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**WEAKENING OF THE STATE, FRAYING OF THE SOCIAL
TISSUE AND LACK OF PROSPECTS FOR RESOLVING
THE CONFLICT
(TRANSLATION)**

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INTRODUCTION

After six years of armed conflict, there are still hundreds of thousands of people affected by the war, unable to return to their areas of origin. The increase in the war effort, within a framework of intervention by the International Monetary Fund, tends to be responsible for divestment in social sectors such as health and education, raising problems of assistance to the population. To make the situation worse, humanitarian aid is clearly underfunded. After describing population movements in the province, the aim of this Destaques Rural is to characterise access to public services by people affected by the conflict, as well as the humanitarian and development aid response. Finally, the aim is to describe the level of socio-economic integration of the populations, trying to distinguish between those who remain displaced and those who have returned to their places of origin.

In pursuing of these objectives, 328 individuals affected by the conflict were surveyed. The respondents lived in the resettlement centres of Ntele, Piloto, Mirate (Montepuez district), Nacaca (Montepuez municipality), Eduardo Mondlane (Mueda municipality), Mandimba, Lianda and Chilindi (Mueda district), the Pamunda and Nachimela neighbourhoods (Mocímboa da Praia municipality) and Ntotoe (Mocímboa da Praia district). Data collection was carried out between 10 February and 5 March. At the same time, administrators or permanent secretaries of the selected districts, directors of district services, health centres and educational institutions were interviewed, as well as displaced or returned individuals.

1. SAFETY CONDITIONS AND POPULATION MOVEMENTS

During the first half of 2024, the insurgency became particularly active on the coast of Macomia, Quissanga and the Quirimbas archipelago. Over the course of several weeks, a front was opened in the south of the province, with an incursion in the administrative posts of Mazeze, Chiúre Velho and Ocua (Chiúre district). Messages left by the insurgency, announcing that it would celebrate Eid (the end of Ramadan) together with the population, led many people in the districts of Ibo and Quissanga to flee to Pemba. These attacks and rumours caused waves of panic and the movement of tens of

thousands of people, putting pressure on humanitarian aid, not only in terms of the safety of its staff, but also in terms of providing support to the population.

The increase in insecurity has resulted in new waves of displaced people. In Montepuez and Mueda there have been frustrated attempts to return to their places of origin, especially to Macomia, Muidumbe and Mocímboa da Praia. Reintegration into the displacement centres is complicated by the fact that homes are often sold on departure or damaged during the period of absence.

In the north, many families continue to return to the villages of Nangade and the highlands of the Muidumbe district. Despite the fear of going to more remote production areas, life has returned to some normality.

In December 2023, the official number of displaced people published by the International Organisation for Migration was 709,529 displaced people and 632,408 returnees. However, military instability is making it difficult to update the number of displaced people in the resettlement centres. The reduction in humanitarian assistance and the increase in population displacement mean that security problems are on the rise. In the Nacaca displacement centre (Montepuez city) there are reports of "*almost daily*" thefts from homes, especially of money and food, and of produce in the fields. Insecurity is exacerbated by the lack of public illumination, and the 74 solar-fed bulbs placed along the streets have already been stolen twice (the second time, just three weeks after their replacement). Community policing teams have been set up in some centres, in collaboration with the police command. In several places, insurgents' attempts have been unsuccessful. In Nacaca, out of a group of 12 community policemen, only four remain active. They have no work equipment (uniform, torches, means of communication or handcuffs), no financial reward, and security, and they are not even included on the food support list. The community police have benefited from training promoted by non-governmental organisations, including in the area of human rights. However, it was clear from the focus group discussion that any petty thief is beaten before being handed over to the authorities. The predominant feeling is one of revolt, so the capture of a suspect becomes a moment for venting accumulated frustrations and collective catharsis.

2. "WE ARE REINVENTING OURSELVES" - GROWING PUBLIC SERVICES FRAGILITY

2.1. Precarity of education services

Many families who returned from Montepuez or Mueda to the north-east of the province chose to leave their descendents in the displacement centres, contributing to the densification of the school population in these places, especially in Mapupulo (Montepuez district). In Mueda there have been new influxes of displaced children from the lower areas of Muidumbe, Macomia and Mocímboa da Praia. Newly-arrived students are integrated into the education system, even if they don't have documents.

This situation contributes to extremely densified classrooms. In Mapupulo and Mueda Sede, there are classrooms from first to third grades with more than 200 students. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that several teachers are on maternity leave or sick leave, leaving their classes with little or no pedagogical support. Class sizes tend to be half of that size in the municipality of Mocímboa da Praia, reflecting the reluctance of many families to transfer their descendents to the north-east of the province. Since enrolments are still being accepted, the number will continue to rise, affecting learning and making it difficult to assist the students.



