

MOZAMBIQUE

Conflict in Cabo Delgado



KEY PRIORITIES

+100,000
DISPLACED PEOPLE
SINCE DECEMBER 2023

+400
DESTROYED HOUSES
AND PUBLIC
INFRASTRUCTURE

+800,000
PEOPLE IN CRISIS
(IPC PHASE 3)
AND ABOVE

6.7/10
INFORM
CLIMATE CHANGE
RISK SCORE

CRISIS IMPACT OVERVIEW

Since December 2023, the northern region of Mozambique's Cabo Delgado province has seen an escalation in attacks characterised by violence towards civilians and damage to houses, churches, schools, and health centres. Increased insurgency erupted across the north of the province, with reports of non-state armed groups (NSAGs), including Islamic State Mozambique (ISM), engaging in violent confrontations with security forces in various districts. Formerly named Ahlu Sunna Wal Jama (ASWJ), ISM emerged in October 2017 and is referred to locally as Al-Shabaab (Club of Mozambique 04/03/2024; OCHA 17/03/2024; VOA 21/02/2024; ACLED 30/10/2023).

In December, the epicentre of intense confrontations between ISM and the Defence and Security Forces erupted in Macomia, Meluco, and Muidumbe districts, resulting in fatalities (ACLED 19/01/2024; OCHA 26/02/2024). Then, between 3–5 January, a spike in violence followed in Mocimboa da Praia, triggering a new wave of displacement in the province. On 3 January, an NSAG attack on the village of Ntotwe led to two civilian deaths and the abduction of several youths (OCHA 12/01/2024; ACLED 11/01/2024). As at 21 March 2024, approximately 5,800 people had been displaced from the districts of Chiure, Macomia, and Quissanga to the Metuge district, while 38,000 people had been displaced from Chiure to Chiure Sede (CCCM Cluster 22/03/2024). ISM claimed responsibility for attacks in the Chiure district that led to over 70 fatalities and the destruction of approximately 500 churches, homes, and public infrastructure (Club of Mozambique 05/03/2024). In the first week of April, NSAG movement was reported in Macomia's agricultural area, causing farmers to flee to Nambini locality out of fear, although no casualties were reported (Club of Mozambique 01/04/2024).

Between 22 December 2023 and 3 March 2024, the surge in conflict resulted in over 100,000 individuals, including 61,400 children, fleeing their homes (OCHA 17/03/2024; VOA 21/02/2024). In some areas, people are fleeing out of fear of attack (IOM 22/03/2024). According to the IOM, 65% of newly displaced IDPs are seeking shelter within host communities, while the remaining 35% are spread across 95 designated, densely populated displacement sites, often

residing in makeshift or damaged shelters (IOM 31/01/2024; UNHCR 01/03/2024; OCHA 17/03/2024; Club of Mozambique 04/03/2024). IDPs are facing significant challenges accessing basic necessities such as food, clean water, healthcare, and schooling (MSF 04/03/2024; UNHCR 01/03/2024).

Humanitarian responders' very limited presence (sometimes complete absence) in areas of displacement as a result of insecurity, and the availability of basic services in areas of return, have forced some IDPs to return, to displacement sites within the same district (Protection Cluster 14/02/2024). Urgent needs include food, shelter (either temporary or rebuilt housing), and healthcare services, particularly to prevent or contain the spread of diseases such as cholera, especially in displacement areas. Mental health and psychosocial support programmes are also essential to address the trauma caused by violence and promote resilience. Livelihood support is particularly necessary for returning farmers to regain self-sufficiency. A number of protection concerns have emerged for IDPs, particularly regarding instances of violence and exploitation targeting women and children. Among the displaced, some groups need particular assistance, such as pregnant women, unaccompanied minors, elderly people, and people with disabilities or chronic diseases (Protection Cluster 24/01/2024; IOM 22/03/2024; UNICEF 28/02/2024; Protection Cluster 14/02/2024).

Anticipated scope and scale

The forthcoming conclusion of the Southern African Development Community Mission in Mozambique in July 2024 – a mission deployed in 2021 to combat acts of violent extremism in Cabo Delgado – is likely to create a security vacuum and aggravate violence in Cabo Delgado. A security vacuum could lead to increased competition among NSAGs for control over territory and resources, potentially resulting in heightened violence and insecurity (CSIS 18/03/2024; Cabo Ligado 19/01/2024; SADC 10/11/2021).

