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# THE LENS

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## THIS ISSUE'S FEATURED ARTICLE:

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*Leveraging inclusion against  
extremism*

**- Jaynisha Patel**

## LEVERAGING INCLUSION AGAINST EXTREMISM

Ravaged by a devastating insurgency, Mozambique's 'forgotten cape' has reminded southern Africa that its insulation from violent extremism is in fact a mirage.

From the vortex of Cabo Delgado's political, social and economic exclusion, an insurgent

group known widely as Ahlu-Sunna Wa-Jama'a (ASWJ) or locally as 'Al-Shabaab', has launched an attack on its state and its society as it seeks to establish a breakaway region governed under Sharia Law. The conflict, now threatening to spill over into neighbouring provinces, has demanded from the region a coordinated military response, but getting to the heart of local grievances remains the only sustainable pathway to peace.

While the coordinated response from Southern African Development Community Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) is crucial to destabilising the insurgency, its impact will only be sustained by parallel and longer lasting strategies to address the drivers or root causes of the conflict. Through a consultative process with local youth, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) found that at the core of driving recruitment and narratives that sustain ASWJ activity, are perceptions of exclusion. These perceptions have snowballed at the hand of an unjust system of resource distribution, directed by inaccessible nodes of power and governance.

As young Mozambicans are targeted for recruitment, the entry points for ASWJ show themselves as largely underpinned by state-fuelled grievances that have, in the eyes of locals, undermined their ability to shape their own futures through inclusive governance and as economic agents seeking pathways out of poverty.

Known as a periphery province experiencing decades of neglect, parts of Cabo Delgado are so distant from the country's capital, Maputo, that by land, one would have to cover more distance to reach Montepuez than Cape Town. Exclusion is however not measured only in distance. As other parts of Mozambique develop industry and give way to gainful employment opportunities, Cabo Delgado has remained disproportionately underdeveloped. On a human level, this means that human development deficits characterise the local population.

Unsurprisingly, youths repeatedly cited various human development deficits, including education shortfalls and illiteracy, as reasons for young people joining ASWJ. However, they also alluded to the worrying trend of young Mozambicans with formal educational qualifications not being able to find work. The scarcity of opportunities is creating a sense of hopelessness among the youth.

This hopelessness about the future is overlaid by other material scarcities, with poverty and hunger persisting as features of society. Locals generally rely on the land and natural resources to provide food, and communities lean on the teachings of Islamic clerics for education. They also rely on each other for essentials like water and sanitation.

Hunger is a common plague on the local society, made worse by the impact that Covid-19 related restrictions on economic activity has had on local livelihoods. ASWJ has used this chronic and worsening deprivation of necessities to lure potential recruits.

Youth in the area tell of the group using promises of food or small sums of cash to lure locals into mosques preaching Islamist ideology.

Such widespread material deprivation has also given rise to assessments of injustice, deviously exploited by the insurgent group to stoke further divisions within Mozambique. Local youth feel slighted by the unequal dispensation of resources, with most allocated to southern regions. The effect of this, framed succinctly by youth in the area, whose powerful reflections spotlight how unjust resource distribution not only creates the potential for risky collective action, but also gives ASWJ an entry point to seduce the local youth:

**“REGARDING WEALTH IN CABO DELGADO, YES, I HAVE HEARD, SORRY THE EXPRESSION, PEOPLE FROM NORTH SAYING WE ARE WORKING FOR PEOPLE OF SOUTH, WE HAVE THE WEALTH AND THEY ARE GETTING FAT.”**

**“PEOPLE ... SAY LOOK AT SOUTH, THERE, EVERYTHING IS BEAUTIFUL,  
PEOPLE HAVE OPPORTUNITY AND HERE WE DO NOT HAVE  
OPPORTUNITY, SO WE HAVE TO MAKE JUSTICE WITH OUR OWN HANDS.”**

These reflections emphasise historical grievances, but also ongoing discriminations created by the unjust and exclusionary management of the recently discovered deposits of Liquid Natural Gas (LNG). Without proper consideration of how, moving forward, the process can yield greater inclusion and benefits for locals, the LNG sector might result in a ‘resource curse’ outcome that can be yet another source of instability in the decade to come.

These inaccessible processes of resource dispensation are created, and further compounded by corruption. Mozambique suffers from entrenched elitism that webs through industries and institutions, rendering favourable outcomes for those within the ruling party's patronage networks. While this is a national problem, it has dictated the set-up of the LNG sector and impeded provincial and local governance in Cabo Delgado. A small but well-connected elite in Cabo Delgado has positioned itself to capture what national wealth does make its way up north, while the bureaucracy is staffed with loyalists rather than those who possess technical know-how. This is also noted by youth as a justification for joining the insurgency, where access to incoming earning jobs does not depend on patronage. One youth describes governance in Cabo Delgado as a corrupt ‘beast with seven heads.’

The crippling of the state by corruption, has in other parts of Africa, given way to extremist narratives. Boko Haram, for example, seduced locals with assurances that corruption will be curtailed under Sharia Law.

Making governance more accessible is crucial to enabling more inclusive, equitable development. Yet youth note that local mechanisms to report grievances are unresponsive, with politicians only active in their communities around election time. Consequently, local grievances have no democratic outlet. Without getting to the heart of these local grievances, the potential for ASWJ to recruit from pools of the disenfranchised will remain a potent threat to national and regional security.

Ultimately, these factors boil down to one single issue: the critical need for inclusive governance across all spheres. Governance that enables inclusion is a catalyst for inclusive development, thus breaking a vicious causal pathway from economic or social exclusion to grievances to recruitment into extremist groups.

At present, there is a pressing need for the Mozambican government to look internally and to ask hard questions. What is preventing local governance from being inclusive and responsive? What steps must be taken to ensure greater transparency and accountability? What processes can be invoked to facilitate resources allocated on a needs basis?

Without remedying these critical problems, we are looking at a microcosm of what might become a general reality across the region, with implications for broader regional security. As more evidence comes to light, there is a strong case to be made for a more concerted effort to improve governance processes that could give birth to greater inclusion in the region.