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**A RETURN TO A NEW FUTURE OR A RETURN  
TO THE PAST?  
– THE POPULATION RETURN TO THE NORTHEAST  
OF CABO DELGADO**

**João Feijó**

**INTRODUCTION**

In recent weeks, there has been the rehabilitation of infrastructure and the reopening of public services, as well as the return of tens of thousands of individuals to several districts in the Northeast of Cabo Delgado. At the same time, amnesty is enacted and the presentation of deserters and repentant to local populations for later integration is mediated. Despite this image of greater stabilization of the territory, several attacks persist in vast areas of the north of the province, spreading in small incursions into the South zone, threatening mining interests in Montepuez. Movements of return of populations to places of origin coexist with the arrival of new displaced people to resettlement centers in the south of the province

After describing the security situation in Cabo Delgado, this paper aims to analyze population movements and socio-economic reintegration in the places of origin. Finally, there is a reflection on the type of society that is intended to rebuild in the north of the province, and its viability for the stabilization of the territory. The reflection results from interviews held in October 2022 with teachers, health technicians, non-governmental organizations, chiefs of locality, as well as displaced individuals, living in the districts of Palma, Mocímboa da Praia, Macomia, Quissanga, Pemba, Nangade, Mueda, Muidumbe, Montepuez and Chiúre, in the city of Pemba. Data from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the World Food Programme (WFP) were also considered in the analysis.

**1. A SLOW RETURN OF SECURITY**

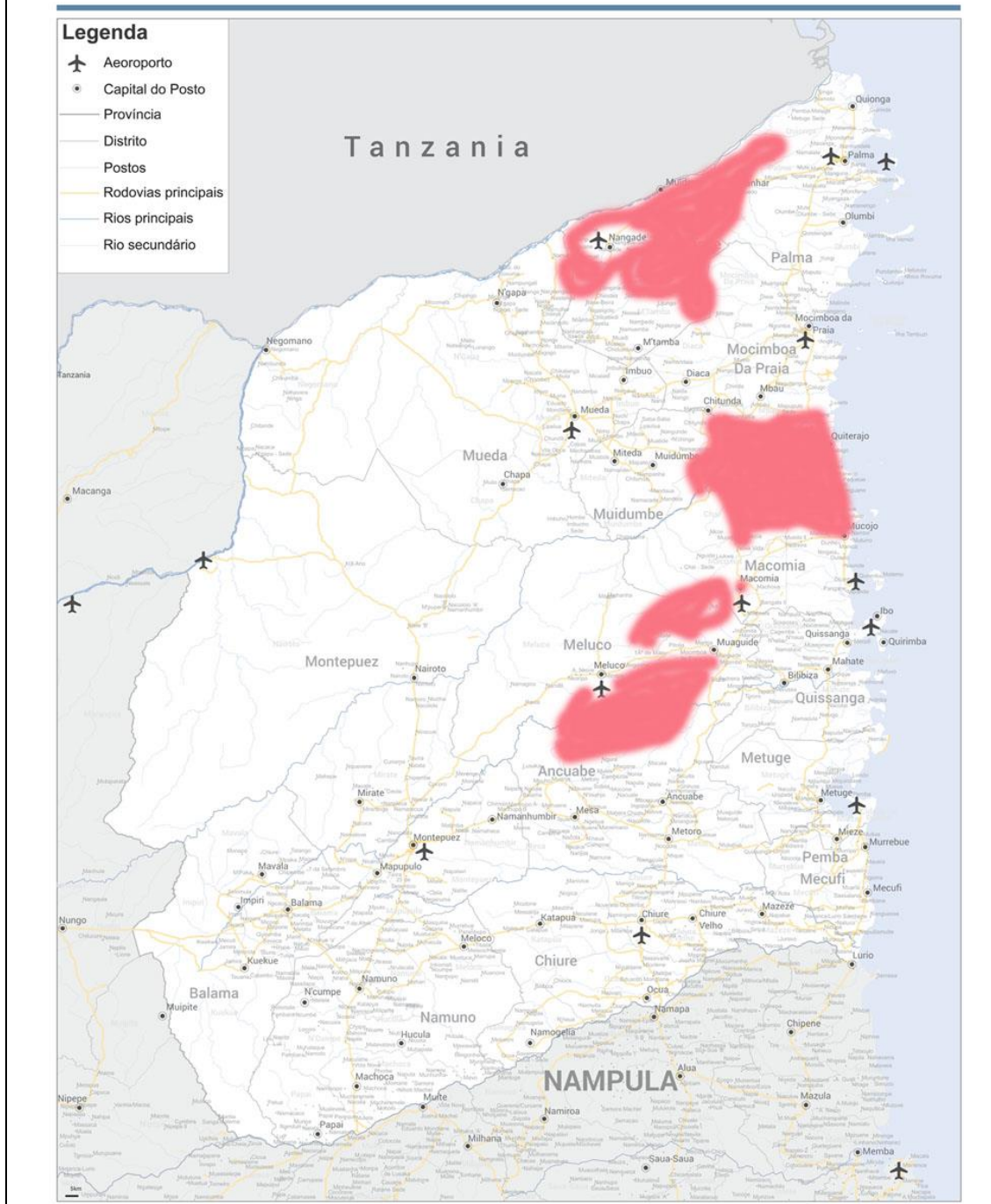
The intervention of the Rwandan Armed Forces and the troops of the Southern African Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) resulted in increased security in the northeast of the province. Rwandans claim that Palma and the Mocímboa da Praia district are safe. Around the village of Mocímboa was constituted a security belt, which was widened with time. To the south of the administrative post of Mbau there is uncertainty, particularly in the forests closest to the Messalo River. In turn, SAMIM has faced strong resistance from the insurgents. There are frequent attacks in Northern Nangade, where virtually all villages