The upcoming presidential election in October 2024 could worsen tensions, as political competition and disputes over power may intensify existing divisions within the country, leading to increased volatility and potential unrest (CSIS

18/03/2024). In some areas of Cabo Delgado, conflict and attacks similar to what occurred during the municipal elections in October 2023 are a possibility (Cabo Ligado 19/01/2024).

During the cyclone season in northern Mozambique (late October–May), increased attacks may heighten the needs of IDPs and those recovering from previous cyclones (UNHCR accessed 12/04/2024; ACAPS accessed 12/04/2024; Oxfam 12/03/2024). As at the end of March 2024, the National Meteorological Institute predicted substantial rainfall in northern Mozambique, including in Cabo Delgado, Nampula, and Niassa provinces, attributable to climate hazards combined with interactions with a weather system in northeast Madagascar (All Africa 26/03/2024; 360 Mozambique 26/03/2024). The seasonal rainfall, combined with inadequate WASH facilities and a lack of access to safe water, aggravates the civilian health situation, including for IDPs (USAID 21/03/2024).

Humanitarian constraints

Humanitarian efforts to deliver aid are hindered by access challenges, primarily insecurity caused by NSAGs. Unpredictable acts of violence disrupt the safe passage of aid convoys, making it difficult to reach those in need (FAO et al. 01/03/2024; MSF 04/03/2024). In some parts of Quissanga and Chiure districts, insecurity has led to the suspension of humanitarian activities and the death of one aid worker (FEWS NET 28/02/2024; MSF 07/01/2024).

The humanitarian access situation is commonly aggravated by seasonal floods and heavy rains (November–April), which further complicate travel and logistics. In this period, roads become impassable and affected communities risk increasing isolation, hindering the delivery of essential services and supplies (FAO et al. 01/03/2024; WFP 01/03/2024). Given the security and access challenges, only 30–40% of IDPs were currently receiving basic humanitarian assistance as at March 2024 (UNHCR 01/03/2024; OCHA 17/03/2024).

In December 2023, misinformation around cholera outbreaks incited riots and violent protests in Cabo Delgado and Nampula provinces, resulting in several fatalities, including among community leaders. The violence, fuelled by rumours that health and government officials were spreading the disease, erupted in the districts of Ancuabe, Chiure, Montepuez, and Namuno in Cabo Delgado, as well as Mecuburi district in Nampula province (OCHA 09/01/2024; Cabo Ligado 19/01/2024; DW 28/12/2023). This led to a series of violent demonstrations and targeted attacks against government and healthcare personnel, aggravating the crisis and undermining efforts to control the outbreak (Cabo Ligado 19/01/2024).

CRISIS IMPACTS

Food security and livelihoods

The resurgence of attacks coincided with the peak of the rainy season (November–April), a critical time for agricultural activities involving nearly the entire population of Cabo Delgado. The violent attacks in the province, including in the districts of Ancuabe, Chiure, Macomia, Mecúfi, Metuge, Mocimboa da Praia, Muidumbe, and Quissanga, have also threatened livelihoods. The conflict undermines the fundamental elements of food security as, firstly, agricultural activities crucial to food availability, such as planting and harvesting, are disrupted, leading to decreased food supplies. Secondly, conflict obstructs food access via displacement, loss of income, and disruptions to transportation and trade routes, leaving many unable to obtain essential food items. Thirdly, conflict-related stress and trauma can impair effective food utilisation, increasing the risk of malnutrition and disease among affected populations. Finally, instability resulting from conflict makes planning and investing in future agricultural activities challenging for farmers, further aggravating uncertainty in food production and distribution systems, hindering access to resources for food production, and potentially leading to lower-than-expected crop production (FEWS NET 28/02/2024).

The fear and reality of attacks have compelled many to abandon their farms, seeking security as IDPs and becoming reliant on humanitarian aid for sustenance (FAO et al. 20/02/2024; FEWS NET 28/02/2024). For those who return, damage and lack of agricultural inputs makes farming an increasing challenge. Consequently, areas in Cabo Delgado previously classified as Stressed (IPC Phase 2) are now facing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) levels of food insecurity again, with the situation continuing to escalate. Between October 2023 to March 2024, an estimated 863,000 people, or 32% of the total population, were expected to fall into IPC 3 or higher, marking a 19% increase from the previous period (FEWS NET 28/02/2024; FAO 09/01/2024; IPC 28/11/2023). This will likely worsen malnutrition rates, especially in Chiure and Erati districts, where acute malnutrition is already on the rise (WFP 01/03/2024).

