

Mozambican Brief 2 | by Fowzia Davids | January 2022

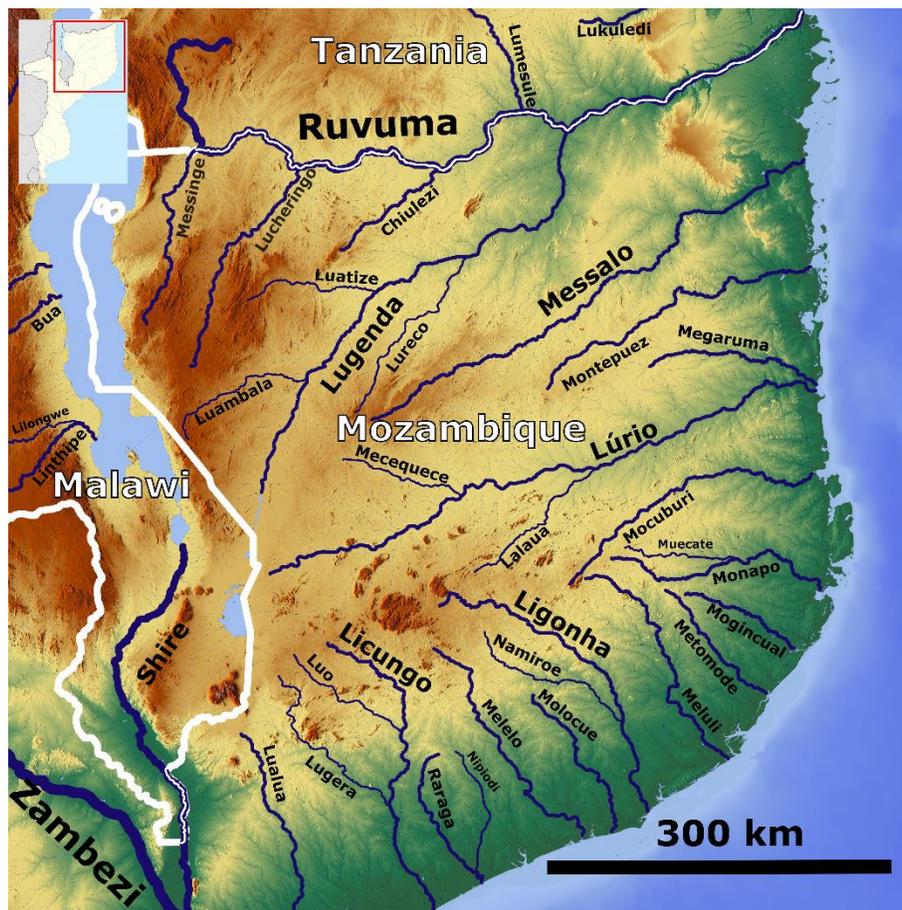


Image: ["File:Rivers of northern Mozambique OSM.png"](#) by Hans Braxmeier & Peter in s is marked with [CC BY-SA 2.0](#).

Background

As a result of the sustained conflict and ongoing insurgency in northern Mozambique's Cabo Delgado province, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), in their regional summit in January 2022, agreed to extend the SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) troop deployment. The Summit noted good progress since the deployment of SAMIM and has made the necessary associated budgetary adjustments. The regional body will continue to monitor the situation going forward.¹

Soldiers from Angola, Botswana, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Lesotho, Malawi, South Africa, Tanzania and Zambia are set to remain in Mozambique alongside Mozambican and Rwandan forces; however, it remains unclear how long the extension will be in place. SADC, alongside the Rwanda Defence Force deployment, has placed more than 3,000 troops on the ground in response to the armed uprising in the northern Cabo Delgado province.²

