

POLICY BRIEF



Mozambique

Escalating militant violence impacting peace and stability

The Republic of Mozambique comprises several diverse ethno-linguistic groups adhering different religions. With a predominant Christian population, the country is also home to Muslims, Jews, Hindus and Bahai's.¹ The constitution establishes democratic rule of law based on pluralism of expression² and through Article 54 provides for the right to practice freely or not to practice religion, prohibiting discrimination based on religion.³

Although a natural resource rich nation, over sixty percent of all Mozambicans live below the poverty line.⁴ Considered a fragile state characterized by weak state capacity, Mozambique's ranking in the Global Fragility Index has been deteriorating since 2014.⁵ This has

left its citizens vulnerable to an array of human rights violations. The government's failure to hold accountable perpetrators of such violations has led to the weakening of legal and social protections for its citizens.⁶ Additionally, the ongoing violent attacks by Islamist groups in Cabo Delgado province located in the northern part of the country has exacerbated the humanitarian crisis.⁷

Violent attacks and abuses by Islamists in Cabo Delgado province

The northern part of Mozambique, more specifically the province of Cabo Delgado, is a resource rich area, notably natural gas and rubies. Incidentally, eighty

¹ "Mozambique: Country Dossier", World Watch Research, January 2023, pp. 34. Available at Full Country Dossier Mozambique opendoorsanalytical.org (password: freedom).

² constitutionproject.org/constitution/Mozambique_2007?lang=en

³ state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/MOZAMBIQUE-2021-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf

⁴ worldbank.org/en/country/mozambique/overview

⁵ fragilestatesindex.org/country-data

⁶ link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-86645-7_19

⁷ hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/mozambique

percent of Cabo Delgado's population lives below the poverty line.⁸ Extremely high levels of illiteracy compounded with large scale youth unemployment has contributed to the insecurity in Cabo Delgado, facilitating the manipulation of local population by Islamist extremist group Ahlu-Sunnah wal Jama'ah (ASWJ), known locally as Mashabab, affiliated with the Islamic State's (ISIS) Central Africa Province.⁹ Christians and Muslims in Mozambique have co-existed peacefully for a large part of the country's post-independence history,¹⁰ but the ASWJ have instrumentalized Islam to cause rebellion in the northern region. Majority of the population residing in Cabo Delgado identify themselves as Muslims and most Mozambican Muslims belong to the Shadhuliyya and Qadiriyya Sufi orders, professing a more tolerant and peaceful Islam¹¹ in contrast to the militant Salafism followed by ASWJ.¹² However, as a result of sharing a porous border with Tanzania, the steady flow of citizens from Tanzania to Cabo Delgado and vice versa have made the region susceptible to violent extremist ideologies from religious leaders linked to Salafist circles in Tanzania and further north in Kenya and Somalia.¹³ The indiscriminate violence caused by ASWJ has claimed

thousands of lives,¹⁴ displaced nearly a million people,¹⁵ caused the closure of almost two hundred schools affecting nearly a hundred thousand children and two thousand teachers.¹⁶ Church buildings were burned down and several Christians killed.¹⁷

Abduction of women and girls for sexual assault including rape, detention for sexual slavery and forced marriage to the extremist fighters is a common practice.¹⁸ Younger healthy-looking girls are sometimes sold as brides to foreign fighters for a fee.¹⁹ According to Open Doors' sources, many abducted Christian girls are returned to their communities when they get pregnant because of the sexual slavery. Integrating into social life becomes extremely difficult because of the social stigma attached to rape. Children born out of such sexual violence are often ostracized by the community by labeling them as the "extremist's child" and suffer neglect and long term psycho-social trauma.²⁰ Some of them conveyed feeling 'invisible' and 'unrecognized,' and of remaining 'in the shadow of war' even after the conflict had ended.²¹



Outdoor refugee church in northern Mozambique.

⁸ *Ibid* Report No. 68239-MZ by World Bank.

⁹ Violent extremism in Mozambique: Drivers and links to transnational organised crime, August 2022, pp. 15.

¹⁰ [theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2014/nov/18/christians-muslims-co-existed-general-synod-religions-allies](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2014/nov/18/christians-muslims-co-existed-general-synod-religions-allies)

¹¹ [nytimes.com/2017/11/24/world/middleeast/sufi-muslim-explainer.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/24/world/middleeast/sufi-muslim-explainer.html)

¹² [fpri.org/article/2021/04/the-evolution-and-escalation-of-the-islamic-state-threat-to-mozambique](https://www.fpri.org/article/2021/04/the-evolution-and-escalation-of-the-islamic-state-threat-to-mozambique)

¹³ *Ibid*, Violent Extremism in Mozambique, pp. 17.

