

BUILDING YOUTH RESILIENCE TO EXTREMISM IN MOZAMBIQUE

Perspectives from Cabo Delgado

KEY INSIGHTS



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This document shares the key insights of a research paper by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation. Read the full paper [here](#).

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OVERVIEW

Mozambique's ongoing conflict, waged by the Islamist group Ahlu-Sunna Wa-Jama'a (ASWJ), is expected to continue for at least three more years. This is optimistic, as the ongoing and lengthy past experiences in Lake Chad, the Sahel and the Horn of Africa have shown. Following the tactical and operational failures by private military groups to contain the insurgency, troops from Rwanda and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) have now joined the Mozambican government in its operations. The ASWJ has grown in size and stature since 2017, with attacks on key infrastructure and transport routes. The group has links to the Islamic State (IS), although the extent of this is unknown. However, what is clear is that the growth of the rebellion has succeeded due to the recruitment of ordinary Mozambicans, disenfranchised with the government and their opportunities for the future.

The youth are particularly at risk of being drawn into the insurgency due to high unemployment, disruptions to education and an economy that offers little in the way of job prospects. Yet at the same time, the youth can be a positive force for change by challenging undemocratic practices and working as peacebuilders within their community. This research report unpacks youth perspectives on the insurgency, based on the findings of two focus groups held in September 2021 in Pemba and Montepuez. The research and resulting report are the joint collaborative efforts of the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR), based in Cape Town, South Africa, and the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), based in Maputo, Mozambique.



KEY INSIGHTS

- Material considerations are significant drivers of violent extremism in Cabo Delgado. When it comes to recruitment, desperation stemming from persistent poverty was a leading push factor cited by participants. This is largely owing to the high prevalence of hunger, unemployment among youth, a lack of education and skills, and perceptions that the youth in the province are being systematically denied income-earning opportunities. Promises of food and money are used to lure young people into mosques where manipulated religious messages are being preached.
- The manipulation of religion and ethnicity are also factors that drive extremism. Religion itself was not a key factor, but rather the manipulation of religious messages and fanaticism. Discussions also brought out the overlap of an ethnic and religious dynamic in Cabo Delgado. For example, resentment has developed between young people and Maxanganas (coming mostly from the South). There is also ongoing conflict between the Makondes and the Makuas due to a breakdown of communication resulting from language barriers.
- Safety and security is another factor driving youths to extremism. Forced recruitment and fear played a key role, as well as distrust in the military due to human rights abuses. At the same time, displaced youths are beginning to express interest in joining the military as a means of protection.
- Cabo Delgado is home to ethnic minorities who have long felt alienated from the state and feel slighted by the unequal disbursement of public wealth that is skewed in favour of southern provinces. A small but well-connected elite in Cabo Delgado has positioned itself to capture what national wealth does make its way up north.

As such, corruption is at the heart of ethnic minorities' grievances with the state. Another theme that emerged was democratic despondency, with youths pointing to declining voter participation. Moreover, there is a lack of mechanisms through which the youth can engage the state.

- In Mozambique, and particularly in Cabo Delgado, youth noted that social capital is depleted by low levels of patriotism, a loss of hope and a lack of trust, both of the government and of one another. They also spoke of the need for bridging and bonding across ethnic groups and religions. Respondents also spoke of individuals exhibiting antisocial behaviours, which extremists prey upon.
- When it comes to offsetting developmental deficits, the Northern Integrated Development Agency (ADIN) may offer prospects for inclusive youth development with its focus on infrastructure, agriculture and youth employment. However, corruption might still threaten these potential gains and thus it will be critical that assertive and independent oversight is set up to ensure both accountability and the appropriate use of funds.
- Job creation is the biggest priority for youth investment. Skills transfer, education, social services and business loans are also critical. Proper consideration needs to be given to developing employment-intensive industries in the north which can contribute to both the income prospects of young people and overall government revenue. In order to ensure ownership and buy-in, youths should be engaged at the design stage of youth programmes, as well as in their implementation. It will also be important that youths are supported to develop structures and organisations that can provide coordinated inputs. A focus will also need to be placed on psychosocial support, healing and social cohesion.
- More broadly, the Mozambican government can do more to engage the youth in critical dialogue and in governance. The UN and AU have developed frameworks for youth engagement in peace and security, which can serve as guides for the government of Mozambique. The SADC should also consider developing a regional framework for youth engagement in peace and security.



RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Mozambican government

- Adopt a zero-tolerance approach to human rights abuses in the military, enforceable through an independent oversight body, and develop mechanisms to strengthen engagement between the military and communities.
- Prioritise the adoption of ADIN's strategy for Cabo Delgado, ensuring inclusive consultations with youth and other marginalised groups, and develop mechanisms for problem solving, social innovation and skills development.
- Provide support to youth-focused institutions and youth hubs and ensure a two-way engagement that takes youth perspectives into account.
- Assess blockages in government grievance mechanisms so that they can be more responsive to the grievances of communities in Cabo Delgado.
- Allocate national resources on a needs basis and make meaningful efforts to ensure that youth in Cabo Delgado are the recipients of quality public services.
- Develop a national framework for youth engagement in terms of peace and security.
- In addressing corruption, more assertive and independent oversight is necessary. This includes the unbundling of elitism that drives grievances and facilitates youth radicalisation.
- Prioritise human development outcomes that help build resilience.

- Consider macroeconomic policy interventions that can develop employment-intensive industry in Cabo Delgado that can be connected to global supply chains.
- Insist on coordinated external engagements, in line with national and local priorities, and ensure the accountability of foreign troops.

To the SADC

- Strengthen the civilian component of the SADC mission and place a focus on human rights training for both the SADC mission and the Mozambican military.
- Develop a regional framework for youth, peace and security and develop programmes that use youths as agents for peace.
- Consider ways to support youth employment in Mozambique through SADC's Youth Employment Promotion Policy.
- Generate financial support and technical expertise from the region to support the youth.

To the international community

- Support training for the Mozambican military on human rights and community engagement.
- Coordinate support for Cabo Delgado and complement harder security approaches with efforts to promote youth dialogue and social cohesion.
- Facilitate a regular dialogue among youth, state authorities, civil society organisations and the private sector on resilience to violent extremism among youth.
- Share successful lessons relating to youth empowerment from the African continent and around the globe and raise awareness on the positive power of youth for peace.
- Support the development of regional and national frameworks for youth, peace and security and invest in their implementation.
- Consider skills-transfer programmes for youth in Cabo Delgado.
- Provide mental health and psychosocial support for youths affected by the conflict.

The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR), established in 2000, is a pan-African organisation that works collaboratively with governments as well as inter-governmental and civil society actors to contribute towards building fair, democratic and inclusive societies across the continent, through transitional justice and peacebuilding interventions. The IJR's work is informed by the insights gained from working with governmental stakeholders and grassroots communities across the continent. Internationally, the IJR has provided strategic and technical advice to a wide variety of stakeholders. The IJR is also a trusted advisor to key decision makers and inter-governmental actors on transitional justice and peacebuilding initiatives. The IJR has positioned itself as a provider of choice of reliable qualitative data on public perception in the areas of peace and security through its continental Afrobarometer and the South African Reconciliation Barometer. We welcome collaboration with like-minded partners and invite you to find out more about our work on our website: www.ijr.org.za.



CDD is a civil society organisation with a strategic focus on catalysing democratic development, human rights and inclusive governance based on the youth agency. The CDD Strategic Plan 2020–2024 has four interdependent pillars: democracy and human rights; youth leadership; economic justice; and peace and security. CDD contributes to building a resilient, inclusive, democratic and human rights-respecting society. It also works to protect civic space, and human rights defenders. Find out more at cddmoz.org.



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Government of the Netherlands



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