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RETURN OF THE POPULATIONS AND RECONSTRUCTION OF THE NORTHEAST OF CABO DELGADO – FROM THE WEAKENING OF THE STATE TO THE EMERGENCE OF A *TOTALAND*

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The media has been reporting the return of tens of thousands of individuals to the Northeast of Cabo Delgado, as well as the return of employees and reopening of public services. This is an important indicator of improved safety, which increases expectations for the return of the gas extraction project promoted by TotalEnergies. At a time when an independent consultant is making a diagnosis of the humanitarian situation in the north-east of the province, there is still a lack of objective and systematized information on the return of populations and security in the province, on what it means to reopen public services (in terms of health, education, support for economic activities or justice) and on the restarting economic activities. This *Destaque Rural* aims to carry out a portrait of the socio-economic environment in the Northeast of Cabo Delgado, particularly in the area around one of the largest natural gas investment projects in the entire African continent, with an epicenter on the Afungi peninsula. The data stems from a week of observation in the districts of Palma and Mocímboa da Praia, interviews with returning populations, members of district governments, teachers and health professionals, members of humanitarian and non-governmental organizations, TotalEnergies workers, police commanders, among other social actors.

1. INCREASED SAFETY AND RETURN OF POPULATIONS

After the attacks on the village capital of Mocímboa da Praia (in March and June 2021) and Palma (in March 2021), the Northeast of Cabo Delgado reached the peak of insecurity, leading TotalEnergies to the decision to stop the mega-investment project in natural gas, claiming force-force. The entry of Rwandan forces into the Northern Operations Theater (Teatro de Operações do Norte - TON) represented a turning point in the conflict, driving the rebels south and west of the province, providing an improvement in the security situation around the villages of Palma and Mocímboa da Praia. During military operations, the population remained displaced south and west of Cabo Delgado or in the resettlement center of Quitunda, near Afungi, putting pressure on TotalEnergies.

Throughout 2022 there was a gradual return of displaced populations to their home areas or to places closer to their previous homes. The return began to Palma capital (still in 2021) and later to Quionga (people mainly from the nearest islands) and Olumbi, on the coast of the same district. The return to Mocímboa da Praia began in the west of the district, in the administrative post of Diaca, mostly led by Makonde peasants. Already in the second half, the return to the village of Quitunda (with the support of TotalEnergies in transport and food for the first three months), but also from Nanili (administrative post of Diaca), where the military forces had concentrated population rescued from the forests or insurgent bases. The precarious conditions in the displaced persons centers in the south of the province, the threats of interruption of food aid and news of stabilization in the northeast of the province have spurred the return of tens of thousands of individuals. At the end of 2022 begins a timid return to the administrative post of Mbau (south of Mocímboa da Praia) and Pundanhar (West of Palma), areas of greatest risk, due to the dense vegetation. In Nhica do Rovuma (on the border with Tanzania) and in the areas near the Messalo River (at the southern end of the Mocímboa da Praia district) there are no population records.

Most people found their homes destroyed or with maintenance problems and their belongings stolen or burned. Many sleeps on the floor or on mats and some resort to canvas brought from resettlement centers. The estimated resident population, provided by the district authorities, is 78,000 individuals in Palma (surpassing the 62,667 censuses in 2017) and 86,813 in Mocímboa da Praia (representing 70% of the 123,975 registered in 2017).

In February 2023, safety is evident throughout the coastline north of Mocímboa da Praia and along the national road between Mocímboa da Praia and Diaca, having also improved at the station's Pundanhar post. Despite the improvement in the situation, the movements of TotalEnergies technicians and their partners continue to be carried out with military escorts. On February 17, the first incident occurred along the Palma-Mocímboa Road, after an interval of several months (Cabo Ligado, 21.02.2023). The southern coast of Mocímboa da Praia remains uncertain, with fishing limitations and reports of the presence of armed insurgents, offering money to the population (Carta, 27.01.2023).

Map 1: Transitability and safety in the districts of Palma and Mocímboa da Praia (Feb/2023)



The heads of administrative posts, such as Quionga, Olumbi and Pundanhari, have not yet returned, with the police command being the authority that replaces them. In late 2022, state officials visited administrative post of Mbau with military escort.

