



POLICY BRIEF

Inclusive dialogue: a priority for resolving the Cabo Delgado insurgency

Borges Nhamirre

The armed insurgency in Cabo Delgado entered its eighth year in October 2025. Despite extensive military efforts, jihadists remain active and pose a serious threat to military and human security. Now under new leadership, the Mozambican government continues to prioritise an exclusively militarised response even though this approach has consistently failed to contain violent extremism. Attempts to resolve the conflict through dialogue have had little impact as they lack government support.

Key findings

- ▶ President Daniel Chapo has continued the policies of his predecessor, Filipe Nyusi, by prioritising military responses to the insurgency. The heavily militarised approach has failed to contain the violent extremists, who remain active in the province and continue to pose a serious threat to human and military security.
- ▶ The deployment of Rwandan troops and the Southern African Development Community Mission in Mozambique had limited impact. While it prevented the spread of the crisis, militants broke up into small groups that continue to attack government forces and civilians.
- ▶ To adapt to the presence of foreign troops, insurgents have shifted strategy and adopted a 'hearts and minds' approach, seeking acceptance among coastal communities where they enjoy relative support. Militants are also exploiting the violence of state forces towards civilians to legitimise themselves as defenders of Muslim communities against government repression.
- ▶ Several voices in Mozambique's political and civil society spheres have proposed dialogue to deal with the drivers of the conflict but the government rejects this, claiming that there is 'no one to talk to'.
- ▶ Labelling the insurgency as international terrorism undermines the potential success of dialogue by reinforcing the stance that terrorists cannot be negotiated with.

Recommendations

- ▶ The government should complement military measures with political, social and economic strategies that address the insurgency's driving factors.
- ▶ The state should enable inclusive dialogue, creating space for structured conversations with community leaders, civil society members and international mediators to build trust and identify non-military solutions.
- ▶ The government and other stakeholders should strengthen community engagement and counter insurgents' recruitment strategy by investing in social services, infrastructure and livelihoods in affected areas. That would allow communities to see the state as a source of protection and opportunity.
- ▶ To avoid fuelling extremist propaganda, the government must prevent security force abuses through training and effective accountability mechanisms.
- ▶ While regional and international support remains important, framing the insurgency as 'international terrorism' limits dialogue options. A more nuanced approach is needed to open channels for local conflict resolution.

Introduction

The government of President Daniel Chapo continues to prioritise military responses to the ongoing jihadist insurgency in Cabo Delgado, northern Mozambique, despite nearly a decade of evidence showing that a military-only approach is insufficient to contain violent extremism.

Chapo came to power following the October 2024 presidential election, which both local and international observers claimed was marred by fraud and electoral irregularities, triggering deadly political unrest in Mozambique. Besides the immediate post-electoral violence that confronted Chapo, the insurgency in Cabo Delgado has been the biggest test of his administration. Chapo's response has been to continue with the strategy of his predecessor, Filipe Nyusi, which relies heavily on hard-handed military responses.

By taking this option, Chapo failed to draw powerful lessons from the two-and-a-half-year military intervention by the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) and the four-year deployment of the Rwandan Defence Force (RDF). These interventions reveal that deploying thousands of well-trained and -equipped troops is not enough to end a crisis that is driven by local grievances.

SAMIM and the RDF have helped to reduce the frequency of attacks, especially large-scale attacks, and weaken the combat capacity of al-Shabaab – the Islamic State Mozambique, which has wreaked havoc in Cabo Delgado since 2017. However, they have not succeeded in ending the insurgency.¹

This policy brief argues that the government of Mozambique should prioritise dialogue as an alternative tool for conflict resolution. This strategy is more likely to be effective than the exclusively military responses pursued since 2017, which have failed to achieve their intended goals.

Methodology

The Institute for Security Studies (ISS) conducted field research in the Cabo Delgado province in the second half of 2023 (June–July, September, November–December), covering the city of Pemba and the districts of Mocímboa da Praia, Montepuez, Mueda and Palma. Two additional visits to Pemba in January 2024 and April 2025 provided further opportunities to assess developments and conditions on the ground.

A qualitative approach was applied, combining documentary and bibliographic research, key informant interviews, focus group discussions and non-participant observation. Documentary research included the review of government reports and publications from civil society and humanitarian organisations operating in Cabo Delgado.

Bibliographic research involved a comprehensive review of literature on the insurrection including its root causes, tactics and strategies, the responses of the Mozambican government and its allies, and the broader implications



SAMIM AND RWANDAN
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of the conflict. This was complemented by a review of the literature on dialogue as a tool for conflict resolution.