are abandoned. In the administrative post of Chai (Macomia district), where virtually no village is inhabited, as well as in the Muidumbe's low areas casualties, SAMIM's troops also face difficulties. The coast of Macomia (administrative posts of Quiterajo and of Mucojo) remains uninhabited. In mid-October, armed individuals attacked the municipal market in the village's district headquarters, causing fatalities and property damage, driving the population out into the bush and increasing the feeling of insecurity.

The last few months reveal a shift in the areas of action of the insurgents, moving from the coastal areas to the interior, and from Palma and Mocímboa da Praia to new districts further south. The action in Northern Nangade takes advantage from the border with Tanzania. The penetration of small armed groups in the districts of Meluco and Ancuabe increases the pressure on the mines of Namanhumbir, but also the threat on the district of Chiúre, where sporadic attacks take place, which are mediated on social networks. It is admitted the possibility of further small incursions in the province of Nampula (see map 1).

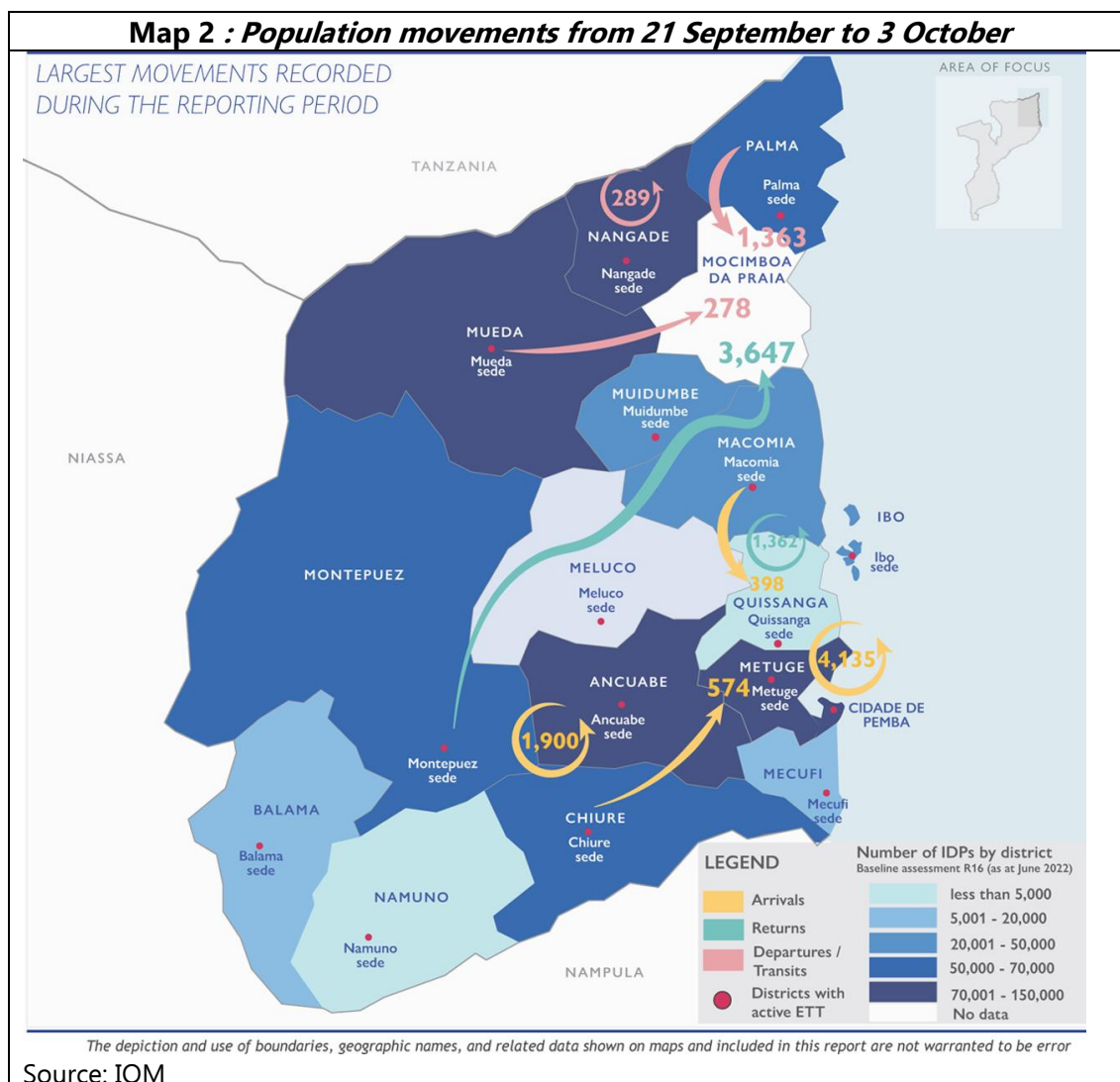
Despite the low-intensity guerrilla, the circulation through the province is now more fluid and transporters are operating between Pemba, Macomia, Mocímboa da Praia and Palma. Traffic from Nangade to Pundanhar remains unsafe and it is not possible to reach Palma from the West.

**Map 1: Areas of uncertainty or of action of violent groups (October 2022)**



## 2. POPULATION MOVEMENTS

Over the past few weeks, there have been contradictory population movements. While many displaced people leave resettlement centres to their home zones, thousands of people arrive to the same centres fleeing attack zones (see map 2).



### a) The situation in the centres of displaced persons

In the centres of displaced persons in the south of the province, difficulties persist in accessing agricultural land and the downward trend in food aid, leaving families particularly vulnerable. To avoid disruptions in humanitarian assistance from April to October 2022, the WFP (WFP, September 2022) was forced to reduce food aid to households to less than 40% of daily minimum caloric needs, reducing to bimonthly the frequency of food distribution. Reports of diversion of humanitarian aid to community leaders continue to abound, generating tensions and conflicts, sometimes ethnicized. In the face of news of greater stability in the north of the province, there is a return of many