2. RECONSTRUCTION OF ADMINISTRATION BUILDINGS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

In Palma and, above all, in Mocímboa da Praia, most of the buildings of the district administration, as well as the justice – Attorney general's office, records and notary services, institute of sponsorship and legal assistance (IPAJ), national criminal investigation service (SERNIC), prison – were heavily vandalized (photos 1 and 2), as well as residences of state officials. In Mocímboa da Praia the district secretariat, the administrator's residence, district education services, economic activities and infrastructure, were completely destroyed or heavily vandalized. The offices of the various administrative posts and their official residences were deeply affected. The Government of Mozambique, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United

Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) and TotalEnergies have been conducting several needs surveys and some works are underway. TotalEnergies has provided several containers where the district services of Mocímboa da Praia operate. UNDP has ceded containers where registration and notary services operate. In Mocímboa da Praia was also rehabilitated the building of the District Services of Economic Activities (SDAE), the session room of the district administration and the INSS building.

Photo 1: Vandalization of the premises of the District Attorney's Office of Mocímboa da Praia



Photo 2: Destruction of the prison of Mocímboa da Praia



The power grid has been deeply affected, with the destruction of many processing stations, theft of poles and electrical cables. The network is being reinstalled, but it is still precarious, having allegedly clandestine connections multiplied, responsible for supply cuts.

3. ACCESS TO WATER, HEALTH AND FOOD

Most of the existing wells and water holes in Mocímboa da Praia have dried or have maintenance problems. According to data from the District Planning and Infrastructure Services (SDPI), out of a total of 120 existing water holes in Mocímboa da Praia before the conflict, in February 2023 only 36 are operational. The current ratio is one water hole per 2,411 inhabitants, a figure well above the 300 recommended by WHO. Doctors Without Borders (MSF) and the Incomati company (funded by TotalEnergies) carried out work to open holes (3 and 6, respectively) and distribute water.

The health system has been largely affected by the armed conflict. Of the 8 health facilities in Mocímboa da Praia, half were largely destroyed during the attacks. Hospital equipment was stolen or vandalized and part of the buildings destroyed, requiring rehabilitation. In both districts, there is a lack of X-ray machines, beds, tables, laboratory supplies, among other previously existing hospital equipment. Until the end of 2022, the Rural Hospital was occupied by the Rwandan army, making it difficult to assess needs. In Palma, MSF provided some laboratory equipment, vacuum cleaners, mattresses, cold chamber to the mortuary. The Olumbi health centre has been rehabilitated with external support, but has no equipment or furniture, so it is not working.

Photo 3: Queue for access to water in the Nanduadua neighborhood, in Mocímboa da Praia



Photo 4: Destruction of the Rural Hospital of Mocímboa da Praia



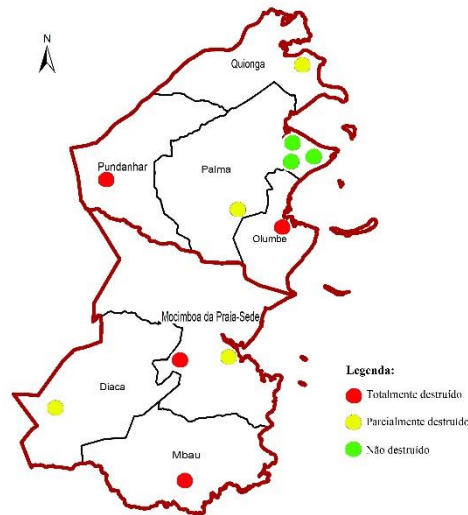
The operational health units are mainly concentrated near the district headquarters villages: in Palma, Quitunda and Maganja, as well as in the TotalEnergies camp in Afungi (near Palma Headquarters), as well as in the municipality of Mocímboa Headquarters. The units operate partially (ensuring emergency services, hospitalization, maternity and some surgery), sometimes resorting to tents provided by Doctors Without Borders. With the accentuation of the rainy season, the tents become less functional. Of a total of 75 hospital beds available before the attacks, in the district of Mocímboa da Praia there are only 19, for a population of more than 86,000 individuals already returned. At peak care the same bed is shared by two patients or granted premature medical discharge. Of the 42 beds in Palma district prior to the attack, there is currently a lower and generally incomplete number in terms of equipment.

