



Liaison, Dialogue and Research

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Policy Brief

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SALO Public Dialogue on Mozambique

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Executive Summary

SALO held a public multi-stakeholder dialogue on 16 September 2021 on the conflict in Mozambique, titled: “*SALO Public Multi-stakeholder Dialogue: Marginalised voices in Mozambique.*” The aim of the dialogue was to engage with a grassroots perspective on the conflict and, in particular, to highlight the experiences of internally displaced persons, women, children and religious and ethnic minorities. Speakers at the event included **João Feijó**, coordinator of the research line on Poverty, Inequalities and Conflicts at the Rural Environment Observatory in Maputo; **Julia Wachave**, Director of Women and Girls Protection (ONG) Cabo Delgado, Mozambique; **Fatima Mimbire**, Journalist and Human Rights Defender; with responses from **Leila Constantino**, Economist in Mozambique and **Adriana Nhancale**, from Centro para Democracia e Desenvolvimento (CDD).

Importance of the Problem

Mozambique's northernmost province of Cabo Delgado has been plagued by violent extremism since 2017. More than 3300 people have reportedly been killed by Ahlu Sunna Wal Jammah (ASWJ). More than two-thirds of those impacted by the ASWJ violence have been civilians.¹ The conflict in Mozambique has had a massive impact on the lives of the Mozambicans. The number of internally displaced people rose from around 70,000 in 2020 to close to 700,000 in March of 2021, with the numbers expected to keep increasing (current numbers are unclear). The area has experienced shocking accounts of beheadings, killings, rape and other atrocities.²

This violence has prompted military interventions and external commitments to fight the ongoing insurgency. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) has deployed troops to the area in an attempt to quell the insurgency from further escalation and spillover in a mission dubbed SAMIM (SADC Mission in Mozambique).³ Independently from the SADC deployment, the Rwandan government sent troops to Mozambique in July 2021.⁴

The conflict is often viewed solely from a security perspective, while the voices on the ground are not amplified. This dialogue sought to mitigate this issue by creating a platform

¹ Pirio, G., Pittelli, R. and Adam, Y. 2021. *Cries from the Community: Listening to the People of Cabo Delgado*. Available: <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/cries-from-the-community-listening-to-the-people-of-cabo-delgado/>

² United Nations, 2021. Mozambique: Cabo Delgado displacement could reach 1 million, UN officials warn. March. Available: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1087952>

³ Defence Web. 2021. SAMIM marks milestones in counter-insurgency fight. 10 November 2021. Available: <https://www.defenceweb.co.za/featured/samim-marks-milestones-in-counter-insurgency-fight/>.

⁴ SADC extends troop deployment in Mozambique to fight insurgency. IOL. 5 October 2021. Available: <https://www.iol.co.za/news/world/sadc-extends-troop-deployment-in-mozambique-to-fight-insurgency-16af5c80-8ac7-5295-9b2f-208e8e9bd6b9>

where an alternative voice can be highlighted and the mainstream narrative around the conflict can be challenged.

The current and future security situation in the country

According to João Feijó, *“the situation in the field is much better now concerning stability and military security. In April 2021, the situation was very bad.”* However, he expressed concern over what would happen when the Rwandan and SADC troops leave Mozambique because, at this stage, it is unclear what the exit plan will be. Currently, the local population is largely cooperating with the Rwandan troops. For this to spill over to the Mozambican troops, there needs to be reform inside the Mozambican army, especially regarding intelligence, internal discipline, logistical support, the ability to relate with and build the trust of the population.

Fatima Mimbire added to this,

“We are really concerned... about the future after the international force's support because we don't see the state doing any investments to prepare the forces to deal with the situation, to control the situation, to maintain stability in the region. We also don't see the state investing in social cohesion.”

She believes that the Rwandan intervention has been successful thus far because the nature of communication between the Mozambican state and the population has changed from what it was previously. From the beginning of 2017, communication from the government was severely lacking and the media was barred from giving an accurate depiction of the situation on the ground and were often prosecuted. This ‘secrecy methodology’ of the state was challenged by the intervention of the Rwandese. The Mozambican government is now communicating better with the citizens because if they do not, the Rwandans will, which will harm the reputation of the government. She added:

“So, after the troops are gone, what will happen in Mozambique? My hope as a citizen, as the human rights defender, is that after the troops are gone, people can restart their lives, people can return to their region [and] can return to their normal lives. But my question is, will we have the conditions to allow that to happen?”

