

# MOZAMBIQUE

## Impact of the five-year conflict in Cabo Delgado

### CRISIS OVERVIEW

In October 2017, violence erupted in Cabo Delgado, northern Mozambique, when armed men occupied the city of Mocimboa da Praia for two days and attacked three police stations, killing 17 people. Afterwards, armed men from the Islamist armed group Ahlu Sunna Wal Jama (ASWJ) conducted new attacks. The ASWJ is usually known locally as Al-Shabaab or mashababos, not to be confused with the Somali group Al-Shabaab (Morier-Genoud 10/03/202; Lister 15/10/2022; ADF 20/11/2022). The crisis in northern Mozambique is mostly concentrated in Cabo Delgado province, but it has also spread to neighbouring provinces, such as Nampula and Niassa (ICG 10/02/2022; Cabo Ligado 30/11/2021; USIP 28/07/2021).

The Cabo Delgado conflict has its roots in the pre-existing socioeconomic marginalisation of northern Mozambique, political and religious ideology, and inequalities worsened by the discovery of minerals and natural gas deposits in the region, which has threatened the livelihood of the local population. Besides the ideology of the ASWJ/Al-Shabaab, poverty and marginalisation are also facilitating the armed group's recruitment in the region. The Government's response to Al-Shabaab has prompted the group to strategise and form small units able to confront government forces (Al Jazeera 24/02/2020; ACCORD 29/04/2021; ISS 08/09/2022).

The Government of Mozambique has been collaborating with regional and international allies to address the crisis, including the Southern African Development Community's Mission in Mozambique. This peacekeeping mission deployed more than 3,000 troops in July 2021 to counter Al-Shabaab. The troops are still operational in conflict-affected areas (Reuters 09/07/2021; VOA 22/02/2022).

As at April 2023, the conflict had displaced over one million people (both returnees and IDPs). Many of these people live in overcrowded camps across the affected provinces, with little access to food, safe drinking water, healthcare, or education. 65% of the IDPs live in host communities and 35% in 99 displacement sites (IOM 23/05/2023). There have been reports of protection concerns, including violence and abuse against women and children from government forces and Al-Shabaab (UNHCR accessed 30/04/2023; HRW 24/11/2022; MSF 04/03/2021).

The humanitarian access situation for aid and assistance delivery in northern Mozambique is challenging. Insecurity, Al-Shabaab deliberately targeting humanitarians and humanitarian facilities, limited financial resources, and bureaucratic obstacles limit humanitarian organisations' ability to reach people in need (OCHA 26/04/2021; UNICEF 05/12/2022; CSIS 08/09/2022; ACAPS 05/07/2023)

### Number of IDPs in conflict-affected provinces of Mozambique



Source: ACAPS using data from IOM (23/05/2023)



## Information gaps

The complexity and dynamism of the crisis limit access to information about the conflict's impact on the country's population. There is limited up-to-date data on how many people the Cabo Delgado conflict has killed or displaced in Mozambique. Reports on numbers from various sources fluctuate, and the Government of Mozambique has previously downplayed the severity of the crisis (DW 21/06/2018). The remoteness of some locations and the heavily politicised environment, with limited press freedom, complicate the reporting of casualties from the conflict-affected provinces (FAO 06/01/2023; IPI 21/08/2022; PGN 22/04/2021).

### About the report

**Aim:** the report aims to analyse the drivers of conflict in northern Mozambique, particularly in Cabo Delgado province, and their humanitarian impact. The report also includes an overview of people's coping mechanisms following the conflict.

**Methodology:** this analysis is based on secondary data from academic, humanitarian, journalistic, and government sources. The report also includes information from interviews with a humanitarian and an independent security consultant with experience in the region.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background information .....	2
Drivers of the conflict .....	3
Overall impact of conflict in Northern Mozambique .....	4
Humanitarian impact .....	5
Humanitarian needs .....	6
Humanitarian access constraints .....	8
Response capacity .....	8

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Armed people acting as an insurgent group attacking police stations in Mocimboa da Praia triggered the conflict in Cabo Delgado. Interrelated economic, social, political, religious, and historical factors drove grievances and tensions that generated the conflict (Morier-Genoud 10/03/2021).

