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**The Role of Women in Conflict in Cabo Delgado:  
Understanding Vicious Cycles of Violence**

**(English Version)**

**João Feijó**

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## INTRODUCTION

Since October 2017, Cabo Delgado Province has been an arena of armed conflict, translating into destruction and looting, abductions and killings of civilian populations. The conflict intensified throughout 2020, with attacks on district headquarters villages, leading to the forced displacement of hundreds of thousands of individuals.

The history of armed conflicts in Mozambique shows that they have had enormous impacts on the civilian population, placed between two opposing groups: rebel forces and government forces. Aware of their respective importance in a guerrilla war (for the possibility of logistical support, camouflage, recruitment, or the provision of information), the warring parties have always related to the civilian population on the basis of mistrust, imposing their domination by force and persuasion, and seeking to interfere in their habitat (in clusters or scattered in the bush).

Being physically more fragile, target for sexual predation by armed young men, and tradition-

ally a food producer, women were a recurrent target, remaining in a particularly vulnerable position. In the current armed conflict in north-east Cabo Delgado, there have been numerous reports of abduction of hundreds of young women, and there is much doubt about their whereabouts. However, viewing women only as passive victims of the conflict does not capture the complexity of the situation. Voluntarily or forcibly, by conviction or without choice, the literature shows that women play an active role in armed conflicts, as observers and providers of military information, in providing logistical support, as vigilantes, and even as soldiers. This active involvement of women is all the more evident the larger the social support base of the insurgent groups.

This study aims to portray the impact of the armed conflict on women during the armed conflict in northern Cabo Delgado, analyzing not only the wide range of violence committed against them, but also the forms of collaboration (more or less voluntary) with rebel groups and their organizational dynamics.



## THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN MILITARY CONFLICT

Over the last 60 years, Mozambique has experienced more than half of the period in military conflict, between 1964 and 1974 (initially in the North of Mozambique and spreading later to the center of the country), between 1977 and 1992 (initially confined to the center of Mozambique and spreading later to the whole territory), from 2013 to 2014 and from 2015 to 2016 (in the center of the country), and from 2017 to the present (in the Northeast of Cabo Delgado). In all situations, the conflict has taken on guerrilla dimensions, that is, a form of unconventional warfare, of greater or lesser density, unleashed in rural environments, in which the military strategy is based predominantly on camouflage and constant mobility of guerrillas, operating in a dispersed manner and in small groups. The possession of relatively limited means is compensated by the conquest of popular support, particularly in social contexts of greater tension with the state. In this scenario, the armed confrontation takes place in contexts inhabited by civilians, with rebel forces penetrating the population, either to obtain protection, camouflage and logistical support, or to violate them. Because of their logistical and military importance (as a source of recruitment, but also of access to food, weapons caches, and information), in a guerrilla war civilians are a disputed resource for the belligerent parties, so their military success requires the support of the population.

Placed between two belligerent parties, in this type of confrontation the population becomes

particularly vulnerable, and there is widespread violence, regardless of gender, age, economic level or education, although it assumes different characteristics in each of the groups. Violence is understood as any action of physical or psychological aggression, implying the intentional use of force and the imposition of physical, emotional, psychological, or material harm on the victim.

### Manifestations of violence against women

Throughout the 16-year war, the mobilization or abduction of young boys and adolescents, more fit and developed for physical activities, was a frequent and well-documented phenomenon, and became a recurring practice of Renamo (Geffray, 1990), but also of government forces. Similarly, women, children, and the elderly were particularly affected by the war due to their lower physical strength, ability to escape, or to protect themselves from the generalized violence.

However, women were a particularly vulnerable group, and were subjected to several specific forms of violence. While most adult men were killed and children and young boys were integrated into the ranks of RENAMO, women were somewhat spared death and disability by their ability to provide assistance and pleasure to the guerrillas. Women were particularly exposed to situations of sexual rape, promoted by both warring parties (Bunker, 2018: 193; Cahen, 2019: 327), including by malefactors and criminals, taking advantage of the chaotic military situation<sup>1</sup> (ISRI and Muleide, 2020: 36). Many violent

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<sup>1</sup> While in the south of the country, Renamo guerrillas are almost always represented as the main aggressors, in the discourses of victims in central and northern Mozambique, government forces are often represented as particularly violent against the population, because of suspected Renamo support. Many commanders of the armed forces were considered evil and executioners, as they did not spare the civilian population as a strategy to maintain respect and fear within the ranks (ISRI e MULEIDE, 2020: 38-39).

acts occurred as punishment against the population for suspected enemy support. Thousands of young women were kidnapped by Renamo forces, treated as wives or sex slaves of commanders or ordinary guerrillas<sup>2</sup>, and in cases of resistance, rape involving the introduction of objects into the vagina was common (ISRI and Muleide, 2020: 36-37). The use of drugs and traditional medicines were often responsible for the increase in atrocities, even justifying the rape of women, especially younger women. The atmosphere of mysticism that surrounded the 16-year war, coupled with low literacy levels, triggered atrocious behavior (such as drinking blood of victims or cannibalism), including as a combat strategy (ISRI and Muleide, 2020: 39).

On the other hand, women were forced to provide supplies to the guerrillas, forced into situations of servitude, forced to carry goods, and often raped and killed on the spot.

Another specificity of the violence against women was the murder of minors and fetuses macabrely torn from their wombs in front of the populations as a form of intimidation of the whole or surrounding group (ISRI and Muleide, 2020). The deliberate attack on women fulfilled a number of functions, including intimidation, demoralization, and control of opponents, as well as cohesion and strengthening the morale of the combatants by winning a war trophy.

The impacts of the armed conflict on women continued in the post-conflict period, namely through their marginalization in the demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration processes, both of female combatants and of women dependent on former guerrillas.<sup>3</sup> (Jacobson, 2006). These phenomena of violence deserve to be understood in the framework of a predominantly patriarchal culture, marked by male domination, responsible for the social construction of the woman (by many guerrillas) as submissive to her husband or as a sexual object whose function is to serve the man.

### Women's forms of collaboration during armed conflicts

Notwithstanding the vulnerability and intense suffering they have been subjected to, women are far from being mere passive subjects during armed conflicts. Throughout history and in many different latitudes, women have engaged with violent groups in military insurgency activities (Spencer, 2016). With personal, ideological, or material motivations<sup>4</sup>, groups of women were involved with rebel groups, fighting for their beliefs and suffering the consequences of this choice.

Spencer (2016: 77) describes the involvement of women in radical Islamic groups, both pas-

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**2** The situation was also a source of conflict among senior Renamo officers, generating messages of military concern from Afonso Dhlakama, due to the exposure of the bases to the civilian population. Women were thus represented as a destabilizing element in the troop, and thus seen as a "problem [for the men]. The presence of women appeared as antagonistic to discipline, except when they were organized in separate female detachments (Cahen, 2019: 345).

**3** Analyzing the demobilization and reintegration program implemented by ONUMOZ, Jacobson (2006) found that demobilization packages for female ex-combatants included only male underwear. Regarding dependent women, the program ignored situations of polygamy, assuming that each soldier would have only one wife, forcing them to choose one female officer, leaving the rest to their fate, along with their children. According to the author, this situation contributed to a considerable increase in destitution and prostitution in the military areas, aggravated by the presence of international troops sent in the process of implementing the general peace agreement.

**4** Women may become involved in armed groups for a variety of reasons, ranging from a desire for personal or family revenge, the need to defend a community right, lured by material or security advantages, or by coercion and intimidation.

sively - as wives and mothers of guerrillas - and actively, intervening as recruiters, community organizers, indoctrinators, and in observation activities (Spencer (2016: 77) describes the involvement of women in radical Islamic groups, both passively - as wives and mothers of guerrillas - and actively, intervening as recruiters, community organizers, indoctrinators, and in observation activities. Within the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS), the recruitment of women falls under different objectives, including increasing the population and membership of the group, but also arousing sensationalism in the Western media (Spencer, 2016: 78). Gender issues occupy a central place in Islamic extremism, which tends to blame the West for the mixing of gender roles and the crumbling of the social foundations of the family, creating social chaos. It is in this scenario that women, through their role as socializing people, are transformed as guardians of cultural, social, and religious values. However, evidence shows that their role in ISIS goes beyond the role of wives and mothers, appearing in operational roles: patrolling operations, law enforcement and control of Islamic morality, in supervisory activities, in intelligence gathering, in recruitment tasks or even state building and functioning functions, for example in the reopening of hospitals or orphanages and in the field of education (Spencer, 2016).

