

Social Transformations Resulting from the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract: “*Social transformations resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic*”: this is the subject of this study, a subject that continues to raise debates and reflections in all corners of the world; because the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively affected human societies in their most different sectors, but has brought opportunities to build new bonds - bonds that renew the sense of an existence that is no longer possible as in the more recent past. The objective of this study is, therefore, to map the transformations brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic in Mozambique in the fields of education, transport, health, economics and in the social sector; showing, in the final analysis, that the lived emergency leads man to confront the essential of existence and with what, although not necessarily negative, he can put aside. To ensure this elaboration, the method of reviewing the literature on the subject under study was followed, which has a rich scientific production around the world. As for the conclusion, this study points out that our habits of life in different fields need to be rethought to promote the resumption of activities in the post-COVID-19 period. To this end, complex challenges must be faced, including that of the reorganization of education, transport, health, economics and social sector with short-term interventions, but also of a more structural nature.

Keywords: COVID-19, Education, Health, Transport, Economy, Society, Transformations

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic represents the biggest public health challenge in recent world history and has shown serious social and economic impacts on most countries [1].

When a social phenomenon is still ongoing (COVID-19 Pandemic), it is not easy to propose an interpretation, as there is a risk of making a partial reading and not adequately apprehending all its implications [2].

COVID-19 is a contagious disease and is transmitted from one person to another through small droplets that spread out of the nose or mouth when a person with COVID-19 coughs, exhales, speaks or sings [3]. These droplets spread and land on objects and surfaces that are around the person with COVID-19, so when other subjects pick up such objects or surfaces and then touch their eyes, nose or mouth, they contract COVID-19, says this source.

The rapid spread of COVID-19 has forced the

governments of all countries to take preventive measures to reduce or avoid/stop the contamination of their citizens, such as social isolation, closing borders, mandatory use of the mask, among others, because according to the WHO this is a controllable disease [4]. Despite these measures, the COVID-19 pandemic has created negative impacts on the lives of populations, not only on health but also social (education), economic (transport, commerce, work), political, cultural. However, with the emergence of COVID-19, nations had to reinvent themselves by modifying their habits so that work, education and family life could proceed in a different way from “normal”, representing “the new normal”.

With COVID-19, the world is called upon to adopt a new form of social behavior, new forms of interpersonal relationships, consumption and new work strategies. We live in a time of care, in which human, professional and educational relationships have been resized due to the social isolation caused by the coronavirus.

2. COVID-19 and Education

In the beginning of 2020, schools and universities have been closed in most countries around the world¹ in an attempt to limit the spread of novel coronavirus disease [5]. The disruption has also impacted the work of more than 63 million primary and secondary school teachers, as well as countless education support personnel. It has also affected early childhood education personnel, technical and vocational training personnel and higher education teachers [5].

Teachers and schools have been creative in adopting a variety of technology-based strategies as alternatives to the traditional classroom, providing lessons through videoconferencing and online learning platforms and sharing learning materials and worksheets through school-based intranets and messaging platforms. In some countries² radio programmes and national television are being used to broadcast school lessons and educational materials, particularly in under-resourced areas that may be lacking in technological infrastructure [5].

Furthermore, COVID-19 ILO Sectoral Brief [5], consider that while solutions to the disruption have been innovative and responsive, the reality remains that some schools and regions are better positioned than others to take advantage of resources, technological infrastructure and the education technology market to respond to the crisis in more effective and comprehensive ways. The emphasis on virtual learning can exacerbate existing inequalities in education, particularly in developing contexts, marginalized communities and rural settings, where access to technology and reliable Internet connections may be limited.

According to the same source, the sudden onset of the crisis has forced many teachers into virtual classrooms, unprepared for the demands and expectations of this new reality. The rush to transition to working remotely has left them with insufficient preparation time to learn and adapt to the modalities of virtual and distance teaching, managing virtual workspaces and classes, and engaging students in new and innovative ways of learning. For some teachers, these challenges are amplified by their own caregiving responsibilities and lack of access to technology and infrastructure, and for many more, the situation has required out-of-pocket expenses for supplies and equipment [5].

