

17 February 2026



**INSTITUTIONAL WEAKENING,  
WEARING OF THE SOCIAL FABRIC,  
AND CHALLENGES TO THE STATE'S LEGITIMACY  
IN CABO DELGADO**

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**INTRODUCTION**

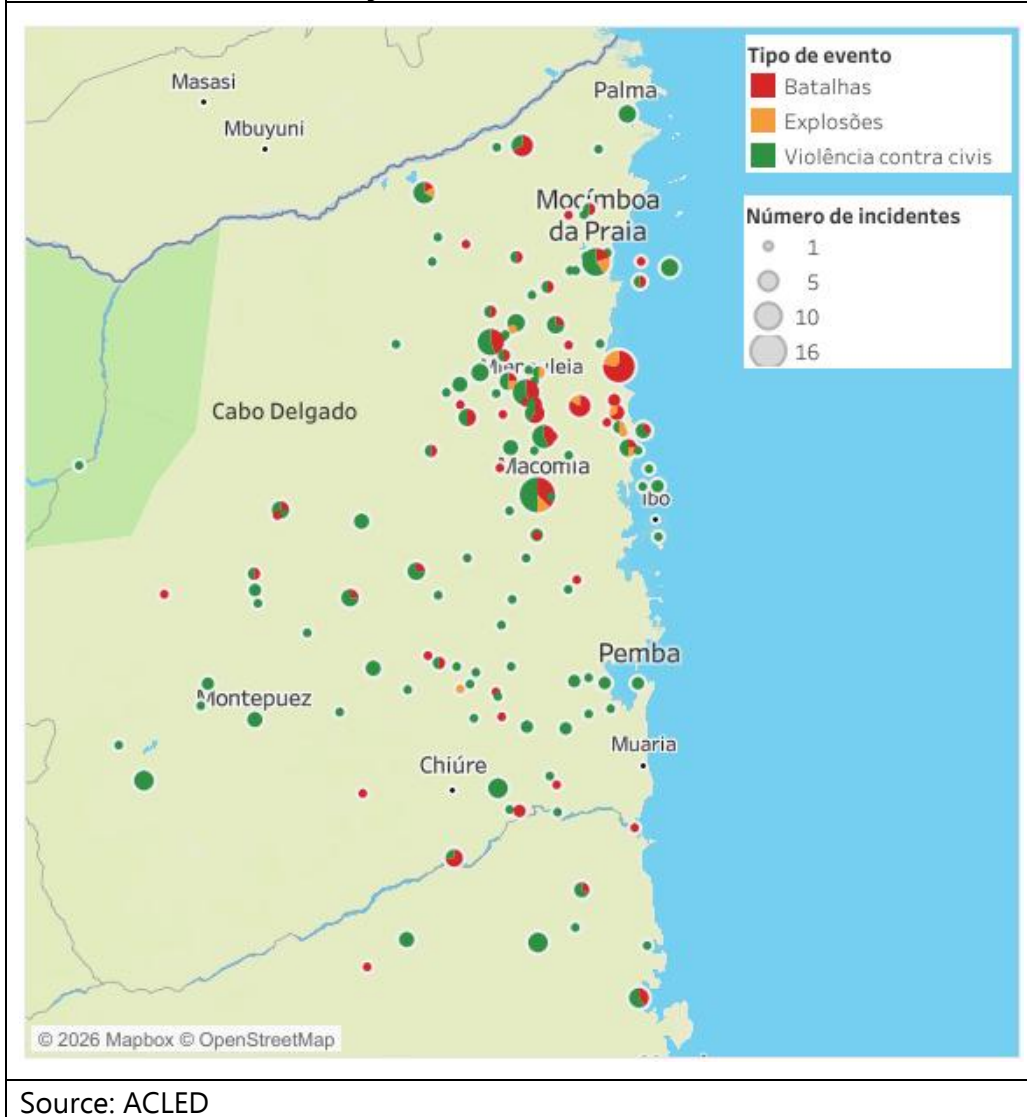
The protraction of the armed conflict in North-Eastern Cabo Delgado has shown that a military response alone is insufficient to ensure stability in the region. As institutions weaken and become unable to provide State services, including justice, social legitimacy erodes and trust in public institutions collapses. The State apparatus is facing unprecedented demotivation, with education and health professionals surviving between informal extortion and growing political opposition.