Similarly, in Mozambique, women's groups have never ceased to play an active role in violent groups. During the armed struggle led by Frelimo, Mozambican women took on roles in mobilizing people, supporting refugees, working with orphaned children, and fundraising, but also in logistical support activities (transporting equip-

ment). Consisting of women guerrillas, the Frelimo Women's Detachment was born at the request of the women themselves, confronted with the need to defend and mobilize populations in liberated areas or in areas still controlled by colonialism (Casimiro, 2005: 60-62). The fact that they lived in military camps, wore pants, did military training, participated in combat, and lived with people outside their kinship group, led them to broaden their personal horizons, generating a revolution in peasant and conservative areas (Casimiro, 2005: 62; Katto, 2020: 99).

During the 16-year war, there were few cases of women's involvement in combat situations and few regiments, companies, platoons or battalions were composed solely of women or led by women, either from the government forces or from Renamo. On the government forces side, it was rare to see female military units fighting against RENAMO guerrillas. During the 16-year war, there were few cases of women's involvement in combat situations and few regiments, companies, platoons or battalions were composed solely of women or led by women, either from the government forces or from Renamo. On the government forces side, it was rare to see female military units fighting against RENAMO guerrillas<sup>5</sup> (ISRI and MULEIDE, 2020: 41), despite the fact that many have undergone military training and took part in patrol actions as part of militias (Bunker, 2018: 189).

Although women's participation in combat was relatively small, their role was essential in paramilitary terms. Women from the RENAMO Women's Detachment participated in the loading of weapons, medicines and other logistics

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5 Women interviewed in the ISRI and Muleide study (2020: 42) mentioned that in Mogovolas district, RENAMO guerrillas, who surrounded the village, shouted the name of a female commander. The voice of command given to the men was that of a woman. The interviewees perceived the existence of other women in the group, even though the majority were men. Similarly, in Nampula province there was a RENAMO commander who was very feared and particularly violent.

(Wiegink, 2019: 261; Cahen, 2019: 344). On both sides in the confrontation, women were actively involved (voluntarily or coerced) in producing and cooking meals for military personnel, providing food and shelter, both to RENAMO guerrillas and to militias supporting government forces (Bunker, 2018: 189). Several accounts show that some women were morally responsible for acts of violence committed against other women, either as instigators or even as aggressors<sup>6</sup>.

More recently, the few existing analyses of the ongoing conflict in northern Cabo Delgado report active support from broad social sectors of the coast to insurgent groups, who then share the spoils of theft with family members, including women (Macalane and Jafar, 2021: 41).

## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN DURING THE CONFLICT

In military conflicts, the civilian populations are usually the most sacrificed, and violence against women tends to have specific characteristics. The testimonies collected allow us to identify different problems faced by women, related to food insecurity, destruction and theft of property, physical aggression and murder, sexual violations and kidnappings. The situation is aggravated by the dismantling of all government structures for access to justice, and particularly when the aggressors are supposed to be those who should protect citizens.

### Food Insecurity

One of the most immediate problems caused by the armed conflict was related to the reduction of agricultural production, due to insecurity and fear of displacement to the production sites. Since food production tends to be the responsibility of women (although often with the collaboration of their spouse), military insecurity had a direct impact on their economic activities. Many women chose to produce closer to their homes, creating greater pressure on land adjacent to populated areas. As the attacks intensified, there was a generalized flight of the population, abandoning agricultural products in the fields:

*“We used to make cassava fields, but since they occupied the forests no one went to the yam fields, or in the distant fields growing fields or anything. All the people had to do vegetable gardens close to the house. Even then, sometimes, we would hear that on that side they had already passed. That day you didn’t even go to the field. Only after*

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<sup>6</sup> According to reports, women from RENAMO or who resided in RENAMO bases for a long time, adopted the same violent behavior as men towards newly arrived and newly kidnapped women and girls. A feared commander of the RENAMO forces who spread terror in some parts of the province, in Zambezia (ISRI and Muleide, 2020: 42).

*being attentive, the movement was great, would you go to the fields again, nearby, to go and then come back.”* (Interview 8).

Food shortages have worsened as food stores and warehouses have been robbed, and transporters and traders have been afraid to operate in the risky locations. The situation has taken on particular dimensions in the district of Palma. The presence of armed groups in the Nangade-Palma and Mocímboa-Palma sections, and threats of maritime attacks, hampered logistical supply to the gas project implementation areas and had an impact on shortages and increases in the prices of basic necessities<sup>7</sup>. Military insecurity has limited the work of food aid organizations, which have themselves been victims of attacks on food stores. Humanitarian aid workers have been withdrawn from the affected areas, leaving the population vulnerable. A large part of the districts of Mocímboa da Praia, Macomia and Quissanga have remained, for several months, without access to medical assistance and medication, vulnerable to cholera, malaria and other diseases. As one interviewer stated:

*“Not one kind of support was given to us. There, in our land, no support arrives. Only all the support we hear ends in Pemba”* (Interview 5).

Against a backdrop of food shortages and rising prices, the people living in the conflict zones resort to different survival strategies. Women are involved in searching for roots (such as yams) for consumption (or sale) or in selling mandazi (a type of fried bread). The situation worsened after the attacks, in which the fleeing populations remained hidden in the bushes for several

days, gathering, when possible, tubers from farms or feeding on (wild) roots and fruits. *Doctors Without Borders* (MSF) teams that have since re-established themselves on the ground have reported significant cases of malnutrition among civilians in Macomia, especially children (ACLED, 09.02.2021).

The arrival in the city of Pemba or in reception centers provides access to humanitarian aid. However, the abandonment of production areas, the destitution of means of production, the absence of shelters, the lack of capital and the difficulty in accessing land make the socio-economic reintegration of the populations difficult, making them heavily dependent on external support. The difficulty of access to natural resources (water or firewood) becomes particularly evident in urban contexts marked by the monetarization of social relations. Once in the host locations, the displaced population remains food insecure:

*“We get only one meal a day (...)”* (Interview 12);

*“We get a meal in the morning for the children, based on porridge, and in the afternoon we buy malhação [small fish] and cook to eat. That is when we have at least 50 meticais. (...); I have no alternative, no place to make a farm, nor to lean and rest”* (Interview 13);

*“Even water to drink, we who have children need money. Better is in our land, you couldn’t buy water, if you didn’t have any you would go to your friends and ask for water. You would also ask your friends*

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<sup>7</sup> Videos circulating in social networks, reporting on the rationing and increase in the price of food products. In February 2021, journalistic sources (Valoi, 04.02.2021) reported that in Palma, a 25kg bag of rice reached 2000 meticais, at a time when the same product cost 1200 meticais in Maputo.

*for curry and they would make your shima (mealy meal) and you would eat it. But here in Pemba nobody knows you who will give you flour or curry” (Interview 8).*

## Destruction and theft of heritage

The attacks of the machababos (insurgents) on villages often result in the destruction of houses and their belongings. The intention is clearly to promote terror and abandonment of the population. The women interviewed report experiences of repetitive destruction of dwellings, as well as the impossibility of defense. Although everyone feels like a possible target of attack, the reality is that the social groups most often targeted are members of the government and economically wealthy individuals.

*“When they find a house belonging to someone with a certain economic power, they do enormous damage” (Interview 18);*

*“All our houses were burned. My house was burned, but my daughter’s was worse, she couldn’t get anything out, not even a mattress, so we are without anything, only the clothes on our bodies” (Interview 11);*

*“Everyone displaced from Mutamba was filled in Nkomangano with their possessions that they managed to save, and they built huts to store their possessions. They loaded their possessions in cars and boats to save the freezers, motorcycles, etc. But everything was burned in the new refuge” (Interview 12);*

*“Don’t even talk to me, I who am standing here testifying have been burned three times. I don’t even have a spare rag or utensil. I am like this, alone. With nothing.*

*Every time they come they burn us. Even I ran away here, because I had nowhere to live.” (Interview 15);*

*“They didn’t shoot anybody. They would shoot in the air and we would flee to the woods and they would burn the houses. When they left, at night we returned to our land. But this time they killed a person by cutting out his tongue and putting it in his chest. They left no writing and no greeting” (Interview 15).*

Theft of property is another widespread practice. Following attacks, money, telephones, motorcycles, mattresses, and other durable goods are invariably looted, and the wealthy tend to be the worst affected. Reports show a chaotic scenario, marked by widespread opportunism, with looting by insurgents, but also by the population itself, including individuals from the Defense and Security Forces (FDS):

*“Before, they go into the tents, they take everything they like. They entered a young man’s tent, called Doctor, and Mr. Jampani, they took everything, including telephones, necklaces, sweaters, slippers and everything they like, while you, captives, don’t take any goods” (Interview 2);*

*“We used to have pots and pans, clothes, and now we are without anything. Everything today is given to us” (Interview 1);*

*“That aunt struck, her father is in this land. He called her on the phone from Pemba. But Alshabaab themselves answered, since they had stolen all the phones, and answered ‘after all don’t you know that in Macomia there is war?’” (Interview 6);*



*"We would stay there, not returning home, we would only hear that so-and-so was killed, people are stealing in the market, stalls were burned in the market"* (Interview 8);

*"After the attacks, the military would break into the houses to take the leftover goods"* (Interview 10);

*"They loaded seven mopeds on a boat and another boat had peanut cargo from an Indian and they burned it. And when water leaked out they kidnapped people and stole money, rice and other things. I took my money 50, others 200, 40 thousand. We kept the money inside"* (Interview 20).