According to data from district health services, the entire district of Mocímboa da Praia has 2 doctors (3 before the conflict), and the district of Palma has 4 doctors. The ratio of physician per inhabitant is 1 per 43,000 (in Mocímboa) and 1 per 19,500 (in Palma), values well above the maximum recommended by the WHO, of one doctor per 10,000 inhabitants. In February 2023, of the 232 employees assigned to the district health services of Mocímboa da Praia, only 146 had returned, representing about 63% of the sector's staff. In Palma, the rate of return of staff in the health sector exceeds 90%.

With the exception of the administrative post of Diaca, where there is a permanent team in UNICEF tents, and outside the villages, assistance is usually done by mobile brigades, usually from MSF, namely in Quelimane and Mbau (in Mocímboa da Praia), Quionga and Olumbi (in Palma). The movement of technicians assigned to the national health service is irregular due to lack of human and material resources, including fuel. The district of Mocímboa da Praia has only one operational ambulance and Palma has two. Several vehicles have operational problems, such as malfunctions, difficulty in accessing mechanics and spare parts and fuel money, and are often dependent on external support. The repair of the vehicles is in charge of external actors, such as Doctors Without Borders. Mobile brigades move without an escort, and technicians are afraid to go to Mbau's administrative post, so the population can only resort to Elementary Polyvalent Agents (Agentes Polivalentes Elementares – APE). The lack of working conditions (destruction of

infrastructure and lack of hospital equipment), destruction of homes and fear of insecurity are the justifications for the non-return of nurses and health assistants.

Map 2: State of health units in the districts of Palma and Mocímboa da Praia (Dec/2023)



Source: Adapted from ACAPS (2022)

Rwandan soldiers carried out one-off health programs. Until April 2022, the military force guaranteed access to health, performing surgical interventions in the Rwandan hospital installed in Afungi, with the possibility of transferring patients to Pemba through aircraft chartered by TotalEnergies or True North, usually with mediation of Vamoz.

Population displacements have destabilized existing indirect health structures. In some administrative posts there are already APEs, trained to carry out malaria diagnoses and carriers of a pharmacy very elementary, but often incomplete (usually paracetamol for reducing fevers and Coartem for malaria treatment). Actors on the ground report a clear decrease in the number of matrons for support in childbirth, some of which have died and others have not returned.

The medication available in hospital pharmacies is mainly limited to analgesics, anti-malarials and antibiotics, often incomplete and lacking more specific medications. Like other parts of the country, many medicines that are not available in pharmacies are sold in the informal markets, leading to suspicions of medication diversion, involving health professionals themselves. The distribution of medicines is also a problem, with State services heavily dependent on UNICEF or Vamoz (especially in Palma), institutions that also face severe difficulties.

The biggest problems faced by the population are malaria, respiratory diseases and anemia as a result of malnutrition. Mocímboa da Praia constituted the second district of the province in number of blood transfusions. The rapid population growth in the district

has made the number of mosquito nets initially distributed largely insufficient. Health professionals report the existence of many pregnant women, orphaned children and families with missing relatives, as well as food insecurity problems.

Vamoz (supported by TotalEnergies) provided food to the populations returned to Mocímboa da Praia and Pundanhar, and the World Food Programme (WFP) was also on the ground. Food support has clearly been insufficient for needs. All the interlocutors in Mocímboa da Praia reported not having received food in the last three months, but economic agents were observed selling food in bags the World Food Programme's insignia. As in other parts of the province, this situation generates discontent among the population.

4. ATTEMPTS TO RE-ESTABLISH THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

The education sector has been deeply affected by the armed conflict. Classrooms and teachers' offices were burned and vandalized. The infrastructure built with precarious material were degraded due to lack of maintenance. Photos circulated on social media of barricades built by insurgents with school desks, blocking the N380 in Mienguelewa (Muidumbe district). Other desks are degraded by exposure to rain.