Health and WASH

Attacks in Cabo Delgado have severely damaged critical infrastructure, with healthcare facilities among the most affected. Such violent incidents have not only resulted in the physical destruction of healthcare facilities but also the disruption of essential medical services. In Palma district, health facilities lack water, affecting health provision (Health Cluster 22/02/2024; OCHA 11/12/2023). In Macomia, only one of the district's seven health facilities is providing services; in Muidumbe, only one in seven health facilities is functional (MSF 04/03/2024; OCHA 11/12/2023).

The escalating conflict has aggravated the challenges faced by the health and WASH sectors, leading to dire consequences. With the number of cholera cases rising (over 40,000 reported in Mozambique between September 2022-January 2023), lack of access to medical services resulting from insecurity and damaged infrastructure has significantly hindered timely treatment and containment efforts. This situation amplifies morbidity and mortality rates, particularly within the context of a large cholera outbreak. Compromised WASH infrastructure further aggravates the spread of waterborne diseases, heightening the risk of infection and adding strain to already overwhelmed healthcare systems. As at February 2024, Cabo Delgado had reported cholera cases in six districts, including Chiure and Erati, (Cabo Ligado 19/01/2024; UNICEF 28/02/2024).

Shelter

Widespread displacement has meant a critical shortage of adequate shelter. The continuing conflict has damaged houses and essential infrastructure, making it challenging for displaced communities to return to their homes and reconstruct their lives. Returnees often find themselves residing in displacement sites in their original districts. For example, there are over 90,000 former residents of Chiure who were displaced in February and are living in displacement sites and host communities in Erati, Chiure, Metuge and Pemba districts (IOM 04/03/2024).

Overcrowding is prevalent in temporary shelters, damaged houses, and relocation areas, further aggravating the situation (OCHA 17/03/2024). These sites frequently lack essential amenities such as clean water, proper sanitation facilities, and necessary household items (OCHA 04/03/2024).

Protection

Families urgently require mental health and psychosocial support services to address the psychological impact of the traumas they have witnessed or experienced, including killings, abductions, and the destruction of property (OCHA 17/03/2024; MSF 04/03/2024).

Many families have reported being separated, with no information on the condition or location of those left behind (Protection Cluster 24/01/2024). In a conflict setting like Cabo Delgado province, the number of unaccompanied children is likely to increase as a result of several factors. Displacement and violence can cause the breakdown of family structures and social support networks, resulting in children being separated from their families or losing their caregivers. The death or abduction of parents or guardians during conflict also further contributes to the rise in unaccompanied children. More than half of those displaced between January–March 2024 were children (IOM 04/03/2024). As at 5 March 2024, 150

children had been reported missing and around 180 unaccompanied children were registered in camps (OCHA 17/03/2024).

Women without civil documentation are at significantly increased risk of sexual exploitation, abuse, harassment, discrimination, and other forms of gender-based violence, particularly at the hands of law enforcement officials and individuals in positions of power or authority. Women and girls have also reported incidents of sexual harassment and assault by NSAGs at checkpoints and roadblocks. The lack of ID cards or the act of having their belongings searched places them in an especially precarious position (Protection Cluster 14/02/2024).

Men have also been subject to harassment, physical violence, and arbitrary detention at the hands of NSAGs. The authorities sometimes view undocumented individuals as potential NSAG affiliates, resulting in such individuals facing further protection risks (OCHA 17/03/2024; Protection Cluster 24/01/2024; UNHCR 01/03/2024).

There have also been reports of the forced recruitment of children by NSAGs. In 2023, patterns of child abduction and recruitment by NSAGs were documented in Pangane village (Macomia district) and Naquitengue village (Mocimboa da Praia district) (Protection Cluster 14/02/2024; Club of Mozambique 21/03/2024).

