



Five years after the first attack in Mocímboa da Praia: How is Cabo Delgado?



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Introduction

The conflict in Cabo Delgado completed five years on October 5, 2022. Its beginning took place one day after the commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the signing of the General Peace Accords in Rome and four days after the end of the XI Congress

of the Frelimo Party and five years later it reconvened at the XII Congress in Matola, where the conflict in Cabo Delgado deserved attention.

At the beginning of the attacks on state institutions in Mocímboa da Praia, the statements of the authorities did not take into account the



seriousness of the situation, even considering simple acts of banditry that in a period not exceeding seven days it would be enough to restore public order and tranquility. in the district, which would culminate in the handing over of the “evildoers” to the local authorities to be held accountable.

However, what appeared to be an isolated act of bandits quickly became one of the biggest problems of the last five years, not only for the population of Cabo Delgado and Mozambique in general, but also for the countries of the region, Africa and in the world, in a context in which Mozambique was preparing to take an important leap in the exploration of gas from the Rovuma

Basin, with the potential to transform the economy of the province and the entire country.

The outbreak of the conflict motivated the emergence of institutions to assist the reconstruction process, such as the Northern Integrated Development Agency (ADIN), national and international humanitarian support agencies that, although in an uncoordinated way at first, managed to reduce the suffering of the people moving from conflict zones to areas considered safe, through food and psychosocial support, shelter kits, opening of resettlement centers, etc.

Five years later, the aim of this text is to make an X-ray of the state of Cabo Delgado in its various contexts.

Attempts to understand the conflict

Some of the theses have been looking in history for cleavages that can substantiate conflicts in Cabo Delgado. In addition to issues of latent ethnolinguistic conflicts between the peoples of the coast (Mwanis) and the interior (Maconde plateau) of Cabo Delgado, others pointed to the generalized poverty and marginalization of the youth in the waithood phase that did not find accommodation in the official discourse of their interests and noticed a fertile space in violent

extremism to show their indignation towards the State.

There was also the understanding that violent extremists wanted to impose a caliphate in Cabo Delgado, where the Islamic religion should be at the epicenter of governance. The acts were later classified as aggression against the State by violent extremists using terrorist methods.

All theses that tried to explain the emergence of extremism and its motivations were rejected



by the authorities, who argued that the conflict was driven by internal and external agents who were not satisfied with the governance and also because of the riches that Mozambique has.

Meanwhile, violent extremists known locally as Al-shabbab (young people) were gaining strength and allied themselves with the Islamic State (IS), moving from small attacks on villages to large-scale attacks that allowed them to seize localities and administrative posts and hoist the IS flag, causing a crisis of almost one million displaced people, thousands of people dead and destruction of the population's homes, social infrastructures such as schools, hospitals, markets and police stations.

The reports made by journalists from Community Radios who arrived in different parts of the country and the world describing the reality on the ground began to be interpreted by some

sectors of propaganda as fake news and, consequently, a persecution front was opened. , as were the cases of the disappearance of journalist Ibraimo Abu Mbaruco and the arrest without charge of journalist Amade Abubacar.

These acts awakened in society the seriousness of the situation that occurred in the north of Cabo Delgado and culminated in an unprecedented debate both in the Mozambican and foreign media about the best approach to be followed, always looking at the experiences of other contexts that face extremism. terrorist-inspired violence. This approach led the Government to assume that it was a complex phenomenon that should not be approached in isolation from other countries, opening space for the entry of international support in military logistics, training and the landing of troops from Rwanda and the SADC Mission. in Mozambique (SAMIM).

From the weaknesses of the Mozambican Army to international support

The weaknesses of the Mozambican army cannot be seen as a lack of bravery on the part of the soldiers who daily fight against violent extremists in Cabo Delgado, but rather as a result of an entire system that has not received investment in recent years.