This *Destaque Rural* describes institutional fragility in the education, health and justice sectors, as well as a economy of survival. Generalised insecurity and the absence of a solid productive base, the lack of links between major economic projects and the local economic fabric, such as the Mozambique LNG, leave the population vulnerable and dependent on humanitarian assistance, which is largely insufficient for their needs. The social chaos and vacuum of moral authority is exploited by the insurgency through attempts to coexist with the coastal populations. The paper suggests that a victory against the insurgency depends on the State's ability to transform itself from an actor of coercion, aligned with the interests of multinational companies, into a guarantor of citizenship and social cohesion.

**1. PERSISTENCE OF INSECURITY**

Throughout the second half of 2025, the security situation remained unstable in north-eastern Cabo Delgado, with sporadic incursions by the insurgency into the south of the province, including the north-eastern districts of Nampula (see map 1).

**Map 1: Violent incidents in Cabo Delgado and Nampula (July/2025 - December/2025)**



Source: ACLED

Map 1 shows that the Macomia district remains the epicentre of the conflict, with Rwandan bombardments to insurgent bases and rebel attacks to the N380 road, where they sometimes set up barricades to collect toll roads. While the joint military intervention by Mozambicans and Rwandans has improved security to the south of Mucojo, and there is less movement of terrorists, in the north of the province there are still frequent movements of insurgents. The rebels leave their bases in Katupa for Pangane and the mouth of the Messalo River, transporting their products in boats or on the head, threatening fishermen. The military's bans on fishing for security reasons have generated popular dissatisfaction, fuelling the population's collaboration with the insurgents. Some fishermen set up temporary camps on the northern coast of Macomia, becoming the target of distrust and repression by the Defence and Security Forces. All along the coast (from the north of Quissanga to the south of Palma) there are reports of insurgents buying products from the population or praying in mosques with the locals.

The reports indicate that the insurgents are complicit with the locals, watching comedy videos (from Tanzania) or football matches together. There are reports of alleged insurgents who stay overnight at relatives' houses in the town of Mocímboa da Praia (in Milamba or Mabubussi). With the exception of isolated cases of individuals selling alcohol, the relationship with the population in the coastal area is generally harmonious. This attitude contrasts with that of government soldiers, who are more impersonal and are sometimes accused of stealing charcoal and food. In order to survive, the population collaborates with both sides in the conflict.

The population's trust in the Rwandan forces has diminished considerably. There have been several reports of insurgents ambushing Rwandans with improvised explosive devices, and the Rwandan army is seen as less active in pursuing the insurgency. With the exception of the headquarters of the administrative post and the village of Chinda, the villages of the Mbau administrative post (in the southern part of Mocímboa da Praia) remain abandoned. The lowlands of Muidumbe remain unstable, with much of the population still afraid to return. Recurrent attacks in the lowlands cause people to migrate to the highlands in a cyclical movement.

Since September 2025, Nangade has experienced an upsurge in insecurity, with attacks on villages all over the district. The rebels concentrate on looting food and destroying agricultural surpluses (such as cashew nut stores), avoiding murdering villagers or confronting Tanzanian troops. The villagers continue to work their fields, but with growing fear. Locals suspect that the insurgency has reactivated its logistical relations with Tanzania, and there are reports of war material (ammunition) being captured and hidden in bicycle tyres. Some people accuse the Tanzanian troops of being more concerned with patrolling the border, protecting their military bases and with economic interests (logging and timber trafficking) than with defending the villages.

There have been no attacks in the district of Mueda, but it is the recipient of war displaced people in successive waves of population movements, and the Local Force (LF) is frequently on alert. In the district headquarters town, night patrols are carried out by the LF. The Local Force maintains a curfew from 8pm, including elements of the FADM and the police, and there are conflicts of jurisdiction. LF elements apply corporal punishment and collect money from individuals travelling after 8pm. Along the inter-district roads, members of the LF (around 20 meticaís at each barrier) and the police (50 to 100 meticaís) collect from bus drivers. The payment of subsidies to the LF has been uncertain and became a critical problem for governance. Irregular payments generate dissatisfaction, particularly in the Montepuez and Chiúre units, facilitating corruption and extortion on the inter-district roads.

Further south, there have been attacks along the Pemba-Montepuez-Balama corridor, with a heavy concentration in Ancuabe and Meloco, and to the north of the Montepuez district, in Mirate and Nairoto. The attacks and murders of peasants created panic among the villagers, generating movements of displaced people. Once again, military incursions

were carried out south of Chiúre, crossing the Lúrio River into Nampula province, and attacks took place in Memba district, panicking the population and causing them to abandon their homes. Population displacement contributes to the worsening of living conditions, given the inability of the State and humanitarian agencies to provide a response.