¹⁴ cabodelgado.com/reports/cabo-delgado-weekly-8-14-august-2022

¹⁵ data.unhcr.org/en/country/moz

¹⁶ news24.com/news24/africa/news/how-insurgent-attacks-affected-schools-and-students-in-cabo-delgado-mozambique-20211229

¹⁷ [reuters.com/world/africa/least-six-mozambicans-beheaded-italian-nun-shot-dead-by-insurgents-2022-09-07](https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/least-six-mozambicans-beheaded-italian-nun-shot-dead-by-insurgents-2022-09-07)

¹⁸ [gendersecurityproject.com/post/crsv-cabo-delgado-mozambique](https://www.gendersecurityproject.com/post/crsv-cabo-delgado-mozambique)

¹⁹ [hrw.org/news/2021/12/07/mozambique-hundreds-women-girls-abducted](https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/12/07/mozambique-hundreds-women-girls-abducted)

²⁰ [un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/report/auto-draft/N2223437.pdf](https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/report/auto-draft/N2223437.pdf)

²¹ Forgotten Children of War Association (Udruženje "Zaboravljena djeca rata"), Wagner, K., Bartels, S.A., Weber, S. et al., 2021.

Inadequate provision of basic services to rising number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

As a consequence of the ongoing armed conflict in northern Mozambique, over a million people have been forcibly displaced of which fifty percent are children.²² Having fled their homes, IDPs often face challenges in regard to protection, shelter, food and accessing other basic services such as health care, sanitation, safe water and education. Shortage of designated IDP camps has meant that many IDPs have had to seek shelter in makeshift camps in football field or school compounds which either provide minimum basic services or entirely lack any of the support. For example, there are 70,000 IDPs in the province of Nampula but there is only one designated IDP camp in Posto Administrativo de Corrane, in the district of Meconta which shelters seven thousand people.²³ The need for tents is an urgent requirement as currently two or three families are having to share one tent. According to information available to Open Doors, corruption within the government departments is one of the leading factors for the shortage in supply of tents.

Furthermore, IDPs are often considered suspects on arrival in the host communities, subjecting them to inhumane treatments such as exclusion from accessing local community resources namely farmlands or fishing areas along with limited livelihood opportunities.²⁴ Due to a concern that Islamist extremists have infiltrated the IDP population, there has been considerable reticence from the government of Mozambique toward the humanitarian response. This inhibition has also resulted in heavy handed security measures directed towards IDPs by state security agencies.²⁵

Restrictive regulations to govern churches

In May 2022, the government of Mozambique introduced their plan for a new draft law with stricter provisions to regulate and register churches.²⁶ This draft law includes conditions pertaining to mandatory registration, need for minimum 2000 signatures to legalize a church and tax payments by churches.²⁷ It also makes it compulsory

for the leaders of these churches to hold a certificate in theology.²⁸ The stipulations of this draft law are similar to the restrictions imposed on churches in Rwanda²⁹ and non-compliance could lead to either fine or imprisonment. This is a cause of concern for many evangelical Christians who are either members of small congregation or meet in house churches. It prohibits them from gathering as a church, an act that falls within their freedom to manifest their religion or belief. Registration cannot be imposed as a condition to the right to manifest one's religion or belief.

Role of Local Faith Actors as first responders and peace builders

Mozambique is frequently affected by natural hazards, most prominently droughts, flooding, and cyclones,³⁰ flattening villages, destroying vital infrastructure, killing thousands of people and displacing millions.³¹ Sixty percent of the country's population lives on Mozambique's extensive coastline, increasing its vulnerability to tropical cyclones and storms.³² The impact of the ongoing crisis in Cabo Delgado, compounded with large scale damage repeatedly caused by natural disasters, adds to the already precarious situation in Mozambique, that of underlying poverty and weak institutional mechanisms. Local Faith Actors (LFAs) in the country have been actively involved in distribution of aid, ensuring protection and providing shelter and basic health services to those affected. Due to their closer ties with the affected communities, LFAs often are the first ones to help with the most urgent needs. Many local churches or church based organizations are actively involved in providing psycho-social trauma counseling to victims of sexual assault.³³ Their significant role in conflict prevention and peacebuilding³⁴ has resulted in various ongoing community level inter-religious meetings between different religious groups emphatically calling for dialogue and reconciliation.³⁵ Nonetheless, because of the low visibility of their work or scarcity of funding, their contribution towards building safe communities is often unmentioned or given minimum credit.

