

SALO Public Dialogue: Developing Regional and International Consensus on the Conflict in Mozambique

By Ineke Stemmet, SALO

DEVELOPING REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL CONSENSUS ON THE CONFLICT IN MOZAMBIQUE

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EGNA SIDUMO
DOCTORAL RESEARCHER, CMI-NORWAY



JASMINE OPPERMAN
SECURITY ANALYST



DR BIANCA GERENTE
DEAN OF MANAGEMENT OF TOURISM AND INFORMATICS FACULTY, CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF MOZAMBIQUE



PHILLIP DEXTER
ACTIVIST

Executive summary

The Southern African Liaison Office (SALO), in partnership with the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa, hosted a public multi-stakeholder dialogue to develop regional and international consensus on the conflict in the north of Mozambique, including on underlying drivers and how political actors might best respond. The discussion intended to enhance the understanding in South Africa and the region of the current conflict situation, and to create a platform for accurate information and an alternative voice to inform duty-bearers and decision-makers.

Speakers included **Egna Sidumo** - Centre for Strategic and International Studies at Joaquim Chissano University, **Phillip Dexter** – Activist, **Jasmine Opperman** - Security Analyst, and **Dr Bianca Gerente** - Dean of Management of the Tourism and Informatics Faculty, Catholic University of Mozambique.

Context/ Importance of the Problem

At the time of this dialogue, the SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) and the independent Rwandan Defence Force (RDF) deployment had been present in the country for just over a year. Since its deployments, the security situation had improved. The Chief of the South African National Defence Force said this in April 2022:

*“Since its deployment, SAMIM has registered a number of milestones, including recapturing villages, dislodging terrorists from their bases and seizing weapons and warfare material, which have contributed [to] creating a relatively secure environment for safer passage of humanitarian support”.*¹

Furthermore, SADC proposed a new strategy for deployment in April 2022. The SADC Troika approved the transition from scenario six, which requires rapid deployment capacity, to scenario five, which is the use of a multidimensional force with a robust mandate.² This move might reflect SADC’s priority of consolidating the territorial gains made by SAMIM forces as well as increasing humanitarian operations, while still being able to conduct military actions.³

Despite the improved security situation, the humanitarian crisis in Mozambique remains dire. The internal displacement caused by the conflict has put pressure on an already fragile and challenging human rights situation in the area. Food insecurity in Cabo Delgado and Nampula provinces is continuing to deteriorate and is being exacerbated by the conflict.⁴

In June alone, nearly 30 000 children were displaced, following a surge in attacks from insurgents.⁵ According to Save the Children, *“families moved in large numbers to the city of Pemba and the towns of Macomia and Montepuez seeking safety even though several deadly attacks were reported*

¹ Basch, S. 2022. *SANDF gives an update on Mozambique deployment*. Defence Web. 14 April. Available: <https://www.defenceweb.co.za/featured/sandf-gives-an-updateon-mozambique-deployment/> [10 July 2022]

² Guilengue, F. 2022. *What does SADC’s new military approach in Mozambique mean?* Mail & Guardian. 27 April. Available: <https://mg.co.za/opinion/2022-04-27-what-does-sadcs-new-military-approach-in-mozambique-mean/> [15 July 2022]

³ *ibid*

⁴ FEWS Net. 2022. Crisis (IPC Phase 3) is likely to persist through early 2023, with needs projected to remain high. Available: <https://fews.net/southern-africa/mozambique/food-security-outlook/june-2022> [21 September 2022].

⁵ News 24. Nearly 30 000 children fled Mozambique violence in June: charity. 2022. Available: <https://www.news24.com/news24/africa/news/nearly-30-000-children-fled-mozambique-violence-in-june-charity-20220701> [20 September 2022].

last weekend [24-26 June 2022] in Ancuabe, Macomia and Mocimboa da Praia, with six people, including one pregnant woman, killed.”⁶ Not only are internally displaced people (IDP) facing dire living conditions, limited access to services and a lack of essential needs, but the dynamics caused by IDPs in host areas are becoming an increasing problem. According to CARE, “there are evident signs of solidarity fatigue and tensions between IDPs and host communities result in frequent conflicts”.⁷

A Normalisation Narrative

Jasmine Opperman started the dialogue by making it clear that the conflict is not over. Several actors have claimed that the insurgents have been defeated and that the area is secure. She disagreed with this view, which she calls a normalisation narrative:

“We are seeing an insurgency not on the run. Let me be specific on that matter. That is a [normalisation] narrative which simply does not speak to [the] harsh realities in Cabo Delgado.”