Image 1: Second grade class with 193 students, annexed primary school in Ntele, Mapupulo, Montepuez district

The exponential increase in students is not accompanied by an increase in the number of teachers. In the 2024 academic year, only 13 teachers were hired for the entire Montepuez district and 11 for the entire Mueda district (compared to 39 new hires in 2023). The hiring of teachers is not keeping up with natural and immigrant student population growth, nor is it compensating for teachers' death and dropout. Between January and February alone, 7 deaths were recorded among the teaching staff in the Montepuez district. Basic schools lack teachers for specific areas, such as chemistry, physics, and Portuguese.

In the displacement centres, there have been several efforts to build classrooms, often using local materials, but they are clearly insufficient for the needs. The classrooms are in a poor state of conservation (stolen handles, broken glass and torn mosquito nets). According to figures provided by the District Education Services, of the 586 classrooms in the Montepuez district, 65.1 % are considered conventional. In the municipality of Montepuez there are classes taking place outdoors, interrupted on rainy days. School desks are largely insufficient and sitting on the floor is taken for granted by the vast majority of students. In the schools that do exist (generally built by humanitarian organisations), the toilets have no water and there are no administrative block.

Despite the increase in students and educational needs, the schools' budgets have been reduced relative to previous years. In the 2023 school year, only the first transfer of funds from the direct support for schools (ADE) programme was made. A month after the start of the 2024 school year, the budget for the respective school year had still not been distributed, and it is known that the amount will decrease compared to the previous year. In the schools visited, apart from a precarious slate board, no other teaching material was seen. In the districts of Mueda and Mocímboa da Praia, at the beginning of March 2024, no school had yet received textbooks, having continued to use the previous year's textbooks, which are badly damaged. The books are not properly plasticised, and the children use them to cover their heads on rainy days, to the detriment of their preservation. The teachers mentioned the reluctance of some parents to buy school materials, claiming that it was the government's responsibility. Computer classes are taught in schools without power or computers; when they do work, it is thanks to the teacher's personal equipment, which is insufficient for large classes.

The district education services have no means of working. In Mueda, the annual budget of 35,000 meticais (around 550 dollars) is insufficient to pay for water, energy, office supplies and minor maintenance. As a result, five of the seven existing motorbikes are broken down. In Montepuez, the car is over 12 years old and not roadworthy. There are no vehicles or fuel to visit schools or to supply school books, which are usually transported by the teachers with their own means.

Teachers' working conditions are precarious. Poor access roads, no means of transport, weak telecommunications networks, lack of energy and mobile phone operators, difficulties accessing water and precarious housing and health conditions, or the distance from markets all contribute to deep isolation and numerous illnesses among the teaching staff. The fear of insecurity leads many teachers to ask for a transfer. Aware that they are among the main targets of the insurgency, at the slightest suspicion of an attack, these professionals are among the first to abandon the schools. After the disappointment generated by the introduction of the Single Salary Scale and the non-payment of overtime for years (in Montepuez since 2019), all the teachers interviewed refuse to accept second classes or work overtime. This refusal will result in very densified classes, to the detriment of students' academic performance. As the teachers themselves recognise, the low pedagogic performance will be disguised by administrative approval.

According to teachers in Mapupulo (Montepuez district), only 30% of students who finish 4th grade have minimum reading skills. A large number of students continue to drop out before completing primary school.

2.2. The weakness of water and health services

Despite the construction of several boreholes in the Montepuez district, especially in areas with the highest concentration of displaced people, access to water continues to be a problem. On the ground, several broken down boreholes were found, leading the population to resort to wells and other unsafe sources.

On the plateau, the presence of displaced people exacerbates the historical problems of water supply. In the displacement centres in Mueda Sede, water is obtained from boreholes in the Lipuede River and then transported to the highlands via pipes or tankers, with the sponsorship of humanitarian organisations. Since the supply is not regular, a large part of the population collects water from the rain or travels long distances to the lower areas. Government officials say there is a water supply project for the entire plateau, budgeted at 100 million dollars, but it is awaiting funding.

Problems with access to water affect most of the health centres visited. At the rural hospital in Mueda, FIPAG has been cutting off water supply, but the solution has been remedied by humanitarian organisations. In the vast majority of small health centres, there is no functioning running water system.