The insurgents' belief that the Government has failed to address the underlying reasons for their attacks has led to the escalation of violence. These armed men have launched attacks on villages, towns, and military outposts, causing widespread displacement and destruction to denounce the State and the ruling of the Mozambique Liberation Front party, FRELIMO (ICG 11/06/2021; CFR 29/08/2022). The conflict that began in Cabo Delgado with the October 2017 attacks is often called an 'insurgency' for this reason.

After conducting more coordinated attacks in Cabo Delgado province, the armed men organised and identified themselves as the ASWJ, a NSAG of Islamist ideology. The group officially pledged allegiance to the Islamic State (IS) in 2019. The group is known locally as Al-Shabaab or mashababos (Morier-Genoud 10/03/2021).

To respond to the attacks, the Government has deployed state forces who conduct military operations to regain control of Al-Shabaab-occupied areas (Cabo Ligado 24/05/2023). To protect civilians and strategic infrastructure, the Government has implemented security measures, such as establishing security checkpoints and increasing surveillance (360 Mozambique 22/02/2023; US Embassy Maputo 02/08/2022). Mozambique has also sought help from regional and international responders to counter Al-Shabaab. In July 2021, the Southern Africa Development Community's Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) and Rwanda deployed their forces against the NSAG (SADC 10/11/2021; Military Africa 07/03/2023).

The military response to Al-Shabaab has led to further human rights abuses, including the detention of journalists and the arbitrary detention of civilians suspected of supporting the NSAG and those protesting human rights violations (HRW accessed 25/06/2023). Security operations have also fractured the NSAG into smaller groups, making it easier for them to attack from different fronts and evade capture (IDA 03/2020).

Al-Shabaab's attacks have increased over the years and expanded beyond their geographic base to the provinces of Niassa and Nampula, with the potential to cross borders (Columbo 09/03/2023; CFR 29/08/2022). The group's early leadership included locals who had studied religious doctrine and received military training in Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Tanzania, giving the group an international dimension (FPRI 13/04/2021).



## DRIVERS OF THE CONFLICT

### Regional disparities

Socioeconomic disparities between Maputo, Mozambique's capital, and the marginalised north are some of the main drivers of conflict in Cabo Delgado, Nampula, and Niassa (ISS 08/09/2022). The capital city's proximity to South Africa, combined with being a port city and the country's political centre, has resulted in the concentration of resources and innovative economic sectors in Maputo. At the same time, the lack of policies allowing the investment of resources and development projects in the north has generated mistrust towards the State among the population. Al-Shabaab has exploited this sense of exclusion and frustration, recruiting disaffected youth and offering them a sense of purpose and belonging. This behaviour has allowed the group to gain capacities and control in some areas of the country (KII 07/03/2023; TE 23/05/2023; IPSS 21/04/2020; M&G 23/01/2022; ISS 08/09/2022).

### Grievances over exploitation of natural resources

Mozambique ranks 185th out of 191 countries in the Human Development Index despite being rich in natural resources like liquid petroleum gas, ruby, graphite, gold, and timber, especially in Cabo Delgado (UNDP accessed 13/06/2023; GOGEL accessed 21/06/2023). Historically, the agricultural, construction, and financial sectors have been the primary drivers of the GDP. Although the informal agricultural sector employs an estimated 70% of the population, its contribution to the GDP is only around 25%, indicating inefficiencies, a lack of economies of scale, and limited value-added processing within a sector that employs the greatest proportion of the population (ITA 29/11/2022).

The 2010 discovery of major gas deposits off Cabo Delgado's coast spurred confidence among the population, with many expecting that the discovery would bring prosperity to the impoverished region (Mongabay 26/04/2021). Despite expectations, there have been few reported positive outcomes from the liquefied natural gas operations in Cabo Delgado (SAIIA 09/07/2021).

Instead, the development of gas extraction operations has led to evictions of people from their land with insufficient compensation. These people are mostly farmers and fishermen, and their new allocation of arable land encroaches on the farmlands of other communities, causing tensions. Some fishermen have been relocated far from the sea, and gas development and drilling affect fishing stocks. Job creation from the emergence of industries has not materialised (SAIIA 09/07/2021).