## Physical assaults and murders

Reports of physical assaults and killings, including beatings, mutilation of limbs, and beheadings, are widespread. As of early February, an ACLED report (09.02.2021) counted 2578 reported deaths, of which 1305 were civilians. Although there is a great deal of confusion over the identity of the perpetrators, since the opposing parties wear identical uniforms, the most vicious violence is attributed to the machababos, who often leave behind a catalogue of killings, with very violent details. The bodies, often butchered, are left lying on the ground until they are collected and buried:

*"It was the gangs. I saw them bite, cut out the tongue and put it in the chest. First they shot and died, cut out the tongue and put it in the chest. The boy's name is Amade"* (Interview 15);

*"I had many, they cut off my brother Sufo Cheira and buried him in the backyard. They cut off my brother from the same mother*

*and same father, named Afonso Insa Momade. They cut him on the beach and he was buried on the seashore"* (Interview 16);

*"After they captured them they didn't kill anyone, but they had beheaded some people. (...) Men. (...) The rest of us [women] were people who only received beatings without just cause. They only beat us. When you went out to attend to minor needs without asking permission, they beat you about 10 chambocos" (whippings)* (Interview 19);

*"These people passing by the road, immediately killed four people (...) In the name of Allah Rassullallah, I see that they are the military (...) But in the name of Allah Rassullallah, I don't understand so well who they actually are, since they both wear the same uniform"* (Interview 5).

A second group of aggressors, referred to by the interviewees, concerns members of the FDS. According to the reports, the coexistence between members of the SDS and the population was not a peaceful and harmonious process, being marked by distrust, tension and aggressiveness. Displaced populations in Pemba, from the districts of Mocímboa da Praia, Macomia or Quissanga, spread stories of violence perpetrated by the FDS, including attacks on civilians (including children), murders, arbitrary arrests, blackmail and extortion of monetary values for subsequent release. The video that circulated on social networks of a naked and defenseless woman, beaten and murdered by several individuals wearing the uniform of the Armed Defense Forces of Mozambique (FADM), was one of the most striking moments of the war. The attitude of the FDS aggravated the sense of fear, accelerating the population's flight from their locations. The following accounts are illustrative:

*"It's the military. The military doesn't feel pity. If they felt sorry for us, the bad guys wouldn't get to all these places. Even some little babies if they find themselves beaten, some adults cut so we don't even know where to run to, or who to believe. When he sees your companion, you run away so that he doesn't see you" (Interview 1);*

*"The real gangs were the military. If they found you arguing or angry with your husband, they would come from behind and beat you heavily. If your child cried in the street you were beaten. If they crossed you on the road you were beaten to death. So what was the benefit here? (...) They stayed here in the village, because they had nowhere to go. So the punishments got worse" (Interview 3);*

*"[the crew of the boat that was heading to Ibo] They were not bandits. To tell the truth, they were merchants, because after they were killed by the military and another boat we never saw again, the bodies that kept appearing on the beach we saw that they were civilians and not bandits. One boat suffered and ended up in the port and another got lost, we don't know. We can't lie, they were not bandits. And many died. We don't know how many in numbers, but many people died." (Interview 20);*

*"One girl, she said the military broke into her house. She was a Muslim. They thought her family were alshabaabs. So they beat*

*her father, her brother, her uncle"*  
(Interview 21).

The reports of aggressiveness of the FDS on the populations deserve to be understood in light of several factors. First, disorganization, immaturity and indiscipline were observed among young soldiers of the FADM, who often complained about the lack of logistics, the extension of missions beyond the stipulated three months, filming and sharing on social networks venting using a smartphone, especially throughout the first half of 2020. The feelings of fragility and uncertainty generate stress, and there is no shortage of situations of alcohol consumption, which are evident in the testimonies of the interviewees<sup>8</sup>.

On the other hand, the existence of young rebels infiltrated within the communities fuels the military's suspicion of the local populations. The unpreparedness for an unconventional war is reflected in the way local youngsters are treated. The situation was particularly evident in the district of Mocímboa da Praia, especially as the military's suspicion of the local population's collaboration with machababos groups grew. As one interviewee put it:

*"In April and May there were still many insurgents in Mocímboa da Praia, but there were many military personnel, which caused great stress in the population, because they entered the villages and did not know who was a civilian and who was an insurgent. There were civilian deaths by mistake (...).*

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**8** This phenomenon is also observed by machababos in their comments about the members of the FDS, classifying the former with pejorative terms such as "kafir," "pigs," "girls," or "weaklings." According to one interviewee, "one of the soldiers from the insurgents told me what weakened the Mozambique army. 'They are fearful. So to get brave, they drink, they take drugs. When they come to fight with us, they no longer succeed' (...) They said that the Mozambican forces are cowards. At the time of the fight they take off their uniforms, drop their weapons and 'we are going to meet them at the front and we are going to kill them the same way'" (Interview 21).

*There was] a Catholic group that was in the field, in a village that the military thought was insurgent and the military killed practically all the people that were there. They killed 5 young men who were in the field at one time. They only didn't kill more people because an animator started shouting 'we are Christians. We are only working in the field.' Then they stopped attacking. It was a complicated time because the military was afraid of the insurgents. So first they would shoot and then they would ask who was"* (Interview 21).

Journalistic reports give accounts of persecution and torture by the military of all those who were "identified 'divining' the insurgents" (Baptista, 31.03.2020) and to whom stolen food products were distributed during the attack on the headquarters village of Quissanga. Interviewing 12 victims and witnesses of abuses, Human Rights Watch (04.12.2018) reported arbitrary arrests of civilians in military barracks, ill-treatment and summary executions "of dozens of individuals suspected of belonging to an armed Islamist group." Also Amnesty International (07.10.2020) denounced persecutions of suspected armed involvement, forced disappearances, torture and extrajudicial executions committed by the Mozambican army. The same organization linked the Mozambican army to kidnappings and arbitrary detention of journalists, researchers, community leaders, among other individuals who tried to denounce the abuses. Similarly, ACLED (2020: 2) reported that in June 2020, residents of the Milamba neighborhood in Mocímboa da Praia found the corpses of 26 individuals, identified as civilians who had been arrested the

previous nights by the police. Videos were circulated on social networks in which individuals in FDS uniforms were lambasting captured individuals or in which corpses were exposed and outraged. The images and videos that circulated on social networks throughout 2020 show an increase in violence and the stressful situation experienced by the operatives on the ground <sup>9</sup>. Matsinhe e Valoi (2019: 15-16) entrevistaram militares no terreno que explicaram as ordens superiores existentes para lidar com suspeitos: começam por ser interrogados, procurando retirar toda a informação possível "através de quaisquer meios", inclusive através do uso da força. Os suspeitos são posteriormente detidos (sendo que os que dispõem de valores militares são libertados) ou enviados para o mato, para "onde partirão de vez", para "não voltarem a ser vistos" (vulgo "apanhar lenha"). Matsinhe and Valoi (2019: 15-16) interviewed military personnel in the field who explained the existing superior orders for dealing with suspects: they begin by being interrogated, seeking to extract as much information as possible "through any means," including through the use of force. The suspects are subsequently detained (with those with military valuables being released) or sent into the bush, to "where they will leave for good," so as "not to be seen again" (aka "gathering firewood").

The violence continued throughout the flight to the places of refuge, including on arrival in the city of Pemba. The neighborhoods of Paquitequete and others characterized by the widespread presence of young Islamists without professional occupation or mosques (Cariacó, Chuíba, Muxara, Ingonane, or Maringanha) are

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<sup>9</sup> The Ministry of National Defense (MDN) has always denied the authenticity of the images. In reaction to the statement by Amnesty International, Omar Saranga, spokesman for the MDN, said that the acts of torture reported as having been committed by elements wearing the uniform of the army and the Rapid Intervention Unit, "should not be seen as definitive certainty", expressing openness to work with all social segments in the investigation of these situations (Miguel, 10.09.2021).

places of greater distrust and aggression on the part of the police forces:

*“But before we got off the boat, the Pemba beach inspectors demanded that we wear masks, and if someone didn’t, they were immediately beaten” (Interview 3).*

Abuses of authority intensified during the State of Emergency. There are numerous reports of members of the DSF conducting stop operations, demanding travel permits that are impossible to obtain in a conflict context, or identification documents from populations fleeing attacks in order to extort money. Shopkeepers who carried large sums of money to buy goods reported being accused of sponsoring insurgents, blackmailed, threatened, and extorted. According to eyewitness accounts, during and after the attacks and taking advantage of the general stampede, there were robberies of residences and commercial stores, carried out by insurgents, by neighbors, but also by the FDS themselves, in a scenario described as *“total anarchy”* (Newsdesk, 06.07.2020).