Due to a lack of budget to pay for energy, many health centres are often without power for two or three weeks. Births are carried out by the light of mobile phone torches. The health centre in Namahaca, located in the Namanhumbir administrative post and built by the Montepuez Ruby Mining, is often without power for several weeks. Vaccines are transported to Montepuez every day, jeopardising their quality. In other cases, such as the health centre in Nikuapua (in the city of Montepuez) built by non-governmental organisations, there is a solar panel fed illumination system, but it has been out of order for several months. Without power, the health centre has no water supply because the electric pump is broken. The centre has never been visited by an electrician and there is no budget for maintenance. The lack of power stabilisers throughout the region is responsible for the damage to electrical appliances due to the poor quality of EDM's power. According to a district health director, instead of installing a new system to protect the electronic equipment, they have opted to carry out minor maintenance, which in the end is more costly. The oldest health facilities are dilapidated, with cleaning problems (in Mirate, Montepuez district) and infiltration, which are sometimes repaired by humanitarian organisations. Several health centres do not manage hospital waste, which is buried or incinerated, putting public health at risk.

Another problem is the lack of hospital supplies. The rural hospital in Montepuez doesn't have syringes or serum, but requests them from the district's health centres. Patients' relatives often provide syringes for analyses and the administration of serum, as well as

feeding the patients. In other cases, fees are charged for the provision of hospital utensils. Many beds do not have mosquito nets, allegedly because they have been stolen. Type II health centres have problems with lack of laboratory equipment and have never worked. In Mapupulo, analyses are sent to the rural hospital in Montepuez, and the wait for results can take up to two months.

Available medicines are mainly essential drugs such as quatem, paracetamol, amoxicillin, co-trimoxazole or anti-diarrhoea drugs. Due to insecurity and transport problems, access to medication is more problematic in the north-east of the province. Several shelves were empty at the only private pharmacy in Mocímboa da Praia. Many medicines are found for sale in informal markets, presumably diverted from the hospital.

In Mocímboa da Praia, most of the health units have been destroyed and the government has only managed to reopen four units, including the rural hospital in Mocímboa da Praia, which operates in the health training centre. Despite being a rural hospital, it lacks X-ray, hemogram, laboratory and biochemistry equipment and microscopes, which compromises medical diagnoses. Many health units in this district continue to operate in tents and have difficulty setting up mobile brigades to attend to patients. Many patients are forced to go to the rural hospital in the the district village capital. Due to the distances, the poor quality of the access roads, the lack of transport operators and its costs, many patients arrive in a critical situation. There are three ambulances, but only one is not broken down.

The hospital in Mueda, which has more support from humanitarian organisations, has less disadvantageous conditions, despite the lack of equipment, such as X-rays, and an insufficient budget. Its director believes that the greater attention paid to this health unit derives from its proximity to an important military barrack. During 2023, military personnel from SAMIM provided water to the health centre. The hospital is very dependent on the partners' support to water supply, facilities maintenance (operating theatre, urgency unit, nurse's station), vehicles repair and fuel, cleaning supplies, food for patients and t-shirts and snacks for blood donors. Thus, patients from Mocímboa da Praia are transferred to Mueda.

In the areas affected by the war, health professionals have great fear to return, and health centres tend to close very early. Doctors' houses have been destroyed or vandalised. Similarly to teachers, health workers are demotivated by the lack of overtime pay.

During the rainy season, people complain of malaria, respiratory infections, and abdominal disorders. A serious outbreak of cholera has affected Chiúre, Namuno, Montepuez and Mueda. Official figures from the Mozambican government show that there were 1,949 cases of cholera in Cabo Delgado province, but health professionals estimate that the number was higher. Mental health problems are also noticeable, through people's fears and irritability.

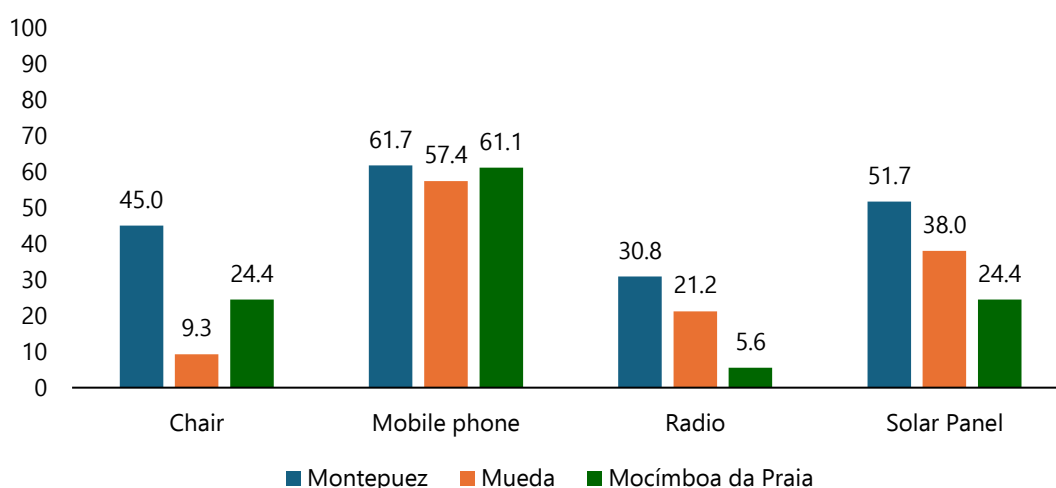
3. ALLEVIATING PROBLEMS BY AGGRAVATING CONFLICTS: HUMANITARIAN AND DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT

The main cities in Cabo Delgado province continue to be the stage of international organisations action, which generally repeat the same type of response in different countries: providing water and sanitation, shelters, food and nutritional aid, healthcare, support for educational activities, but also support for setting up small businesses. With the return of the population to the districts of Quissanga, Muidumbe, Nangade and Mocímboa da Praia, greater redirection of these organisations towards these districts can be seen.

However, the unpredictability on the ground and the unstable movements of the population are responsible for the growing sense of uncertainty among the heads of humanitarian organisations. On the one hand, the attacks in the districts of Quissanga and Chiúre have deeply affected the organisations operating in the south of Cabo Delgado province, which now fear for the safety of their staff and activists. On the other hand, the attacks are generating new waves of displaced people, perpetuating humanitarian aid and hampering development aid.

In the first quarter of 2023, the situation of the population remained very unstable. Several years after fleeing their places of origin, the vast majority of the population still has no access to consumer goods such as chairs, radios, solar panels, etc., whilst small mobile phones are becoming more widespread (see chart 1). Increasingly worn out canvas are still the main material used to cover the homes of more than two thirds (67.3%) of the families. The rest are left with reeds.

Chart 1: Percentage of families surveyed who own property, by district



The situation is worsening with the reduction in food distribution, both in terms of frequency and the number of families covered, leaving an increasing number of families excluded. Although humanitarian aid has played a fundamental role in providing primary care for the population, it has also created a number of conflicts.

Firstly because of the **scarcity of support**, which creates enormous tension. Food distribution is a moment of expectation, anxiety and sadness. During these periods, hundreds of people gather to watch the unloading of basic consumer goods, which are invariably insufficient, triggering sadness and frustration in those who have not received them. In the village of Chilindi, Mueda district, which had 1,989 displaced families, a humanitarian organisation wanted to provide 262 canvas, but the village leadership refused it after great uproar. The insufficient allocation of resources was reported by the respondents with deep dissatisfaction: *"it's a criminal offence for some to eat here and others to sit around, that is crime"*. According to the reports, faced with insufficient food support for the benefit of all the families, a local leader in the Mwingwe neighbourhood, in the municipality of Mocímboa da Praia, threatened the humanitarian organisation's technicians: *"if you repeat the aid in the same places, we'll call on those in the bush to help us"*.

Secondly, the **lack of understanding of the distribution criteria** adopted by the humanitarian organisations, in a context where almost the entire population suffers from high levels of deprivation. According to the respondents, during the vulnerability assessments carried out by humanitarian organisations, the individuals who are most able to give answers in line with the interviewers' expectations tend to get their names on the lists of beneficiaries. The reality is that the value of the vouchers (4,230 meticalis) distributed to families in need does not vary according to the number of people in the household.

Thirdly, the existence of **irregularities in the drawing up of beneficiary lists**. In the various districts, there are reports of neighbourhood leaders improperly putting their family members' names on the lists of displaced people, of families registered in various places where they circulate in order to obtain support, or of families who have opened small shops to sell rice supplied by the WFP.

Fourthly, by **increased inequalities between the technicians from non-governmental organisations and the beneficiaries of the aid**, subverting the whole logic of humanitarian aid, the presence of technicians from urban areas (from Cabo Delgado or outside the province), and transporting themselves in 4WD vehicles with drivers, showing off modern consumer goods (smartphones, sunglasses, unnatural hair, uniforms, etc.), feeds the conviction that these individuals are improving their lives at the expense of the suffering of the population affected by the conflict. The hiring of technicians from urban centres to the detriment of the population living in the displacement centres is a source of dissatisfaction.

Fifthly, conflicts persist between host populations, who cede resources of their territory but do not benefit from support, and the displaced, who remain very vulnerable, with deprived access to means of production.

Development aid also has implementation problems. Firstly, there are delays in distribution. In Mapupulo, the seeds were delivered at the end of December, several weeks after the first rains in November, known among the Makonde as *"shikumbu valime"* (remember to go farming). In mid-February, when the maize was almost ripe, humanitarian organisations distributed hoes in Mapupulo.

