
PREVENTION, MANAGEMENT AND TREATMENT: A QUANTITATIVE LOOK AT THE COMMUNICATIVE
ACTION OF THE GOVERNMENT OF MOZAMBIQUE IN FIGHTING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Conteúdo

Introduction.....	2
Public transportation of people and goods.....	3
Volunteering.....	3
Prevention and combat measures.....	4
Civic education and health awareness.....	4
Face to Face Classes.....	5
Markets.....	5
Religious services and celebrations.....	6
Public and private events and commercial establishments.....	6
Additional measures.....	7
Graph of Distribution of News by Categories in Decrees 51 and 69/2020 - (Month of August).....	8

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INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic is a global public health problem. Public health aims to prevent, manage and treat diseases. As a pandemic, covid-19 is a problem that requires methodologies and approaches that involve two or more countries, as well as multilateral decision-making processes. Public health was defined as early as 1933 as “the art and science of preventing disease, prolonging life, and promoting health through organized efforts of society”¹. The general objective of public health is to “strengthen health systems and reduce inequalities in order to improve and protect the well-being of individuals, communities and populations”² in general. To this end, public health strives to promote healthy lifestyles through the use of education and research. The creation of conditions for the prevention of the spread of infectious diseases such as Covid-19, and the promotion of an equitable provision of quality health services for all citizens are crucial milestones for assessing the quality of public health both nationally and globally.

This document details how the government of Mozambique is dealing with the challenges of prevention and management of covid-19 as communicated through the media. It provides an overview of concerns about the new corona virus, SARS-Cov-2, which is plaguing the world and Mozambique. It also makes known the actions that have been taken by the Ministry of Health and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), aimed at combating the Pandemic, since April 28, 2020. The data table contains information on the most discussed categories during the month of August 2020. The introduction presents a brief contextualization about each category, and the way it was discussed in the media by different social actors.

The categories discussed are:

1. Public transportation of people and goods
2. Volunteering
3. Prevention and combat measures
4. Civic education and health awareness
5. Face to Face Classes

¹ CDC - Introduction to Public Health, <https://www.cdc.gov/publichealth101/public-health.html>

²Public Health vs. Global Health: Understanding The Difference, <https://onlinedegrees.unr.edu/blog/public-health-vs-global-health-understanding-the-difference/>

6. Markets
7. Religious services and celebrations
8. Public and private events and commercial establishments
9. Additional measures

The following is a brief description of each category. The table is at the end of the text.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION OF PEOPLE AND GOODS

The collective transport of people and goods in Mozambique is made up of a mix of public and private operators. The government decree 12/2020 of 2 April prohibited the circulation of motor cycle taxis and bicycle taxis. In the subsequent decrees (26/2020 of 8 May, 36/2020 of 2 June, 51/2020 of 1 July and 69/2020 of 11 August) the circulation of motorcycle taxis and bicycle taxis was no longer prohibited. However the circulation was approved subject to the mandatory use of masks, as is done in public and private passenger transport, and obeying the capacity rules. The intention of the policymaker is that the carrier should always limit the number of passengers to 1/3 of their capacity. Due to the pronouncements by government officials, politicians, organizations in the area and civil society there were challenges related to the capacity of public and private companies to guarantee the transportation of people while ensuring the conditions of hygiene and distance stipulated in the law. Given the fact that no new buses had been bought until then, the country returned to the “new normal” without increasing the possibility of safe transportation.

VOLUNTEERING

Volunteer actions were among the most popular in the fight against Covid-19. It involved public, philanthropic and private entities throughout the country, in providing people with the means to comply with the preventive measures. With regard to volunteering, it was the intention of the policymaker to ensure that private, non-profit, national and international entities could have space to close the gap left by the combined efforts of the State and citizens in terms of Covid-19 prevention in public places (such as hospitals , markets) and private places (such as the homes of vulnerable people). It is through these actions that the country has strengthened its actions in response to Covid-19. In the different decrees, the government stipulated that a certain category of individuals belonging to groups considered vulnerable deserved special protection, namely: individuals aged 60 years or above and individuals suffering from illnesses considered risky

(pregnant, renal diseases, hypertension, diabetic, cardiovascular diseases, oncological and carriers of respiratory diseases) (articles 6 in decree 12/2020, 26/2020 and 36/2020, and article 7 in decrees 51/2020 and 69/2020).