As lesões provocadas pelas agressões agravaram-se com as dificuldades de acesso à saúde, em virtude da destruição e saque de unidades sanitárias, e pela fuga dos próprios técnicos do Serviço Nacional de Saúde (SNS), alvos frequentes dos insurgentes. Num comunicado de 6 de Junho de 2020, os Médicos Sem Fronteiras anunciaram a fuga de 27 profissionais de Macomia, na sequência do ataque à vila sede, depois de já se terem retirado de Mocimboa da Praia, em Março do mesmo ano. A situação interrompeu tratamentos de malária, cólera, HIV/SIDA e tuberculose ou ferimentos resultantes dos combates. Neste cenário, a população do Nordeste de Cabo Delgado só tem hipótese de recorrer a Pemba, Montepuez ou Mueda, num estado agravado: The injuries caused by

the attacks were aggravated by the difficulties in accessing health care due to the destruction and looting of health units, and by the flight of the National Health Service (SNS) technicians themselves, frequent targets of the insurgents. In a statement on June 6, 2020, Doctors Without Borders announced the flight of 27 professionals from Macomia, following the attack on the headquarters village, after they had already withdrawn from Mocimboa da Praia in March of the same year. The situation interrupted treatments for malaria, cholera, HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis or injuries resulting from the fighting. In this scenario, the population of north-eastern Cabo Delgado has no choice but to go to Pemba, Montepuez or Mueda, in an aggravated state:

*“At the hospital we were immediately attended to, but the finger was amputated four days later. On the fifth day, Auntie was transferred from Pemba to Nampula, because they said that these bullets could not be extracted in Pemba. When she arrived in Nampula, she was not treated for 15 days. On the day she was treated, she didn’t speak or anything, and was sent back here. But they’ve already recovered it. But the bullets were removed from the body, they only left one” (Interview 6).*

## Sexual assaults

As in other armed conflicts, in the north of Cabo Delgado there is no lack of reports of sexual violations. Although in the district of Mocimboa da Praia violent aggressions against women by *machababos* were mentioned, during the process of attack and capture of the women no episodes of sexual violation were reported. The opposite was reported in relation to the military of the FDS, considered too young and imma-

ture, opportunistic and taking advantage of the power relationship with young civilians, familiar with poverty and violence, vulnerable, seeking to take possible advantages of their female condition. During the raids on suspected places, the aggressiveness demonstrated did not fail to spill over into episodes of sexual violation:

*“One of the soldiers was very abusive with her (...) I believe it was a rape situation, because when she told us about it she cried a lot.”* (Interview 21);

*“But before that, back in Mocímboa da Praia... those military men are very young. Those soldiers took advantage of us. They were unprepared. They were too young. So they used their power to force the young girls to be with them. But in the context there, they didn’t think it was sexual violence. Unfortunately they think it’s normal to be forced. Our girls, in that context of violence, three years ago, after a while, it becomes normal. (...) Some even thought... they offered some benefits so that they could be with them.”* (Interview 21)

A young soldier of the FADM interviewed in Maputo, during a rest period between missions in Cabo Delgado province, said that *“we were with the girl friends... they couldn’t say no”*, revealing the asymmetric power relation imposed by armed men in uniform on civilian women, and the vulnerability of the latter to the sexual desires of the former. Different testimonies collected by researchers from the Rovuma University (Macalane and Jafar, 2021: 63) confirm a negative feeling on the part of the population towards the actions of the FDS, which are characterized by violence, including practices of rape of local women.

The most violent reports are from Quissanga District and were perpetrated by machababos. Several eyewitnesses reported that women were raped in groups or even with objects, and died in the field or later in the city of Pemba. The survivors were severely traumatized by the situation, and even lost their speech:

*“They collectively and abusively rape you, and after they have had enough, they introduce sticks and inappropriate objects to you. You, as a woman, were not created to be raped with sticks or with more than 80 men, you being unique. What are you left with as a person?”* (Interview 1)

The reality is that a Doctors Without Borders team that returned in February 2021 to the Macomia district reported a high number of sexually transmitted infections among the population (ACLEDA, 09.02.2021).

## Kidnappings

A very frequent phenomenon in the attacks, which is widely reported in interviews, informal conversations and the media, is related to the abduction of young women, but also young adolescent males. The March 2020 attack on the municipality of Mocímboa da Praia is described as one of the moments of greatest capture of children and girls, and there are reports of dozens of them being transported in pickup trucks. The evidence allows us to estimate that, throughout the conflict, many hundreds of young girls were abducted:

*“They took many women of all ethnicities. They are countless. (...) You can find a child, they take him to go and teach him in mad-rassa”* (Interview 9);

*"This fourth or fifth time many women, children and men were captured by the gangs (...) Some people lost three or four children. They would go from house to house, capture the girls and take them away to their homes." (Interview 12);*

*"Many abducted are mwanis, many children are not known whereabouts, the children of the house and others were abducted. My five cousins were kidnapped" (Interview 16);*

*"In Quirimba they kidnapped 37 minors. To date only 5 children have returned, who managed to escape, three boys and two girls. The others, to this day, have not returned." (Interview 17);*

*"What I have watched is that when they come, they do not forgive, they capture underage boys and girls." (Interview 18).*

The process of capturing women is not related to belonging to any ethnic or religious group, but is strictly based on age and sexual attraction. The youngest and most attractive ones are particularly chosen. According to the reports of the interviewees, the lighter young women (commonly known as *Lulu*) are the most wanted. The codes used in the selection of the women are based on food concepts, distinguishing the ones called *macaroni* (the youngest and most attractive) from those called *mapira* (*ntama*) [sorghum], translating a representation of the woman as a sexual object for male consumption and satisfaction. The noodles represent the most desired food (more tender, associated with urban consumption and greater purchasing power, therefore much preferred among young people), as opposed to the sorghum, a second resort food in dry periods, more insipid and less encouraging to the palate:

*"Teenage girls are the most favorite victims. It is worthwhile that the other age segments are spared. Girls and maidens are the most sought after victims, they call them the noodles. So if they stay around they are captured" (Interview 3);*

*"These girls are not selected, there is no choice of macondes or otherwise. Every girl found is macond, is instant trip, while old girls are called ntama. And, being old, they leave you. But the maiden, being noodle, must be taken on the trip" (Interview 3);*

*"They don't choose, both Muani, Makonde, Swahili kidnap. It's enough to be a pretty, clear girl. The so-called Lulu. Even pregnant they take you to give birth there. Much more the young girls. They take them without discrimination." (Interview 8).*

*"In general, as long as they are maidens with titties, women like me up to 30 years old will kidnap. All they have to do is like it, except for pregnant women or old women." (Interview 15);*

*"They don't choose. They take all kinds of women, especially young girls, to be their wives. They call them noodles" (Interview 18).*

The women least vulnerable to abduction are those who are older, disabled or injured, therefore sexually less attractive or a burden in terms of assistance:

*"We were a lot of kidnapped women (...) On the way, they were releasing the old women, telling them 'come back while it's still early" (Interview 2).*

*"In my case, they claimed that I don't hear*



*well. I couldn't even understand what they were telling me. It was my fellow kidnapers who informed them that I was deaf. They soon released me" (Interview 2).*

*"They searched me and saw that they shot me in the arm and chest. 'Because she's been shot, leave her. She's sick. Otherwise, she'll give us a hard time on the way, so leave her. She'll die in the bush, you can leave her'. One of them ordered. From there they abandoned me. (Interview 6).*

Women abducted in the municipality of Mocímboa da Praia were taken to temporary camps, located about 30 or 40 km south of the municipality, usually in abandoned villages, transported by the dozens in pickup trucks. Similarly, after the attack on Palma, in March 2021, young women were transported by van during the night and through the bush to the town of Mocímboa da Praia, where they stayed for several weeks. In Quissanga District, the kidnapped women were transported north, on foot. The process of displacement on foot obeys strict safety rules:

*"They [machababos] stay far and wide away from the people. Even we captured follow in single file, subdivided into small intervals, which is interspersed with their vigilantes in the middle of the line. We also walk in age categories or classes. The old people follow at the back of the line with their respective vigilante. In the middle there is also a vigilante with his group, just like at the beginning of the queue. Each captured person carrying the luggage is watched more closely, both at the back and at the front" (Interview 2);*

*"We didn't get to their base. They put you in a tree and tie up cloth and say 'stay here'.*

*They go to their camp and come back. And when they want to get you there, they tie you in the face and take you there. And to get out they do the same thing. So it makes it hard to know your way around the base." (Interview 20).*

Mulheres raptadas em Mocímboa da Praia foram hospedadas em aldeias abandonadas, cerca de 30 km mais a Sul, em casas pertencentes a famílias deslocadas, geralmente em grupos de 40 a 60 por casa (de duas ou três assoalhadas), utilizando as camas, esteiras e equipamento mobiliário existente e acedendo a várias refeições por dia (confeccionadas pelas próprias). As mulheres permaneceram nestes locais cerca de duas semanas, antes de seguirem para os locais definitivos. Este período transitório tem várias funções.