individuals to the plateau of Mueda and Muidumbe, Palma and Mocímboa da Praia, with a perceptible decrease in the number of displaced people in the resettlement centers of Montepuez or Chiúre. In the largest urban centers many families receive vouchers of 3,600 meticaís for buying food, which are often sold to finance the return trip. Similarly, in Marrupa (Chiúre district), after receiving food aid, there was massive food sales. A collective contribution to rent open box vans to return to the places of origin, where the few belongings are loaded, including the canvases from donations, with which they covered their homes. Other displaced people prefer to wait at the resettlement site, claiming that those returning have not witnessed the phenomena of greater violence. Government discourses remain cautious about the return of populations, so those who return do so on their own initiative. However, the massive issuance of credentials for the return to Mocímboa da Praia suggests tacit support from the Government.

In the South, the return movements of individuals coexist with the arrival of new displaced people, particularly after attacks in the Muidumbe low areas, in the districts of Ancuabe and Meluco and in the administrative post of Mazeze (Chiúre district).

Paradoxically, in return areas, such as Macomia, there is the creation of displaced persons' centers, where populations from attacked areas in Meluco, Ancuabe and Chai villages take refuge. Many displaced people are staying in family homes. Food distribution is carried out, mainly by the WFP, but irregularly and insufficiently. The new displaced also receive support from non-governmental organizations (this is Médicos Sem Fronteiras – Doctors Without Borders), that provide canvases, kitchen tools and food. In Quissanga a displaced person' centre was also set up in the village of Tandanhague, where people from Ancuabe, Metuge and Matemo are taken refuge.

The situation remains critical in the village-headquarters of Nangade, where between 70,000 and 150,000 individuals are concentrated (see map 2). In August 2022 there were attempts to return by the displaced population to the villages of the north of the district, but the intensification of attacks during the month of September brought people back to the village-headquarters. The insecurity in the district makes it difficult to supply and distribute food aid.

### **b) The return of the population**

In the northeast of the province there is a gradual return of populations to certain areas. In the district of Mocímboa da Praia, the return of the populations was often preceded by the arrival of the respective leaders, summoned by the authorities themselves, with the aim of identifying the populations returned. Data from IOM estimate the existence of between 50 and 70,000 individuals throughout Palma district (see map 2), and in Pundanhar there is still no residents. The number of displaced people in Palma headquarters has drastically reduced, with populations returning to Mocímboa da Praia and to several villages in Olumbe and Quionga's administrative posts. Reducing the pressure on Afungi, Total facilitated the return of the displaced population in Senga,

Quitunda, Quitupo, Pataca and Maganja to Mocímboa da Praia, providing the respective transport. Throughout October, in the village of Mocímboa, dozens of people from the south of the province arrived daily. In mid-October it was estimated that between 2 and 3,000 people per week arrived at the village of Mocímboa da Praia, as well as the presence of 50,000 individuals throughout the district, half of whom arrived at the village headquarters. Returning individuals claim that there are former guerrillas (insurgents) among the returnees, who interact with the populations and even play football with the military. Officials from United Nations organizations report movement restrictions around the headquarters village, suspecting that security is not guaranteed. In the administrative post of Diaca the return of the population continues to occur, but the administrative post of Mbau remains unstable. Throughout the district, uncertainty and irregularity in food distribution persist.

In most of the villages in Muidumbe high lands, people are returning. In view of the lack of government information, the displaced people were informally in contact with those who ventured back to return, assessing security. To avoid land conflicts, non-originating populations are not allowed to build houses in the villages of destination. Some populations risk returning to low-lying areas, where they have access to water, fertile land, cashew trees, banana trees, firewood, and other natural resources.

In the district of Macomia, the population is particularly concentrated around the village headquarters. The villages of the coast or the administrative post of Chai remain virtually deserted. On the coast of Macomia and in the administrative post of Chai practically there are only military or a local force.