In 2021, Quissanga was recaptured by the government forces, with the help of SAMIM and the RDF. This was announced with great fanfare, including statements that the area was ‘cleared’ of insurgents. However, in May 2022, Quissanga suffered a fresh attack.⁸ When speaking about counter-insurgency, statements like these are rarely true, as insurgents tend to resurface. People who were forced back to Quissanga were made vulnerable to attacks and are facing a failing government that cannot provide security to returned IDPs.

It is clear that the insurgents are communicating with one another and coordinating attacks precisely. Generally, when President Nyusi visits an area, it does not take long before an attack is carried out there. Smaller groups are surfacing to carry out these attacks. This happened in Mocimboa da Praia when a dormant cell became active again and targeted vehicles. These lines of communication and coordination should not be underestimated.

At the time of the dialogue, the insurgents did not control any specific area, however, Opperman believes that this is not their objective. Their objective is to carry out small attacks with severe brutality while moving south to spread the message that they are active. This results in the people of Cabo Delgado, Nampula and Ancuabe living in constant fear, adding to the humanitarian crisis. The insurgents are finding support within communities which are feeding into the movement. Insurgents have been given too much space since 2017 to embed themselves within the communities and to find streams of support.

The Islamic State

Jasmine Opperman further gave insight on the working of ISIS and the international aspects of the conflict:

⁶ Save the Children. 2022. ‘NO END IN SIGHT’ AS RENEWED VIOLENCE IN MOZAMBIQUE’S CABO DELGADO SPARKS YEAR-HIGH NUMBER OF CHILDREN TO FLEE. Available: <https://www.savethechildren.net/news/no-end-sight-renewed-violence-mozambique-s-cabo-delgado-sparks-year-high-number-children-flee> [21 September 2022].

⁷ CARE. 2022. Rapid Gender Analysis Cabo Delgado, Mozambique. 22 April. Available: <https://reliefweb.int/report/mozambique/conflict-sensitive-rapid-gender-analysis-cabo-delgado-mozambique-april-2022> [21 September 2022].

⁸ Hanlon, J. 2022. Mozambique: Under Pressure, Insurgents Disperse, Create New Forest Base, AllAfrica. 7 June. Available: <https://allafrica.com/stories/202206100520.html> [21 September 2022].

“Here we sit with an international terror group, the leading international terror group I would say on the African continent and worldwide, and yet there seems to be silence on this matter...”

The presence of the Islamic State in Mozambique can be seen in several ways. An important factor to understand about how ISIS operates is that its branding is very important. It is typical for Islamic State’s claims to carry credibility because they are generally well-documented. ISIS has claimed several attacks in the area. However, Jasmine described an exception to this - an incident that occurred in Nangade at the time of the dialogue that had not been claimed and there had not been an IS Mozambique photo report. She believes that this was the case because ISIS was awaiting the detail of what exactly occurred and they did not have quality photographs. This indicates the level of its involvement in Mozambique.

Secondly, two videos were released in June from Syria and Iraq in which ISIS fighters pledged their support to Nigeria and Mozambique. This indicates a voice of support for the Mozambican insurgency via the ISIS channels and their followers, and global linkages from Southern Africa with a level of communication that should not be underestimated. She fears that there is clear guidance from ISIS, and a clear direction on how IS Mozambique should be branding itself.

The region has looked at responding to this through a type of ‘Iraqification’ – a militarised response driven by foreign agendas. This type of response is failing to freeze the insurgency and is further failing to address the root causes of the conflict. The involvement of external actors is not being done in a coordinated way, and the soldiers on the ground are not being given what they need from South Africa, the region, and beyond. The European Union has tweeted photos of soldiers being trained but the location of these soldiers is obscure, and there is no clear information on the form of this training and how they are being coordinated within the bigger picture of the response to the conflict.

Opperman concluded thus:

“You can give a soldier a gun, [but] if you cannot train the soldier to win the hearts and the minds of the people of Cabo Delgado, which I think is too late. I'm afraid we are stuck in a situation that is going to impact on the region. The Islamic State is being allowed too much space and too much opportunity, and it's time for SADC to realise this.”

Approaches to the conflict

Egna Sidumo explained how the approach to the conflict has shifted slightly since the initial military response. When the attacks started five years ago, a counter-terrorism approach was taken. Mozambique was not prepared for these types of attacks and responded exclusively with the use of force and aggression, and also worked with private military companies. This was met with opposition from civil society. Eventually international actors such as the European Union and the United States were engaged. Throughout these initial steps, Mozambique was not prepared to deal with the root causes of the conflict, and these were not sufficiently addressed.