IDPs in camps and overcrowded spaces are particularly vulnerable to protection risks, including violence, exploitation, and abuse. The dense living conditions often lack adequate security measures, making it difficult to ensure the security and privacy of individuals, especially women and children (OCHA 17/03/2024; Protection Cluster 14/02/2024).

Education

The conflict has significantly affected education: of Cabo Delgado's 978 schools, over 150 remain temporarily closed (Club of Mozambique 05/03/2024). In Nampula province, the closure of 17 schools has affected nearly 71,000 children (STC 05/03/2024). In Chiure district, four schools have been damaged in recent attacks, and military forces continue to occupy one school in Erati district. Education centres are also sometimes used to host IDPs, further hindering access to education (UNICEF 28/02/2024).

DRIVERS OF THE CRISIS

Pre-existing marginalisation

Communities in Cabo Delgado have long felt marginalised by the central Government and excluded from economic opportunities. Unemployed youth and marginalised ethnic groups, such as the Mwani, have been particularly affected. This sense of marginalisation has been aggravated by the lack of development initiatives in areas such as Mocimboa da Praia and Palma, leading to grievances against the Government (ICG 11/06/2021; BBC 29/03/2021; MG 09/02/2023; CSIS 18/03/2024). The conflict is largely driven by regional disparities between the wealthier capital, Maputo, located in Mozambique's far south, and the poorer northern provinces (ISS 08/09/2022).

Emergence of militias

In Mozambique, the emergence of multiple NSAGs, including groups such as the Naparamas, contributes to escalating conflict dynamics, as NSAGs frequently clash with government security forces. The Naparamas are a militia group originally formed by civilians to protect communities from banditry and other security threats, which often operate independent of, and sometimes in opposition to, official government forces (Hudson 20/02/2024; Club of Mozambique 12/01/2024).

In Cabo Delgado, specifically in the districts of Ancuabe, Balama, Chiure, Montepuez, and Namuno, there have been 14 incidents of cholera disinformation leading to violent demonstrations (Cabo Ligado 19/01/2024). The Naparamas were accused of inciting these riots by claiming health workers were spreading cholera in December 2023 and January 2024 (Cabo Ligado 19/01/2024; Club of Mozambique 12/01/2024; CSIS 18/03/2024). Authorities contend that the Naparamas have been mobilising communities to revolt against the state, fuelling instability across the region (Club of Mozambique 12/01/2024). The presence of such NSAGs complicates the security landscape, undermining state authority and complicating peacekeeping and humanitarian efforts.

Resource competition and economic factors

The discovery of significant natural gas reserves in Cabo Delgado has intensified competition for control over such resources. The involvement of international energy companies in gas exploration, such as Total and ExxonMobil, has heightened tensions, particularly around issues of land rights, compensation for affected communities, and the distribution

of economic benefits. NSAGs, such as ISM, have been exploiting these grievances and economic disparities to assert control over resource-rich areas and profit from illegal activities, including smuggling and extortion (BBC 29/03/2021; MG 09/02/2023; ISS 08/09/2022; CSIS 18/03/2024).

COMPOUNDING/AGGRAVATING FACTORS

Cholera Outbreak

The outbreak of cholera aggravates an already dire situation, further straining limited resources and already stretched healthcare infrastructure. As at 14 March 2024, there were approximately 6,700 cholera cases in Nampula and Cabo Delgado (OCHA 17/03/2024; UNICEF 02/02/2024). The strained healthcare system, compounded by IDPs' challenging living conditions and the scarcity of health, water, and sanitation amenities, significantly increases susceptibility to cholera outbreaks.

The recent murder of officials involved in the cholera response in Chiure and Montepuez districts highlights a persistent challenge to mitigating the effects of the disease: the erosion of trust in the Government. This scepticism extends to suspicions of the mechanisms employed in the cholera response, that elites are exploiting such mechanisms to perpetrate harm, further aggravating tensions and undermining public confidence in governance. These killings, coupled with the destruction of health facilities, underscore a deep-seated distrust of the authorities, fuelled by a belief that elites aim to harm ordinary citizens (Zitamar 23/01/2024).