²² [unicef.org/appeals/mozambique](https://www.unicef.org/appeals/mozambique)

²³ Open Doors source.

²⁴ *Ibid*, Violent Extremism in Mozambique, pp. 31.

²⁵ cdn.odi.org/media/documents/USAID_CCD_Mozambique_final.pdf

²⁶ theheritagetimes.com/mozambique-moves-to-regulate-churches

²⁷ clubofmozambique.com/news/taxation-new-law-causes-concern-in-churches-voa-report-215777

²⁸ issuu.com/wi3117/docs/this_week_e_edition_with_bridge_/s/18119363

²⁹ *Ibid*, "Mozambique: Country Dossier", pp. 28.

³⁰ climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/country/mozambique/vulnerability

³¹ Tropical storm Gombe on 11 March, 2022, killed at least 61, 488 people. Tropical Storm Chalane and Tropical Storm Eloise in 2021 and Tropical Cyclones Idai and Kenneth in 2019 displaced 2.2 million people. Available here: reliefweb.int/report/mozambique/mozambique-floods-and-cyclones-operations-update-n-3-mdrmz016

³² *Ibid*.

³³ aciafrica.org/news/3081/international-catholic-charity-facilitating-counselling-of-mozambiques-violence-victims

³⁴ s3.amazonaws.com/berkeley-center/130801BCMozambiqueReligiousPeacebuildersBrokerEndCivilWar.pdf

³⁵ *Ibid*, Violent Extremism in Mozambique, pp. 19.

Recommendations:

To ensure the respect of fundamental rights of all Mozambicans, Open Doors recommends:

1 To prevent impunity, ensure institutional accountability and curb endemic violence in northern Mozambique, the International Community should:

- Strengthen Mozambique government's technical capacity to investigate and prosecute terrorist crimes by providing trainings for members of Counter-Terrorism Unit within the National Criminal Investigation Service (SERNIC) on development of strategy for the investigation, prosecution and adjudication of terrorism cases, simultaneously ensuring that these workshops are at par with international human rights standards;
- Urge the government of Mozambique to adopt a national legislation based on the principles of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Declaration concerning Firearms, Ammunition and Other Related Materials and ensure its full and effective implementation.

2 To combat militant groups like ISIS, its affiliate ASWJ and other similar groups and to counter radical narratives, the government of Mozambique should urgently:

- Develop and implement a comprehensive and integrated national strategy drawing inspiration from the framework of the SADC Regional Counter-terrorism Strategy modeled upon the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy that addresses the political, humanitarian, socio-economic and security aspects of preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalization;
- Address the perpetual problem of lack of livelihoods in Cabo Delgado by prioritizing pro-poor and pro-youth development projects that seek to generate employment, and implement measures, including military responses, that are designed to gain the trust of communities;
- Protect the properties, including land and houses, of those displaced to facilitate their return and prevent further discontent.

3 To address the humanitarian crisis severely affecting more than a million IDPs:

- The International Community should immediately set in action programs providing aid and support in IDP camps. Support should include water, sanitation, hygiene (WASH) and food, and should be channeled through established faith-based organizations, which are trusted partners for the community, have provided impartial assistance and have already established their vital role in helping victims of violence, including women, children and IDPs;
- The International Community should implement monitoring and accountability mechanisms that must be adhered by agencies or individuals of the Mozambican government involved in distribution of aid to ensure it reaches the intended beneficiaries as planned.

4 To ensure that Christians in Mozambique enjoy their right to assemble peacefully for worship and manifest their religion in a community, the government of Mozambique should urgently withdraw the draft law which regulates the registration of churches.

5 To ensure the respect and protection of women and children from conflict related sexual violence:

- The government of Mozambique must prioritize and expedite its efforts to strengthen provisions of comprehensive care for sexual violence survivors, in particular medical, mental health and psychosocial services;
- The International Community should embed child rights and wellbeing risk assessments into programmatic funding decisions and allocate resources earmarked specifically for implementing initiatives for children born of conflict-related sexual violence.