This will depend on a few things, as discussed by the speakers, the first being whether the military response is supported by a program of de-radicalisation to address the root causes of the conflict, one being religious radicalisation. Further root causes that need to be addressed are grievances related to poverty, social and economic exclusion, the lack of local ownership over the rich natural resource base and the subsequent unemployment. The Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) projects in the area have led to the

displacement of communities inland. This has added to the local grievances because these people had to start over in a place where they were unfamiliar with the territory.

The government has created an entity called ADIN (North Integrated Development Agency) which is a development agency to carry out socio-economic development projects in the area. ADIN has four main functions, namely, humanitarian assistance, economic development, community resilience and communication.⁵ However, according to Fatima: *“What we saw is that the ADIN has no resources.”* As such, it has been ineffective at assisting those most in need and is considered to be a response that has been ‘too little, too late’ and will not effectively address the root causes of the conflict.

The Humanitarian Situation

Previously, the government did not take a proactive approach to communication and hid the severity of the conflict while people were being displaced, kidnapped, and killed. Partly as a result of this, nearly 800 000 people became displaced. 90% of them are not receiving any support from the government and are living with relatives and friends. This is putting further pressure on communities where food insecurity is increasingly becoming more dire. Furthermore, it is increasing the risk for the spread of COVID-19 in these communities as there are often 10 to 20 people living together in one house. As it stands, Mozambique does not have a national strategy as to how to deal with IDPs and also lacks a clear mechanism for dialogue where IDPs can have their voices heard.

Adriana Nhancale added to this by stressing the importance of including voices that are often the most marginalized in these types of conversations and how this exclusion is often part and parcel of the root causes of conflict.

“We need to look for the perspective of those who have been most affected. That is the IDPs, the EDPs and other citizens in the Northern regions of Mozambique affected by violent extremism.”

One such group is women. Julia Wachave highlighted the situation for women on the ground. Gender-based violence has also been on the increase in these types of situations:

“women are pregnant [and] they're coming from the bush; they're coming from the areas where there's been conflict. So, we don't know if those pregnancies are from

⁵ Cilliers, J., Louw-Vaudran, L., Walker, T., Els, W. and Ewi, M. 2021. What would it take to stabilise Cabo Delgado? Institute for Security Studies. 27 May. Available: <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/what-would-it-take-to-stabilise-cabo-delgado>

the insurgents [or] from the husband, but we know that they've been raped, and they're coming to the cities pregnant.”

These factors exacerbate the psychological and trauma-related problems that come with conflict situations. Women and girls are disproportionately affected as they lack critical services and are often not able to make their voices heard in terms of their needs and what they wish to see in the community, due to a systemic lack of political participation. Women are economically marginalised and many do not have an income. Without a means to provide for herself and her family, political participation will be unlikely. These problems have been exacerbated by the conflict which has added a double burden on women. Julia Wachave added that women and the youth are not educated on their rights.

The Government Narrative

João Feijó explained that the government discourse in Mozambique comprises three myths about the conflict:

“The first one is that the enemy has no face. The second is that we don't know what they want. And the third is that there are no communication channels with the insurgents.”

However, he continued to unpack these myths.

Myth 1: The Enemy has no Face

The idea that ‘the enemy has no face’ obscures the internal causes of the conflict and chooses instead to focus on the international aspect. Although there is international participation, it is important to note the participation of thousands of local Mozambicans in the violence. This myth is a useful political tool to view the conflict as external, and detracts from internal issues and responsibilities. Furthermore,

“...the majority of local populations know quite well, who the insurgents [are]. They are people who grew up in that area. In fact, the names of the leaders were told to the government before the conflict started but the government didn't pay enough attention to it.”

Myth 2: It is unclear what the insurgents want

On the second myth, that it is unclear what the insurgents want, he admitted that a clear and political project of the insurgents is not known, but some ideas can be drawn from their past conduct on what they want. The first is that they want to implement Shariah law

and that the Quran is the answer for the social chaos. He says, according to the insurgents,

“to obey the President is a sin, it is not accepted. So, there is this condemnation of democracy. Democracy is understood as a system responsible for social injustice, inequalities, [and] poverty.”

Myth 3: There is no communication with the insurgents

There are indeed no formal lines of communication with the insurgents but informal channels do exist. One is during the payment of ransoms when someone is kidnapped, with the involvement of the police and intelligence services. In these cases, negotiations will usually take place through family contacts. Another is that information and news are fed to insurgents via telephone about the location of the army.