In the early 2000s, the discovery of significant ruby deposits in Cabo Delgado, some of the largest in the world, drew the attention of prospectors and unregulated miners from various

parts of East Africa. Multinational companies took control of the mines, leading to the forceful expulsion of informal miners and creating more tensions and frustrations within the province (ISS 08/09/2022).

Al-Shabaab has taken advantage of these economic disparities and political instability in Cabo Delgado province by seizing land, garnering attention for their cause "against the central state", and instilling fear among the population through attacks (KII 07/03/2023; M&G 09/02/2023).

### Tensions along ethnic lines

The conflict in Cabo Delgado also has an ethnic dimension, although ethnicity should not be considered a reason for conflict (CMI 05/2020; ISS 08/09/2022).

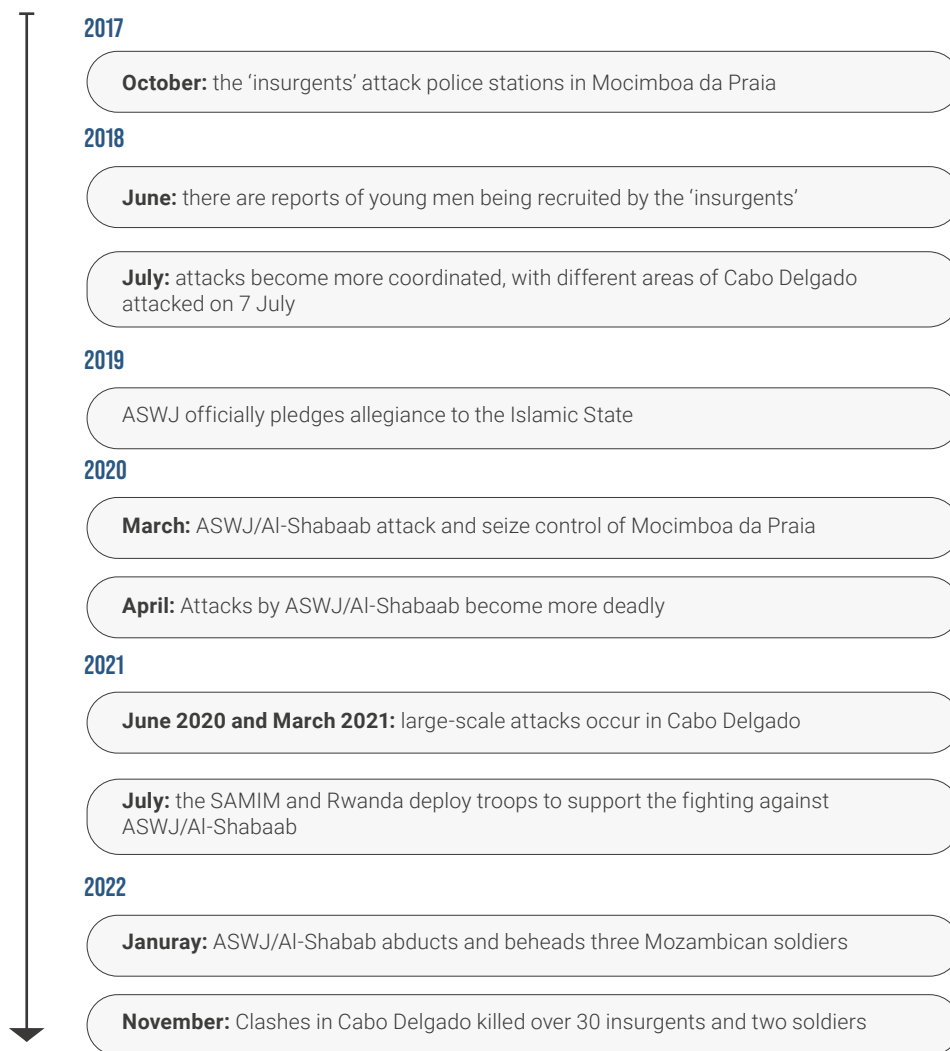
In 2007, the youth in Cabo Delgado's southern districts, belonging to the Makua ethnic group, started to question local Muslim religious leaders for being aligned with the state authorities and conducted some actions to hamper children's enrolment in secular schools. These actions failed. Later, in the mid-2010s, ethnic Mwani in the coastal district of Mocimboa da Praia also started questioning local religious authorities and the State. Mwani youth violently demanded local authorities in Cabo Delgado's districts to prohibit the sale of alcohol and oppose children's education in state schools and women's right to work. They resented the influence of Mozambique Liberation Front generals, who had business interests in the province and belonged to the same Makonde ethnic group as President Filipe Nyusi. President Nyusi had been president since 2015. These youth groups in the province felt economically and politically marginalised, leading some armed young men to carry out their initial attack in Mocimboa da Praia in October 2017 (ICG 11/06/2021).