Secondly, numerous projects promoted by development organisations were discontinued throughout 2021 and 2022, resulting in their morbidity. Small poultry farms built with support from NGOs have been abandoned. The chicken were sold to cover the periods when food support was interrupted or to finance journeys back to their places of origin. Community mills never worked due to lack of money for fuel. Facilities built to support children's nutrition never functioned, and were left overgrown with grass, a clear sign of abandonment. Small stalls selling clothes have empty displays. Micro-entrepreneurs are decapitalised and there are no credit providers to finance small-scale businesses such as cake making, selling drinks and so on.

Thirdly, there were reports of poorly implemented donations. The director of SDAE in Mueda denounces the distribution of goats not adapted to the plateau's climate, delivered during the rainy season and without quarantine, resulting in high animal mortality. Agro-dealers take the opportunity to sell inputs, and there are reports of poor quality seed being delivered (uncertified or even grain), transported and stored in poor conditions. Non-governmental organisations are not always led by technicians with knowledge of agroecological specificities and products. With the aim of maximising the distribution process, the State shows no motivation or capacity to control product quality. There is no assessment of the local impacts of humanitarian and development aid. Accelerated training projects, in areas such as carpentry, electricity, sewing, cooking, mechanics or construction, among others, have involved hundreds of young people, but have been insufficient for the existing population. In addition, some young graduates have found jobs and set up on their own, but many remain unemployed. It would therefore be important to evaluate the impact of these initiatives.

Throughout the province, the guidelines of the district governments are to replace humanitarian aid with development aid. In meetings with displaced people, government representatives emphasise the need to replace the concept of displaced person with "native": *"after all the time they've been here, now they're no longer guests"*; and a critical attitude is adopted towards humanitarian aid: *"we have to remove the rice [from the humanitarian distribution] so that there can be understanding" or "there's already a hoe, forget the support"*. Government speeches emphasise the existence of vast areas of forest available, ignoring distances from the main infrastructures and public services (roads, power grid, health, education and rural extension), the decapitalisation of families to

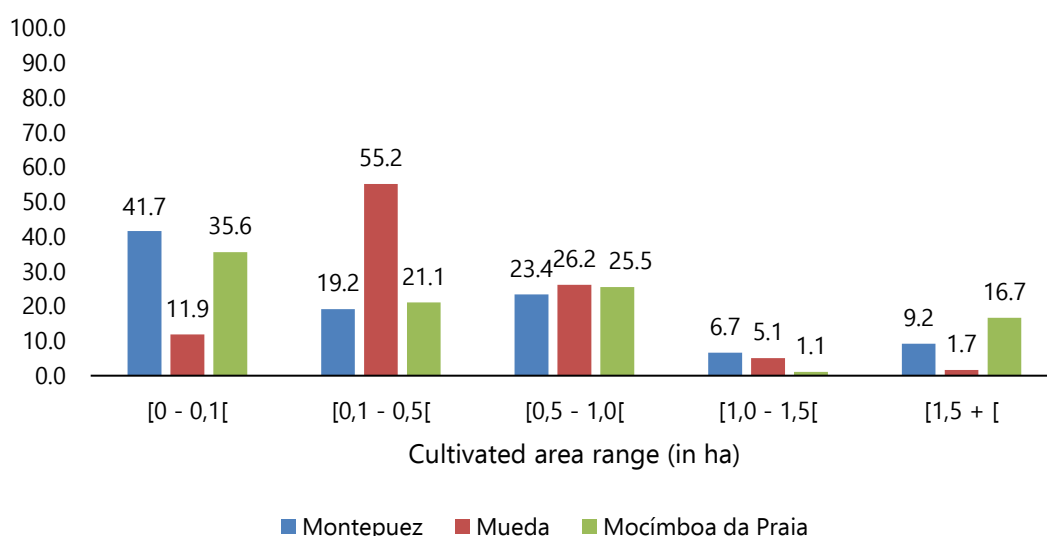
negotiate with landowners and the scarcity of inputs. In Mueda, the government guidelines are to channel 60% of the support to the native population, and 40% to the displaced, but the representatives of the non-governmental organisations are unaware of these guidelines.

4. STAGNATION AND THE CLOSURE OF SMALL BUSINESSES: THE RECONSTITUTION OF ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

Although agriculture is the main economic activity of the populations interviewed, the problems of access to land remain. In 2020, the Montepuez district parcelled out around 200 hectares in the 5 administrative posts, for a displaced population of, according to the IOM, reached 17,660 families in 2021, reduced to 4,235 families in December 2023. In the Mueda district, the government has allocated 400 hectares to house displaced people temporarily. In order to avoid tensions with the local population, part of this land was idle land owned by prominent local figures or earmarked for the construction of public buildings.