## **2. PRECARIOUS HEALTH CONDITIONS AND GENERALISED CORRUPTION**

The health system remains precarious, characterised by a lack of infrastructure, human resources, medicines and accessibility problems. The State remains dependent on humanitarian partners, who tend to reduce cooperation. In Nangade, the operational health centres are limited to the district headquarters and the Ntama post, and tents have been set up in the villages of Muia and Mtole. In Muidumbe, the health situation in the second half of 2025 was aggravated by security conditions. Access to healthcare in low-lying areas is problematic in terms of medical staff and medicines, resulting in many home births. In Mocímboa da Praia, reports of insurgents on the move worry health workers, who realise that they are a target of the insurgency and are therefore likely to leave the district. The withdrawal of humanitarian organisations from Mocímboa da Praia, following the movement of guerrillas, has overloaded the State's staff, and the assistance provided by the Rwandan military is insufficient for needs. The absence of staff has led to looting of health facilities, such as the Nanduada health centre, where medicines and medical equipment have been stolen, compromising the service provided to the local population.

In Macomia, there is a single health centre covering the whole district (staffed by the military and Médecins Sans Frontières) with a small operation theatre. On the coast, medical assistance was provided by Rwandan military personnel, but with the improvement in the situation in Mucojo, occasional assistance from mobile teams has become possible.

Further south, in Quissanga, the situation is tending to stabilise and there is a health centre in the main town, with regular services and a resident doctor and nurse. Other health centres have reopened in Bilibiza, Mahate and Nacóba. In the displacement centres in the south of the province, particularly in Chiúre, the mobile units have stopped providing assistance to the population, forcing them to move to the main town. Throughout the province there is a chronic shortage of medicines, stimulating the opening of private pharmacies, especially in urban centres. In public health centres, patients have to buy material (gloves, catheters), medicines (except paracetamol) and pay for services (consultations, surgeries) from doctors and nurses. The low salaries of professionals in the sector are compensated for by the private appropriation of public health services. The authorities are aware of the reality but are little proactive in responding because they are involved in these fraudulent schemes or to avoid conflicts with their colleagues.

### 3. SCHOOL OVERCROWDING AND TEACHING STAFF DEMOTIVATION

Government pressure to standardise the education sector continues to be countered by the inability to respond on the ground. Infrastructure remains precarious and overcrowded. Class sizes far exceed the number of teachers and classroom capacity, often reaching 150 students/classroom, particularly in the Montepuez district. Students sit on the floor or, when there are school desks, four sit at each desk, usually without textbooks.

The lack of teachers is notorious. Hiring of new teachers is far from compensating for the increase in the student population, replacing only those who have died or transferred to other schools. Remote areas and more insecure districts (such as Quissanga or Muidumbe) are suffering from a severe shortage of teachers. However, according to sources in the Montepuez district education directorate, there are more than 80 teachers without an assigned class, often protected by individuals with political influence.

In Muidumbe, many teachers are refusing to resume their duties without the payment of risk allowances. In Montepuez, the failure to honour a promise to pay overtime has led to frustration among teachers, exacerbated by outstanding debts from previous years. Post-election conflicts have increased demotivation among the teaching staff. The fact that many education officials have joined opposition parties (CAD, PODEMOS and ANAMOLA) has led to a more contentious attitude among many professionals in the sector, which represents a crisis in the Frelimo party's support base.

In the districts closest to the conflict zones (Nangade, Muidumbe, Mocímboa da Praia, Macomia, Quissanga and Meluco), teachers are apprehensive and on the lookout for news of insurgent movements. Insurgent attacks and the flight of the school population, even if only occasionally, jeopardise learning and contribute to school drop-outs, reproducing phenomena of poverty.

### 4. ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES IN A CONTEXT OF INSECURITY

The re-establishment of economic activities continues to be strongly conditioned by the insecurity on the ground, the delay in restarting operations at the Mozambique LNG project and by its the decision to provide logistical assistance by sea.

Agriculture is one of the population's main activities. However, the uncertainty throughout the Messalo river valley makes access to production areas difficult. In the south of the province, access to land continues to be the main obstacle for the displaced. The lack of resources to rent agricultural land pushes many families to return to areas closer to where they came from. In Nangade there has been a revitalisation of the cashew sector, where traders from Nampula buy the nuts at attractive prices, thus avoiding selling the product in Tanzania. The production of firewood and charcoal is a widespread

survival strategy, complementary to agriculture. Logging operations in insecure areas (such as Nangade or along the Quirimbas Park) raise suspicions of links between operators and the insurgency. In the south of the province, with its epicentre in Montepuez, gold and precious gem artisanal mining persists as an alternative for many young people, although it is marked by violent conflicts with the authorities.