Therefore, society is undergoing a broad process of transformation, especially in the digital evolution. Nowadays, many tasks are no longer performed without the presence of digital devices, online. We live in a social context where

connectivity and collaboration are part of the lives of millions of people [6]. In this way, education in the time of COVID-19 starts to assume technology as a space for transformation. Hyper-connected students in the classroom now have access to different sources of information, being updated at every moment about events happening in the world. In this sense, it is essential to rethink the use of ICT³ in the classroom as a tool to mediate learning [6].

With the suspensions of classes due to COVID-19, much is said about the use of digital technologies to mediate the remote learning process as an alternative to not suspending classes. Having to resort to distance education, some institutions are adapting to use digital platforms for learning mediation purposes.

Casagrande cited by Barreto & Rocha [7] emphasizes that the use of new technologies as a form of teaching and learning is a tool already used in higher education and, with COVID-19, it serves to repair damage to students during the spread of the virus. However, the use of technologies in basic education is a bigger problem, because schools are not prepared, therefore, educational institutions must adapt quickly and make use of new technologies. For these practices to be effective it is necessary that all students have access to the internet.

For Junior & Monteiro [8], Google Classroom is the most chosen platform for remote mediation, as it does not require a local installation and an exclusive server. The tool is online, it houses students and teachers, facilitating the entry (login) and the integration of different resources made available by Google itself.

In this context, it is important that teachers assume their own role in the educational process, not only using technologies, but allowing the resource used to include all students, in order to meet the specific educational needs of each one [8]. With a view to universalizing learning in a flexible and virtual way, it is believed that it is possible to continue to develop the educational process using ICT's, reducing the impacts or effects of social isolation in the training of thousands of students away from the physical structure of the face-to-face classroom. [8]

Despite numerous positive reports about the use of digital tools, difficulties in adapting to the new reality are also recognized. Every transition, however, requires adaptation, not only from students, but from teachers and educational managers [8].

The COVID-19 pandemic dictated the need for reforms in various aspects of education, despite its negative impacts, an improvement can be seen in educational administration in Mozambique [9]. Before the pandemic, teachers worked with overcrowded classes. With COVID-19, there was a reduction in the number of students per class, which represents a relief

¹ School closures, especially when combined with other restrictive measures of personal freedom, can affect the psychological well-being and physical health of children and young people by causing social isolation, loss of peer and teacher support, and reduction of 'physical activity, SILVIA MINOZZI et al (2021). Impact of social distancing for covid-19 on young people: type and quality of studies found through a systematic review of the literature. *Recent Advances in Medicine*, 112 (5).

² At the international level, the United Nations Economic, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has launched a Global Education Coalition, of which ILO is a member, which seeks to bring together international organizations, non-governmental organizations and the private sector on supporting COVID-19 responses in education.

³ The use of ICTs in teaching and learning is largely advantageous, as it gives the student more hours of learning; since there is no need to travel to the educational institution, all the time is used for study. In addition, less financial resources are spent on transport and school lunch, as learning takes place at home. Allied to this, the student awakens the capacity for self-learning through the research he does through ICTs.

in the work of teachers. In the period before the pandemic, there was not enough infrastructure, fundamentally for the supply of drinking water in public schools. With the crisis, efforts were made to ensure water in all schools in order to allow the hygiene of the hands of students, teachers and all members of the school community. In addition, with the outbreak of the pandemic, classes began to be taught virtually [9]. As can be seen, the pandemic accelerated a process that was already underway, that is, the integration of digital information and communication technologies in educational institutions. This new reality demanded that all those involved (students, teachers, parents and guardians) in the educational process develop skills in the use of information and communication technologies. In addition, the pandemic has forced parents and guardians to be more involved in their children's learning, supporting the acquisition of computer resources, helping to solve the sheets made available by schools, clarifying difficulties, explaining the subject, among other ways.

Still in education, specifically in the area of research, in universities (Pedagogical University, etc.) there was a need to combine synergies in the search for a global response to a common problem. In this context, through investigations carried out, hand hygiene gels were produced..., which is one of the ways to prevent the disease.