The increase in population density and competition for accessing land means that a large proportion of displaced people still have very small areas of production. As shown in chart 2, the overwhelming majority of respondents cultivate areas of less than half a hectare, which is clearly insufficient to guarantee food security throughout the year. Many respondents said that landowners demanded monetary sums, and pressure them to give back land or forbid fruit trees planting. Allegedly, the plots of land ceded are generally of reduced size, and have lower agricultural yields. Some owners threaten that this will be the last year they lend their land.

Graph 2: Percentage distribution of respondents by cultivated area (in hectares), by district

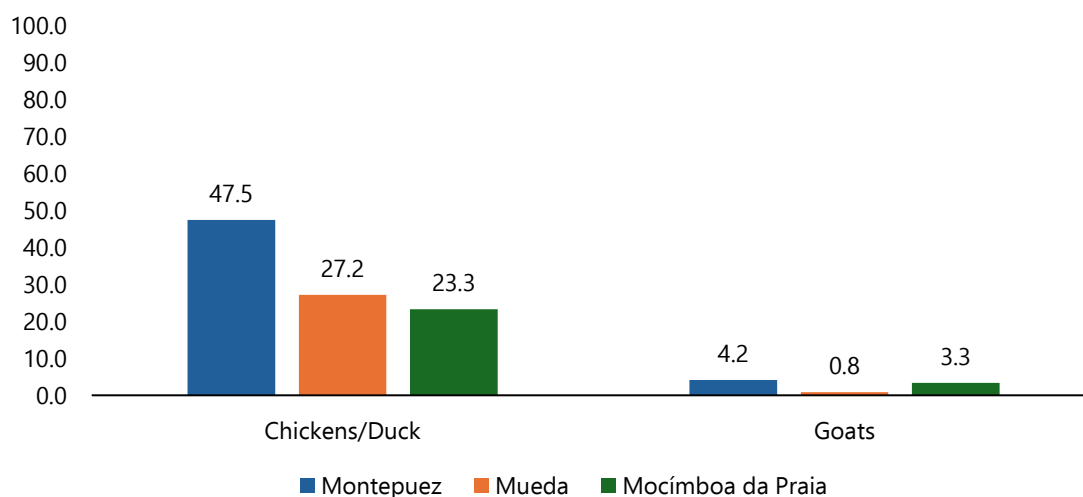


In this scenario of pressure over agricultural areas, a land market is emerging, with prices varying according to proximity to urban centres, the possibility of second season farming, and land productivity. Prices per hectare vary between 17,000 and 26,000 meticaís in Mapupulo, depending on the possibility of second season cultivation, reaching 50,000 meticaís in Nandimba (Mueda Sede). In Mueda, rents are around 2,500 meticaís per hectare. Families who cannot afford it are forced to clear their landlords' plots in order to be given access to an area half that size.

The scarcity of agricultural land pushes people to cultivate small flowerbeds on the land around their homes, so the streets of the displacement centres are transformed into small flowerbeds. However, the high rainfall in February and March had a negative impact on production, increasing vulnerability and dependence on external aid.

In terms of livestock rearing, a small percentage of families keep poultry (chicken or ducks), especially in Mueda and Mocímboa da Praia, while goat farmers are residual (see chart 3).