In Quissanga the return of people occurs mainly in the coastal area, along the road from Metuge to Mahate. The population comes from Pemba or the Quirimbas archipelago, where they abandoned the small shelters, they had built along the beach. Due to insecurity, the return of the population is less visible in the North and West of the district. Along the coast, the situation is moving towards normalization, even if there are conflicts over the possession of resources. Reports proliferate of people arriving to their home zones finding other individuals residing in their homes or occupying agricultural land belonging to third parties. Some individuals buy land at reduced prices for the construction of their homes. Some returnees in southern Quissanga remain registered in the displaced persons centre of Metuge, from where they are contacted when the food distribution is processed, returning for this purpose.

### **c) Amnesty granting and *ad hoc* reintegration attempts**

Following major offensives carried out on insurgent bases during June and July, numerous guerrillas were captured or surrendered. The media reported the existence of deserters and individuals captured by the Defense and Security Forces, granted amnesty and handed over to family members in their home areas. Televisions show individuals

being introduced to the populations by the authorities, where they are publicly questioned about their actions, including the number of murders carried out. Local leaders mention 29 individuals reinstated in Macomia district, 14 in Mocímboa da Praia, 9 in Muidumbe and 7 in Nangade, but other sources estimate this number to be much higher. There is a general ignorance about this process, including by organizations such as the Red Cross, the Islamic Council of Mozambique, the Christian Council of Mozambique or the Catholic Church. Civil Society Organizations are not involved in this process, and it is unknown what kind of consultation is carried out with the communities of provenance of individuals granted amnesty, how families and neighbors are prepared for the return of these individuals, mechanisms of social reintegration (technical and financial support), psychosocial monitoring (including cleansing rituals) and guaranteeing the safety of people.

### **3. INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES**

The conditions of access to infrastructure and services remain precarious. In the Northeast of the country, much of the district services, schools and health centers have been destroyed. In Palma, the public Prosecutor's office, the registration and notary services and the district services of the Government were destroyed, operating in improvised tents, but with access to energy and informatic means. Movitel's network is not yet working. In Mocímboa da Praia all district directorates are already operating, but the facilities continue in rehabilitation and without means. It is envisaged the reconstruction of the district public Prosecutor's building and of the registration and notary, as well as the rehabilitation of schools and other public buildings. In Palma, Mocímboa da Praia, Muidumbe and Macomia there are still no bank branches, which are concentrated only in the municipality of Mueda (three branches). In Quitunda (Palma district) an ATM was recently installed, and a banking delegation is expected to be opened soon. Mpesa agents are the only resource for financial inclusion.

#### **a) Health services**

In the Northern zone, access to health is mainly concentrated in district-headquarters villages. In Palma a rural hospital operates and there are health centers in Olumbe, Maganja, Quionga and Quitunda, most of which requiring technical staff. In Mocímboa da Praia the hospital is operating, and another health unit was announced, promoted by Doctors Without Borders. The military has its own hospital. Work of rehabilitation of water holes is taking place. On the plateau, health conditions are mainly concentrated in the hospital of Mueda, which was not directly affected by the conflict. The health facilities in Nangade have been the target of attacks (Nkomba, Muiha and Ntoli), currently focusing on the district's headquarters and the administrative post of Ntamba. There is only one doctor in the entire district and medicines area scarce. In Muidumbe district, the only existing health center is in Miteda, where people are forced to go, at risk of attacks. When safety conditions permit, health technicians make ambulatory visits to

some villages. Aware of being a prime target of attacks, technicians have been reluctant to travel. The great difficulty is the lack of medicines. Similarly, in Macomia, health infrastructure is concentrated in the village headquarters. It is also noticeable the presence of the Doctors Without Borders, who created first aid posts in several neighborhoods. In Quissanga the health situation tends to improve. In the first few months only the mobile health brigade worked, but the rural hospital was rehabilitated. The headquarters of Bilibiza's administrative post is assisted by a mobile brigade coming from Quissanga.