“So they have [a] social base of support so they [can] mix with the population without being noticed.”

The Economic Cost of the Conflict

Another aspect that is often overlooked is the transparency and management of spending on the conflict. Leila Constantino’s organization did a study that found from 2017 to 2020, the total cost of the conflict was 64 million Mozambican meticals, which corresponds to 1.1 billion dollars. More important than the numbers is the lack of accountability and transparency in the spending:

“We were consulting some budget execution reports of the government and we didn't see even a mention of the war in Cabo Delgado. Looking at them, it's like, there's no war happening in Cabo Delgado.”

In comparison, the government is regularly publishing documents about the spending on the COVID-19 pandemic. This is not done for the war effort in Cabo Delgado. It is known that the government is spending on public security and defence, but the details are not known. This lack of transparency opens space for misuse of state budget funds.

Questions and Comments from the Participants

Piers Pigou, Senior Consultant for Southern Africa at the International Crisis Group:

- *“I'm wondering what people think are... the primary levers for influencing the Mozambican state around the security and humanitarian concerns towards, one would hope, a more enlightened approach to addressing the issues that are in play? But perhaps at this stage, even to get some traction on a more evidence-*

based conversation about these issues, and where are the kind of primary potential access points for doing that?” and

- *“In that respect, also, what role can the international community play in terms of support [to those] kinds of initiative[s]?”*

Ambassador Welile Nhlapo:

- *“If we say ‘when the troops are gone’, what period [of time] are we talking about? These foreign troops that are there, when [will they be] gone? What is the end state? We don’t know. And why would they think that they finished the job they’ve come to do? What is the end state? The reasons for which they have been there... when are those reasons or conditions going to change? The departure of any foreign troops in any situation even in simple peacekeeping operations leave a lot of challenges behind.” and*
- *“There are a number of countries that are providing training in terms of bilateral arrangements: the Portuguese, the Americans, then you have the EU. There have been some suggestions that Lesotho and Zimbabwe might be involved in some training. Training based on what? To do what?” and*
- *“Is there any plan or programme for reconstruction in Cabo Delgado after this whole mess?”*

Ineke Stemmet, SALO:

- *“We know when we start talking about any type of peacebuilding, it’s always more successful when women are involved. So, what type of space or capacity is there for women to take the lead on something like deradicalisation or disarmament as we’ve seen in the continent before, for example, [in] Liberia, where it’s been quite successful. Is there any type of capacity for that and if not, what kind of support could be given in that regard?”*

Responses from Panelists

Understanding the situation as an internal problem

First of all, the government needs to recognize the causes of the conflict. As João explains,

“[The] North of Cabo Delgado is a structure on several axes of contradiction based on ethnic problems, class problems, poverty, inequalities and regional inequalities, [i.e.] north and south political problems.”

These grievances are not taken seriously by the government and the president thinks that this is purely a military issue. Once the military leaves, it will not be the same as before the conflict started in 2017, for several reasons. One, is that people are much poorer, and another is because the insurgents are unlikely to be wiped out completely - it is likely that they will return once the military threat is gone and when the Total LNG plant in the area restarts its project.

The conflict is an internal problem that requires an internal solution. FRELIMO should address this by rethinking its system of governance and its current model of development. The negotiations within FRELIMO are very important and will be more integral than negotiating with the insurgents. The ADIN development program includes concepts such as decentralisation, participation and justice - but these cannot merely be words. It should lead to some kind of action. The types of reforms required for this will face a lot of resistance from within the ruling party, especially as this will threaten the Mozambican 'big man' who own the majority of natural resources.

Foreign Aid

Foreign aid can support capacity building and institutional reforms, not only with regards to military training but also education, healthcare, rural extension, economic activities and assisting local people, by not only giving them money and credit, but also training local entrepreneurs and farmers.

“The inequalities are amazing if you compare the quality of a rural school, in the countryside, with the quality of education in urban areas, especially in Maputo in the private schools, the international schools, the American School, and so on. The difference is enormous.”

The government is not responding to the needs of the people and is not taking its responsibilities toward the citizens of Cabo Delgado seriously. One challenge of international aid from partners and individuals is the interaction with the government. This may be because the government is not transparent about the seriousness of the situation. However, Fatima Mimbire believes that Mozambique does have proper institutions to deal with calamities and to support people, but that these are not used properly. She was unsure whether this is because the state is lacking in the appropriate resources, or whether it is merely a situation of mismanagement of resources.