Women abducted in Mocímboa da Praia were hosted in abandoned villages about 30 km further south in houses belonging to displaced families, usually in groups of 40 to 60 per house (two or three-room houses), using the existing beds, mats and furniture and accessing several meals a day (cooked by the women themselves). The women stayed at these sites for about two weeks before moving on to the permanent sites. This transitional period has several functions.

First, it has a religious-political indoctrination objective, reducing the anxiety and fear of the women, gaining their confidence, and promoting group integration. During this period, political-religious debate sessions were held, where young people with a deeper knowledge of the Koran and the ability to articulate ideas explore the theme of exclusion and social injustice in a clear attempt to capitalize politically on negative personal experiences and individual resentments. Messages of justice, equality, and social order are promoted from the Quran, in a tone that is relatively appealing to some women:

*"The day we arrived they did a reading from the Koran, they brought up the whole issue of injustice in the country, of social abuse, of corruption. They asked if they knew the situation and if they had experienced police violence, if they had to go through a situation of corruption. Some felt encouraged and would talk and say that they had been through situations similar to this. And they would end that, with their new government, they were going to end injustice. That all people were going to be respected. There would be no more stealing, no more corruption in the government. One of the things that they said the most was that democracy was demonic, because in Mozambique it allowed the politicians to steal and the people to continue to starve and die without any kind of care. And they indoctrinated those women so that they would end up accepting their proposal. In seven days they made this meeting twice. (...) Men who, as it turned out, knew the Koran very well. They were two different men, both Tanzanians." (Interview 21);*

*"Most of them kept quiet, listening. But this happened twice a week (...) Some 3 or 4 [intervened], not as many as 5. But, as they listened, they identified ..." (Interview 21).*

Despite all the aggressiveness unleashed by the insurgent group in its attacks, during indoctrination a discourse is constructed according to which the Mozambican State is the great aggressor, with the radical group presenting itself as protection against social injustices. The messianic promise of a social order, combined with the distribution of concrete benefits - food, clothing, and protection - are particularly seductive for vulnerable populations, especially in a scenario of violence, great social precariousness, and food insecurity, such as that experienced in the region:

*"One told us that it was no use crying. Because there they had food and security and she had been hiding in the bush for so long that she was better off there than in the bush" (Interview 21);*

*The kids who were captured with us were still treated differently. They were given orange. The insurgents were kind to them. The boys who had mothers in the house where we were, they came in saying that they had won T-shirts from the insurgents. They had stolen it from somewhere and were giving it to them. They were starting to think that it was good to stay in that camp, they felt comfortable with the insurgents. With the girls and the women it was like that, as well as with the boys. They arrived happy, showing their mothers what they had earned." (Interview 21).*

The reality is that the testimonies of women who have been kidnapped for a longer time reflect a situation of resignation to the situation of captivity, seeking to take advantage of the new situation:

*"she started telling and venting and she said like this: 'After a while, all the women begin to think that this is real. And they all want to go home.' The way they see to go back home is to help the group. One lady said: 'After a week you get used to it. You cry, you don't eat for a while. But then you find out that there is no way out.' They begin to come to terms with reality and begin to change sides. And some very young wives of these people, they start to think that this is true. So they insert themselves again. That's what they understood what was happening. (Interview 21)*

Secondly, the reason for these meetings is to prepare women for what is their role in the destination group, in light of the understanding made from Islam. This is the role of wives and mothers who are responsible for inculcating what is called the correct principles of Islam:

*-"[They made] a preparation of the young girl to become a true Islamic, to become a good Islamic mother. Because they believed that women are the ones who educate the family to follow Islam in the right way"* (Interview 21).

At the end of this transitional period, the women are divided into three groups, depending on their destination:

*"For the girls and women they had three options: to be chosen by one of the soldiers to be a future wife; or to be chosen by some of the men, not for marriage, but to follow the more radical norms of Islam. It was a word that I forgot. Which is a preparation of the young woman to become a true Islamic, to become a good Islamic mother. Because they believed that the woman is the one who educates the family to follow Islam in the right way. The third option was for those who were Christians and who didn't want to convert, who would be chosen by the soldiers to be slaves."* (Interview 21).

The sheer number of young women abducted and the special treatment given to the youngest and most attractive ones, does not fail to raise suspicions of trafficking in women:

*"there was a group of girls who were not going to this camp. A group of girls said 'we are going to a place where we are going to learn English' (...) a very beautiful young*

*girl, about 12, 13 years old [said] that she and her friends were going to Tanzania to learn English (...) That's when we thought that this group of girls were victims of trafficking in women. Because it was a group of very young and very beautiful girls and they were not going to the camp that they called home."* (Interview 21).

The reality is that the high number of kidnapped women, verifiable from the reports of those who escaped captivity, but also from the number of families with young girls kidnapped, would raise a serious logistical and military problem, giving support to the hypothesis of kidnapping human beings, possibly to finance the armed struggle.

Trafficking of women and children for sexual exploitation on the African continent, including in southern and eastern Africa, has been a well-documented phenomenon in recent decades. A report by the International Organization for Migration (Laczo and Gozdzia, 2005) reveals that the map of trafficking on the continent is quite complex, involving several origins and destinations within and outside the region. There is evidence of women and girls being trafficked from Mozambique to South Africa (in the provinces of Gauteng and Kwa-Zulu Natal). From Malawi, women and girls are trafficked to Northern Europe and South Africa. In East Africa, Tanzania and Kenya are also on trafficking routes for women. In Kenya, there are references to trafficking of girls to Europe organized by international syndicates. Kenya also serves as a trafficking route for Ethiopian women to Europe and the Gulf States (Butegwa, 1997). In both countries, some orphan girls under foster care are allegedly sold to traffickers under the guise of protection and education, scholarship or marriage. In Uganda there are references to recruitment of teenage girls for work as prostitutes in the Gulf States. In Northern Uganda there are reports of abductions for sexual satisfaction by

rebel commanders or simply for sale as slaves to wealthy men in Sudan and the Gulf States. Similarly there are reports of Ethiopian women being recruited to work as domestic servants in Lebanon and the Gulf States, eventually being sexually abused. On the other hand, human trafficking has been a common practice in Islamic terrorist organizations in the Middle East and North Africa (Besenyő, 2017), enabling the recruitment and retention of foreign mercenaries and the financing of violent actions, constituting a mechanism to reward the most successful fighters. There is a great need for further study of this phenomenon, with a view to understanding its role, not only in securing a new generation of fighters, control over the population, reducing enemy morale and resistance, but also in financing the armed group itself. The financing of the group is also achieved through the collection of ransoms, especially when they are foreign citizens, involving variable amounts, but which can reach one million meticaís. The negotiation is carried out via satellite telephone.

The process of coercive adherence of women coexists with other situations of more voluntary involvement with the rebel groups, although subject to forms of intimidation. Eyewitnesses report that many local women colluded with the actions of male family members, from whom they even received support. Reports from residents of Mocímboa da Praia tell of different ways in which young women were involved with the rebel movement, whether in logistical and camouflage support, hiding military equipment or young rebels, or as spies and observers of the movements of the Mozambican army. There is no shortage of stories of young locals, aka *"sharpshooters,"* who became involved with the military in order

to gather intelligence. As attacks intensified in the district of Mocímboa da Praia and as the threat of an offensive on the municipality increased, women were encouraged to join the machababos group in exchange for protection, becoming involved as wives (aka delivering the arrussi), participating in the recruitment of other women, or supporting the hiding of rebels and weapons. Particularly after the March 23, 2020 attack on Mocímboa da Praia, there were several reports of family members visiting the insurgents' bases to check on their living conditions. Other testimonies tell of local women cooking for the *machababos*, either voluntarily or by choice, during the March 2021 attack on Palma. On the other hand, although the majority of the armed rebels are men, there were reports of some women actively participating in the military attacks. Both in Quissanga and in Mocímboa da Praia, armed women were observed, some of them registered, sometimes assuming leadership roles, with power of decision over the future of the prisoners:

*"In total it was 16 men and one woman from Quissanga. She is a thief, a native of Quissanga, and she is with the bandits. They were wearing military clothing like this one"* (entrevista 20);

*"One of the chiefs and a woman stayed there as guards. They went to the market, started to collect everything that was motorcycles and other goods (...) they were with women in uniforms."* (Interview 22).