Data collection included 32 open-ended key informant interviews with individuals selected for their in-depth knowledge of the insurgency's dynamics and conflict resolution. Among the interviewees were eight religious leaders, six traditional leaders, nine local traders, seven members of the defence and security forces, and two commanders of the local militia as well as scholars conducting research on the Cabo Delgado conflict. Three focus group discussions were also conducted:

- One in Pemba with 13 former members of the community police in Bairro Alto Gingone, which dealt with crime, government responses and community contributions to prevention
- One in Montepuez with 22 young informal vendors at the local market, which explored structural drivers of violence that may push the youth to join or support the insurgency
- One in Mueda with 18 members of the local militia, which focused on the causes of the rebellion, the government's response and the militia's contribution to the counterinsurgency.

Non-participant observation was carried out in markets, internally displaced persons (IDPs) camps, schools and hospitals to better understand daily life, community interactions and relations with public officials and the defence and security forces.

This policy brief has four sections: an assessment of Chapo's response to the unrest; a discussion on the role of dialogue as a counterinsurgency tool; a mapping of existing dialogue initiatives and their actors, objectives and challenges; and a final section with conclusions and recommendations.

Mozambique government's response to the insurgency

For over seven years (2017–2024), the government under then-president Filipe Nyusi relied heavily on a militarised response to the insurgency in Cabo Delgado. Special police units and armed forces were deployed to villages targeted by rebels. However, this strategy quickly proved ineffective, as insurgents outmanoeuvred government

forces and expanded their operations, even reaching district capitals.

Consistent with the militarised response, the government turned to private military companies to bolster national forces.² When this also failed, Nyusi later turned to foreign troops from the SADC and Rwanda.³ This new tactic achieved some success as the troops helped to reduce the frequency and geographic spread of the attacks.

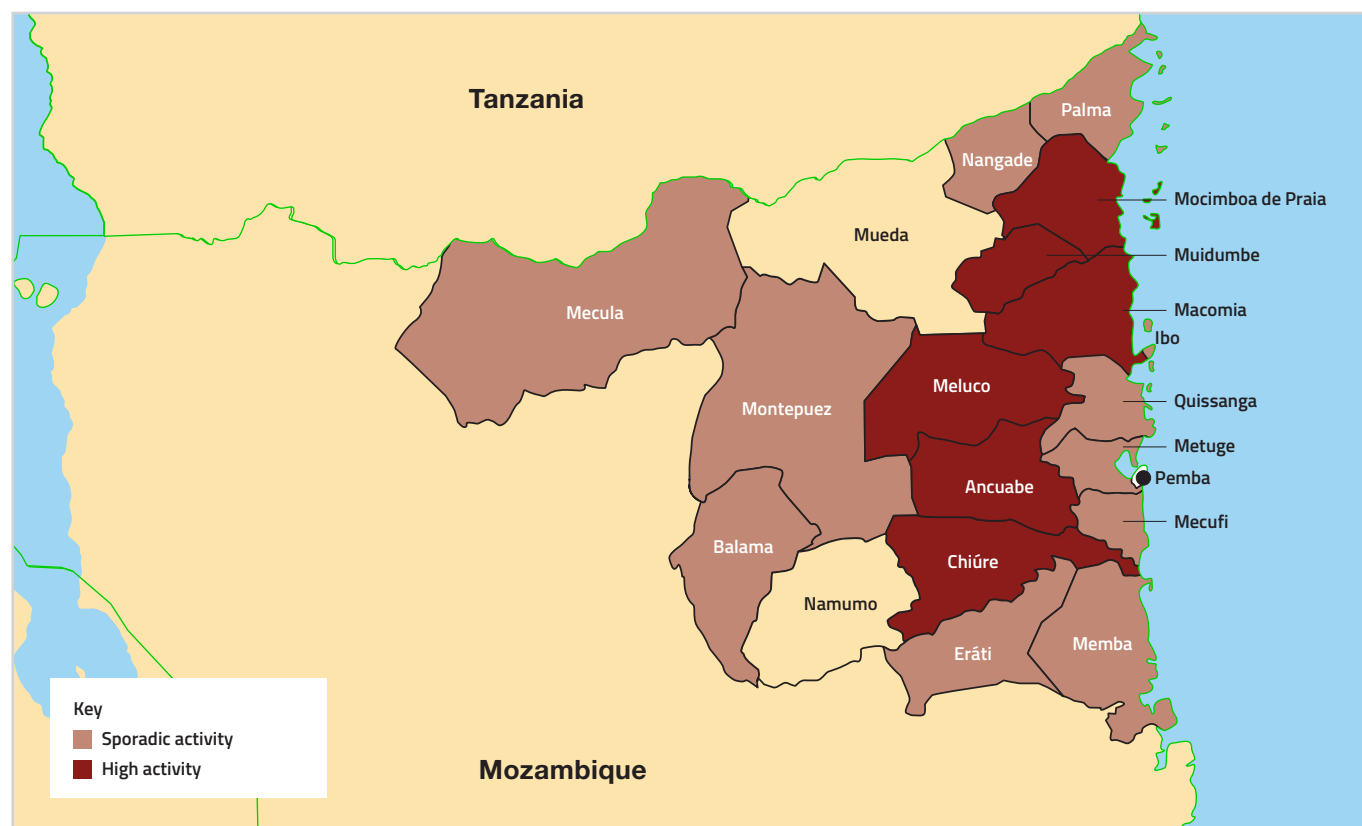
Foreign forces have also managed to confine the insurgents to remote areas and re-establish relative security in the region, which has facilitated the return of approximately 600 000 IDPs. This represents about 50% of all IDPs⁴ who fled the insurgency to find sanctuaries in the southern parts of Cabo Delgado and the neighbouring provinces of Nampula and Niassa.⁵