Chart 3: Percentage of respondents who keep chickens or goats, by district

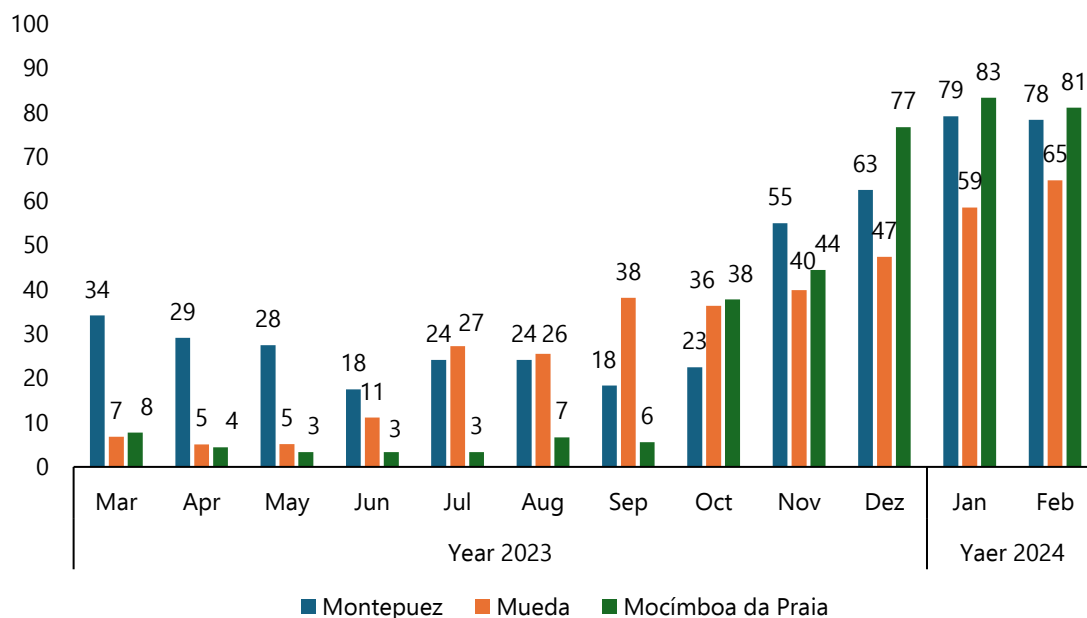


The responses from the district services for economic activities (SDAE) are clearly insufficient. Most of the road networks are in poor condition and the SDAE in Mueda doesn't have a car, so that its capacity to provide assistance is very limited. The maize seed only arrived in February and only benefited farmers in the main village. In an election year, district administrators visit agricultural areas with escorts, but without inputs for distribution, often making speeches calling for production, ignoring the structural difficulties of the population. The limited existing means of transport end up being used for theatre of power.

In Montepuez, a small group of displaced people have benefited from SUSTENTA supplies. The lack of inputs contributes to situations of food insecurity, which are relatively continuous throughout the year, but particularly evident in the months of December, January and February, when the majority of the population declared that they

had been hungry (see chart 4). On average, respondents were able to buy meat or fish only 1.1 times a month in Montepuez, 1.3 times in Mueda and 2.6 times in Mocímboa da Praia.

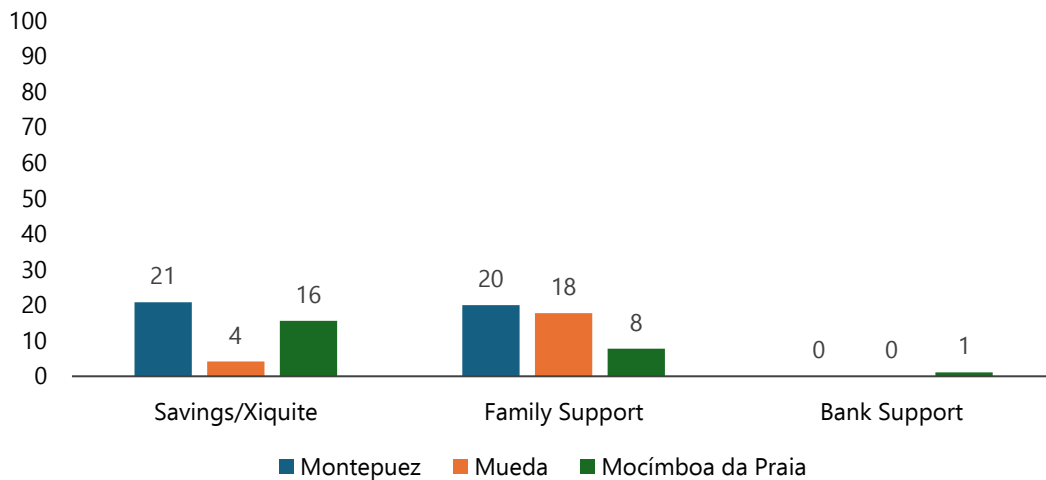
Chart 4: Percentage of people who said they had been hungry, by district and month of the year



During the rainy season, the pressure on artisanal mining intensifies, with the resulting conflicts with the authorities. The Montepuez provincial jail is full of people caught up in this illegal activity.

In Mueda, the local market is flourishing, both in terms of the number of stalls and the variety of products, reflecting the greater presence of technicians from humanitarian organisations, and national and foreign military personnel. The vast majority of respondents are decapitalised and have no access to financial support, making it very difficult to finance an agricultural campaign or other economic activity. As shown in Chart 5, less than 20% of respondents have benefited from family financial support or are able to set up an informal savings system.

Chart 5: Percentage of individuals who have saved or obtained financial support



After growth from the end of 2022, with the return of many individuals and the dynamisation of small businesses, Palma and Mocímboa da Praia are currently experiencing economic stagnation. In the outlying neighbourhoods of Palma, there are still many empty houses, full of grass all around, showing the fear of many people to return. Among the local youth, complaints persist about the lack of jobs, problems certifying informally acquired skills (driving, electricity, etc.), and competition from staff from outside the region. There is still discourse that the new-comers get jobs via the internet, to the detriment of the locals.