PREVENTION AND COMBAT MEASURES

In the context of prevention against Covid-19, the governmental emphasis is on the need for strict compliance with preventive measures, with a focus on frequent hand washing, correct use of masks and social and physical distancing as stipulated in decrees 12 / 2020 of 2 April, 26/2020 of 8 May, 69/2020 of 11 August. The decrees reiterate that physical distancing, frequent hand washing, mandatory use of masks in public and private places, as well as in passenger transport, are basic measures in preventing the pandemic. It is noted that there are still certain challenges to implement these measures. One of them is lack of public hand washing stations (other than markets and public institutions with different access rules). On the other hand, there are the disadvantaged who cannot afford masks for facial protection and therefore depend on charity so as to have the means which enable them to go out.

CIVIC EDUCATION AND HEALTH AWARENESS

In all the decrees of the state of emergency the authorities should implement measures that raise awareness and civic education about the pandemic to citizens. The focus on compliance with pandemic prevention measures has been to raise awareness and disseminate information about Covid-19. But there are aspects little observed when it comes to awareness, which go beyond things like the reach of information by the target group, the type of message that is spread or the type of language used. As can be seen in countries with a higher literacy rate, citizens with full knowledge of prevention measures rebel against them. In the case of Mozambique, the citizens who visit bottle stores, churches, gyms, and other non-essential places are among the most literate in the country, which seems to indicate that more information about the disease is not the obvious solution to ensure compliance with preventive measures. In the different decrees, the government legislates on the need to “implement additional measures with a view to raising awareness and civic and health education of citizens about the covid-19 pandemic, namely through public and private mass media and other means considered adequate” (articles 35 of decree 12/2020, article 38 in decrees 26 and 36/2020, article 42 of decree 51/2020, and article 41 in decree 69/2020).

During this period, there was no reflection on other measures to raise awareness among literate groups.

FACE TO FACE CLASSES

With the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in the country, which forced the closure of educational establishments, in the first decrees of the state of emergency (12/2020 of 2 April and 26/2020 of 8 May), the policymaker, in an attempt to allow learning to continue at home, determined that educational and vocational institutions should issue instructions to ensure compliance with teaching programs in the context of Covid-19. There was a period of experimentation with the distance learning model, but later it lost political support when it was publicly denounced by the ministry of education in the country. On 11 August, in Article 15 of decree 69/2020, the government decided to gradually reopen educational establishments from 18 August. It also stipulated in the same article that classes could start through a contingency plan and the creation of adequate sanitary conditions. This legal provision prompted the education ministry responsible to begin immediately with a program for the rehabilitation and reorganization of schools. The debates surrounding the Face to Face classes brought to light the serious problems of under investment in infrastructure in public schools, some of them without drinking water or toilets in conditions to be used.

MARKETS

The markets area is one of the most challenging in managing the Covid-19 pandemic. First, markets (both formal and informal) functioned to a great extent in the post-independence period as areas left to the discretion of local / party authorities, where the organizational and supervisory action was basically limited to charging fees. In the different decrees of the state of emergency, the opening hours of the markets remain static. In the first three, the legislation makes it clear that markets can be closed in compliance with the recommendations of the competent authorities and that market managers must create the necessary conditions to ensure compliance with preventive measures among sellers and between sellers and customers, as well as the use of masks (article 20 in decree 12/2020, article 23 in decrees 26/2020 and 36/2020, article 25 in decrees 51/2020 and 69/2020). The same managers were tasked with disinfecting the markets on a regular basis. In the last two decrees of the state of emergency, the legislation says that in order to comply with the

measures to prevent and combat the Covid-19 pandemic, local agencies must reorganize the markets. This reorganization has been controversial in most markets, often consisting of a simple transfer of people from the formal areas of the markets to their periphery. Hygiene and prevention issues were often completely abandoned after a certain period.