However, the foreign forces failed to neutralise the insurgency and bring peace, stability and development to the region. The military intervention was not accompanied by initiatives specifically aimed at addressing the conflict drivers. Most of the deployed military and security forces are trained and equipped to deal with the hard security issues. Ending the crisis, however, requires a broader strategy that combines military and non-military responses. Soft security measures include dialogue, community reconciliation, and structural and developmental responses that factor in the conditions that escalate and sustain the insurgency.

Such measures deal with the push and pull factors that enable the local youth to join or participate in terrorism and insurgencies of this nature, be they social, economic, political, religious, ethnic or demographic. Studies suggest that effective responses to insurgency are often grounded in human security approaches, which view security from a much wider perspective and develop programmes that are more integrated and encompassing.

After eight years of the military response, the conflict has shown no sign of ending; instead, the insurgency seems to be expanding. In the first half of 2025, rebels launched attacks in 12 districts of Cabo Delgado, more than double the number of districts targeted in the second half of 2024 (see Chart 1). This year's attacks reached Niassa province, which had not experienced such incursions since 2021.⁶ Maritime attacks have also increased in Mozambican territorial waters.⁷

Chart 1: Districts in Cabo Delgado, Niassa and Nampula provinces targeted by insurgent attacks, January–October 2025



Source: Author

Chapo continues the military approach

The departure of Nyusi from power in January 2025 raised expectations that the government might alter its approach to the Cabo Delgado conflict. During the election campaign that brought him to office, Chapo declared that ‘the first objective of [his] governance is to end terrorism, using all available means to restore peace.’⁸

Six months into his presidency, Chapo stated that resolving the Cabo Delgado crisis requires ‘two paths: one, fighting on the ground; and the other, identifying the insurgents’ leadership structure – as happened during the civil war with Renamo.’ He further emphasised that ‘wars always end with dialogue, and we believe dialogue is fundamental.’⁹ These statements fuelled hopes that Chapo would adopt a different approach from his predecessor by pursuing dialogue.

In March 2025, Chapo’s cabinet approved the National Strategy for the Prevention and Combat of Terrorism and Violent Extremism. However, its development

process lacked meaningful engagement with civil society actors, who could have introduced softer approaches to complement the heavy military emphasis. In addition, the strategy does not include implementation plans that effectively incorporate civil society participation.

Instead, the Chapo administration has remained focused on a hard security approach, the same one that has failed to contain the insurgency for the past eight years. Despite recognising the importance of dialogue for conflict resolution, Chapo focused on strengthening military alliances with neighbouring countries that have deployed troops to help Mozambique fight terrorism, travelling to Tanzania in April¹⁰ and Rwanda in August.¹¹

Nearly one year into his presidency, no concrete steps have been taken to advance dialogue initiatives aimed at resolving the conflict. These measures have received no or very little support from the government, representing a missed opportunity to successfully contain and prevent violent extremism.