Foreign Troops

Reacting to the question on the foreign troops, Fatima Mimbire explained that the current understanding was that the Rwandan and SAMIM intervention has a three-month mandate, which can be extended depending on the results. She also raised the question

of when it would be considered that the region is stable which would mean that the troops can withdraw. Thus far, several areas had been freed from occupation, but insurgents were not found. As such she asked:

“What are the risks that after we consider the region [has obtained] peace [that] these people [would] not come back and restart the instability again?... We need to make sure that we know, and we neutralise these people and not have them coming back in a moment where we suppose that the situation is stable.”

Policy critiques

- The government’s response to the conflict has not been one that takes into account the voices of the local people and their grievances. Fatima Mimbire states it as such:

“The government is not asking the people what they want, it's acting like the one who knows what the people want. But people don't want what the government thinks they want.”

- A purely military response has been employed to deal with the violence. This will not be effective as a long-term solution and the development initiatives in place (including ADIN) are not being implemented properly to address underlying grievances.
- The current military interventions and international involvement in the country are not appropriately being explained to the citizens of the country. The government’s communication with affected communities is lacking.
- There is no concrete plan of action for what will happen when the international military presence is lifted, nor for when it would be appropriate for these troops to withdraw.
- To increase accountability, there is a need for transparency regarding agreements with foreign countries on military interventions and training. The local people are seeing foreign troops coming into their communities, but they are not sure why they are there and what they are supposed to be doing.

Policy Recommendations

- The reforms that need to happen in the country should be based on the needs and desires of the people. This is the type of development that will be necessary for social justice. For example, the previous National Development Plan was implemented without the consultation of the Mozambican citizens. This policy is to

be revised soon and will benefit from proper engagement with Mozambicans, especially displaced people in Cabo Delgado.

- These reforms should include the capacity to rebuild infrastructure and strengthen public services. Many schools, hospitals, energy systems etc. have been destroyed during the conflict.
- Spaces for political participation should be created to give the local population the sense that violence is not the only way to make your needs heard (especially for women).
- Access to justice should be prioritised.
- Military reform is important and should not be de-prioritised due to the presence of foreign troops and their dominance in the field. The military should be kept accountable and transparent in their actions.
- According to one of the speakers, an option that should be considered is to establish channels of communication with certain violent groups involving civil society organisations and create the possibility for amnesties to reintegrate insurgents back into their communities. This could include training courses on conflict de-escalation, job training and active citizenship.
- Economic support to communities who wish to engage in these types of activities is crucial as most people caught in the conflict do not own any economic capital because their means of production have been destroyed.
- The state needs to be freed from the hands of the party to rebuild trust between the citizens, the communities, and the state, for the state to represent the interests of the citizens.
- There should be an internal debate and dialogue in Mozambique to find clarity and consensus on how the country wants to move forward. The Mozambican development model should be revised to move from an extractive and capital-intensive model towards a more inclusive and labour-intensive model.
- Foreign aid is welcomed but internal changes are integral for the aid money to be spent in a way that will contribute to the people's wellbeing and economic development: João Feijó states:

“This country is ours; we have to manage this country because we cannot be dependent on foreign help for the rest of our lives.”

Conclusion

This dialogue brought to the fore the perspectives of Mozambicans on the ground. These perspectives are increasingly important to understand the current situation as well as the proper responses and way forward. The valuable contributions from these perspectives brought several issues and opportunities to the fore, including the security gains made by the foreign intervention but also the uncertainty around their presence in Mozambique;

the deteriorating humanitarian situation; the myths around the conflict; and the issues of transparency and management with regards to the economic aspect of the conflict. These types of discussions should continue to shed light on the developments on the ground and amplify an alternative discourse than what is portrayed by the Mozambican state.

The analysis and recommendations included in this brief do not necessarily reflect the view of SALO or any of the donors or conference participants, but rather draw upon the major strands of discussion put forward at the event. Participants neither reviewed nor approved this document. The contents of the brief are the sole responsibility of SALO, and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the donors who provided financial assistance for this policy dialogue session.

About the Southern African Liaison Office:



The Southern African Liaison Office (SALO) is a South African-based not-for-profit civil society organisation which, through advocacy, dialogue, policy consensus and in-depth research and analysis, influences the current thinking and debates on foreign policy especially regarding African crises and conflicts.

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