The idleness of the sector allowed its capture by corruption networks, which are illustrated by the discovery, in May 2022, of about seven thousand non-existent soldiers (ghosts) who took from the State coffers resources that, if invested, could have a great impact. at the North Opera-



tive Theater. Suffice it to say that 7,000 soldiers are more than the sum of the SAMIM and Rwandan troops supporting Cabo Delgado.

Before the arrival of troops from Rwanda and SAMIM, private security companies from South Africa and Russia – Dick Adviser Group (DAG), Paramount and Wagner Group – were hired, causing controversy in society, as the limits were not known. instruments that governed its action and the reason for prioritizing private companies in the defense of Mozambique’s sovereignty.

Aware of these facts, sectors with some influence on the national political chess, such as civil society, opposition political parties, the media and academics, looked to international support as the solution to effectively combat violent extremism in Cabo Delgado, putting the countries in the region (SADC) as priorities in supporting

the efforts of Mozambican troops in this process, at a time when Mozambique led the rotational governance of SADC.

Curious or not, at the same time that the arrival of troops from the countries in the region was being negotiated, military and police officers from Rwanda arrived in Mozambique who quickly recovered the Municipal Village of Mocimboa da Praia and participated in the expulsion of violent extremists in Palma. A month later, SADC troops arrived, alternating the military approach and the construction of dialogue mechanisms to build peace in the province.

In addition to the efforts of Mozambican, Rwanda and SADC troops, support in military training and logistics from the European Union and the United States of America, which train Mozambican soldiers in matters related to the fight against terrorism.

Attacks on district headquarters and the humanitarian crisis

The largest attacks were, without a doubt, those that made it possible to take the headquarters of the districts of Quissanga on March 25, 2020, from Macomia on May 28, 2020, from Mocímbo da Praia on August 11, 2020 and from Palma on 24 March 2021, causing a humanitarian crisis of almost one million people who have moved to the districts of Metuge, Montepuez, Chiúre, the city of Pemba and the neighboring provinces of Nampula and Niassa.

These attacks by violent extremists resulted in changes in the leadership of security sector bodies, mainly in the Ministry of National Defense and the Ministry of the Interior, as well as in the State Intelligence and Security Service (SISE), announcing a change in approach, with greater control over discipline and information.

If on the one hand there was a military component, on the other it was important to manage the humanitarian crisis generated by the attacks of violent extremists. It was for this reason that, through United Nations agencies and other national and international NGOs, an apparatus for food support, resettlements and livelihoods was quickly installed in Cabo Delgado in coordination with the government.

This apparatus has brought with it the depen-

dence of the IDPs on aid, which makes them currently resisting returning to their areas of origin. The absence of a mechanism or platform for coordinating humanitarian aid to make the implementation of projects or programs aimed at helping these populations efficient and effective does not allow for this important bridge between military efforts, humanitarian aid and support to populations for the development of income activities.

In recent months there has been no help in terms of food for the displaced populations, and a "census" is being carried out to update the data of the beneficiaries who were inflated in the lists, with a non-displaced population receiving support to the detriment of the displaced themselves.

Currently, the violent extremists are weakened, but the attacks continue, although with a smaller proportion and with tendencies to rise to the southern districts of the province, evidenced by the incursions in Ancuabe and in the districts of Nampula and Niassa province. Recently, some villages in the district of Quissanga recorded attacks again, causing a new wave of displaced people and raising the alarm for populations that had returned to their areas of origin and for those who were thinking of returning.

Deficit in the supply of public services

The humanitarian crisis caused by violent extremism has dragged many people to areas considered safe, including the city of Pemba, the districts of Montepuez, Chiúre and Metuge. However, if it is true that, before the attacks, conditions in terms of the provision of public services in education, health and water and sanitation were quite deficient, it is also true that conditions deteriorated even more with the unprecedented increase in population and without any quick reaction by structures within the province.

