** Bishop José dos Santos G3rcia, then bishop of Porto Am3lia - today the city of Pemba - asked the FMA to enter the newborn Mission of Santa Isabel di **Chiure**, which was rising in an area still without Christianity, because of the great Muslim influence. Shortly after its opening, the mission assumed all the traditional missionary works: catechesis, preparation of catechists, catechumenate, elementary school, a well-attended dispensary, periodic visits to the villages, and a course to prepare young brides for Christian marriage, at that time a primary work that contributed greatly to the promotion of indigenous women and Christian families.

Today this presence welcomes girls in vocational discernment, manages the Don Bosco Elementary School, the Eusebia Palomino Kindergarten, an oratory, the accompaniment of youth groups, catechesis, the ADMA, and the Association of Salesian Cooperators (SSCC).

After Chiure, the next foundation was that of **Macomia**, where the FMA were called in 1963. At the time, it was called Mission of Santa Filomena, a name that would be changed to St. John Bosco, who was given the title of patron of the church built there and inaugurated in 1964. The sisters dedicated themselves to the work of evangelization in collaboration with the Missionaries of the Good News in catechesis, in the preparation of catechists, in the catechumenate, in primary school, and in the preparation of young brides for Christian marriage. The FMA remained until 1978 and in that year, for what was happening throughout the country, namely the nationalization of the works, the Sisters were expelled and by imposition of the local district authorities of Frelimo (Mozambique Liberation Front) the mission had to be abandoned by the missionaries who had generously dedicated themselves to the people of the region.

After the nationalization phenomenon, the house was not reopened.

**In 1964, there was the arrival of the third FMA Community in Cabo Delgado.** Bishop José dos Santos García, in gratitude for the arrival and work of the Salesian charism in his Diocese, created the second urban parish in the city of Porto Amélia, which he named after his patron, Mary Help of Christians. It was the first parish in Africa to bear this name. Once again, the FMA collaborated with the Missionaries of the Good News. Here, in addition to pastoral and evangelization activities, the Sisters worked as teachers at St Paul's Diocesan College, St Jerome Romero Business School, and provided domestic coordination services at St Joseph's Diocesan Major Seminary.

Perhaps because it was dedicated to Mary Help of Christians, this house had the singular privilege of having emerged unscathed from the provocations and profanations that swept through all the missions in 1978. In fact, in Cabo Delgado the leaders, who lived in the city of Pemba, forgot their rage. In addition, the sisters of other congregations who, during religious persecution, had to leave their homes and their missions to concentrate in the city, were welcomed there.

**Also in 1964, the Sisters were called to Tete** by Bishop Félix Niza Ribeiro, to take care of the Children's Home. Soon after, they opened a kindergarten in the house and then engaged in pastoral and social promotion activities in the suburbs of Tete. They worked there until 1976.

In 1965, in Brentwood Park, South Africa, the Portuguese Nossa Senhora de Fátima Parish School was opened, at the request of the Archbishop of Lourenço Marques (Maputo), Msgr. Custodian Alvim Pereira, to provide cultural and spiritual support and assistance to the children of the many Portuguese emigrants.

**Also in 1965, in the extreme south, in Namaacha,** where they had entered the country, the FMA began their work with the creation of Mary Help of Christians High School for the preparatory cycle. The school was able to accompany a good number of students throughout adolescence. Two years later, there was also built the beautiful and spacious chapel consecrated by the Custodian Archbishop Alvim Pereira.

On 5 February 1970, the FMA opened the "Casa Cristina Arantes e Oliveira", in the city of Lourenço Marques, entrusted to them by the Public Assistance, with the aim of accompanying the students of the João de Deus Institute to continue their studies, always benefiting from public assistance.

After 1964, during the mandate of Mother Maria Valle, an attempt was made for the first time to build the Houses as a delegation, but the attempt was ineffective and we had to withdraw, waiting for times with greater economic resources and more local vocations. The hoped-for construction of all the houses and works in Mozambique as a **delegation** finally took place in **1968**. The Superiors who assumed the responsibility of the government from 1958 to 1985 were the following: Sister Maddalena Mazzone, Sister Maria Salomé Dias, Sister Maria del Rosário Fernandes, Sister Maria Dolorinda Ferreira.

**In 1985, the delegation of Mozambique was elevated to the category of Preprovince dedicated to Saint John Bosco.** The superior of the Preprovince was Maria José Freitas.

On 25 June 1975, the country gained independence from Portugal, but the peace lasted little, because in 1976 a long civil war broke out between the Frelimo (Liberation Front of Mozambique) and the Renamo (Mozambique National Reconciliation) the two national parties that contended for power in government. At the time, 51 Sisters from the Portuguese Province worked in Mozambique. One dreamed of a joyful and promising independence, but unfortunately with the arrival of a Marxist regime, religious persecution began and Catholic missions were nationalized. For this reason, the FMA had to move

from Mary Help of Christians College to Casal St. Antonio, a residence near the College, larger and with a lot of land. This residence then became the formation house of the FMA in Mozambique.