South African President and chairperson of the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security, Cyril Ramaphosa, stated that progress had been made following the SAMIM deployment. The security situation in Cabo Delgado is reportedly improving which has allowed some internally displaced persons to return to their homes and resume everyday life. Working with Mozambican troops, regional forces have managed to assist in creating a safe passage for bringing humanitarian assistance to violence-hit areas. Furthermore, the communique stemming from the SADC Summit revealed the approval of the Framework for Support to the Republic of Mozambique in addressing terrorism, which outlines actions for consolidating peace, security and the socio-economic recovery of Mozambique's Cabo Delgado Province. It also commended the "successful operations and... achievements recorded since the deployment of the Mission in July 2021."³

Tracking the spread of the insurgency

As per the U.S. State Departments *Country Reports on Terrorism 2020*, Ahlul Sunnah Wa Jama'a (ASWJ) / Islamic State of Iraq and Syria-Mozambique (ISIS-M) attacks have resulted in the deaths of at least 1,500 people in 2020, and to date more than 3,700 deaths.⁴ Earlier in the conflict, which started in 2017, President Nyusi's administration primarily relied on private military companies in the fight against the insurgency. This included Russia's Wagner Group, which assisted the under-

¹ Communiqué of the Extraordinary Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). 2022. Southern African Development Community. 22 January. Available: <https://www.sadc.int/news-events/news/communique-extraordinary-summit-heads-state-and-government-southern-african-development-community-sadc/>

² Fabricius, P. 2022. 'Wars can't be fought on the cheap': Experts and special forces call for more infantry and equipment in Mozambique. *Daily Maverick*. 22 January. URL: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2022-01-11-wars-cant-be-fought-on-the-cheap-experts-and-special-forces-call-for-more-infantry-and-equipment-in-mozambique/> [online: 9 March 2022].

³ Ibid.

⁴ U.S. Department of State. 2021. *Country Reports on Terrorism 2020*. December. URL: https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Country_Reports_on_Terrorism_2020.pdf [online: 9 March 2022].

resourced and poorly equipped Mozambican Defence Armed Forces (FADM). This assistance by the private military companies failed to improve the security situation, with ISIS-M continuing to grow in capacity and capture towns, including the port city of Mocimboa de Praia and carrying out attacks along the Tanzanian border.⁵ Counterinsurgency operations have proven challenging, particularly amid border security challenges in southern Africa and northern Mozambique. Terrorist groupings are known to cross the porous border with Tanzania, which serves as a recruitment exercise in the neighbouring country and a transit point for terrorist and criminal activity.⁶

Noting the inability to counter the terrorist campaign, President Nyusi succumbed to SADC's pressure to allow the intervention of SAMIM, after initially turning to Rwanda for military support. Following the initial intervention of the Rwanda Defence Forces (RDF) and SAMIM that bolstered the efforts of the FADM, the insurgency was pushed back within the first four months, bringing some stability to northern Mozambique. Within the first few weeks, the RDF gained significant ground by helping Mozambican forces recapture several towns, including Mocimboa de Praia, which had been under ISIS-M/ASWJ control for more than a year. The security situation has improved significantly, with schools in some areas re-opening and private companies involved in the offshore Liquid Natural Gas project preparing to return to operations.⁷

However, approximately four months after the RDF's initial intervention, the insurgency started regrouping, reorganising, and launching frequent attacks targeting local populations, including women, and recruiting young people. They also expanded their attacks to other parts of the country beyond Cabo Delgado Province into Niassa Province at least since mid-November 2021.⁸ However, President Filipe Nyusi stated that the 'expanding pockets' of violence are in response to the group being pushed back by the military offensive.

As the insurgency grouping further retreats southward, it threatens to destroy conservation progress and fragile environmental protections in the Niassa Special Reserve.⁹ The Niassa Special Reserve, bordering on Tanzania, in 2019 was just recovering from a period of elephant poaching, followed by Cyclone Eloise. However, as the insurgency grouping is moving further inland and westward into the Niassa Special Reserve, with the first attack taking place on 25 November 2021, it destroyed four towns and displaced over 2,000 people.¹⁰ As IDPs seek protection from the attacks, they will likely penetrate into the thick bush, making conservation efforts less of a priority, as people will look for food sources within the reserve.