In districts not directly affected by war, the health sector continues to come under great pressure due to the persistence of a large number of displaced people. In Mapupulo, resettlement sites are far from the sanitary unit. Doctors Without Borders and Doctors Mundi built several health centers with local materials, which they left to the State, but which lack medical personnel to ensure operation. Increased safety allows the movement of mobile brigades to the various resettlement centers, but visits are reduced to needs and medicines are scarce. Although some water holes have broken down, the downward trend in the displaced population tends to reduce the pressure on water demand.

## **b) Education**

Education infrastructures were also a prime target of the attacks, so in the Northern zone the school park is largely destroyed. Despite the growing arrival of individuals to Mocímboa da Praia, schools are expected to open only in 2023. In the village of Palma there is a secondary school, as well as primary schools in Quitunda, Maganja, Olumbe and Palma headquarters. In Nangade primary schools are concentrated in the village headquarters (with overcrowded classes exceeding 90 students/class in first year) or in some villages in the southern part of the district. Faced with uncertainty about the future, many families were initially reluctant to enroll their children, but over time they were inserted. Most of the villages in the Muidumbe high lands are already operating (Namacande, Nchinga, 24 March, Namunde, Muambula, Miteda, Lutete, Lyautua, Muatide, Namande, Nampanha, Namacule, Mandava and Napate and Mandela), and Miteda and Nangololo have secondary school. Some children arrive with their parents, but not always with transfer documents. Other returning families left the children temporarily in the displaced persons centers. Due to the return of many displaced people, the number of students in Mueda schools is clearly decreasing. In Macomia, schools are concentrated in Macomia headquarters. In Quissanga, primary schools are opening in the coastal area, along the road Metuge - Mahate, as well as in the village headquarters, where the classes are overcrowded, often above 85 students/class. Many classrooms had been destroyed, so they have no doors or windows. In the West and North zones of the district there are no records of school openings due to absence of population. In the district there is not a single secondary school, and the nearest one is on the island of Ibo, to where students with family contacts or more resources resort to.



In the southern part of the province there are many requests for transfer of students, who return with their families to the North zone. Some return to the resettlement center a few weeks after departure, victims of attacks, destabilizing the school environment. According to local teachers, the average class size in Mapupulo's administrative post decreased from about 90 to 70 students/class, despite fluctuations. Mapupulo's displaced persons centres are often far from schools, contributing to the low frequency of children in primary school. Where school feeding is provided there is a higher retention rate of students. In the districts of Montepuez, Ancuabe or Chiúre there are efforts to expand schools and build classrooms, using local material and zinc sheets, led by non-governmental organizations. Sometimes teachers are selected among displaced individuals, favoring their integration.

#### **4. DEVELOPMENT OF ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES**

Economic activities in the centre and north of the province continue to be affected by war, population displacement and lack of access to means of production.

##### **a) Agriculture**

In Palma and Mocímboa da Praia, Total has been increasing its concern to promote economic integration, increase production and decrease the rate of inactivity. Projects are announced to supply agricultural supplies by private individuals, in partnership with the State. The WFP announced support for more than 40,000 individuals in the reconstruction of livelihoods in Northern Cabo Delgado (WFP, September 2022), but these numbers are clearly insufficient considering the real needs. In the administrative post of Diaca the population prepares the agricultural season, facing the lack of support in food and agricultural inputs. Around the villages' headquarters of Mueda, Nangade and Macomia, where much of the displaced population is concentrated, there is a shortage of agricultural areas for production, and a strong dependence on foreign aid. Social differentiation is evident among those who arrived longer (and managed to gain access to agricultural land for production) or those who have access to the former combatant's allowance. In Muidumbe high lands, in villages that were not attacked (notably in Miteda), the populations had a good harvest and preserved surplus maize, fueling some agricultural trade. Those returning to the previously attacked villages have no agricultural surpluses and are particularly vulnerable, beginning to prepare agricultural land in the low-lying areas. Also, on the coast of Quissanga people are cleaning the *machambas* (farm plots) and sowing, waiting for the first rains. There is a timid resumption of livestock farming.