RELIGIOUS SERVICES AND CELEBRATIONS

In the first three decrees of the state of emergency, the suspension of services and any type of religious celebration in groups and in all places intended for the practice of services is clearly stated. The suspension previously mentioned also opens up the possibility of exercising the right to freedom of worship at home, through observance of the Covid-19 pandemic prevention measures. In the fourth decree, the possibility of reopening the places of worship comes up after the progressive assessment of health security conditions. In the last decree, the practice of services is authorized by reducing the number of participants, application of the health protocol issued by the Ministry of Health, existence of a sectoral contingency plan, and finally, the verification of the appropriate conditions in each place of worship by the health authorities. (Article 15 in Decree 12/2020, Article 16 in Decrees 26/2020 and 36/2020, Article 18 in Decrees 51/2020 and 69/2020).

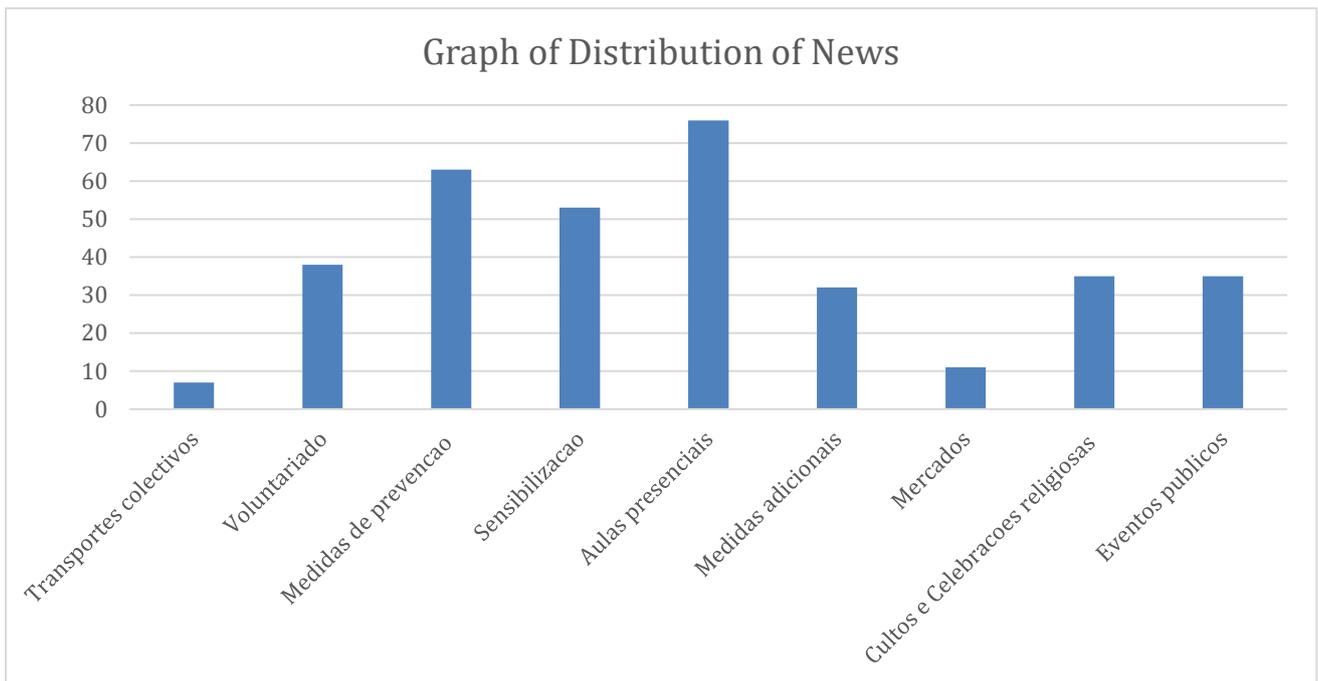
PUBLIC AND PRIVATE EVENTS AND COMMERCIAL ESTABLISHMENTS

In the first two decrees of the state of emergency, cultural, recreational and sporting activities practiced in public places, including beach attendance, were prohibited. As a result, entertainment venues and some commercial establishments were closed, such as: nightclubs, gaming rooms, bars, museums, libraries and others. The ban was not valid, if it were state events. In the third decree, there was an exception in the area of sport. High performance athletes and their coaches who were preparing for the Tokyo Olympics in some modalities, however, with due regard to preventive measures, were exempt from the ban. The fourth decree authorized, under strict observance of the measures to prevent and combat the pandemic of Covid-19, the return to training for national teams with international games and the reopening of museums, galleries and libraries. In the last state of emergency decree, interdictions continued, but there were areas that benefited from the easing of restrictive measures, such as cinemas, theaters and casinos (Article 14 in Decree 12/2020, Article 15 in Decrees 26 / 2020 and 36/2020, article 17 in decrees 51/2020 and 69/2020).