⁵ Smith, J. 2022. Rwanda: A force for good in Mozambique's "War on Terror"?, *African Arguments*. 9 February. URL: <https://africanarguments.org/2022/02/rwanda-a-force-for-good-in-mozambiques-war-on-terror/> [online: 9 March 2022].

⁶ Miguel, R and Baptista, A. 2021. Officials Say Insurgency in Northern Mozambique is Spreading, VOA. 17 December. URL: <https://www.voanews.com/a/officials-say-insurgency-in-northern-mozambique-is-spreading/6359526.html> [online: 9 March 2022].

⁷ Smith, J. 2022.

⁸ Miguel, R and Baptista, A. 2021.

⁹ Begg, A. 2021. Mozambique's ISIS insurgency threatens to destroy conservation progress and fragile environmental protections in Niassa Special Reserve. *Daily Maverick*. 17 December 2021. URL: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-12-17-mozambiques-isis-insurgency-threatens-to-destroy-conservation-progress-and-fragile-environmental-protections-in-niassa-special-reserve/> [online 14 March 2022].

¹⁰ Ibid.

Drivers of the Conflict

According to Professor Adriano Nuvunga from the Center for Development for Democracy in Mozambique, in an open dialogue held by SALO in mid-January, understanding the cause of conflict entirely from a prism of Islamist terrorism or violent extremism is somewhat narrow. There is clearly an international element that is supporting the group which shows in the magnitude and capacity to sustain this war for almost five years to date, ASWJ's ability to target military infrastructure, and the capacity to recruit. Furthermore, they have been using the language and flags of international terrorist organisations such as that of ISIS although the nature of that relationship remains unclear.¹¹

However, noting this, the root causes of the conflict include local grievances and the marginalisation of people in the north. This is mixed with fundamentalism that is occurring in a context of an elite-centric extractives industry that is not generating socio-economic development benefits for the residents of the area. As such, people remain fundamentally excluded from decision-making processes, which adds another layer to their grievances.

The heavy-handed state security response and policies targeting youth have further angered youth groupings in the north who are already disgruntled, as they believe that their mechanisms for making a livelihood have been taken by elites. This has contributed to furthering violence in an area already underpinned by networks of organised crime operating within an illicit economy which has been ongoing for decades. Professor Nuvunga asserts that this organised crime network is magnifying the capacity and catalysing the military activities of the insurgency grouping.

The Mozambican government developed a program for reconstruction and development of Northern Mozambique, named *Resilience and Development Strategy for the North*, which is meant to provide social services and deal with the amenities crisis, as a means to address some of the root causes and consequences of the conflict.¹² The strategy is anticipated to be approved by the Mozambican cabinet in the first half of 2022. The strategy is encompassed by three pillars - *“the support for the construction of peace, security and social cohesion; reconstruction of the social contract between the state and the population; and recovery economics and resilience.”* All of these are to be carried out by relevant government agencies.¹³

Importantly, it is the first official document that recognises the role of internal factors in creating the conflict. The government noted, *“socio-economic inequalities, frustration related to the exploitation of natural resources, especially among youth in the north, political and economic exclusion, and perceived marginalisation by the local population.”*¹⁴ This is quite noteworthy as it represents a significant shift in the government's largely heavy-handed approach to the conflict, wherein it squarely understood the conflict as that of external terrorist aggressors. However, it

¹¹ SALO Dialogue on Mozambique. 2022. 16 January.

¹² ISS. 2022. *Mozambique shifts gear with its new strategy for the north*. 9 February. URL: <https://www.defenceweb.co.za/joint/diplomacy-a-peace/iss-mozambique-shifts-gear-with-its-new-strategy-for-the-north/> [online 14 March 2022].