Although young women, especially attractive ones, are the kidnapers' preferred target, the reality is that dozens of (pre)teenage boys are

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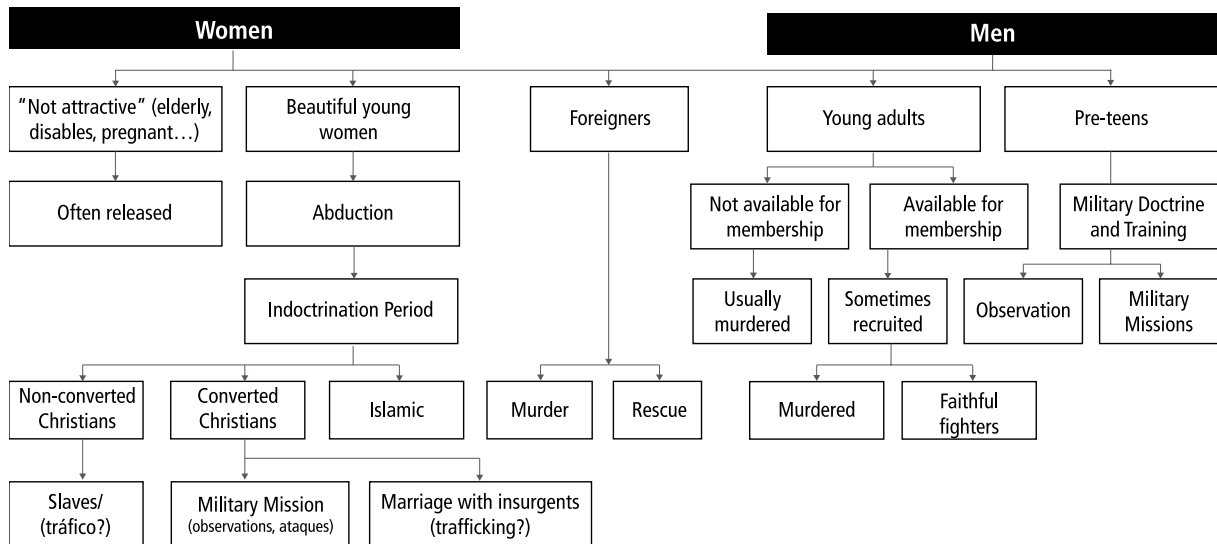
11 Nas décadas passadas a palavra arrussi era localmente utilizada para designar casamento com virgindade, sendo que, nos dias actuais, é utilizado para definir apenas casamento.

also among the kidnapped, later subjected to indoctrination and military training sessions:

*“We saw a little more advanced training with teenagers between the ages of 12 and 14. (...) They were training a kind of fighting with boys. They were training the use of a machete. The first ones that were captured, in 2017, are already being prepared to be used as a group of boy soldiers” (Interview 21);*

With regard to more adult youths, although most are murdered, there have been instances of voluntary joining after capture, as a condition for survival. The survival of all these young individuals is conditioned, above all, on loyalty to the rebel group. As one interviewee put it, “[Since] they are Islamists, they don’t have a guarantee on life. What guarantees people’s lives there is to believe what they want you to believe.” Table 1 summarizes the fate accorded to the population on the ground:

**Table 1: Abduction and fate of men and women in the Northeast of Cabo Delgado**



### Reports of women fleeing

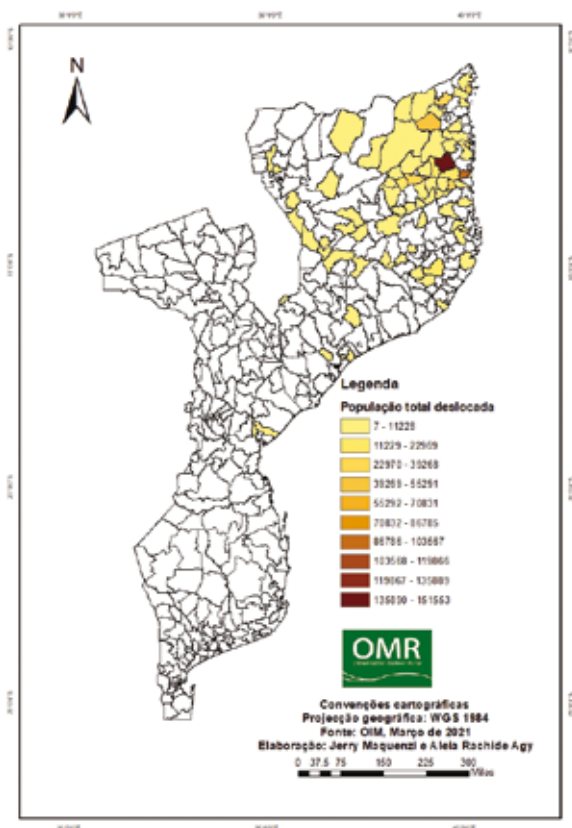
In the process of fleeing the regions under attack, it is possible to distinguish different groups of individuals: on the one hand, those who, with more money and family contacts at their destination, were able to evacuate (part of) their families and goods beforehand, in a scenario of increasingly expensive transportation costs. At the other extreme, there are those with less financial capacity, physically weakened or without family contacts in other safer places, who had no alternative

but to stay in their places, hiding in the bush and eventually leaving, either by land or by sea.

While the former tended to choose as destination the municipal areas of Mueda, Montepuez, Pemba or, further south, in the province of Nampula, where they have residence, the ability to rent premises or a family network that absorbed them, in the second case the populations, by land, often on foot, are concentrated in displacement camps on the perimeter of the conflict (see map 1).



**Map 1: Concentration of IDPs, by administrative post (April/2021)**



Source: IOM

The accounts of escaping from attacks are frequent odysseys, marked by long journeys through the bush, deprived of water and food, with permanent fear of encounters, of their identities and intentions, as well as sea crossings in overcrowded, unsafe boats. The women interviewed reported situations of hunger, thirst, and diarrhea, including deaths during the journey:

*“To leave Mocimboa, we walked a long way through the bush, with so much suffering. We stayed four days on the road, without having eaten. Our luck was that we took five liters and another one and a half liters of water and flour, in which we made some porridge for the children”* (Interview 14);

*“We were 27 people. But the day we left, there were many speedboats, more than 29 speedboats. They were crossing the sea, as if it were road traffic through the road”* (Interview 10);

*“On the way we slept three days. We left for Pangani and slept when we got to Matemwe, a child lost his life on the boat, we asked for help and they gave us support for the funeral and we left, we slept on the boat until we got to Mefunvu and slept. And from there we went straight to Pemba. So we stayed at sea for three days”* (Interview 12).

Faced with a lack of financial resources to transport all members of the extended family, households often had to make difficult choices, selecting which members to evacuate, leading to situations of household separation:

*“My daughter’s decision was that we go to Pemba, where my relatives were. So my son-in-law was to give me travel money. My daughter decided to stay with her husband wherever he was going. So they helped me to get out of the trouble zone, because I was suffering and I couldn’t sleep.”* (Interview 11);

*“I had two children, and another I left with his grandmother. I left the little one, who is the third, because the trip and the constant escape... the bush. Besides that the journey to Mueda and Montepuez, with several stops, without a route, would be tiring. Then his father suggested I leave it with his grandmother, even though I had no such intention, because I already had two children with me”* (Interview 13).



## Denial of access to justice

In a violent and chaotic scenario, marked by violations of fundamental rights, populations face the problem of difficulty in accessing justice, essentially for two reasons:

Firstly, by absence, since as representatives of the state, local authorities are the main targets of *machababos*, and fearing for their safety, they are usually the first to flee the region. Even public offices have been destroyed, so the places where complaints are filed are inoperable. There are reports of civil servants taking refuge in the provincial capital, leaving many areas unmanaged, of local chiefs hiding in the bush, and even of military and police officers abandoning their uniforms during attacks, mixing and fleeing with the civilian population. The absence of authorities leaves the population without access to justice, reflecting a situation of total absence of the State. The disabling of telecommunication networks increases the isolation of the populations, making it difficult for them to make complaints, making them particularly vulnerable to the power of violent groups:

*“We don’t know where to complain because there is nowhere to go, no satisfactory answer, nor is there the place for submission to do so. Each one is moaning and groaning and running away”* (Interview 1);

*“No matter how much your daughter is raped, you have no one to complain to. Nothing becomes serious. There is no one you can find. Even if you do find this person you can complain to, he lives in the bush, transfigured”* (Interview 1);

*“Who could I complain to? If the chief moved away from here, it’s a long time ago. He is here in Pemba (...) The chiefs know*

*that they are the most wanted. If they stay and are found, they will be butchered. No one is there, they leave the little ones.”* (Interview 3);

*“They stayed five days and nights just firing their guns, with no response from the FDS. These had run away, and there in the bush they took off their uniforms and shot and ran away. Those who didn’t run away and stayed in the houses were the ones who were captured.”* (Interview 9);

*“We don’t complain to anyone, we can’t even talk, the phones until today are not functioning. When they enter an area, the phones are all cut off, you can’t even tell your family member who is far away.”* (Interview 11).