In Mocímboa da Praia there is still no detailed information about the level of destruction, translating difficulties of diagnosis and systematization of the situation. Of the 64 existing schools in this district in 2020, only 24 (38%) were reopened, concentrated in the district village capital and along the corridor to Mueda (N380) and Palma (R762). In Palma, 26 schools reopened, representing 60% of the 43 before the attacks. Some Areas of Pedagogical Influence (Nsangue and Pundanhar, in the district of Palma, and in Mbau Nitumbati and Marere, in the district of Mocímboa da Praia), are not yet functioning..

Com dados ainda por actualizar (muitas famílias ainda estão a regressar), em meados de Fevereiro de 2023 estavam matriculadas 17.001 crianças no distrito de Mocímboa da Praia, da 1ª primeira à 12ª classe, das quais 7.613 do sexo feminino (44,8%). O défice de meninas pode espelhar o número de raptos de adolescentes durante o conflito, mas também o receio dos encarregados de educação em fazer regressar as suas filhas. O efectivo escolar representa apenas 63% do número de estudantes matriculados em 2020, altura em que foram identificados 27.112 estudantes nesses mesmos níveis de ensino (Governo do Distrito de MdP, With data to be updated (many families are still returning), in mid-February 2023 17,001 children were enrolled in the district of Mocímboa da Praia, from the 1st to the 12th grade, of which 7,613 were female (44.8%). The deficit of girls may mirror the number of teenage abductions during the conflict, but also the fear of parents for their daughters' return. The school staff represents only 63% of the number of students enrolled in 2020, when 27,112 students were identified at these same levels of education (District Government, MdP, 2019: 5-6).

In February 2023, it was estimated that only 30 to 40% of the teachers had returned to the district of Mocímboa da Praia and 60% to the district of Palma. Many teachers have made traumatic escapes, some have lost some family members and many have their homes and stuffs destroyed or stolen. Most of the teachers contacted in Mocímboa da Praia left the family in the south of the province.

The long interruption of school activities has led to a high number of children enrolled in first class. For example, of the 628 children enrolled in the full primary school of Quionga capital, about 300 are in first class. In this school only three teachers returned (60% of the total), resulting in a ratio of 1 teacher to 209 pupils. Eleven classes run in only two classrooms and under two large trees (photo 5). The destruction of residences and the feeling of insecurity lead teachers to reside in the villages district headquarters, doing daily the round trip, increasing tiredness, demotivation, with potential repercussions on assiduity, punctuality and monitoring capacity of children. According to teachers, children face food insecurity as a result of the late return of families, negatively affecting learning.

Photo 5: *Quionga Complete Primary School - outdoor classrooms*



In the schools visited there is a lack of material for the beginning of classes, namely notebooks for planning, chalk and school books. Since no enrolments have been registered in previous years, no direct school support (Apoio Directo às Escolas – ADE) has been made available, worsening pedagogical conditions. The shortage of staff, vehicles and transport funds, combined with the degradation of several access roads, makes school inspection unfeasible.

There are some efforts to rehabilitated the school park. In Palma, 12 rooms were rehabilitated by UNICEF, using bamboo and zinc plates, and TotalEnergies’s collaboration was also verified. Some schools rehabilitated, but still without teachers, cause some discontent in donors, denoting lack of coordination.

5. STARTING FROM ZERO: THE REVITALIZATION OF THE ECONOMIC FABRIC

5.1. Agriculture and livestock

Agricultural production tends to return to normal along the main access roads, namely the N380 (between Mocímboa da Praia and Diaca) and the R762 (between Palma and Mocímboa da Praia). In areas near the coast, it is possible to see the production of rice in the low-lying areas, but also maize, beans and cassava along the access roads or around the houses. In Mocímboa da Praia, the district government provided indications that families should not grow far from villages and main access routes. In Quionga, the abandonment of the region was responsible for the approximation of wild fauna, causing destruction of crops. The presence of elephants increases opportunities to obtain ivory, feeding trafficking networks.