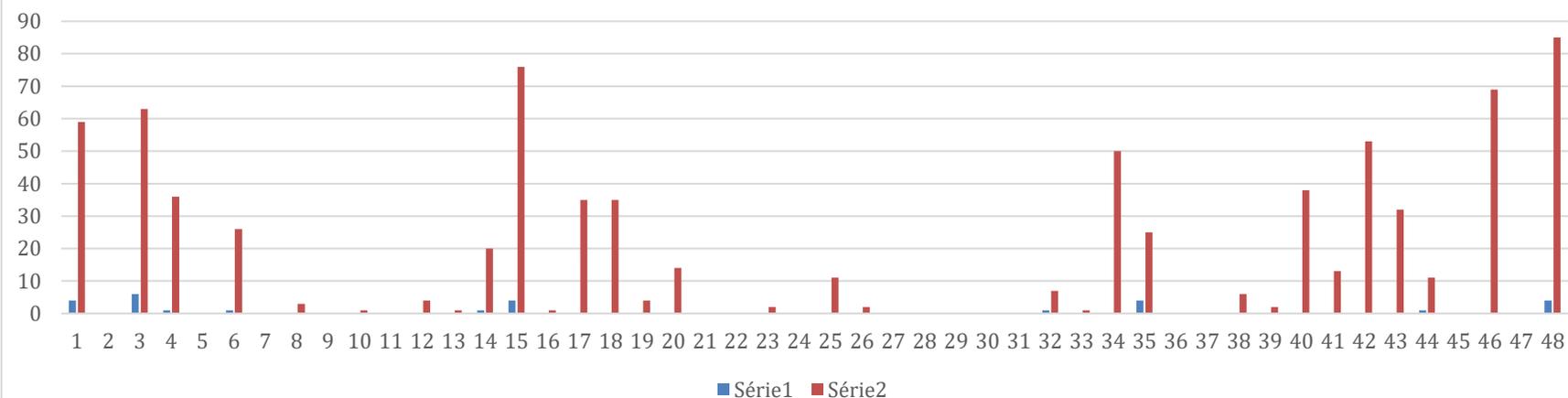
ADDITIONAL MEASURES

With this legal provision, the government created conditions for public institutions to be able to respond to Covid-19's challenges quickly and dynamically, without having to wait for new decrees. The government stipulated that “all additional measures (6, 12/2020, Article 39 of Decrees 26 and 36/2020, Article 43 of Decree 51/2020 and Article 42 of Decree 69/2020) adopted by competent authorities for the prevention and combating of the Covid 19 pandemic” are valid and effective since they do not contradict what has been stated in different decrees. The apparent legal opening did not, however, function as a mechanism for social dialogue in the discussion of other combat measures, but rather as another space where other government institutions communicated their activities related to Covid-19. Apparently, the criticisms and suggestions from citizens and social groups did not reach the policymaker through this legal window, because the different decrees did not include (let alone openly discuss) social suggestions on new approaches to combating Covid-19 - such as extending social assistance, supporting informal vendors, school snacks for students, special protection for victims of domestic violence, financial transparency, public transport, etc. The potential for dialogue that this legal provision has brought seems to be so far ignored by the executive. Some crucial areas for the prevention of covid-19, such as waste management, have been completely ignored by policymakers at both national and municipal levels. Bearing in mind that the Covid-19 virus survives in bathroom wastewater, garbage and places where citizens even water vegetables with dirty water constitute potential sources of the spread.

GRAPH OF DISTRIBUTION OF NEWS BY CATEGORIES IN DECREES 51 AND 69/2020 - (MONTH OF AUGUST)



**Graph of distribution of news by article of decrees 51 and 69/2020
(August)
CEDE**



Maputo, Setembro de 2020

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