To address the attacks, the Government enlisted local militia from the Makonde ethnic group, known as *força local*, predominantly composed of Christians. Their main objective was to operate in the interior regions and contain the spread of Al-Shabaab, particularly in the Muslim-dominated coastal areas, fuelling the conflict on ethnic lines (Agenzia Fides 23/06/2022; ISS 18/05/2022).

### Poor governance

The fragility of the State, coupled with poor governance and corruption, has resulted in a lack of trust and confidence in the Government's ability to provide essential services in Cabo Delgado, including healthcare, education, clean water, and security (CFR 23/09/2020; TE 23/05/2023). The limited state presence has alienated the local population, creating a security vacuum in the province and providing a fertile ground for the emergence of ASWJ Al-Shabaab (M&G 09/02/2023; ISS 27/05/2021).

## Timeline of key conflict events in Cabo Delgado



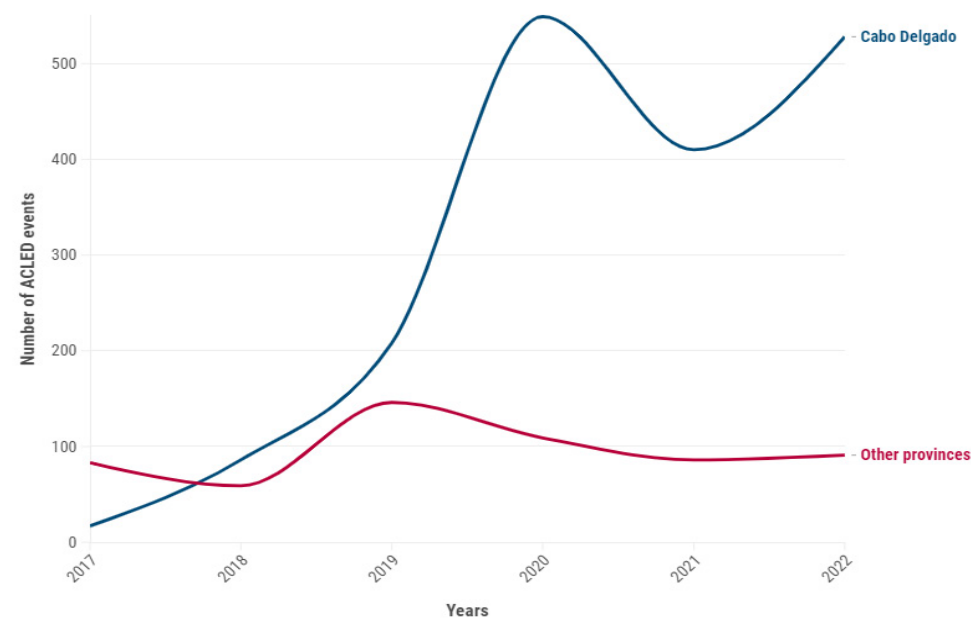
Sources: ACAPS using data from ACLED (21/07/2018 and 30/06/2020); ICG (11/06/2021); The Guardian (07/05/2021); Africanews (09/07/2021); ITIC (20/01/2022); AllAfrica (08/02/2022); Reuters (30/11/2022) Lister(05/2021); The Guardian (07/05/2021); Africanews (09/07/2021); ITIC (20/01/2022); AllAfrica (08/02/2022); Reuters (30/11/2022) The Guardian (07/05/2021); Africanews (09/07/2021); ITIC (20/01/2022); AllAfrica (08/02/2022); Reuters (30/11/2022); Lister(05/2021); The Guardian (07/05/2021); Africanews (09/07/2021); ITIC (20/01/2022); AllAfrica (08/02/2022); Reuters (30/11/2022)

Disclaimer: Timeline is not exhaustive and reflects only selected events that show the evolution of the conflict.