In the administrative posts of Pundanhar and Mbau, considered the granaries of the districts of Palma and Mocímboa da Praia, the cultivated area is greatly reduced, due to the slower and late return of the populations and the feeling of insecurity. For the 2022/23 agricultural year in the Mocímboa da Praia district, about 15,000 hectares of agricultural production were planned, representing less than half of the 2018/19 (33,332 hectares) and just over a third of 2017/18 (40,832 hectares) (District Government, MdP, 2019). In Palma, the area planned for the 2022/23 campaign (15,150 hectares) represents 84% of what was planned in 2019/2020 (17,964 ha), in a period already strongly affected by the conflict.

In terms of support for agriculture, in Mocímboa da Praia, the distribution of 375 tons of maize seed was projected by the Government, with the potential to sow an area of 15,000 hectares. However, SDAE technicians revealed delays in seed distribution, which compromised the targets planned. Widely disseminated in the media (RM, 14.11.2022) and with the presence of the Head of State and the Minister of Agriculture, in Nango (administrative post of Diaca) 213 hectares of production were projected, with the support of a machine park, under the Sustenta program, involving 183 families. However, only 10 hectares have been effectively prepared, with a lack of coordination and delays in planning, in particular in the provision of land clearing machines. The machine park never worked, having resorted to TotalEnergies' support. In Mocímboa da Praia, support for agriculture is concentrated in the administrative post of Diaca, next to the main access route. In Palma, 62 tons of maize seed, 9 tons of groundnuts, 5,000 hoes, 6,000 machetes and 280 tons of NPK fertilizer were reportedly distributed, benefiting 6,254 farmers.

More than half of the agrarian extensionists of Mocímboa da Praia have not yet returned. The number of motorbikes available has doubled due to support received by the Sustenta Programme, but the lack of fuel funding since January prevents technicians from accompanying producers. In addition, there is lack of pesticides. In Palma, the number of extensionists increased from 12 to 22, although there are only 6 motorbikes. During 2022, fuel financing was dependent on TotalEnergies, but technicians say that this year they have not yet obtained money. In both districts, technicians are mainly limited to

work in the cabinet. TotalEnergies has been complementing the SDAE in support of the production of vegetables and chickens in small aviaries, later acquired by the company.

5.2 Fishing activities

From September 2022, fishing resumed normality in the coastal strip between Mocímboa da Praia and Quionga, but with great limitations south of the municipality of Mocímboa, where some vessels have already been seized by military forces.

In Mocímboa da Praia there is a significant decrease in the number of vessels. Of the 971 (of which 44 with motor) registered in 2019 (District Government, MdP, 2019), currently only 91 vessels have been registered by SDAE technicians, 12 of which with motor. In Palma, district services do not have registered data.

Although there are no estimates of the value fished (technicians responsible for the fishing extension have not yet returned to service), reports show that the fish comes out in quantity as a result of the long fishing closure period. In the art of trawling, the fishing mesh used is reported as too small. Surveillance has been permissible, given the difficulties of fishermen.

Compared to agriculture, public support for the fishing sector was much lower, limited to the delivery of 10 fishing *kits* in Mocímboa da Praia. With the support of TotalEnergies, the Civil Society Support Mechanism (MASC) provided 14 canoes, covering many other individuals. The total number of beneficiaries represents less than 2.5% of the 1,003 fishermen identified by the SDAE. There is strong pressure from producers to request fishing inputs, including nets and vessels. In Palma, no public support has been declared for the fishing sector, the only evidence being the supply of MASC credit for supplies, sponsored by TotalEnergies. This multinational company has been acquiring the production of fish, enhancing the local sector.

In Mocímboa da Praia, of the 12 technicians existing in the SDAE (8 responsible for the extension, and 4 for fishing licensing and inspection), two inspectors only have returned. For security reasons, they are largely confined to the area of the municipality.