Currently, the government started implementing another strategy to complement the security approach. The apparent shift from a combat strategy to a strategy of containment resulted from the recognition that the military strategy alone would not eliminate attacks and address the process of radicalisation. A more comprehensive approach is needed that encompasses not only essential security and basic relief measures, but also systematic preventative measures that address the fundamental determinants of violent extremism. In the two to three weeks leading up to the dialogue, the Resilience and Development for the North (ERDIN) strategy was approved. This recognises some of the root causes of the conflict.

ERDIN's mission is to promote the peace-building process in Cabo Delgado and to support economic recovery with the participation of the community: Sidumo outlined the approach as follows:

“This is very important, we were talking about the need to have the government closer to the communities, closer to the youth, closer to the women and maybe this is the opportunity [to do so].”

Phillip Dexter added to this by stressing that the military response remains essential, otherwise the insurgents will continue conducting a reign of terror. He noted that they survive on warfare – they plunder and loot to obtain their resources from the areas where military presence is relatively low. The military deployment should put enough pressure on the insurgents to bring them to the negotiating table to attempt a type of peace accord. A failure to do so will mean that they will continue terrorising the area. The strategy should include a national discussion to bring a new social compact to the country at a national, provincial and local level.

The Uncertain Security and Humanitarian Situation

Bianca Gerente spoke about how uncertain things are on the ground for the people affected by the conflict, as well as for humanitarian organisations.

“So, in the two last weeks, we suspended our activities in some districts because of the situation, because we don't know what will happen and if it's secure or not for our teams [to] continue this activity. So now we are just working in Pemba and attend [to] some people that need regularised documentation.”

She said that they see the international actors and the army on the ground trying to provide some security, but they are not always successful. The attacks that happened in Ancuabe took these actors by surprise because they considered it a secure area. The security situation in Nampula is also not clear. She is concerned that the conflict situation will spread to another province in Mozambique, particularly Niassa.

Organisations on the ground need more accurate information to carry out their work in the area. Many people came to Pemba and are unsure of where they can safely go or whether they can return to their places of origin, which is difficult to determine. There seems to be no real structure to deal with the emergency and humanitarian situation, particularly the movement and safety of IDPs. Some people leave their houses and towns not because they have been attacked but because they are afraid, and they do not see police presence in their areas.

“So, in terms of the communication, also, it's very weak. Because sometimes we have information from the government, the police have other information, and you have the media that can [spread] some fake news. So, it's very complicated how we can have real information about what happened, which activities we can do, what we can do to prevent the worst scenario.”

The Crisis in Mozambique

Phillip Dexter pointed out that it is not just Cabo Delgado facing a crisis, but the whole of Mozambique. It is the seventh poorest country in Africa with a GDP of around \$480-\$500 per capita. It had fairly good economic growth until the COVID-19 pandemic. Apart from natural gas, Mozambique has several lucrative natural resources including iron ore, coal, marine resources etc. Because of this, and the fact that it has a relatively small population, it should be one of the richest countries in Africa.

Several reasons for this exist, according to Phillip. One of them is that the history of Mozambique includes four periods of sustained conflict: the heavily militarised struggle for liberation, the RENAMO-led conflict which surfaced again after a peace agreement had been struck and was followed by sporadic incidents of violence, and the Cabo Delgado conflict.

“My submission is that the roots of these problems are in the socio-economic structure of the country. Mozambique is very similar to a lot of African countries, it's a post-colonial state, [and] it has a neo-colonial structure to the economy and society. The sources of these grievances are in the exclusion of the majority of the people from the formal economy.”

Questions and Comments

- Professor Anthoni van Nieuwkerk (University of the Witwatersrand): *“...what kind of response can we come up with if we believe that ruling elites are not solving the problem? What is our role then? Do we understand the SADC approach? Where is SAMIM? The second one is where are we with our shared understanding of the nature of the problem of violent extremism? Are we able to influence SADC? Are we able to go to a SADC summit and say ‘here is our position as regional civil society - we have proposals to make?’ And then finally...how can we support [the ERDIN Programme]? Because that's what we are also saying - we need a balanced approach. How can we do that? And who do we partner with? Who are our natural partners and allies beyond our region that we can work with? And let me just quickly say, I like this idea, let's send a high-level delegation to Cabo Delgado to go and you know, promote our approach. Where's the budget for that? How do we sort that out?”*
- Piers Pigou (Senior Consultant for Southern Africa, Crisis Group): *“So perhaps the question to our Mozambican colleagues, given they are the ones who have the best experience of operating in the Mozambique situation, what's working in terms of constructive partnering [with the] government and what is not? We need [a] realistic understanding of where plans can be actually pushed. And at the moment, saying, well, the ERDIN strategy demonstrates X, Y and Z but what are the practicalities on the ground that needs to be addressed?”*

