A Constructed State

The IMF and the World Bank are very happy with Mozambique. But, of course, 14 per cent of nothing is still nothing.

World Bank representative to Mozambique, 1998

A government is not elected or nominated to rob its people nor are its members to appropriate for themselves the best economic opportunities in the country.

Editorial in Savana, 1999

The transformation of Mozambique from Africa’s war ravaged mendicant to a much-touted economic success built upon a democratic foundation, while exaggerated by its proponents, nonetheless generated significant international interest. With the international community taking credit for these positive developments, just as it had in the successful aftermath of the peacekeeping operation, it found itself increasingly in the position of needing to sustain Mozambique’s ‘miraculous’ transition through recourse to extraordinary measures. And yet the gap between the international assessment of its achievements in Mozambique and the actual situation was considerable. This was evident in the area of its most obvious success, the resolution of conflict, where despite the termination of the international support programmes for ex-soldiers, the conditions of volatility and criminality persisted. This was also evident in the political sphere where re-legitimating the state through democratization disguised its superficial nature and the
difficulties experienced in devolving power away from the centre. Finally, this was evident in the restructuring of the economy, where a consistent record of improvement in the gross economic indicators obscured the reversion of key sectors into foreign hands coupled with the astonishing rise in corruption. In the absence of substantive international commitment to its stated agenda for change, the imperatives of African society ‘captured’ the very processes and institutions that were created to ‘emancipate’ it. The result was the ushering in not of the new African state in Mozambique as initially conceived but a patently different entity.

This chapter will examine, against a background of reputed success, the shortcomings of the international community’s efforts to achieve its broader objectives for remaking the post-conflict African state in Mozambique. It will critically analyse the international role in fostering change in the areas of resolution of conflict, political re-legitimization through elections and civil society, and the restructuring of the economy against the growing realization of the limitations of conditionality and the resilience of African society. Finally, the chapter will assess the implications of the incomplete fulfilment of the international agenda for change upon the shape of post-conflict Mozambique.

The changing international agenda and the new African state

The internationalist consensus on an interventionist agenda for Africa, which had reached its height in the early 1990s, started to erode as it began to experience a range of difficulties in achieving its ambitious plans for deep structural change. On the one hand, the shortcomings of the international approach were coupled to unforeseen difficulties that arose from the donors themselves and their domestic constituencies who were unable or unwilling to sustain their activist programme. On the other hand, the obstacles to change were more substantial than anticipated, coming from within the fabric of African states and societies. The result of this situation was to jeopardize the construction of the new post-conflict African state.

In the area of conflict, the promise of resolution through international mediation and peacekeeping operations, the prerequisite to Africa’s recovery, had been severely challenged by events over the