5.3. Emergence of small artisans and transformation of primary products

The reconstruction of the district capital villages has generated several opportunities for small local artisans. Some economic agents, who reopened their economic units in Mocímboa da Praia, brought carpenters from Pemba, because the locals were very overloaded. Reconstruction also involves the demand for small electricity services. With the support of TotalEnergies, some NGOs are encouraging block building activities used for infrastructure rehabilitation. In the district capital villages, there are many small tailors, operating in markets or stalls. In Palma there was a significant decrease in the number of milling mills (from 13 to 4), sawmills and carpentries (from 24 to 15) and block production units (from 22 to 7).

5.4. Small trade

Trade has been deeply affected by the armed conflict. The reports refer to looting by the warring parties, but also by civilians, as well as burning and destroying commercial units. In Palma and Mocímboa da Praia all trade is done by small, informal operators (micro-companies), in tents or containers, whilst supermarkets and medium-sized areas are closed. Small, informal agents are proliferating selling ¹ *diesel* or gasoline, but there are already several formal fuel filling stations. The Palma market has surpassed the pre-conflict dynamism, both in number of stalls and in variety and quantity of products. In the village of Quitunda a market began to boost for the rental of houses built by TotalEnergies or of dependencies built in the backyards.

Throughout 2021, through microcredit agents, the Ministry of Industry and Commerce made available a line of credit covering less than 100 displaced economic operators in the south of the province, victims of armed conflict, some from Palma and Mocímboa da Praia. The return of these economic agents to the Northeast of the province resulted in additional costs (related to the transport of people and goods, rehabilitation and cleaning of shops, purchase of equipment and goods), which made it difficult to reimburse the capital. Through MASC, TotalEnergies supported more than a hundred economic operators with construction material for the rehabilitation of shops and stalls, some of which received additional support for the acquisition of merchandise. The return of these traders has had an impact on the economy, encouraging production and trade, breaking military monopolies (notably in Palma) and boosting the return of the people. Economic operators are waiting for a new phase of financing.

Quionga's border with Tanzania remains closed and illegal trade is a risky operation, with negative consequences for the local economy, historically dependent on cross-border trade. Traders are required to resort to the Ngomano border (Mueda district) or to purchase products in Pemba or Nampula. Recent attacks on the national road in Macomia and Nairoto hamper trade with the South.

5.5. Hotel sector

War also significantly reduced the number of hotel establishments. Of the 44 units registered in Palma before the attack, only 4 reopened, resulting in a huge reduction in the number of beds. Some operators in Palma have significantly inflated prices, seeking to recover the high losses. In Mocímboa da Praia 3 small pensions are registered as opened, rehabilitated by the owners, much less than the 24 hotel units existing in 2019 (Government of the District, MdP, 2019).

¹ It is understood commercial areas providing a greater variety and quantity of articles, organized in corridor and in self-service system.

5.6. Transport sector

The transport network has also been deeply affected, with a decrease in the number of operators. It is common to circulate between Palma and Mocímboa da Praia without seeing a single passenger transport vehicle. Similarly, the two transport operators operating between Quionga and Palma no longer circulate along this route and have not yet been replaced. Operators fear moving to the administrative posts of Mbau and Pundanhar, not only for insecurity reasons, but also because of the degradation of access roads, particularly during the rains. This situation contributes to the isolation of populations and difficulties in trade relations. A small number of *txopelas* (motorized tricycles) circulate in Palma and Mocímboa da Praia, provided by MASC in the form of credit.

5.7. Financial services

In the entire Northeast of the province there is only one bank post for cash collection, located in Quitunda, near the Peninsula of Afungi. Residents of Mocímboa da Praia tend to resort to bank branches in Mueda. The financial inclusion of populations is mainly through electronic money schemes, in particular Mpesa and E-mola .

Photo 6: Aspect of the destruction of a banking establishment in Mocímboa da Praia



6. CONFLICT, ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND EXERCISE OF CITIZENSHIP

Despite the significant increase in security, the existence of many unemployed young people and of abandoned homes triggers many thefts, especially at night. In Mocímboa da Praia, the institutions of justice continue to be reconstituted, namely the Public Prosecutor's Office, SERNIC, IPAJ, courts and prisons. According to the reports, it is Rwandan forces that the populations readily resort to, whenever there are incidents with the Mozambican Defense and Security Forces (FDS), bridging the absence of the institutions of justice. Reports of incidents between FDS and populations tend to

decrease, especially around the Afungi area. The decrease in the presence of insurgents in the area may have contributed to decreased incidents with FDS (reducing the mistrust and pressure of the FDS on the population), but also the referral of complaints from victims to technicians of TotalEnergies, who intercede with the FDS. The representation of Rwandan troops by the population remains quite positive. Stories of school notebook offered to the student population and acts of charity circulate within the people in need. In Mocímboa da Praia Rwandan soldiers are often greeted by children, which is not the case in relation to the national troop.