Dialogue as a tool to resolve Cabo Delgado conflict

Dialogue is widely recognised as a mechanism for preventing and resolving conflicts by involving multiple actors. In some contexts, the term is used interchangeably with formal negotiations between parties seeking a mutually agreed settlement. More commonly, however, dialogue refers to informal communication processes between opposing sides that can pave the way for formal negotiations or mediation processes.

The concept also encompasses peacebuilding initiatives, grassroots efforts and bottom-up policy approaches designed to prevent the escalation of conflict, even if these initiatives do not explicitly aim to produce a negotiated agreement.¹²

Dialogue can also provide a framework for engaging with violent extremist groups that seek specific benefits. Talks with an opposing group and its members are not the same as legitimising the group's goals and ideology; on the contrary, engagement can moderate its policies and behaviour.¹³

In Cabo Delgado, dialogue should be designed, led and coordinated by community members or organisations

When referring to dialogue in Cabo Delgado, the tendency is to think of negotiations between the government and the insurgents. But dialogue can be vertical or horizontal, especially when dealing with a broad range of stakeholders, including state entities, traditional or community leaders, political actors, religious groups, the youth and gender-based organisations.

Dialogues help provide platforms for stakeholders or conflict actors to discuss internal grievances and seek peaceful solutions to conflicts, whether among members of the same community or between different communities. This is of great relevance to the Cabo Delgado insurgency, which is fuelled by tensions and a lack of social cohesion between different groups in communities.¹⁴

In this context, dialogue should be a horizontal process that is designed, led and coordinated by community members or community organisations. This is because it is important to understand the cultural and social contexts of the conflict, which should shape the development of appropriate interventions and solutions. In post-Mubarak Egypt, for example, dialogue initiatives involving respected religious leaders in the community have played an important role in ending acute tensions that led to several fatalities.¹⁵

Vertical dialogue involves, or can lead to, negotiations between governments and insurgents to end armed conflict. A recent example is South Sudan, where negotiations between the government and rebel groups culminated in a peace agreement.¹⁶ While the jihadist insurgency in Cabo Delgado is backed by the Islamic State (an international terrorist organisation with a radical approach that makes dialogue difficult) the insurgency's leadership is primarily local. The fighters are also mostly locals.¹⁷ Engaging with these local leaders could provide an entry point for dialogue that may ultimately lead to negotiations aimed at ending the conflict.

By involving local leaders, dialogue makes it possible to identify the factors behind violent extremism, many of which would otherwise remain unrecognised. Community members are able to share their concerns and grievances with trusted religious and traditional leaders and can even propose solutions to the challenges they face.

Dialogue can play a fundamental role in countering and preventing violent extremism in Cabo Delgado. Recognising this possibility, prominent figures including former president Joaquim Chissano,¹⁸ the mainstream opposition¹⁹ and civil society leaders have advocated for dialogue as an alternative or complementary measure for conflict resolution.

The Mozambican government, however, has repeatedly denied that internal grievances fuel the conflict, questioning whether there is, in fact, anyone to engage with.²⁰ By portraying the insurgency as 'faceless', the authorities have effectively ruled out dialogue.²¹ Conveniently, the government has reinforced this position by framing the conflict as Islamic State aggression, thereby avoiding deeper scrutiny of its underlying drivers.²²

The insurgents operating in northern Mozambique use terrorist tactics, including deliberately targeting civilians, and are backed by the Islamic State, which they pledged to support in mid-2019. However, portraying the insurgency solely as terrorism obscures the local grievances that motivate young people to join or support the group.

Researchers and experts on the Cabo Delgado conflict consistently note that although local insurgents are linked to the Islamic State, most of their fighters and leaders come from Mocímboa da Praia and are well known to the population.²³