Due to the poor quality of the access roads, the opening of the border with Tanzania has had no significant impact. During the rainy season, the 170-kilometre journey from Mueda to the border at Ngomano takes around 10 hours, and travelling by light vehicles is unfeasible. Tanzania imports mainly clothing, household utensils, agricultural inputs, motorbikes and cars. Exports generally consist of maize, cashew nuts, sesame and peanuts. There is an illegal trade in wood and nuts, often using false documentation. In Mueda there are illegal foreign money exchange activities, organised by Tanzanians and Mozambicans.

PROTECTING ECONOMIC INVESTMENTS AND PROLONGING THE CONFLICT: THE DIFFICULTY OF THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

Until the end of 2023, the Mozambican armed forces and their allies had been confining the insurgency to the Messalo river valley and the Macomia coast, focusing on cutting off the rebel group's logistics, and planning attacks to its military bases. Aware of the difficulties of a military solution and the durability of the conflict, in the south and north-west of the province the government began a process of convincing populations displaced from the most insecure places to settle definitively. The concept of "displaced person" has been replaced by that of "native", and the integration of families is proclaimed, but without any support mechanisms for development and social reintegration.

Many of the displaced families still have no access to means of production (land), is decapitalised, and there are no credit lines to support small businesses. The distribution of inputs is clearly inadequate, often carried out late and discontinuously, making it difficult for small producers to plan.

Despite all the palliative efforts to alleviate the suffering of the population, humanitarian aid is a generator and reproducer of conflicts. The scarcity of aid, the lack of clarity in the distribution criteria, the existence of irregularities in the lists of beneficiaries, the inequalities between humanitarian aid technicians and the beneficiaries of the aid, tend to generate tensions among the displaced populations. There persist reports of widespread opportunism in obtaining aid and conflicts between displaced populations and host populations who cede land. Military instability and population movements not only create confusion between humanitarian aid and development support, but also exacerbate the challenge for non-governmental organisations against a drop of funding. Four years after the resettlement process, most families are still deprived of consumer goods.

The rainy season was responsible for worsening the already precarious situation of the communication networks, contributing to the further isolation of the people in the north of the province. In addition to road insecurity on the E380 due to the conflict, the collapse of the bridge over the Messalo River has created additional logistical problems, worsening the supply of fuel, medicines, school textbooks, among other basic necessities, and causing prices to rise.

Public institutions continue to be increasingly fragile, particularly in education and health services. Despite the increase in the student population, school budgets continue to suffer significant cuts and the ratio of students to teachers increases. A large proportion of students drop out at the end of primary school, without reading skills, problematising social integration and the exercise of citizenship itself, and increasing the vulnerability to recruitment into violent groups. The fragility of the education system will be the main bill to be paid in the near future. The health services follow the same trend, as the various health units lack energy, running water, laboratory equipment and medicines and even cleaning products. The district services don't have the budget, adequate technical and human resources and are incapable of managing and maintaining donated equipment, such as classrooms, sanitary units, water boreholes or electrical systems. The buildings and equipment deteriorate day by day, to the detriment of the quality of public services and the population.

Civil servants, who are favoured targets of the insurgency and have had their facilities destroyed, are openly demotivated and adopt an attitude of passive resistance, particularly in the education sector. In an election year, the ruling party will find it difficult to mobilise its traditional support base, so that tougher attempts at control and electoral fraud are to be expected.

In the areas where large extractive projects have penetrated, the multinationals' social responsibility initiatives have not translated into a clear improvement in people's living conditions. This situation fuels the belief that the province is rich in natural resources, but that these do not benefit the people.

All this precariousness is contributing to an increase in tension among the population, who are looking for scapegoats to carry out their catharsis. Technicians from humanitarian organisations face tense situations during the distribution process. In the south of the province, people are expressing feelings of precariousness and uncertainty by lynching health workers (suspected of being responsible for the spread of cholera) or civic electoral education technicians.

Seven years after the start of the war, the generalised stress of the social tissue is all too evident. Nevertheless, there are few signs that the Mozambican government or international actors are seeking political solutions to the conflict. By funding the training of the Mozambican armed forces and supporting the deployment of foreign troops in the region, foreign countries encourage the government to insist on a military solution with no end in sight. Multinationals are comfortable with the presence of a foreign army to protect their energy interests, particularly gas (in Palma) and graphite (Ancuabe), even though they see the risk of socio-political exclusion for their investments. The region is consolidated as an area sacrificed to resource extraction in order to stabilise energy prices on international markets. An unsustainable and illegitimate system is being reproduced in the eyes of the population, with negative impacts on State institutions, but also on investment projects and actions by humanitarian organisations. Within the ruling party, in a period of defining candidates for its leadership and candidacy, no ideas or political visions are presented on these complex issues.