3. COVID-19 and the Transport Sector

Public transport is heavily affected by the effects of the health emergency. It is therefore necessary to reflect on how to support the sector and the public service and on how to reorganize and reshape the mobility needs of our urban areas [10].

However, for DFI [10], the assiduous use of public transport entails an increased risk of infection with the new coronavirus. To minimize this risk, these recommendations go: 1) Avoid taking public transport for travel for tourism purposes and during leisure time; 2) Keep your distance from other people on public transport and strictly observe the rules of hygiene and general recommendations of behaviour; 3) Under no circumstances should you take public transport if you have symptoms of a respiratory illness (e.g. dry cough and fever) and stay home; 4) People over the age of 65 should avoid taking public transport as much as possible [10].

It's known that the Transport Sector constitutes the anchor for economic activity, given its transversality in the connections between the various sectors. Like other sectors, transport was severely affected by COVID-19 as a result of the slowdown in activity in other sectors [11].

In order to respond to the public health problem related to the COVID-19 pandemic, several measures were approved in Mozambique through Decree No. 12/2020 of Council of Ministers, namely: 1) Determination of the need to comply with a limit number of passengers for collective, public or private transport⁴; 2) Determination of the obligation for the

owners of companies or vehicles to guarantee hygiene and health safety conditions [12].

The feasibility of these measures involves prioritizing investment in strengthening the response capacity of the bus fleets (private and public) which is still far from meeting demand [12].

4. COVID-19 and Health

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic further exposed the challenges of a fragile health system that the country has faced, including a continuous shortage of personnel, lack of adequate infrastructure, insufficient financial resources and lack of preparedness for the management of public health emergencies.

In order to face the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Health prepared in April 2020, the National Plan for Preparedness and Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic, which presents response strategies informed by the progression of the pandemic in time and space and in the transmissibility and/or severity of the disease. In light of the aforementioned plan, a set of multilevel and multifaceted interventions were implemented to minimize the risk of the introduction and spread of SARS-COV-2 in Mozambique and reduce the negative impact on the health of the population and on the economic and social sphere of the country [13].

There are several actions taken to protect the health of Mozambicans, from the declarations of the state of emergency and more recently of the state of public calamity by the President of the Republic, which in combination with the actions of the intervention pillars helped the country to delay the negative impact on the health sector. Among the various measures taken, social confinement by encouraging work from home, interruption of face-to-face classes, reducing the size of public meetings and contact activities, restriction of business hours, use of face masks in public spaces, regular hand disinfection in order to reduce exposure to the virus and thus reduce its spread [13].

The health system's ability to maintain essential health services has been greatly pressured by the demands of the COVID-19 pandemic; several health professionals infected by COVID-19, in particular in Greater Maputo and Nampula and with several deaths, increasing the stress on the SNS's ability to provide quality care; the strategy adopted at entry points was very proactive and positive as it contributed to delaying the introduction of the virus in Mozambique [13].

Robust data on the number of infected health workers are not, however, being collected systematically, as many countries do not have adequate reporting mechanisms in place. Furthermore, many reports do not distinguish health worker infection by general and occupational exposure, but rather include all sources of infection [10].

⁴ With the reduction in the number of passengers in public transport, traveling by bus has become more comfortable. Allied to this, the transporters finished their activity earlier leaving more time for rest. There was also a reduction in the flow

of vehicles on the roads/avenues of the cities, as there was a reduction in working hours accompanied by the alternation of the presence of employees in the workplace.

Going beyond, ILO Sectoral Brief [10], refer that every infected health worker means a further gap in the fight against the pandemic. Ensuring the safety and health of health workers is therefore a matter of high priority. The health-care workplace is particularly vulnerable to the risk of exposure to COVID-19. According to current knowledge, the two main routes of transmission are direct interaction with patients and contact with respiratory droplets in the space closely surrounding an infected person.

The capacity of health systems for rapid reorganization to respond to the crisis by mobilizing health workers, while at the same time ensuring the ongoing provision of essential services along the continuum of care, is equally critical and challenging [10].