## OVERALL IMPACT OF CONFLICT IN NORTHERN MOZAMBIQUE

Al-Shabaab's tactics include targeting military personnel, local communities, and basic infrastructure (such as schools, health centres, and government buildings). They also target foreign workers and investors, including those in the oil and gas industry. They justify their attacks on religious grounds, arguing that their interpretation of Islam requires establishing an Islamic state and implementing Shari'a law (AI 02/03/2021 a; FPRI 13/04/2021). The NSAG attacks in Cabo Delgado have claimed many lives over time, including civilians (STC 15/03/2021; OCHA 06/12/2022). Since the beginning of the current conflict in 2017, violence, mostly against civilians, has resulted in more than 2,000 recorded fatalities (ACLED 07/06/2023; ACLED accessed 08/03/2023 a; ACLED accessed 08/03/2023 b). As Al-Shabaab upgrades tactics and turns to increasingly sophisticated methods of attacks, such as the use of improvised explosive devices, the conflict risks further deteriorating, possibly leading to an increased number of fatalities (KII 08/03/2023; KII 09/03/2023).

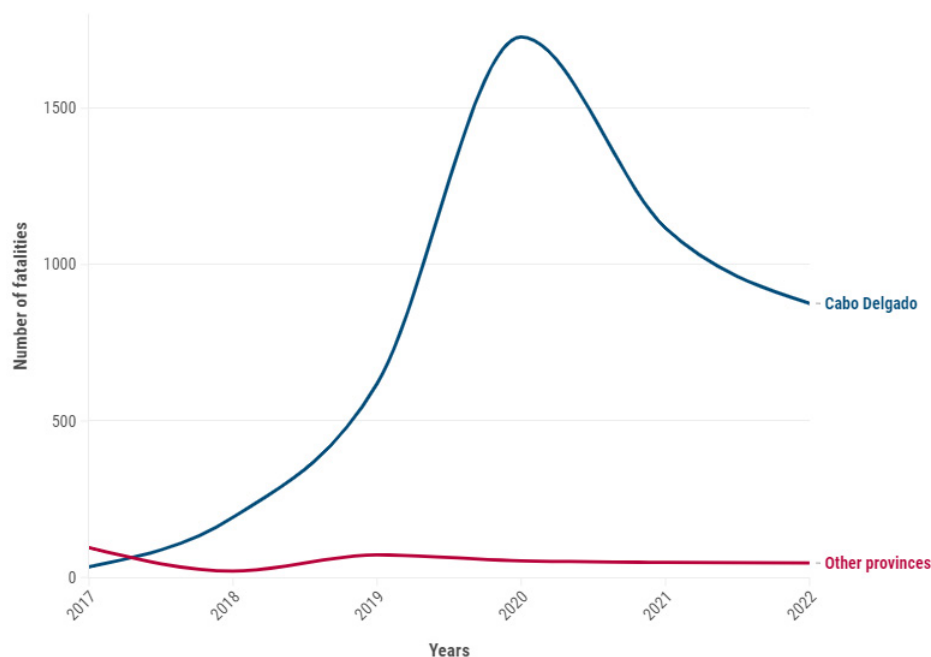
### Number of violent events by Islamist armed groups (unspecified) in Cabo Delgado and other provinces (2017–2022)



Source: ACAPS using data from ACLED (accessed 03/04/2023)



## Number of fatalities per region (2017–2022)



Source: ACAPS using data from ACLED (accessed 03/04/2023)

## HUMANITARIAN IMPACT

### Destruction and damage of critical infrastructure

Al-Shabaab's attacks have destroyed public infrastructure across Cabo Delgado, including education and health facilities, road and telecommunication systems, water points, and public administrative buildings (KII 07/03/2023; AIAC 30/04/2020; Lister 05/2021; Cabo Ligado 15/04/2022).