Fishing is one of the main activities in the coastal area, from Palma to Quissanga, but it is a high-risk activity. Fishermen are victims of restrictions and attacks by the navy and extortion by insurgents. The reopening of the access road to Mucojo has boosted fish sales to Macomia and other districts.

In the district headquarters towns and administrative post headquarters, the service economy continues to be dominated by young people, who manage as mobile wallet agents (*mpesa* and *emola*), taxi services or selling goods from Tanzania, among other informal activities. Women concentrate on selling food products. In Mueda, the street sale of clothing and cosmetics has been banned by the authorities for fear of infiltration by insurgents for reconnaissance purposes. Actors on the ground suspect that there are commercial operations with the insurgency, boosting economic revenues, usually camouflaged.

The production of artisanal alcoholic drinks (*nipa* and *cabanga*) is recurrent in almost every district. The extreme vulnerability of displaced women continues to generate promiscuous behaviour and, in a scenario marked by poverty and precariousness, premature behaviour remains a reality.

Quite financially constrained and with little population coverage, non-governmental organisations continue to be the main drivers of economic activities, providing support for agricultural inputs, animal husbandry and setting up other businesses. Support is largely insufficient and the majority of the population affected by the conflict still lacks the capital to start productive activities. In Quissanga, the destruction of formal markets has led to the creation of scattered stalls in residential areas or transport terminals, to the detriment of economic organisation and supervision.

Around Afungi, TotalEnergies' decision to be supplied by sea consolidates an enclave economic model. The company's employees access the camp by air and are restricted from leaving the areas of operation, having no impact on the hotel and catering industry in the district headquarters town. With the exception of the population of Quitunda, which is set up as a workers' village next to Mozambique LNG, providing the necessary labour for cleaning, security and catering, access to employment is very limited for the rest of the population in the north-east of the province. Economic operators have seen their investment hopes dashed and are very dismayed by the situation.

## 5. JUSTICE AND CITIZENSHIP

The return of the population to the north-east of Cabo Delgado, starting in the second half of 2022, was followed by the reconstruction of State institutions in terms of health, education and support for economic activities. Access to justice initially took place at police stations, but preferably with the Rwandan forces and the Local Force. From 2024 onwards, an effort was made to rebuild the justice institutions by installing containers to accommodate technicians from IPAJ, the prosecutor's office, SERNIC and the registry offices. In Palma, the court building has already been rebuilt. However, the creation of infrastructure has not been accompanied by the return of magistrates. What's more, there are no prisons, forcing people from the coast to move to Mueda, where they are criticised for being involved in the insurgency.

From 2024 there was an effort to reorganise the community courts, relieving the pressure on the police stations and the Local Force. Dozens of community judges received training from the Institute for Legal Sponsorship and Assistance (IPAJ) and an effort was made to revitalise these local organisations. However, according to IPAJ technicians interviewed, only 20 per cent of the community courts that existed before the conflict are still in operation. Some of them are based in the neighbourhood secretariat, which also houses Frelimo's headquarters, and all the judges are militants of the ruling party. Several judges are even appointed by the neighbourhood secretary, creating confusion between the executive and the judiciary.

The armed conflict has changed the dynamics of access to justice. The violence of war has had an impact on the way conflicts are resolved, with the population favouring entities with greater power of coercion and the use of force, namely the PRM and the Local Force. On the other hand, with resources and the ability to attract qualified staff, who are therefore more effective at managing small conflicts, various NGOs began to compete with the community courts, taking away their prominence among the population. The lack of financial support for the community courts has led to many judges quitting, weakening these institutions. The Community Security Councils are involved in resolving local conflicts that generate more heated tensions (resulting from adultery, insults or petty theft between neighbours) and play an important role in reducing and preventing community violence.

The emergence of new political forces in Cabo Delgado, particularly the ANAMOLA party, has redefined the region's socio-political landscape. The process of expansion of this opposition force faces structural barriers, characterised by administrative repression, partisanship and instrumentalization of public institutions and restrictions on freedom of association. In the south of the province (in Pemba, Montepuez and Chiúre) there is a pattern of retaliation against State employees, especially teachers, involved in opposition parties. Tactics include punitive transfers to remote areas and threats of job losses. Fear of public exposure prevents more active political participation by this professional class. In Mueda, the neutrality of religious institutions seems to be compromised. Reports indicate the influence of the ruling party on the Catholic Church, and there are reports of

discrimination against young people associated with the opposition in parish ceremonies. In religious activities, there is a duality of treatment: while party symbols associated with the opposition (caps, T-shirts) are banned by the clergy, there is tolerance towards the symbolism of the ruling party.