Second, the problem of access to justice becomes even more serious in situations where it is state agents who are responsible for the violation, precisely those who should be looking out for their protection, leaving the population doubly unjust. Throughout the period under review, there was no lack of reports of extortion and abuses against the population carried out by the SDS themselves: requests for travel permits from displaced people without documents, undue collection of amounts, blackmail and threats from local businessmen, beatings of young suspects or unmasked individuals, consumption of alcoholic beverages without payment, theft of goods left behind by the displaced population, and the rape of young local women. The lack of cooperation from the local population and the suspicion of their involvement with rebel groups<sup>10</sup> increases the pressure on the locals. Reports of malfeasance are particularly evident from the population living closest to the barracks, often complaining about the opportunism of the defense and security forces:

*“On the other hand, with the withdrawal of the Alshabaab invaders, the SDS military was raping 15-year-old children. These victims did not go anywhere to complain because the military themselves were the heads of the District Headquarters, since the District Administrator had fled since the first invasion. So there was no one to submit a complaint to.”* (Interview 4);

*“Even here where we are the situation is the same, if you don’t wear a mask they torture you heavily, right here on the beach. So we are still afraid. If we want them to, they come into the villages and we are not okay. But when our soldiers come in, we are not okay either. In the bush, we cry,*

*but when the others come, they don’t do us any good either. So we all mix them into the group of the bad ones”* (Interview 1).

The absence of security and the dismantling of the civil administration created a vacuum in the administration. In the most affected districts, the government became the responsibility of a military command, which took over the administration of the district. A militarized state is consolidated in these areas, but it is very fragile in terms of access to logistics and operating conditions, such as weapons, food, access to information, or the possibility of paying motivating salaries. The absence of discipline within the corporation and the great fragility of the justice mechanisms lead to a scenario of generalized opportunism.

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**10** The involvement of a large part of the civilian population with the rebel groups is particularly evident from the interviewees’ information. Some accounts are illustrative of this: “Yes [the people] knew [previously of the attack]. If they lived together! Those from Quissanga, when they came to Quirimba, they talked, until they came here. What do you think? Until they destroyed it, they spoke again and again. They forgot that they sometimes come to play soccer, for entertainment. But they forget that it is a city for them. (Interview 20);

“Some of those who were part of the group were already there in Mocimboa. A lot of people from outside arrived. But there were already some there. (...) They already had a group organized locally. They already knew where the authorities that were still there were and how the military were organized. Because when the military had a routine, they knew the routine of the military. They were watching” (Interview 21);

“They took everything in his tent, and started distributing it to the population. They didn’t burn it, but just opened it and let people take everything. (...) they had stopped at an almond tree with a list and called the names of the bosses, Anza, we are already here. Andorabe we are already here. Cachimo, Ramadan we are here. We have already arrived in Quirimba. They came with a list. Chenco we have already arrived. They are children from there and we all know them since we were children. (...) Because they called, had connections with them or something else, we don’t know if they had lent the money or not, or came with a list to rob people or not. (Interview 20).

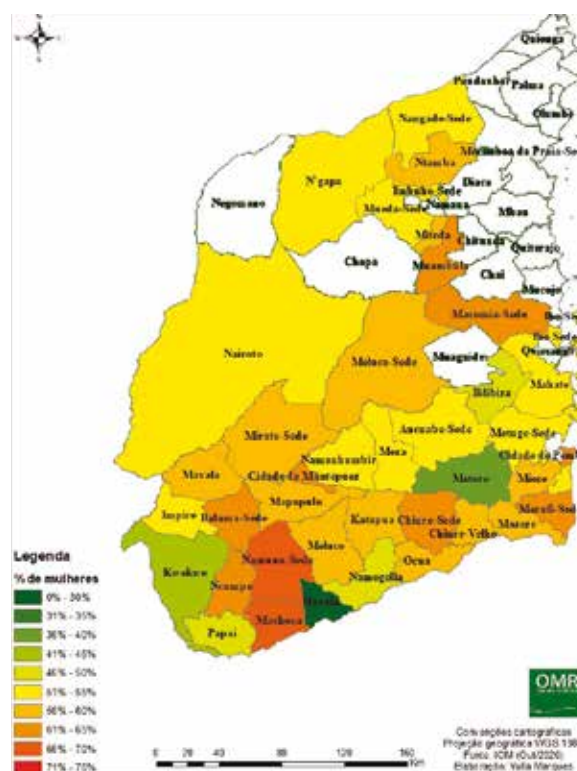
## THE REINTEGRATION PROCESS AT THE DESTINATION SITES

After the process of traumatic flight, mourning, anguish resulting from not knowing the whereabouts of loved ones, loss of possessions, and uncertainty about the future, there follows a period of extreme hardship and dependence on others for survival. Sheltered in camps for displaced people or with relatives, the families interviewed face the problem of lack of clothing, food, and medical assistance.

The sudden arrival of thousands of families fleeing an armed conflict has an impact on host sites. First, by the great additional pressure on natural resources in the areas where displaced people are concentrated, namely land, water, stakes for building homes, and firewood, forcing populations to travel longer distances. In Metuge district, the works of the Water Supply Investment and Property Fund (FIPAG) to extend the water access network have alleviated the problem. Population pressure has led to the creation of latrines near local residences, causing unease and tension, and there have been episodes of destruction of latrines by local populations. The reality is that, in this emergency situation, the “owners of the land” were not consulted, feeling threatened of loss of land and resources. Secondly, the construction of temporary resettlement centers in villages and administrative post headquarters has increased population densification. The food support (flour, rice and beans) to the newly arrived populations generates situations of envy among the “owners of the land”, who are not unaffected by the population densification. The presence of a large concentration of displaced people with access to food creates business opportunities for the indigenous populations.

The fact that the former do not have access to firewood or vegetables triggers, in the latter, business opportunities, witnessing unequal exchange practices, where a bucket of flour or rice is exchanged for an equal bucket of bean leaf or pumpkin. Local people set up their stalls near resettlement sites in order to exploit business opportunities with populations receiving food support. Reports from volunteers from charitable organizations reveal the emergence of prostitution phenomena, in order to support the family. Thirdly, situations of mistrust on the part of local populations towards the displaced population are evident. In several districts, particularly in Namuno, Montepuez, Mecúfi, Chiúre, Pemba and Macomia, women represent more than 65% of the displaced individuals (see map 2), which fuels situations of mistrust, on the part of the local populations, about the

**Map 2: Percentage of women among displaced individuals, by administrative post (October/2020)**



Fonte: IOM

whereabouts of their husbands and feelings of Islamophobia.

Despite all the support in terms of food, whether from the World Food Program (WFP), Caritas, Islamic organizations and local businessmen, including the National Institute for Disaster Management (INGD), the reality is that successive appeals and fundraising campaigns only show that it is not enough. On the ground there are families facing great difficulties in surviving:

*“The clothes we haven’t received yet. The other day they gave us a bag of rice, I think it was you who brought it to us, and we divided the bag into several parts (...) We haven’t had any kind of support yet, except for rice only (...) We have been [for] about a month and a half here”* (Interview 8);

*“Sometimes we get tea in the morning and, throughout the day, just one meal a day. Until the following days for the same hours (...) We never had any help, no registration to have food, clothes or money. We only had food once when we took humanitarian aid with us. About registration, we did it on the beach, on arrival, and here it was more than three times, and they gave us masks. But no one has ever come to give us food or clothes. But since we fled we don’t know how the government is treating us.”* (Interview 11);

*“In fact, we still can’t get used to it, and we always think it’s better at home. Because when I walk around here I don’t see anyone with fifty meticais or anything. That’s why they say that it’s hard in other people’s land. It’s better to stay until you get used to it.”* (Interview 9).