Health services are under great pressure and health units are characterized by long lines for

care and lack of medication; schools work with overcrowded classes in a context in which few classrooms were built to respond to demand. The long distances that students travel to get to schools is contributing to the dropout of children and girls.

In Pemba, for example, the water crisis that has always characterized the city has worsened and now it is normal to go weeks without running water from the taps. To minimize the suffering of the population, the Water Supply Investment and Heritage Fund (FIPAG) chose to supply water using cistern tanks in order to minimize the suffering of the population.

Food aid deficit, begging and child labor

Humanitarian aid, which at first reached the internally displaced people without much trouble through international agencies and waves of solidarity, is no longer being felt as it was at first. In Pemba, for example, the cost of living has worsened in recent years, making the capital of Cabo Delgado one of the most expensive cities in the country.

The way in which food aid was provided – dis-

tribution of vouchers to collect food from local traders, precipitated a general rise in food prices. Shortcomings in continuing aid increased the rate of begging on the streets of the cities of Pemba and Montepuez and in many places where the internally displaced are located. The lack of food aid has also increased the labor of children who are sent to the streets to sell prepared foods.

Reconstruction in the context of escalating conflict

With a view to recovery of infrastructure destroyed by the conflict and the design of programs to allow the creation of objective conditions for the non-adherence of young people to violent extremism, the government created the ADIN and approved several programs and projects. With more than two billion dollars budgeted, Cabo Delgado's reconstruction system needs clarification as to who does what, where, how and when. Although the conflict has slowed down at certain

points, as in the case of Palma, this process is not being followed at the same pace in the reconstruction of social infrastructure and humanitarian support in the places where the population resides. Therefore, the lack of coordination between the institutions in the field of reconstruction and the weakening of the ADIN structure do not allow a better response in terms of infrastructure replacement and the return of populations to their areas of origin to be envisioned so soon.

Final notes: How is Cabo Delgado?

Five years later, violent extremism in Cabo Delgado continues to leave its mark with small-scale terrorist incursions in regions very close to the provincial capital, Pemba, although Mozambican and foreign troops from Rwanda and SADC are more involved and have bit of clarity on the enemy.

The host towns and the entire territory in conflict have seen a timid return of the population, as the populations fear the shortage of humanitarian aid and security issues that call into question the resumption of production in agriculture and fishing, the main subsistence sectors of this population. In short, humanitarian aid even in the resettlement areas is proving to be scarce and less and less guaranteed.

The current dynamics of lack of food aid has led the displaced populations to engage in begging and child labour, creating other challenges to the current scenario in the province that will

have a greater impact on the future, especially for children and young people.

ADIN, a development agency created to address the current and future problems of the region and the province in particular, has publicly assumed that it does not have the funds to finance the different projects that are part of its portfolio, leaving the population in "desperation" and without understanding the emergence of this agency as an "escape pipe" for the problems of the province.

Therefore, the five years of the conflict (which takes place in the interval between the last two congresses of the Frelimo Party) deserve better discussion and robust proposals that must meet the seriousness of the problem and the return of peace and the right to development for the population of Cabo Delgado Province and the entire country.



EDITORIAL INFORMATION

Property: CDD – Centro para Democracia e Desenvolvimento
Director: Prof. Adriano Nuvunga
Program Coordinator: Prof. Domingos do Rosário
Deputy Program Coordinator: Américo Maluana
Editor: Emídio Beula
Author: Abdul Tavares
Technical team: Emídio Beúla; Leonel Sapite (Nampula); Abdul Gafur Monteiro Tavares (Cabo Delgado); Evaristo Lucas (Niassa)
Layout: CDD

Address:
Rua Dar-Es-Salaam Nº 279, Bairro da Sommerschild, Cidade de Maputo.
Telefone: +258 21 085 797

 CDD_moz
E-mail: info@cddmoz.org
Website: <http://www.cddmoz.org>

Partners:



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Embaixada da Suíça em Moçambique