Although it is possible to verify the existence of economic and religious associations, the few civil society organisations (CSOs) that existed are dismembered, decapitalised and inoperative. CSOs have been largely neglected in the process of social reintegration of victims of violence or repentant individuals, a matter that continues to be managed confidentially by the authorities. Although centrally and slowly, in recent months there has been greater flexibility in the processes of granting credentials for the northeast of the province, particularly to humanitarian aid agents. The facilities of the community radio stations of Palma and Mocímboa da Praia remain destroyed.

FROM WEAKENING THE STATE TO THE EMERGENCE OF A *TOTALAND*

Despite the lack of public support, the populations returned to Mocímboa da Praia found here greater economic alternatives – in terms of agriculture, fishing, construction and the tertiary sector – especially by comparison with resettlement sites in the south of the province. The population has returned in a scenario of greater weakening of the State, with enormous difficulties in providing public services related to education, health or support for economic activities. In a geographical area that will absorb one of the largest investment projects across the African continent, public services face problems of destruction or lack of infrastructure and archives, a drastic decrease in the number of technicians, a lack of qualifications, a lack of means of transport, work equipment and a minimum budget allocation for operation. Institutional fragility is visible in the difficulties of collecting socio-economic data, which make it possible to make a rigorous diagnosis of reality. Compounding the situation, employees openly declare themselves disillusioned with the process of introducing the Single Salary Table (Tabela Salarial Única – TSU) and alleged cuts in salaries. Teachers, nurses and health staff are reluctant to return to their jobs, particularly outside the district's capital villages. Claiming the destruction of infrastructure, heads of administrative posts remain in Palma-headquarters, replaced on the ground by the police commander. The State has adopted a flexible and undemanding stance on the return of officials. Much of the health network is yet to be rebuilt, and is lacking technical, human and financial means. Schools are gradually reopening, with a number of students and teachers much lower than before the armed conflict. The populations are the first to return, in a scenario of great absence of the State.

State functions have been complemented, sometimes even replaced, by humanitarian agents and TotalEnergies. This company headed a broad stabilization project in the Northeast of Cabo Delgado, financing several projects to boost a circular economy in the region, creating opportunities for its multiple partners. TotalEnergies replaces the State in humanitarian support (food assistance, construction of water holes and transport of populations to places of origin), in the recovery of economic fabric (supporting agricultural activities, livestock, fishing, trade, transport or block production), environmental recovery (mangrove reconstitution), rehabilitation of roads, reconstruction of schools and sanitary facilities and, even in the justice sector (identity card equipment) and security (informing military authorities of incidents between FDS and populations). In contrast to the State, this private company has budget allocation, capacity to attract national and international experts, means of transport and escort by the armed forces of Mozambique.

In this scenario, there is a great deal of confusion between the functions of the State (tax collection, definition and coordination of development projects, construction of infrastructure and provision of public services) and private (production and tax contribution), raising questions about the social contract in force. In the face of the weakening of the State, TotalEnergies comes to be a post-colonial version of the Niassa Company, influencing welfare expectations on the part of public employees and populations, in general, in relation to this private company².

The confusion of roles and the fragility of the State generate problems of uncoordination. Despite the efforts of the agents on the ground, the support is not sufficient for the real needs, often being delayed and uncoordinated (late distribution of seeds, delivery of inadequate supplies, late arrival of machines). The restoration of public buildings (schools or health facilities) by donors' workers or the private sector is not accompanied with equipment, transport and housing for civil servants, or budget allocation for their operation (payment of water, energy and fuel, etc.) and maintenance.