The food distribution process is carried out through lists of people in need that are drawn up by local leaders, with many fictitious names and attempts to divert the food, creating conflicts between the population, the local structures and the organizations that promote food assistance. The aid process is often criticized as favoring local leaders to the detriment of the population. Strongly disturbed by the whole situation, victimization discourses based on ethnic particularities, particularly among the coastal Muani population, are not lacking:

*“[food distribution] It’s based on friendliness. Because if they followed the list they would give it to us. But we get nothing. They come to sign us up, but the products go to give to their friends. They always sign us up without fail, but they don’t give us bowls, rice and other things that have been donated.”* (Interview 1);

*“About the support itself we have not been donated yet, but they have already come to sign us up. But they took what was meant for us to give to their sisters for them to eat with their family members. They come to sign you up, but they take your password to allocate to their sisters to feed them and receive to eat with their relatives. We haven’t received any support yet. We still haven’t been given clothes or corn, much less cornmeal.”* (Interview 3);

*“We still haven’t had any support, they just sign us up. But, until today, neither clothes, nor food, nor the vouchers to buy food have we had (...) Although the Macuas and Macondes have escaped little from the war, but they are the first to receive aid. This activity is to be ignored and it hurts us (...). The lists are fake, they sign us up all the time, but on the day of the reception your name doesn’t*

*appear no matter how much you go to form a queue. They just watch the others pick up their vouchers (Interview 16).*

In the city of Pemba, a great effort has been made by families hosting the displaced population. Local families, already decapitalized by the interruption of trade routes and the effects of the measures related to the corona virus, are now overwhelmed by the arrival of dozens of displaced people, accumulating people in small spaces, spread over balconies and backyards. The situation leads to rising unemployment:

*“Our son welcomed us well, for he has nowhere to throw us out. He is the one we live with, when he gets something big we eat and when he doesn’t we stay. We have no other options, because he is the one we know.” (Interview 1);*

*“Here we live our daily lives, I have found my daughter. She gives us a little of what she has and we eat.” (Interview 14);*

*“The only thing we have felt sorry for is the owner of the house because he is unemployed. But we are surviving that way. He is not strange to us. He welcomed us” (Interview 16).*

Limited in access to the sea for security reasons, or in doing business because of the declaration of a state of emergency, the interviewees face numerous difficulties in making a small income, based on scratching a living, and there is a greater informalization of the urban economy:

*“Actually food always comes with some difficulty, sometimes the men of the house go to the stowage, carry bags and then they get paid. Sometimes the owners of the house have something and also offer it to us (...) this is how we are surviving” (Interview 8);*

*“We go fishing on the sly and catch small fish and feed ourselves. The support they bring little by little is what makes us survive (...) WFP brings us food like rice, corn, peas, and oil.” (Interview 17).*

## FINAL THOUGHTS

Data collection took place in a specific geographic space and time period that influenced the findings and conclusions. The data collection took place during a period of great violence and combative intensity, with several attacks per week, including the occupation of district headquarters, followed by retaliatory actions by the SDS. On the other hand, all interviewees are from the northern coast of Cabo Delgado (Mocímboa da Praia, Macomia and Quissanga districts), with a majority of their mother tongue being Muani. This is a socio-geographical territory strongly confused with the social base of penetration of the insurgent group, and therefore particularly subject to major distrusts by the defense and security forces and high rates of violence.

Reports coming from the highlands tell a different story. While eyewitnesses from Muidumbe report heavy violence in the attacks on this district<sup>11</sup> (locally understood, in some reports, as an ethno-religious reprisal against the Makonde population), the reality is that, in the highlands, reports of mistreatment by the military against the population were much less frequent, either in journalistic reports or in reports by non-governmental organizations. The greater capacity for self-organization and internal vigilance within the Makonde micro-societies, and their greater defensive capacity in the face of external threats (from insurgents or the military themselves), make these territories more prepared for external threats.

Violence against women is a common practice in various armed conflicts, and the north of Cabo Delgado is no exception. Reports show that women have been victims of abductions and rapes, as well as subjected to assaults. Women have been denied access to economic activities, robbed, and their property destroyed. The limitation of access to health care through the destruction of sanitation facilities and the abandonment of medical personnel has further aggravated the assistance of displaced populations with injuries, but also the provision of maternal and child care, treatment of cholera, diarrhea, and malaria, with often fatal consequences.

The wealthier families with greater economic means or family networks were able to anticipate the departure and move people and goods safely. Unable to afford the displacements, the most disadvantaged tended to stay longer in places, abandoning the land in a dramatic way, separating themselves from family members, and losing all their assets.

Because they were suspected of collaborating with rebel groups and were therefore the target of more violent raids (with reports of robberies, assaults, and rapes), women from coastal ethno-linguistic groups were even more vulnerable. However, the African aphorism that *"in an elephant fight, it is the grass that suffers"*, often used in sub-Saharan Africa to characterize the suffering of the population during armed conflict, does not capture the range of options for social actors in a conflict scenario. Even under coercion and intimidation, the reality is that women do not fail to analyze the advantages (in material and security terms) that they can gain from collaborating with the different forc-

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<sup>11</sup> The Xitaxi massacre, where 52 bodies of murdered young men were found, was the most high-profile example.



es in confrontation, depending on each context, sometimes assuming themselves as active agents in the conflict, as observers, recruiters, or even collaborators in armed actions.

The population displacement and containment of tens of thousands of families in buffer zones has become politically favorable for the Government of Mozambique. On the one hand, because it reduces the population residing in the conflict zones and the recruitment capacity of the rebel groups, for military purposes, for the provision of information, food supply, transport or sexual services. On the other hand, because it creates mechanisms to attract international assistance, politically capitalizable by the government. In a situation of drastically reduced agricultural production and insecure transportation, food supply is a problem that cuts across several social sectors, affecting the population, the machababos (with reports of desertions), but also the military. Among the populations of northeastern Cabo Delgado there is a widespread feeling of lack of protection from the State. On the one hand, it is interpreted as quite fragile, incapable of providing security, justice, and humanitarian support to the populations, this task being largely the responsibility of external organizations, local businessmen, and families, with no lack of allegations of injustice and opportunism in the distribution process. The State is associated as being at the service of the most powerful groups (protecting the large multinationals, largely spared in the conflict), but also an aggressor of the populations, including journalists. All these excesses reinforce the distrust of the population in relation to the security forces, the central power, and agents of the State, increasing resentment and increasing the recruitment base of discontented youth.

In this scenario, the phenomena of poverty, socioeconomic inequality and social injustice gen-

erate a vicious cycle of violence, feeding rebel groups whose actions generate more violence and social injustice. Reversing this cycle will be the biggest challenge for the government, humanitarian organizations, and civil society. To this end, we must invest massively in training, in the economic inclusion of the population (including in the value chain of the humanitarian industry), and also in strengthening access to justice. Recovering the support of the population is urgent, as was evident in the speech by the Deputy Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces (Lusa, 16.02.2021). It is in this sense that the following suggestions are made:

- **Strengthening and broadening access to justice**, investing in criminal investigation, particularly of abuses against the population (including by the agents of the DSF themselves), and the presentation of assertive political messages in this regard is fundamental. Affirming and demonstrating the moral superiority of state agents in the defense of human rights will be a decisive advantage in winning the trust of the population;
- **Expansion of the possibilities for social participation**, including the strengthening and empowerment of women's organizations, not only for the purpose of generating income, but also to build pressure groups, opening up channels for negotiation and demands;
- **Decentralization and local democratization**, including the possibility of electing local leaders;
- **Socio-economic inclusion of displaced populations**: The displacement of more than half a million individuals takes military pressure off civilians in conflict zones, but raises new difficulties related to professional

reintegration, so there is an urgent need to rebuild a whole range of socio-economic services. The worsening of poverty and the increase in feelings of exclusion may imply the spreading of discontent and conflict to other areas of the province.

- **Socio-professional integration of women**, for their role as mothers and educators (and thus in preventing radicalization) and as food producers. Economic assistance to women will have a positive impact on all family members, so this social group deserves to be prioritized. By promoting the socio-economic emancipation of women and thus family planning, support for young women will have an impact on reducing the birth rate and thus poverty.
- **Promotion of amnesties, accompanied by the creation of reception centers for deserters**: the number of young people kidnapped by insurgent groups and all the indoctrination and exposure to violence to

which they have been subjected will pose a challenge in the future in terms of de-radicalization. The violence perpetrated and the suffering generated will make it difficult for the rebels to be accepted by their communities of origin, so it will be necessary to create transitional spaces, technical-vocational training, and youth activities (including sports, Internet access) that involve the development of citizenship skills. The reintegration process should involve local leaders and religious organizations.

- **Reinforcement of partnerships and regional cooperation**, foreseeing border control for trafficking control, sharing of intelligence and criminal information;
- **Training the armed forces in human rights issues** and strengthening internal organization and discipline, including the issuing of public and assertive messages by the leadership condemning violence.

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## FES Peace and Security Series No. 44

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### About this publication

The intensification of an unconventional war in Cabo Delgado Province in northern Mozambique has translated into widespread violence against civilians. Being physically weaker, a target for sexual predation by armed youth, and traditionally a food producer, women are a recurrent target during armed conflict and remain in a particularly vulnerable position. Following the ongoing conflict in northern Cabo Delgado, women remain vulnerable to food insecurity, being victims of aggression and kidnapping by insurgent groups, destruction of property, physical attacks and killings, rape, abductions, and lack of access to justice. However, viewing women only as passive victims of the conflict does not capture

the complexity of the situation, argues João Feijó in his contribution to the security series. Voluntarily or forcibly, by conviction or without alternative, by revolt or opportunism, seeking protection and economic advantages, groups of women play an active role in the military conflict, participating as observers and providers of information, in providing logistical support and camouflage, as recruiters, vigilantes, and even as guerrillas. The author demonstrates how feelings of social injustice are being exploited by insurgent groups as a recruitment and membership strategy. Reversing this vicious cycle will be the biggest challenge for the government, humanitarian organizations, and civil society.