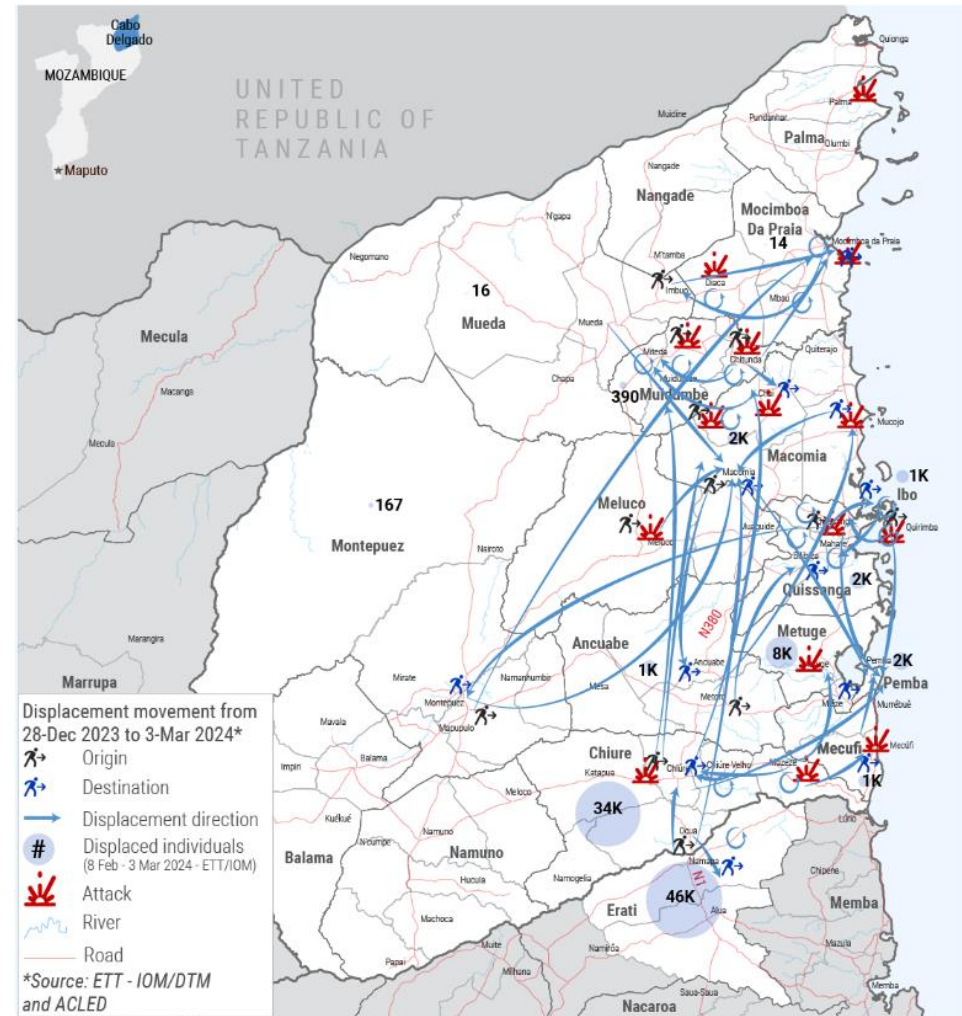
Climate Hazards

The effects of El Niño persist in Mozambique, leading to extreme weather events with the potential to worsen humanitarian access and increase the exposure of those already affected by attacks. According to the National Institute for Disaster Management and Risk Reduction, between October 2023 and January 2024, extreme weather events, including heavy rains and winds, affected nearly 30,000 people and led to over 70 deaths (OCHA 04/03/2024; ACAPS accessed 12/04/2024; EC accessed 12/04/2024).

With its vulnerability to extreme weather events such as cyclones, floods, and drought, Mozambique faces heightened risk of displacement, food insecurity, and critical and basic infrastructure damage (IOM 22/03/2024). The frequency and intensity of these climate-related hazards have escalated in recent years, overwhelming already fragile systems and infrastructure (TNH 14/03/2024). These climate-induced hazards not only directly affect the population's wellbeing but also strain humanitarian responses, necessitating proactive

measures to mitigate adverse effects and build resilience within affected communities. The National Institute for Disaster Management and Risk Reduction estimates that around 2.5 million people face the threat of cyclones, floods, and drought in the 2023–2024 rainy season (OCHA 28/12/2023).

DISPLACEMENT IN NORTHERN CABO DELGADO



Source: OCHA (17/03/2024)