Support for economic activities remains mainly concentrated on agriculture – particularly benefiting the people of the interior, mostly Makondes, Christians and supporters of the ruling party – to the detriment of fishing, neglecting the populations of the coast, mostly Mwanis, Islamists and supporters of opposition parties. Although the Mwanis represent the majority of the population of the municipality of Mocímboa da Praia, civil servants

² At the end of the 19th century, in a scenario of competition from the great European colonial powers to control the African continent, Portugal was unable to occupy and manage vast areas of present-day Mozambican territory. The solution found was the lease of much of the territory to majestic companies, which would have the duty to effectively administer the region, building infrastructure, collecting taxes and recruiting populations. The Company of Niassa corresponded to the present-day territories of Cabo Delgado and Niassa, acquired by French and British and later German private companies. Since the territory was not militarily controlled, the company campaigned against African leaders. Only in the 1920s was the company able to ensure the occupation of the Makonde plateau. At the end of this decade the territory passed to the colonial government's direct administration.

are almost all Makonde, Makua or from outside the province. In the State offices, the local population is not served in their mother tongue, reproducing feelings of unprotection and invasion, easily capitalized by populist and violent groups. The persistence of this asymmetry of access to State resources (jobs, subsidies and economic support) illustrates the political difficulty of recognising the origins of the conflict and devising a holistic response to a complex problem.

Despite some improvements, the State maintains a posture that is too centralized, slow and politicized, to respond to real challenges. The visit of the Head of State to the province involves the mobilization of numerous officials to comply with a heavy protocol, diverting them from priority activities. There are suspicions of little transparency in resource management, as well as internal struggles within government agencies, making public institutions unfunctional and demotivating partners in their relationship with the State. In Palma, the first coordination meeting of humanitarian partners with the Government was held in early 2023.

The rehabilitation of a system of access to justice and peace-building is still a challenge. Criminal investigation services, legal sponsored services and courts are not operational. No civil society organizations involved in conflict mediation have been identified, particularly regarding the social reintegration of populations victims of violence, deserters and repentant. These issues remain cumbersome and heavily controlled by the State, which maintains a distrust of civil society organizations independent of the dominant power. In a year of local elections, increased electoral competition can reignite tempers, especially if there is evidence of State partisanship and the use of public funds for the campaign, as well as electoral fraud.

In view of this scenario, it is urgent to operationalise a holistic response that comprises the following aspects of:

Institutional Strengthening: Need to affirm a strong, bipartisan and competent State actor with the ability to design a holistic and credible project that establishes a link between humanitarian support, economic reconstruction and peace-building, coordinating the different partners. It is urgent to affirm a public institution capable of attracting the trust of donors, but also of more and better employees, with the necessary working conditions. It is important to increase the budget of the affected districts, either through the General State Budget or through donations from partners, strengthening the role of the Administrative Court and CSOs in verifying public accounts.

Increased support for the education sector, providing for the transport of displaced staff in the South and West of Cabo Delgado to the Northeast of the province, and the creation of minimum housing conditions, involving local populations and creating jobs. The School Development Support Fund should be channelled to the schools in the affected districts to ensure the minimum functioning of educational establishments and to invest in technical and vocational education.

Expansion of health services, equipping health units with the necessary equipment, creating housing conditions for their staff; and channeling military medicine to areas of absence of health infrastructure and concentration of population; reconstituting the informal health networks and training of matrons to support childbirth.

Support for economic activities, timely planning of the second agricultural season; support for livestock farming, paying greater attention to fishing activities, including refrigeration activities; support to collective transport operators of goods and services, creation of subsidized credit lines to support economic activities, establishing partnerships with microcredit networks, carefully selected (on the basis of merit and not on clientelist networks).

Reconstitution of the justice system, including prosecutors and criminal investigation services, legal sponsorship and courts, but also the National Commission on Human Rights.

Strengthening of local civil society organizations, closer to populations and governments and, therefore, with an important role in providing services to communities, social reintegration of victims of violence, defectors and repentant, but also monitoring and verification of government actions, election observation and defense of human rights. Support for community radios and funding national think tanks.

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