To address in a focused way the imminent health challenges, including the response to the exponential increase in cases of COVID-19, the response plan was guided by nine key objectives in order to minimize the spread of COVID-19 and reduce the mortality by COVID-19 in the country:

- 1) Strengthen the capacity for intrasectoral, intersectoral, multisectoral and provincial coordination, as well as improve planning and monitoring procedures;
- 2) Ensure the provision of medicines, laboratory supplies, vaccines, medical-surgical material and personal protective equipment in the expected quantities;
- 3) Strengthen national laboratories for timely detection of COVID-19 cases;
- 4) Improve the surveillance system for timely reporting of COVID-19 cases and rapid response;
- 5) Strengthen risk communication and community engagement interventions for behavior change to reduce SARS-COV2 transmission;
- 6) Protect health professionals and users of the Health Units through the prompt availability of personal protective equipment and greater rigor in complying with infection prevention and control measures;
- 7) Treat all cases of COVID-19 in a timely manner and avoid complications and associated deaths;
- 8) Ensure the continuity of primary, secondary and tertiary health care, strengthening the health system;
- 9) Ensuring protection of the country's borders at all points of entry for a reinforced control of the entry of travelers infected by COVID-19.

Health care coverage in the National Health Service was affected both by reduced demand as well as supply constraints related to COVID-19, but its continuity and progressive improvement in supply was notable.

5. COVID-19 and Commercial Activities

The performance of the Mozambican economy, in 2020, was compromised due to interaction of adverse shocks, especially the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic. The restrictions adopted throughout 2020 with a view to containing the pace of the spread of infections by the new coronavirus competed for the sharp slowdown in the level of economic activity, hence the need to assess the costs of the

effects of the pandemic on the economy [14].

The crisis created by COVID-19 has put to the test the ability of economies to respond to crises of various dimensions. Its effects on the economy and the ability to mitigate them depend on the type of economic and social structures that characterize each country [15].

Restrictive measures to stop the rapid spread of COVID-19 around the world have had negative effects on global economic activity. This has led countries to take measures to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on their economies. In Mozambique, a few days before the official announcement of the first case of infection by COVID-19, a set of restrictive measures was taken to stop the rapid spread of the virus. These measures were evident in the first decree on the State of Emergency, approved by parliament on 31 March 2020 [15].

As in the rest of the world, the restrictive measures had an immediate impact on economic activity, especially in production, trade, transport and services. Since the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economy were already being felt even before the emergence of the first case of infection and the determination of the first restrictive measures, measures for its mitigation were being considered [15].

With the measures adopted to contain the spread of the pandemic, in March 2020, a number of productive activities were closed, putting companies in a situation of vulnerability⁵ that resulted in the stoppage of their activities, in the reduction of supply and consequent loss of income. The combination of these factors resulted in the loss of workers' income, given the difficulties and impossibility of paying wages, especially for SMEs. As a result, in the first months of the restrictive measures in force, there was an increase in unemployment and, consequently, a reduction in the demand for goods and services by families [15].

In the context of COVID-19, merchants had to reinvent themselves based on online sales accompanied by home delivery. As pointed out by EY-Parthenonta [16], traders were forced to adopt new business models by adapting their distribution and sales channels for their goods. The new business model favors the movement of goods towards people, to the detriment of the movement of people towards goods, that is, merchants started to honor home delivery or takeaway. Allied to this, there is the growth of digital consumption of activities whose nature is more difficult to "define", as is the case of shows, sports, among others, says EY-Parthenonta [16]. In addition, other commercial activities have targeted new customers by offering attractive prices for their products.

6. COVID-19 and Society

Nowadays, society is going through a problematic and worrying moment in history. The COVID-19 pandemic spread rapidly and devastatingly around the world, infecting

⁵ Special attention should be paid to the immediate economic impact on poor and vulnerable populations, namely informal workers and their families in urban and suburban areas, who live on daily income and savings, e.g. informal market businesses, micro/small suppliers and producers, street vendors, cf. UN Mozambique (2020). COVID-19 multisectoral response plan.

more than 5 million people and killing about 360,000 [17].