The UNDP conducted an Infrastructure Damage Assessment from January–March 2022 in Cabo Delgado. The survey assessed 30 healthcare facilities and found that 93% were partially damaged and 3% completely damaged. Only 4% of the facilities remained undamaged (UNDP 22/09/2022).

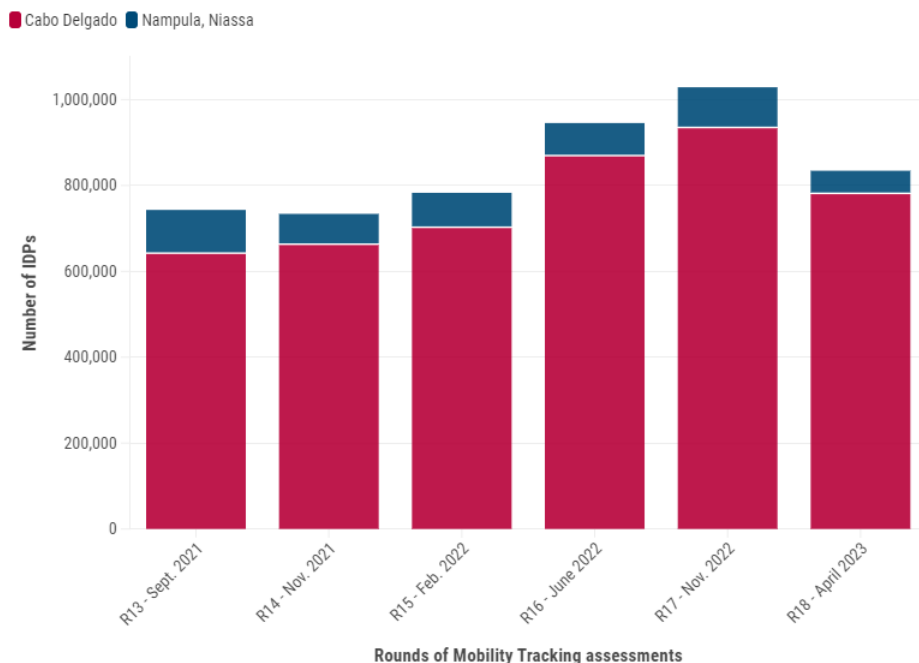
The conflict has disrupted the country's economy and the province's service provision, resulted in displacements, and heightened humanitarian needs for the affected population.

### Displacement and returns

Since the conflict began in October 2017, insecurity and Al Shabaab activity in northern Mozambique have internally displaced an estimated 834,300 people and 420,200 returnees in 221 locations across Cabo Delgado, Nampula, and Niassa provinces. An estimated 65% of the displaced population reside with host communities, and 35% live in 99 displacement sites across the three provinces. 29% of the IDPs are women, and 50% are children (IOM 23/05/2023).

Most of the shelters hosting the displaced people are overcrowded, increasing the risk of contracting endemic diseases (such as cholera) and protection concerns (Protection Cluster 07/03/2023; WHO 24/02/2023). A 2022 UNHCR report indicated that nearly 290,000 IDPs experienced overcrowding, insufficient privacy, and limited availability of secure shelter, clean water, and sanitation facilities (UNHCR 03/05/2023).

## Number of IDPs from September 2021 to April 2023 in Cabo Delgado, Nampula, and Niassa



Source: ACAPS using data from IOM 30/04/2023

## HUMANITARIAN NEEDS

### Protection

Protection remains a significant need in northern Mozambique's conflict-affected areas. The activity of the NSAG and the response of the armed forces have generated multiple protection concerns, including gender-based violence (including sexual violence and sexual exploitation) and child abuse (Protection Cluster 17/11/2022). In 2023, 1.6 million people will need protection services, including approximately 788,800 children (OCHA 12/05/2023 and 24/02/2023).

**Displaced population:** conditions such as overcrowding and a lack of privacy in IDP sites or shelters put IDPs, especially women and children, at risk of abuse and exploitation (KII 08/03/2023; Protection Cluster 17/11/2022; OCHA 24/02/2023).

In 2022, 92% of protection incidents involving displaced people happened in their places of origin and during flight. These incidents included killings, kidnappings, and the destruction of property (Protection Cluster 17/11/2022).