Chart 2: Local grievances that extremist groups could exploit

Area/district	Drivers of violent extremism in Cabo Delgado
Pemba	• Precarious conditions of IDPs: limited humanitarian assistance, shortages of food and basic resources • Diversion of aid: local leaders allegedly divert aid for IDPs, causing exclusion and resentment • Youth unemployment: false promises of jobs make young people vulnerable to recruitment by insurgents • Police extortion: extortion of motorbike taxi drivers, a common livelihood for youth, erodes trust in local authorities
Montepuez	• Stigmatisation of IDPs: displaced people face discrimination from host communities, resulting in denial of land for cultivation and restricted access to water from public standpipes • Perceptions of illicit wealth: young Nampula entrepreneurs thrive in Montepuez's mobile money market, but there are suspicions that their resources stem from working for insurgents
Mueda	• Religious discrimination: in this Christian-majority district, Muslim leaders report persecution by local authorities, the pro-government local militia and Mueda Community Radio. Complaints include discriminatory radio broadcasts, illegal mosque raids, bans on broadcasting the call to prayer from the town's mosques and restrictions on wearing traditional Islamic attire • Security force abuses: police, military and militia are accused of disorderly conduct and extortion, particularly targeting shopkeepers and public transport operators
Mocímboa da Praia	• Ethnic divisions: deep mistrust between Kimwani, majority natives of Mocímboa da Praia, and Makonde political elite, largely from Muidumbe and Mueda, results in the groups living in separate neighbourhoods, undermining social cohesion • Stigma towards returnees: individuals freed or rescued from violent extremist groups receive poor reintegration support, experience community stigma and are labelled as collaborators, increasing the risk of re-recruitment • Fragile return conditions for IDPs: displaced returning families face severe basic resource shortages and no social and economic support, fuelling child begging and youth frustration
Palma	• Military frustration around Afungi: hundreds of Mozambican troops deployed to the area and buffer zone under the Joint Task Force with TotalEnergies reportedly had their allowances cut without notice, raising risks of troops directing their frustration towards local communities • Perceived economic displacement: LNG-driven return of Palma attracted many opportunity-seeking outsiders with better skills than locals, who perceive these economic migrants as 'invaders' taking their jobs • Loss of livelihoods: LNG land concessions have dispossessed locals of farmland and fishing grounds, which, combined with a lack of employment in LNG, fuels resentment and could translate into community support for insurgents

Source: Based on fieldwork interviews

Violent extremist groups depend on the support of their communities to succeed. In Cabo Delgado, a combination of push and pull factors has enabled local populations to be mobilised and recruited into the insurgency.²⁴

In Cabo Delgado, young people are especially vulnerable to recruitment. Studies show that local youth have joined the insurgency for multiple reasons including poverty, unemployment, and social and political exclusion.²⁵ The influence of foreign preachers or local teachers who studied Islam abroad also plays a role.²⁶

These drivers cannot be resolved through military intervention alone. If peace and stability are to be restored and sustained in Cabo Delgado, complementary measures are required. Dialogue can transform the way individuals think about each other and how they can engage with people who are different from them.²⁷ Well-structured dialogue can also help to identify options for intervention at the policy level, in service delivery, and through other practical measures.

The ISS' field research in Cabo Delgado identified several factors that could make the province a potential breeding ground for violent extremism (see Chart 2). If these drivers remain ignored or sidelined by decision makers, they may lead to local youth being radicalised and recruited by insurgents.

Dialogue initiatives aimed at resolving the insurgency

The ISS has mapped various dialogue initiatives promoted by local, national, regional and international actors. These efforts sought to create space for alternative conflict resolution pathways beyond a purely military response.

Interreligious Centre for Peace, Pemba

The first known dialogue initiative in Cabo Delgado was the Interreligious Centre for Peace (CIPAZ), founded in the Diocese of Pemba in 2017 by Catholic priests and Muslim imams from Mocímboa da Praia.

When the first attacks occurred in October 2017, many displaced people from Mocímboa da Praia, including the Islamic Council of Mozambique's (CISLAMO) sheikhs and imams, fled to Pemba. These religious leaders were caught in a 'double accusation': extremists accused them of collaborating with the government, while the government suspected them of sympathising with extremists.²⁸ The Catholic Church sheltered both Muslim clerics and other IDPs, creating a foundation for interfaith cooperation.

The imams proposed an initiative to demonstrate that extremist violence did not reflect Islamic teachings but rather the radical misinterpretation of a few actors. Catholic priests helped formalise the idea and established the CIPAZ as a legal organisation.²⁹

The centre achieved some notable results. It organised interfaith peace conferences and issued joint recommendations to the government and other stakeholders. The CIPAZ also translated the 'Document on Human

FROM JANUARY–JUNE 2025

12

CABO DELGADO DISTRICTS
WERE ATTACKED

Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together,’ signed in Abu Dhabi by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of al-Azhar Ahmad al-Tayyeb in 2019. By distributing the Abu Dhabi declaration to local Christian and Muslim communities, the CIPAZ helped to counter extremist narratives.

Without official permission, even specialists with proven methodologies cannot advance meaningful dialogue

Despite these efforts, the initiative was short-lived. Initial support, including from the Embassy of Sweden in Maputo, dwindled after 2019. The CIPAZ could not expand its activities beyond Pemba into the southern districts of Cabo Delgado. Its founders, Father Eduardo Roca³⁰ and Sheikh Bacar Suale Assumane,³¹ acknowledged that the initiative did not achieve its full objectives largely due to a lack of financial backing.