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

remains to be seen whether the country's leadership and members of the ruling FRELIMO party will accept that there are internal grievances driving the conflict.

Humanitarian Crisis

According to the World Food Program, the humanitarian crisis in the Cabo Delgado region is incredibly dire. There is a severe food shortage as a result of the conflict, climate change, and COVID-19.¹⁵ As of December 2021, nearly 856,002 people have been displaced, half of which are children; approximately 83 percent of internally displaced persons (IDPs) live in host communities, whilst 17 percent live in IDP camps or resettlement sites. The affected populations are vulnerable to health, education, and nutrition-related crises.¹⁶ In a study done by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification Acute Malnutrition analysis in July 2021, it showed that nearly 75,000 children are at risk of severe acute malnutrition (SAM); however, SAM services are below 30 percent due to limited health facility access and availability and shortages of vital medical products.¹⁷ The ongoing crisis has also exacerbated the conditions of vulnerable groups, including women and children, who have been victims of killings, abductions, recruitment by armed groups, and gender-based violence.¹⁸

Climatic shocks have also contributed to the ongoing humanitarian crises, with tropical storm Ana and tropical depression Dumako worsening the situation.¹⁹ Tropical storm Ana affected over 185,000 people and disrupted 126 265 hectares of land in Manica, Nampula, Sofala, Tete, and Zambezia provinces, which displaced over 2200 families in urgent need of humanitarian relief. Tropical depression Dumako impacted more than 23 700 people, resulting in 14 deaths, flooding more than 2200 houses and damaging 918 kilometres of roads.²⁰

Conclusion

While the counterinsurgency operations are making inroads in stemming the conflict, alongside a promising reconstruction and development plan by the Mozambican government, the myriad of challenges regarding the conflict remain. ASWJ is moving further south as the counterinsurgency pushes them out of Cabo Delgado, and environmental and humanitarian challenges persist causing a further challenge of hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons with a significant funding gap. It remains to be seen whether the Mozambican government can effectively implement and address the challenges and aspirations of the development plan and whether this will be enough to sufficiently address the root causes of the conflict. If not, it is unlikely that the conflict will end anytime soon.

¹⁵ World Food Programme. 2021. *World Food Programme: Nobel Peace Prize lecture*. 10 December. URL: <https://www.wfp.org/stories/wfps-nobel-lecture> [online: 9 March 2022].

¹⁶ ReliefWeb. 2021. *Humanitarian Action for Children 2022 - Mozambique*. 8 December. URL: <https://reliefweb.int/report/mozambique/humanitarian-action-children-2022-mozambique> [online: 9 March 2022].

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Domingos, A. 2022. Mozambique: Cyclones Aggravate Mozambique Humanitarian Crisis. *All Africa*. 10 March. URL: <https://allafrica.com/stories/202203100516.html> [online 14 March 2022].

²⁰ Ibid.

The Dialogue Online, is an online extension of SALO's national, regional and international consensus-building dialogues (typically workshops, seminars and small meetings) on Peace and Security, Development, SA Foreign Policy, Gender (including LGBTI rights), Natural Resource Governance, Human Rights and the rights of migrant communities through *weekly written articles and/or commentary*. It is a channel through which critical issues raised during dialogue events are synthesised and shared with wider audiences. By taking the dialogue 'online', the conversation is enabled to continue beyond the limits of space and time and to a wider audience.

Since SALO's central focus is peace and security, *Dialogue Online* articles focus primarily on this theme, but drawing attention to the nexuses with development, natural resource governance, human rights and gender, mediation, environment and climate change. Preference is towards articles that speak to international development and peace building policy and practice, raise awareness about conflict situations and the gender dimensions thereof and provoke fresh thinking and policy debate. Contributions are drawn from SALO's pool of experts, peace building and development practitioners, activists, academics, former and current diplomats and workshop participants.

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