One of the measures adopted to reduce the spread of the virus, and consequently the number of deaths, was social isolation. In a society that is based on productivity, where more than half of the population works around ten hours a day, a “stop” was imposed that dictated the suspension of social life⁶ until one was confined to home day after day. According to Cambi et al [17], interpersonal relationships started to be carried out in virtual spaces, giving the false sensation of proximity and socialization without any type of physical contact. From this experience, we realized the real importance and necessity of coexistence and relationship. Man, however, is a social being - he is made to integrate a greater unity, to develop himself, to go beyond individuality, to communicate and interact with others in order to reach fullness.

Humanity has been living for years in a situation of normalization of chaos⁷, as if misery, environmental degradation and social injustice were mere side effects of the search for wealth and economic power.

However, with the outbreak of COVID-19, society was paralyzed, and it was necessary to review the values that form it and admit the fragility of its structure. The COVID-19 pandemic made all the evils arising from social inequality obvious, showed that, in a world marked by economic conflicts and the search for wealth and power, the virus makes those who already live in a situation of extreme violation of fundamental rights even more vulnerable.

The installed situation imposed on everyone the need for self-reflection and breaking of pre-established social standards. This disease made people realize the importance of the other, because someone's life depends on taking care of the other's life (Nobody is immune to the disease, so taking care of yourself has come to mean taking care of the other too [18]. This means that it is not enough for a person to take care of Covid-19, when others cannot take care of themselves, thus becoming potential transmitters of the disease. It was in this context that the state began to provide food for the neediest families.

It cannot be accepted, therefore, that people continue to give exaggerated value to what is superfluous in a period when human lives are being decimated by the thousands everyday.

7. Conclusion

The COVID-19 era is responsible for a series of transformations that today influence the choices of citizens, families, companies and governments; it is for everyone a radical experience of immersion in reality, because the virus

has brought back some fundamental anthropological questions that had been forgotten. The emergence of this phenomenon did not lead man to improve automatically; but it led him to have a more objective, more human outlook on life, and it reopened some questions about life itself: What can I know? What should I do? What can I expect? What is man?

The post-pandemic society is called adapting to a way of existing not yet known that aims, above all, to overcome resistance to the transformations operated in the different social sectors (education, health, transport, economy...) imposed by the complexity of a phenomenon that changed the course of history.

Our cities and our habits of life and consumption need to be rethought to promote the resumption of activities in the post-COVID-19 period. To this end, complex challenges must be faced, including that of the reorganization of mobility, with short-term interventions, but also of a more structural nature. A rethinking must also take place for places of entertainment and aggregation; it is necessary to develop strategies that combine actions of civic involvement and the recovery of spaces, such as green areas, underused public buildings and, possibly, disused shops [19].

Going along with a study carried out at University of Pisa [19], it is reaffirmed that the allocation of public resources to the digital transformation of the economy and society cannot be postponed. This is fundamental to favor the reconversion of human activities as a whole and to seize the opportunities that can arise from the changes that the emergency has produced on economic systems, on the labor market, as well as on people's lifestyles, also to seek to limit the risk of marginalization. Structured training initiatives are fundamental to improve the digital culture both to allow citizens to use the services electronically and to allow economic operators to adapt their business models and service delivery [19].

8. Suggestions

After the suffering caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, in a social and economic context that sees inequalities increase, it is necessary: *a)* to build a more just and equitable society, *b)* to vigorously combat the poverty pandemic, *c)* to design and promote more and more connectivity between human communities, *d)* capitalize on the experience of COVID-19 for society to reinvent itself in various aspects of life such as: fighting hunger, natural disasters, climate change, among others, *e)* schools can take advantage of the experience of using ICT's for the rationalized management of spaces, interspersing face-to-face classes with online ones.

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6 The closure or reduction in the number of people in the various commercial establishments such as restaurants, clubs, bars, beaches, etc., made families more economical (spending less), and that parents were more present at home accompanying the development and education of children. In addition, the most vulnerable groups were supported with food products that would guarantee them to stay at home in order to respond with the call for social isolation.

7 End of World War II, end of the Cold War.

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