Sheikh Assumane later became a target of government repression when he was arrested in 2024 on terrorism charges while travelling for medical treatment in Tanzania. He was deported to Mozambique without a formal judicial extradition process and is currently detained and awaiting trial at the maximum-security prison in Maputo. The sheikh’s case underscores the risks faced by clerics engaged in dialogue initiatives and the government’s reluctance to differentiate between peacebuilders and violent extremists.

Interreligious Dialogue, Cabo Delgado

Another significant initiative came from two Mozambican civil society organisations, the Civil Society Support Mechanism Foundation (MASC) and the Institute for Social and Economic Studies (IESE). Both organisations had been at the forefront of research into the root causes of the Cabo Delgado conflict.³²

In early 2020, they convened a major workshop in Pemba that brought together the province’s leading religious actors. The aim was to reflect on the origins of the violence, discuss pathways towards peace and reconciliation, and strengthen interfaith cooperation.

The workshop was attended by the Governor of Cabo Delgado, Valige Tauabo, who publicly endorsed interreligious dialogue as a means to ensure mutual respect and prevent religious conflict.³³ The initiative received financial support from international partners including the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID), which enabled similar meetings to be organised in the Niassa and Nampula provinces.

Despite this early momentum, when donor support ended, the Interreligious Dialogue could not consolidate its presence as a durable platform for peacebuilding in northern Mozambique.

Peacemaking Advisory Group, Southern Africa

The most recognised dialogue initiative for the Cabo Delgado insurgency is the Peacemaking Advisory Group (PAG), a regional platform of prominent Southern African religious and human rights leaders working towards conflict resolution in northern Mozambique. PAG has positioned itself as a credible convenor for engagement.³⁴ Its secretariat is the Johannesburg-based non-governmental organisation (NGO) Good Governance Africa (GGA).

PAG is chaired by Bishop Trevor Mwamba, President of Zambia’s United National Independence Party (UNIP). Other religious leaders in the group are Bishop Dinis Matsolo from the Christian Council of Mozambique and Sheikh Aminuddin Muhammad Ibrahim, President of CISLAMU and member of Mozambique’s Council of State.

Since 2022, PAG has carried out stakeholder consultations in Maputo, Pemba, Metuge and southern Tanzania, engaging with government officials, religious leaders, civil society actors and IDPs. These missions concluded that there is a broad ‘readiness for peace dialogue across all sectors of society, both state and non-state’.³⁵ PAG has also sought to incorporate regional perspectives, holding consultations in South Africa and Tanzania on the cross-border dynamics of the Cabo Delgado conflict.

Despite these efforts, the group’s meetings are constrained by security conditions, with little direct engagement in the conflict-affected districts. As a result, the perspectives of national and provincial elites

tend to dominate, while the sensitivities and priorities of affected communities remain underrepresented. PAG itself recognises the need to deepen grassroots-level consultations to strengthen the legitimacy and inclusivity of any dialogue process.

Intercultural Dialogue, Maputo

The Intercultural Dialogue is led by Severino Ngoenha, professor of philosophy and interculturalism and one of Mozambique's most prominent advocates for peace in Cabo Delgado. Ngoenha has repeatedly warned of the risk of the 'Sudanisation' of Mozambique should dialogue not be prioritised.³⁶

Inspired by the interreligious dialogue facilitated by MASC and the IESE, this initiative is less formal and is linked to Ngoenha's academic chair. Building on earlier efforts to bring together Christians and Muslims in Cabo Delgado, he sought to expand the scope of dialogue beyond religious lines to encompass broader societal divides.

According to Ngoenha, the Intercultural Dialogue enabled reconciliation between religious denominations and revealed common ground in beliefs and doctrinal teachings.³⁷ However, it simultaneously exposed deeper fractures within Mozambican society. While these cracks appear at first glance to be religious, ethnic, regional or political, Ngoenha argues that they are ultimately rooted in economic inequality and elites exploiting differences in their pursuit of power and resources.

Ngoenha cautions that Mozambique faces the risk of severe divisive conflicts if intercultural work is not pursued consistently and across disciplines. Like other dialogue initiatives in Mozambique, the Intercultural Dialogue highlights important perspectives but has so far not achieved tangible results in resolving the insurgency.