In 1981, the first religious profession of Sister Claudina Valente Manjate was celebrated with great joy. **In 1982, the novitiate was canonically erected** with the first Mozambican novice, Sister Maria Alice Cerejo Mateus, placed under the protection of Saint Joseph, where the headquarters of the FMA Delegation in Mozambique operated until 1985.

The events after independence followed very quickly and the Salesian Sisters were forced to seek another refuge, in the "Holy Mary House" that belonged to the Dominican Sisters, who, after independence, gave it to Archbishop Alexandre José Maria dos Santos. Concerned about the fate of those who lived there, he asked the FMA to stay there until 1993. This house was the seat of the Preprovince until 1990, when the current see was purchased.

On the night of 2 June 1982, in "Holy Mary Home" Sister Vera Occhiena, FMA, was assassinated, a fact still shrouded in mystery, and in 1989 the reception of street children began.

In 1984, Mother Rosetta House was opened on the outskirts of Maputo, with the aim of continuing the Salesian religious formation and the pastoral care of temporary professed Sister. Today, in addition to pastoral and educational activities, this community dedicates itself to the initiation of young aspirants and postulants.

In 1988, the FMA wanted to reopen the old missionary action centers and finally, on **8 December 1988, the Chiure Mission was reopened, in the area of Chiure Novo**. In the same year, at the request of the Bishop of Tete, Msgr. Paulo Mandlate, the FMA took over the management of Village S.O.S., which housed several hundred orphaned and abandoned children. Since the work depended on a German organization, whose moral and pedagogical principles were substantially different from Christian ones, the FMA withdrew after five years. The community moved to another mission, Changara, which since its foundation, was providentially dedicated to Mary Help of Christians, to prepare the arrival of her Daughters in the future. The presence in this mission lasted 12 years, since, on the recommendation of the Bishop of the Diocese, the community withdrew from that mission in January 2005.

With the passage of time, the Salesian charism became so widespread that **on 24 January 1992, it became "St. John Bosco" Province, including Mozambique and Angola**. The first Provincial was Sister Giuseppina Pescarini, followed by Sister Lucília Monteiro Teixeira. The Province had a dramatic increase in street children and the growing need for assistance led to the creation of a new center to respond to the appeal. In 1993, Don Bosco Reception Center was inaugurated on the outskirts of Maputo. In addition to charitable activities, a school was built for the instruction and education of children, completing their training with an increase of professional activities in sewing, tailoring, bookbinding, shoemaking, gardening, and agricultural activities.

**In 1999, a new presence was inaugurated in the diocese of Nampula**, the "Eusebia Palomino" House, opened with the aim of offering a community to the student Sisters of the Catholic University of Mozambique in Nampula. In addition to their studies, the Sisters devoted themselves to pastoral work at various levels, as well as to educational activities of adult literacy in the kindergarten.

In December 2001, the Tete School was opened in the city of Moatize. The Sisters make a great contribution to parish and community ministry, as well as teaching in schools and doing a much appreciated work in the field of health.

At the end of the six-year period, Mozambique was separated from Angola, with the Province of St. John Bosco and the Preprovince of Angola. The Superiors who led the Province in these years were: Sister Ivone de Jesus Grachane, Sister Paula Cristina Langa, Sister Zvonka Mikec, Sister Carolina Ilda Hermínio, and the current one.

**In February 2004, a new presence began in Inharrime**, in the Diocese of Inhambane, in response to the request of Bishop Alberto Setele. In addition to the pastoral work and religious initiation of young girls with a vocation, this flourishing presence is dedicated to the reception of orphaned and disadvantaged girls in the school, as well as running a secondary school that welcomes pupils from the district of Inharrime and other districts farther away.

Faced with numerous requests to found new presences, in 2010 the FMA opened a community **in Nacala** at the request of the Bishop of the diocese, Msgr. Germano Grachane, with the aim of contributing to the pastoral and to the school. It began with the pastoral care and the reception of girls with a vocation and, later, the community, having more personnel, was able to respond by assuming the management of the primary school of Santa Maria de Miramar.

The *Mary Help of Christians* community in Changara was permanently closed on December 31, 2004. Due to lack of staff, the *Eusebia Palomino* house in Nampula was temporarily closed on December 31, 2015 and reopened on January 24, 2023. Due to lack of staff and the need to build a new provincial house, the *Mother Rosetta* house on the periphery of Maputo was temporarily closed on December 31, 2017. The *St. Francis of Sales* house in Nacala was closed on December 31, 2022.

## **The presence of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Mozambique today**

At present, the St. John Bosco Province has 47 sisters, 11 of whom are missionaries ad gentes and 37 native sisters, one of whom is a missionary ad gentes. 5 novices and 4 aspirants.

The Province consists of 9 communities: three in the north - Pemba, Chiure and Nampula - one in the center, Moatize and five in the south, Inharrime, two communities in Maputo and two in Namaacha.

In almost all the communities there is as works the direction of primary and secondary schools and kindergarten. The Province then has two family houses in the south of the country, catechesis, Youth Centers, adult education (literacy). In addition, the FMA, where they are located, collaborate in youth ministry with the dioceses. Among the challenges is the lack of human resources to respond to the demands of the Province.