## b) Fisheries

Fishing is one of the main economic activities affected by the conflict, due to the departure of the populations and long months of prohibitions. The stabilisation of security in coastal areas has contributed to the lifting of fishing restrictions in Palma, Mocímboa da Praia and Quissanga, and many fishermen resume activities. Due to a forced closure of several years, reports account for an increase in fishing fauna. Fishing is also reported on Lake Bilibiza. The situation inverts the coast of Macomia, where there are only military personnel, and on Lake Nguri, where fishing is not authorized. Young locals risk carrying out this activity, facing the risk of insurgent attacks and the mistrust of the defense and security forces.

## c) Trade

Trade tends to be rehabilitated in the district headquarter villages, where commercial stores are opening. However, in view of the production deficit and transport risks, prices are clearly inflated. As Table 1 shows, food prices are particularly high in the north of the province, reflecting an imbalance between supply and demand.

**Table 1: Approximate cost of essential goods, in meticais**

Product	Local					
	Palma Sede	Mocímboa da Praia	Nangade Sede	Miteda	Quissanga Sede	Pemba
1 kg sugar	110	90	90	100	95	75
1 litro cooking oil	150	(*)	150	175	200	140
1 barra soap	110	80	85	120	110	80
1 kg de rice	95	80		200	120	70
1 kg maize flour	75			60	60	50

(\*) According to reports, cooking oil is mostly sold in small quantities in plastic bags.

## 5. SNOOTING, THEFT AND MENDICITY

In a scenario of great precariousness, survival strategies are multiplied, which often only mitigate situations of food deprivation. In large population centres, notably in resettlement centres or district headquarters, displaced people seek to carry out *ganho-ganho* activities in the others' farms, often in exchange for food. The displaced population in Quitunda always benefited of symbolic compensation for their involvement in village clean-up days and other initiatives. In Nangade, children snoosize corn grains in milling plants or farms. In Mocímboa da Praia many collect old iron from the wreckage for sale. There are reports of individuals moving from the village of Mocímboa to bases abandoned by the insurgents, with a view to collect objects, such as motorized, facing security risks. Many live off theft of what they find.

In the hinterland many resort to hunting crawling animals, for consumption or sale, or looking for firewood. In Montepuez, Ancuabe and Chiúre there is an increase in artisanal mining. In Montepuez, reports account for the increase in crime. Several women make *cabanga* (traditional alcoholic beverage based on sugar and cornmeal).

Throughout the province, there is an increase in prostitution, early pregnancy, and premature marriages, as a direct and indirect consequence of armed conflict. The most promiscuous behaviours are reported in the hinterland areas, especially in more vulnerable families (notably single parent families headed by women). Young girls engage with men with more resources (with economic, political, or military power, etc.), in exchange for material benefits, sometimes generating conflicts. In most places, State institutions or traditional authorities are not present. Unable to deal with these matters, the dominant attitude is resignation. Many women's empowerment organisations provide economic alternatives by organising sewing or mat production activities to reduce these phenomena. In May and June 2021, there were reports of sexual assaults in Palma district, perpetrated by members of the Defense and Security Forces. The frequency of these reports has drastically reduced with the arrival of Rwandan troops.