**Women and girls:** between 2018–2021, Al-Shabaab in Mozambique abducted more than 600 women and girls in Cabo Delgado, sometimes to marry or abuse them. They have also sold other women to fighters from foreign NSAGs (HRW 07/12/2021). Both government forces and Al-Shabaab have raped women and girls (AI 02/03/2021 b).

The conflict has disrupted access to healthcare through the destruction and damage of health facilities, significantly affecting women and girls' ability to seek medical care following protection incidents (UNFPA accessed 26/04/2023).

**Children:** girls and boys are vulnerable to child rights violations, gender-based violence, and other protection concerns specific to children in armed conflict settings. Groups have abducted boys, forcefully recruited them as soldiers, and forcefully taken girls in as wives, exposing them to early marriages (KII 07/03/2023; HRW 24/11/2022). The conflict has also closed many schools, depriving children of access to education and increasing the risk of child labour and early marriage for out-of-school children. Between January–March 2022, Save the Children recorded 108 cases of child marriage in the Cabo Delgado districts of Chiure, Metuge, Montepuez, and Pemba, compared to 65 cases between October–December 2021 (STC 17/05/2022).

The conflict has separated children from their families, forcing them to flee and seek shelter in various locations. These separations lead to a breakdown of the family structure, exposing children to additional risks (such as trafficking or exploitation) (STC 09/08/2021).

### Food security and livelihoods

Conflict in northern Mozambique has affected the local population's livelihoods, food security, and nutrition. As at April 2021, more than 1,000 enterprises had closed, and 198,000 jobs had been lost since the violence began in Cabo Delgado (CFR 29/08/2022; CoM 15/04/2021). The attacks have resulted in displacement, severely disrupting important livelihoods, such as agriculture, fishing, and tourism. Displacement has resulted in higher unemployment, food scarcity, and price increases (IPC 28/03/2023).



In 2023, 1.4 million people in Cabo Delgado, Nampula, and Niassa provinces will require food security and livelihood assistance because of conflict. 511,000 people, including children and pregnant and lactating women, will need nutrition services (OCHA 12/05/2023).

From November 2022 to March 2023, over 1.65 million people in Cabo Delgado, Nampula, and Niassa experienced Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse food insecurity, mainly resulting from the conflict and natural disasters (such as cyclones). The lack of data and low accessibility resulting from insecurity prevented the gathering of data for 8 of the 17 districts in Cabo Delgado (Ibo, Macomia, Meluco, Mocimboa da Praia, Muidumbe, Nangade, Palma, Quissanga). These are the most conflict-affected districts, meaning food insecurity might be high for them (IPC 29/03/2023).

## Water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH)

The conflict in Cabo Delgado has significantly affected the WASH needs of the affected population. In 2023, in northern Mozambique, 1.4 million people will need WASH services following the effects of the conflict (WASH Cluster 08/06/2023; OCHA 12/05/2023).

The conflict has disrupted the delivery of WASH services, with many WASH facilities and water points destroyed or inaccessible. The absence of proper sanitation facilities worsens the situation, as open defecation can contaminate water sources and spread diseases. A UNDP report indicated that in 2022, over half of the residential buildings and other facilities in Cabo Delgado did not have access to drinking water because of damage to water infrastructure. The report found that only one public latrine was functional on average, with at most only 15 latrines overall (UNDP 22/09/2022).

## Shelter

The conflict and displacement of people within Cabo Delgado, and in Niassa and Nampula, have made shelter a significant humanitarian need. The conflict has forced many individuals to leave their homes and communities, leaving them without proper shelter. This displacement has caused overcrowding in temporary shelters and relocation sites, often lacking adequate water and sanitation facilities and NFIs (UNHCR 14/11/2022; CCCM Cluster 27/02/2023; IOM 23/05/2023). The conflict has caused extensive damage to homes and basic infrastructure, posing significant challenges for displaced communities in terms of returning to their homes and rebuilding their lives. If they manage to return, they often reside in displacement sites within their original districts (IOM 23/05/2023). 1.1 million people in northern Mozambique will need shelter assistance in 2023 (OCHA 12/05/2023).