Despite the restrictions, the ANAMOLA party has invested in acquiring land and building its own headquarters (as in Mueda and Chiúre), signalling an attempt at institutionalisation. In places like Mocímboa da Praia, mobilisation has been visible through marches, mostly made up of young people and teenagers, which has led to close monitoring guidelines from neighbourhood secretaries, warning not to get involved with the movement. The murder of opposition figures and journalists, such as the case of Arlindo Chissale in Pemba and the attack on the district official in Montepuez, have created a climate of insecurity that silences civic participation.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

In addition to a conflict with the insurgency, the Mozambican state is facing an important battle to gain social legitimacy, in a context of institutional fragility and generalised demotivation. While the insurgency refines its approach to coexistence with the coastal populations, sectors of the population continue to view the defence and security forces and their allies with suspicion, perceiving them as ineffective or even predatory. Victory against the insurgency requires the state to present itself as a guarantor of justice and not just as a military actor to contain the insurgency.

If in the health sector, the illicit privatisation of medical services by underpaid State agents has been a buffer for conflicts in the state apparatus, in the education sector there is a general demotivation of the teaching staff, without access to subsidies, facing precarious working conditions and with fewer possibilities for extortion. The growing involvement of education professionals in opposition parties and the increase in contestation within the State apparatus weakened Frelimo's support base.

The economic sectors remain highly fragmented and affected by persistent insecurity. Many peasants are still afraid to access production and fishing sites because these are risky activities and subject to encounters with military groups. The movement of passengers and goods is risky, subject to theft and extortion. Multiple precarious and informal survival strategies continue to emerge, such as informal trade, mobile wallet transactions, mining and stealth activities, or artisanal beverage production, often accompanied by extreme social vulnerabilities. The occasional revitalisation of sectors, such as cashew farming in Nangade or fish marketing in Mucojo, contrasts with the administrative restrictions imposed in Mueda and the destruction of formal markets in Quissanga, creating a scenario of critical dependence on NGOs, whose interventions, although vital, lack the scale to capitalise on the majority of the affected population. The lack of a solid production base, coupled with the insurgency's suspected infiltration of commercial chains and the scarcity of jobs, frustrates the expectations of economic

operators and perpetuates a cycle of social exclusion. The delay in the Mozambique LNG project and its configuration as a logistics “enclave” limit the impact on the local economy.

The slow reconstruction of justice institutions in the north-east of the province is aggravated by the absence of magistrates. The fragility of the community courts leads the population to favour bodies with greater coercive power, such as the security forces and local militias, or to resort to NGOs to resolve conflicts. At the same time, limitations to political pluralism and civic space persist. The emergence of new opposition forces, such as the ANAMOLA party, is systematically held back by tactics of administrative repression and intrusive community surveillance by local government agents or even by the instrumentalization of Catholic organisations, particularly in Mueda. Recent episodes of political violence and assassinations have consolidated a climate of fear and exclusion, which weakens citizenship, discourages democratic participation and jeopardises the social cohesion necessary for the long-term stability of the province.

The government continues to deny the occurrence of systematic human rights violations in the north-east of the province, particularly in 2020 and 2021, to the detriment of the process of reconciliation and restoring people’s trust in the state. Rebuilding justice and a more sustainable social pact will involve a more assertive government approach to invisible social wounds, reconnecting citizens with the state, but also with each other. This process requires few financial resources. Above all, it requires sensitivity.

In this scenario, a series of reforms become relevant, including:

- Tanzanian and Rwandan troops being more proactive in directly protecting villages and farming areas;
- Making the defence and security forces more accountable, involving the investigation of extrajudicial killings of peasants and fishermen, compensation and possible amnesties for the agents involved, with a view to restoring institutional trust;
- Security in production corridors: stepping up patrols in fishing, farming and livestock areas, making the production cycle of cashew nuts, cereals and fish viable, guaranteeing food security and the commercialisation of surpluses;
- Payment of allowances to State officials and agents, especially in risk areas, but also to the Local Force, with a view to discouraging extortion of citizens;
- Reallocating teachers to areas of need, eliminating political influences in the placement process, investing in the hiring and training of teachers;
- Improving the school situation, using local materials and economic actors, boosting employment and economic activities;

- Facilitating access to land, through mediation mechanisms or subsidies to ensure that displaced people can farm without the burden of unaffordable rents;
- Assessing the safe reopening of crossing points in Nangade to revitalise the local economy;
- De-partisan of the State and elimination of political persecution of civil servants through administrative instruments;
- Strengthen security mechanisms for journalists and members of the opposition, ensuring that violence does not become a political management tool;
- Ensure that places of worship remain neutral and inclusive, regardless of the party affiliation of the worshippers.

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