## **6. GO BACK TO THE PAST LIKE NOTHING HAPPENED, OR BUILD A NEW FUTURE?**

The return of the population to the Northeast of the province is mainly motivated by factors of revulsion to the resettlement sites (related to the deprivation of agricultural land and decreasing food aid), but also by a greater attraction of the places of origin, due to the improvement of safety conditions. However, in the districts of Nangade and Macomia, most of the population remains around the district's headquarter villages, with difficulty in accessing means of production. A large part of the population returns on their own initiative, without access to credit lines or economic support, to a place where much of the public infrastructure and services are destroyed or under reconstruction. West of Palma and North of Nangade, on the coast of Macomia, as well as in the lowlands of Muidumbe and Chai administrative post, security remains unstable. Small incursions in the districts of Ancuabe, east of Montepuez and Chiúre were responsible for the (temporary) paralysis of economic activities and generation of new movements of displaced people. The persistence of difficulties in agricultural production and in humanitarian assistance aggravate food insecurity in the region. Facing budgetary difficulties, the WFP warns of the risk of food assistance interruption as early as January 2023, precisely at the peak of the scarcity season, requiring US\$59.1 million to maintain support throughout the first quarter of 2023 (WFP, September 2022). The situation can be aggravated by the risks of flooding in the Megaruma, Montepuez and Messalo river basins. Until the beginning of the next harvests, periods of widespread famine amongst the population and the insurgents are expected, but also amongst the armed forces, with impacts on small crime, armed attacks, prostitution, and collaboration with violent groups.

For Total, the return of populations to the places of origin is an indicator of security recovery and socio-economic stability, capable of promoting the reinitiating of investment operations. Faced with this reality, the government discourse on the return of the population has been contradictory. Whilst when communicating with displaced populations in the south of the province, there is a cautious speech, highlighting the ongoing security work, a set of external messages were issued highlighting the stabilization of the region. Clean-up campaigns in Mocímboa da Praia and celebrations of the Day of Municipality, as well as triumphal journalistic pieces about the stabilization of Palma, fueled feelings of security among the populations, precipitating them to return.

The return of populations takes place without clear structural reforms, with the aggravation of the destruction and inoperability of public infrastructure and services, in a scenario of lack of means of production and widespread decapitalization. The economic disintegration of populations, difficulties in accessing public services and justice, and the absence of spaces for participation, in a scenario of return of foreign investment and increased social inequalities, could aggravate social tensions, and increase collaboration with violent groups. This reality would imply a return to the political-military situation prevailing between 2017 and 2019, when the rural population of the northeast of the province took refuge in the village headquarters of district and administrative posts.

It is in this sense that the return of the population needs to be complemented by, among other reforms, the following measures:

- Rehabilitation of health conditions, particularly in the maternal and child area, involving military physicians, guarantee of food assistance and promotion of family planning;
- Massive investment in education and teacher training, with emphasis on technical education, and partnerships to be established with economic operators, promoting the distribution of school meals, with a view to retaining the student population, particularly young girls;
- Reconstruction of district services and institutional capacity building in terms of equipment, qualified human resources and budget allocation;
- (Re)construction of strategic economic infrastructure for the district, promoting the economic integration of the territory, generating local jobs and income;
- Diversification of the economy and massive support for economic activities such as fishing, agriculture or informal trade, responsible for employability of the overwhelming majority of the population, favouring young people and women, not forgetting the populations of the coast;
- Urgent and massive distribution of agricultural inputs to the populations before the rains and in time to ensure the agricultural year in order to ensure food security;

- Decentralization of the administration of the territory, including of the State budget, and channeling it to employment-generating economic sectors;
- Increase in the percentage value attributed to populations affected by the exploitation of natural resources, applying their value in generating economic opportunities;
- Support for the establishment of local associations, especially youth organizations, producers (peasants, fishermen or traders), training of their leaders in matters of leadership and negotiation, creation and decentralization of spaces for socio-political participation and the exercise of citizenship;
- Involvement of Civil Society Organizations and traditional leaders in the process of social reintegration of deserters, in the areas of mediation and conflict management, providing psychosocial support, including through cleansing and purification rituals;
- Support for the development of community radio stations, to the dissemination and access to information.
- Strengthening the role of the public prosecutor and the judiciary, and expanding access to justice, as well as strengthening public confidence in public institutions;
- Symbolic appreciation of the Islamic populations of the coast, recognizing their role in the struggle for national liberation, conferring recognition in the toponymy of streets, squares and other important public places;
- Reforms of the security forces, building a relationship of trust with the population and an intelligence network, inspired by the model of action of the Rwandan military in Palma and Mocímboa da Praia;
- Identification of the leaders of violent groups, their demands and exploitation of communication channels, with a view to negotiating the cessation of hostilities.

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