## Health

The conflict in Cabo Delgado significantly challenges the availability and delivery of essential healthcare services. This situation leads to increased healthcare needs because of factors such as population displacement, the destruction and looting of healthcare facilities, physical injuries, inadequate hygiene and living conditions, the emergence of new mental health issues, incidents of sexual and gender-based violence, and unaddressed healthcare needs (Health Cluster 31/03/2023).

As at March 2023, the conflict had rendered 26% of health facilities in northern Mozambique non-functional, limiting the capacity of public health services in the face of rising cases of cholera, malaria, measles, and a polio outbreak (Health Cluster 31/03/2023). In April 2023, attacks in Muidumbe district destroyed six out of seven health facilities; the district hosts over 39,300 returnees and nearly 12,600 IDPs (OCHA 12/06/2023; IOM 23/05/2023). 1.1 million people need health services in northern Mozambique (OCHA 12/05/2023).

## Education

Widespread insecurity has also significantly affected education, with armed attacks leading to the closure of over half of the schools in Meluco district, Cabo Delgado province, in February 2022 (OCHA 24/03/2022). As per a 2022 UNDP study in Cabo Delgado, all of the 56 education facilities assessed had sustained damage because of conflict. A significant percentage (91%) sustained partial damage, while 9% were fully damaged (UNDP 22/09/2022).

In 2023, an estimated 547,000 people will need education services in northern Mozambique because of the conflict (OCHA 12/05/2023).

Since the beginning of the conflict, Al-Shabaab has targeted education facilities because they want to prevent children from receiving secular education, which they consider a threat to their ideology (ICG 11/06/2021).

## Coping strategies of the affected population

Displacement has significantly increased cases of early marriage, as families use these marriages to ease their economic burden. Women and girls, particularly orphaned girls and women who lack livelihoods, also resort to transactional sex as a harmful coping mechanism for the lack of livelihood (Protection Cluster 17/11/2022).

Besides selling livestock, firewood, and charcoal, those who are affected also resort to coping strategies such as skipping meals, reducing portion sizes, consuming fewer preferred food options, and relying more on wild foods to mitigate food insecurity (FEWS NET 10/05/2023).



## HUMANITARIAN ACCESS CONSTRAINTS

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The violence and insecurity in Cabo Delgado have made it difficult for humanitarian organisations to reach and deliver aid to affected regions. During April 2023, 78,000 people remained inaccessible to humanitarians because of insecurity (OCHA 12/06/2023).

Insecurity also places humanitarian workers at risk, limiting their ability to reach affected populations. There were 57 reported security incidents affecting humanitarian access in Cabo Delgado between January–April 2023 (OCHA 12/06/2023). Sporadic attacks have targeted humanitarian workers and assets, resulting in injuries and deaths. Between April 2019 and February 2023, attacks killed two humanitarian workers and injured 11. In October 2022, Al Shabaab attacked a newly opened health centre in Nangade district, looting its medical supplies (Zitamar News 11/10/2022; AWSO accessed 03/04/2023). Bureaucratic constraints at the national and local levels also limit humanitarian organisations' access to people in need. These constraints include delays in obtaining licenses, visas, or authorisation to enter affected areas or deliver aid (APIEX 02/2019; CoM 05/05/2022; INSO accessed 12/06/2023).

Cabo Delgado is a poor province with minimal basic infrastructure, including poor road networks and inadequate transportation alternatives. Logistical constraints, such as a lack of fuel and difficulties transporting humanitarian supplies, further delay humanitarian access in the region (UNICEF 24/02/2023; 360 Mozambique 05/01/2023).

## RESPONSE CAPACITY

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In northern Mozambique, specifically in Cabo Delgado, Nampula, and Niassa, the effects of the conflict mean that at least two million people will require urgent humanitarian aid and protection to sustain their lives in 2023. The Humanitarian Response Plan for 2023 targets around 1.6 million people for assistance, with the priority response areas being food security, WASH, protection, and health.

The cluster system and OCHA are present in Mozambique. Around 55 humanitarian operational responders are working to respond to the needs of people affected in northern Mozambique, including UN agencies, INGOs, and NNGOs (OCHA 12/05/2023 and 24/02/23).