Answers from Panellists

Jasmine Opperman:

The idea of an integrated counterterrorism strategy in the region is something that requires urgent attention. There should be a push for interventions and engagements with SADC to address the insufficiencies. The problem is that SADC does not seem open to recommendations and is overwhelmingly dictated by diplomatic interest. The questions from Prof van Nieuwkerk are difficult to answer and at this stage, there is no integrated approach to the conflict. The Intelligence Center in Tanzania is viewed by Opperman as crisis management and a reactive intervention that will have no real impact if it does not feed into a beehive strategy of coordination.

Egna Sidumo:

People are very worried about whether ERDIN will be a good strategy and whether it will be effective in responding to the needs of the people in Cabo Delgado, and in the north generally. ERDIN is partly a result of the pressure that was placed on the Mozambican government for a broader response to the conflict. Civil society organisations have a great responsibility for the implementation of ERDIN in Mozambique and will be an essential element in the application of the strategy. However, the strategy gives only a marginal role to civil society organisations, largely due to the historically strained relationship between the government and civil society organisations. Civil

society organisations must be open to contributing to ERDIN and understand that it is not a government strategy, it is a Mozambican strategy and should be very clear about their expectations from the government.

The government is slowly becoming more open to involvement from civil society organisations, and they are starting to collaborate more with one another. It is important for this strategy to be effective. and for this to happen, it should take its direction from the communities most affected by the conflict.

Policy critiques

- *“Unless steps are taken to restructure and transform the Mozambican economy and to include the Mozambican working class, the poor and the peasantry in the economy, this kind of conflict is never going to go away. You see it in other parts of Africa, and it's exactly the same.”*
- The North Integrated Development Agency (ADIN) has become something of a punching bag, because it appears unable to develop beyond the strategic planning efforts that it has been working on for the last couple of years. The government has now, after sitting on the ERDIN plan for about six months, adopted it. The shift between planning and implementation is not well capacitated.
- The government and multilateral entities are not transparent in their cooperation, and are not prepared to work as effectively with civil society as they could. Encouragingly, this is starting to change and there have been some examples of these actors working with civil society.
- If Cabo Delgado is looked at separately from the rest of Mozambique, any type of intervention will not be sustainable.
- The South African National Defence Force's capacity is very limited: *“all of our Gripen fighter jets are grounded, only about a quarter of our helicopter capability can be deployed. We have limits on being able to move troops because of vehicles and so on. So, we are quite weak militarily.”* The South African government needs to have a discussion about how to provide resources to SANDF to support regional programmes.

Policy Recommendations

- A proper critique of the Mozambican political economy should be undertaken, looking specifically at the socio-economic conditions of people, to put together a strategy that takes into consideration all facets of the conflict.
- The military response is essential because a situation where insurgents conduct a reign of terror is unacceptable. However, there needs to be a massive political deployment to put pressure on the insurgents to bring them to the negotiating table.
- Once insurgents are brought to the negotiating table, a discussion should take place nationally in Mozambique to reach a type of peace accord.
- *“The South African Trade Union movement, South African civil society organisations, churches, [and] organisations like SALO, which thankfully are quite active, need to step up our involvement in terms of solidarity with the Mozambican working class and peasants, we need to not in a dictatorial way or, you know, not an arrogant way, look at how we can assist with solidarity in the struggle against this reactionary [insurgent] organisation. But that involves a critique of the Mozambican government as well.”*
- A few highly visible public visits to Mozambique should be carried out, including church leaders, trade union leaders and people who can make the issue visible.

Conclusion

This dialogue gave an update on the situation as it stands in Mozambique and allowed for a robust discussion of what is needed to move forward. Several issues were discussed, including the shift in the strategy of the insurgents and their movements. The importance of the ERDIN strategy was highlighted as an instrument for peacebuilding and pointers were offered for how the strategy can best be implemented to achieve the desired effects. The role of SADC and regional counter-terrorism organisations were noted in this dialogue as important factors in the future of this conflict. The root causes of the conflict were once again stressed as the basis on which any type of intervention strategy should be based. Jasmine Opperman put it thus:

“The Forgotten Cabo Delgado is lingering on, and the credibility to intervene and to engage with sustainable solutions is not happening. ... And for as long as there is a top-down approach, no intervention can be sustainable and be effective.”

The analysis and recommendations included in this Policy 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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