Dialogue Advisory Group, Amsterdam

At the international level, the Dialogue Advisory Group (DAG) is an Amsterdam-based specialised NGO with a global track record in facilitating dialogue between armed actors in conflict situations.³⁸ Although little is publicly known about its activities in Mozambique, the DAG has started to assess the feasibility of a peaceful dialogue initiative in Cabo Delgado.³⁹ These efforts remain largely exploratory, with no confirmed outcomes to date.

Challenges hindering dialogue efforts

While dialogue is widely regarded as a positive tool for conflict resolution, it is not always successful. Building trust is difficult even among stakeholders with shared values, and in intercultural contexts, suspicion and a lack of interest in agreement often undermine progress. In some cases, adversaries may not even see consensus as desirable or legitimate.

As Pernille Rieker notes, three core challenges shape the prospects for dialogue: secrecy, legitimacy and emotions.⁴⁰ Secrecy limits accountability in engagement, while public dialogue can encourage actors to align their words with deeds, although it can also breed hostility. Regarding legitimacy, leaders must balance negotiations with the need to secure internal support, as shifts in power dynamics can either enable or derail talks. Finally, emotions such as fear, humiliation and hope heavily influence dialogue outcomes, either advancing conflict or creating openings for constructive engagement.

Secrecy limits accountability, while public dialogue encourages actors to align their words with deeds

Field research in Cabo Delgado shows that these and other challenges are highly relevant to the Mozambican context, where they have rendered dialogue initiatives largely ineffective in resolving the crisis.

Government's lack of interest in dialogue

The neutralisation of key insurgent leaders – spiritual leader Sheikh Abu Hassan Swati and Chief of Operations Bonomade Machude Omar – further bolstered the government's confidence in a military solution, making dialogue increasingly unlikely. However, the radicals have since recovered and continue to carry out attacks, underscoring the limits of a security-first strategy and the need to reassess the assumption that the conflict can be resolved exclusively by force.

The government's reluctance to engage has direct consequences for dialogue initiatives. Organisations

with experience in negotiating with violent extremist groups report that they lack government authorisation to contact insurgents, severely constraining their work.⁴¹ Without official permission, even specialised actors with proven methodologies cannot advance meaningful dialogue efforts.

Lack of trust in some religious leaders

Most dialogue initiatives have relied on high-level religious leaders but these figures are widely perceived as elites who are disconnected from grassroots concerns. For instance, Islamic leaders in Mueda and Mocimboa da Praia feel poorly represented by CISLAMO at provincial and national levels. In northern Cabo Delgado, CISLAMO local leaders stress that they have been neglected by higher structures, particularly since the death of regional delegate Sheikh Amade Selemane Juma.⁴²

As a result, dialogue efforts that engage only top religious leaders fail to capture communities' real concerns. Building trust between national and local leadership is essential. Alternatively, initiatives must include local religious leaders who already have the confidence of their communities.

Lack of coordination between different initiatives

Existing dialogue initiatives operate in isolation, creating multiple challenges. Local leaders report fatigue from receiving different groups who repeatedly raise the same issues. There is also a perception that international initiatives fail to recognise or build on the work already carried out at the community level. In addition, competition for donor resources fuels fragmentation.

To be productive, dialogue initiatives must work in a coordinated and complementary manner, maximising efforts and sharing information. Only by consolidating local concerns and presenting them coherently in dialogue with authorities can these initiatives achieve meaningful impact.

Conclusion and recommendations

For eight years, the Government of Mozambique has pursued a military solution to the insurgency, with little success. Despite Chapo's campaign promise to use all means to restore peace, his administration has shown

limited or no openness to dialogue and continues to rely almost exclusively on military responses that have proven to be ineffective.

Preventing and reducing violent conflict requires more than security operations. It demands dismantling the ideologies that sustain violence, delegitimising groups that use violence, creating non-violent alternatives to resolving disputes, and strengthening community resilience against recruitment and support for extremist groups. Achieving these goals requires a deep understanding of local dynamics and, critically, the participation of communities and civil society organisations as key actors in peacebuilding.

Dialogue remains an underutilised but essential tool in Cabo Delgado. Existing local, regional and international initiatives often fail to advance beyond early stages, largely due to a lack of government support. Their influence is further undermined by weak coordination, which leads to a duplication of efforts and competition for resources instead of collaboration and mutual support.

Despite these obstacles, dialogue initiatives should continue and seek ways to operate more productively. A holistic approach is required, with dialogue focusing on the root causes of violence. Dialogue can and should occur at multiple levels: between religious and community groups, between the government and affected communities, and between the government and insurgents. Local initiatives such as the CIPAZ and inter religious and inter cultural platforms can strengthen the first track, while regional and international initiatives such as PAG and DAG are better placed to facilitate government–insurgent dialogue and bridge communication between communities and state institutions.

Recommendations for the Government of Mozambique

- Recognise the limits of military action and integrate dialogue as a core element of conflict resolution
- Support and enable existing dialogue initiatives, including community, interreligious and intercultural platforms, ensuring that they have the space and security to operate effectively
- Facilitate inclusive, multi-level dialogue between communities, religious groups, government institutions

and, where possible, insurgents, with support from credible mediators

- Be receptive to expert analysis on the root causes of the insurgency and incorporate alternative, non-military approaches into national strategies
- Collaborate with regional and international partners, such as PAG and DAG, to bridge communication between the state, affected communities and insurgents

Recommendations for organisations initiating dialogue

- Strengthen local ownership by involving community leaders, youth, women and other marginalised groups to build trust and legitimacy
- Document and share lessons learned to refine approaches and avoid duplication across different initiatives

- Invest in capacity building for mediators, facilitators and community representatives to handle sensitive negotiations effectively
- Coordinate with each other and with state, regional and international actors to create a coherent and complementary peace architecture
- Develop clear engagement strategies with violent extremist groups, balancing the need to make contact with safeguards against legitimising violence
- Ensure monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the impact of dialogue and enable strategies to be adapted to evolving dynamics

Notes

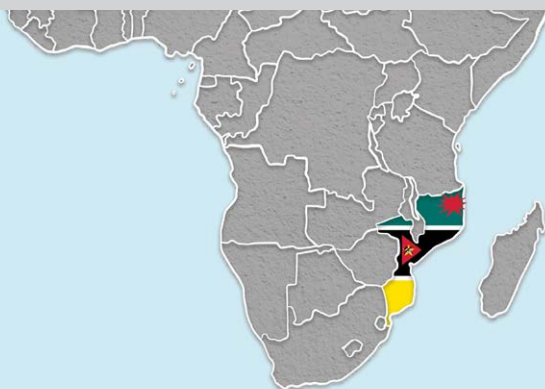
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The genesis of insurgency in northern Mozambique

David M Matsinhe and Estacio Valoi



Insurgents have attacked towns and villages in Cabo Delgado, the poorest province in Mozambique. The government has responded by sending in the military to stamp out the assailants, using 'whatever it takes', amid suspicions that foreign fighters from Tanzania have radicalised local youth who are behind the violence. Other measures to counter the violence include an extra-judicial state of emergency and the suppression of information.

SOUTHERN AFRICA REPORT 27 | OCTOBER 2019

Violent extremism in Mozambique Drivers and links to transnational organised crime

Martin Ewi, Liesl Louw-Vaudran, Willem Els, Richard Chelin, Yussuf Adam and
Elisa Samuel Boerekamp



Collaborative research between the Institute for Security Studies and the Judicial Training Institute of Mozambique revealed that people in Cabo Delgado see the discovery and poor governance of natural resources as a cause of the insurgency. The study also found few links between the insurgency and organised crime, and that regional rather than ethnic differences play a major role in the conflict.

SOUTHERN AFRICA REPORT 51 | AUGUST 2022



POLICY BRIEF

Will foreign intervention end terrorism in Cabo Delgado?

Borges Nhamirre

Mozambique has accepted foreign assistance to deal with the terror threat in Cabo Delgado. Countries from Africa, Europe and North America are directly involved in combating the insurgency, either through military missions or training Mozambican military forces. This policy brief focuses on support provided by private military companies, Rwanda and the Southern African Development Community. It highlights the importance of transparency and the need for foreign missions to be coordinated and tailored to local needs.



POLICY BRIEF

Coordination: key to the success of African solutions for Mozambique

Liesl Louw-Vaudran

The Cabo Delgado crisis is testing the African Union (AU) peace and security architecture. Troop deployments from the Southern African Development Community and Rwanda show that Africa can deal with security challenges in various ways. So far, however, the AU and its Peace and Security Council have taken a back seat. Coordination and a joint vision for tackling the root causes of violent extremism are crucial going forward.

About the author

Borges Nhamirre is a research consultant on southern Africa at the Institute for Security Studies. His focus areas include violent extremism, governance, elections and transnational organised crime. Borges has a master's degree in security studies from Joaquim Chissano University, Mozambique and is studying towards a doctoral degree in ethnicity and conflict at Queen's University Belfast, United Kingdom.

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