Countering Extremist Violence and Terrorism in Cabo Delgado: (How) Can Past Peace-Building and DDR Lessons Be of Use?[1]

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Abstract:

Radical Islamic insurgency and violent extremism have claimed over 5,250 lives and forcibly displaced at least 734,000 people in Cabo Delgado, northern Mozambique over the past six and a half years. Counter-insurgency efforts of the government to date have mainly focused on a military- and security-based response, paying less attention to the structural drivers of extremist violence, such as socio-economic inequalities, poor gov-ernance, historic ideological, ethnic and religious oppositions, and an incomplete peace-building and reconciliation process from the post-civil war period. The paper examines how Mozambique can learn from its past peace-building and Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) experience, build on the achievements while also correct the shortcomings, which have equally contributed to the rise of violence. It also analyses ways to implement a tailored, inclusive, and effective strategy of Countering and Pre-venting Violent Extremism (C/PVE), building on the past but linking it to present needs and future challenges. Addressing long-standing root causes, focusing on youth and their communities, and furthering reconciliation are just a few areas, among others, to focus on to ensure that a heavy military response does not undermine the prospects of long-term peace.

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1. Introduction

Since October 2017, radical Islamic insurgents have staged more than 2,190 attacks in the province of Cabo Delgado, in northern Mozambique (ACLED, 2024). Violence has also spread over to Niassa province and the border areas with Tanzania. The group called *Ahlu Sunnah Wa-Jamo/Ansar al-Sunna* or in short *Al-Shabaab*[4] targets both military and police forces as well as civilians, with a total death toll of more than 5,250 to date. Violent extremism has also displaced at least 734,000 people who had to seek temporary refuge among host communities and internally displaced camps elsewhere (UNOCHA, 2024). Displaced people require continuous humanitarian assistance including a safe place to stay, food, healthcare, psycho-social support, and protection. Most of them have limited hopes to return home due to the persisting risk of further attacks.

The violence has also halted major investments that are critical for the economic development of the country that is among the ten poorest in the world (UNDP, 2023). Following the attack in Palma on 24 March 2021, the main investor Total Energies has sus-pended its liquified natural gas (LNG) extraction project, which was the largest foreign investment project in Africa worth US$20 billion, for an indefinite term (Total Energies, 2022).

The insurgency takes place in one of the most impoverished, remote, and rural areas of Mozambique, with analysts arguing that Cabo Delgado has long been ripe for conflict (ICG, 2021, p. 4). The government has been historically (and purposefully) neglecting the province, characterised by extreme poverty and income inequality, low socio-economic indicators, weak governance, endemic corruption, and widespread organised crime (Faria, 2021, p. 6-8). This is despite the great economic potentials that Cabo Del-gado would have thanks to its fertile land, access to the sea, touristic sights, and a wealth of natural resources. Most significantly, the exploration of the recently discovered vast LNG deposits, the biggest on the continent, could boost economic growth and socio-economic development for the country with billions of dollars over the coming decades, if revenues are well-managed and distributed. The population of Cabo Delga-do, especially its youth, has, however, little benefitted so far from all these potentials. On the contrary, they have experienced lost livelihoods, land grabs, pollution and forced resettlements (Faria, 2021, p. 6; Rawoot, 2020). These have further fuelled the centuries-long oppositions between the north and the south, and their dominant political, ethnic, and religious groups, paving the way for an escalation of violence.

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[4] The name Ahlu Sunnah Wa-Jamo/Ansar al-Sunna meaning 'supporters of tradition', and the name Al-Shabaab means 'youth' in Arabic. Habibe et al. (2019) have found the group to be linked to the Somali Al-Shabaab. Alden and Chichava (2020) as well as ACLED reports (2024) confirm links to the Islamic State, even though Heyen-Dubé and Rands (2021) have doubted any meaningful connection to the latter.

The situation not only presents a serious humanitarian problem, and a local and regional security risk affecting both people and the economy. Faleg (2019, p. 1-7) also calls it a 'test case for a renewed international focus on conflict prevention', which, in case of failure, may render the country into a 'hotspot of instability'. Whereas, in case of success, 'a model for sustainable resilience and peace maintenance', referring to the – in a way, still ongoing – peace-building and maintenance efforts since the early 90s. This task has become more complex, however, with the appearance of a radical Islamist and violent extremist non-state armed group and the different facet of armed conflict compared to that between the FRELIMO and RENAMO in the past.[5]

This also requires new approaches and techniques that cover the various elements and tasks of Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) as well as prevention, deradicalization and disengagement. This paper explores how Mozambique can build on its past peace-building and DDR experience, including capitalizing on the achievements and correcting the shortcomings thereof to support is efforts on Countering and Preventing Violent Extremism (hereinafter C/PVE) in Cabo Delgado. It also analyses where the focus should lie as part of completing the so far incomplete DDR and implementing C/PVE, with a close integration of the two. In examining the above, the paper builds on two hypotheses, namely: 1) The shortcomings of the peace-building and DDR process are contributing factors, among others, to the insurgency; and 2) C/PVE efforts can and shall build on past peace-building and DDR experience and their general elements to ensure that transformation, if achieved, is long-term and sustainable.

The first two chapters provide a short overview of the insurgent group and the government's counter-terrorism approach until now. This is followed by a review of DDR and C/PVE including the clear and potential linkages and synergies between the two. The fourth chapter goes through point-by-point on how one can build on lessons from the past to counter violence and radicalisation and further a more durable peace. Finally, the Conclusion summarises the main arguments and notes some complementary issues that are also to be considered in and for an effective response to the insurgency.

2. The Insurgents and Their Motives

The insurgents are typically young and marginalised men, such as poor and frustrated farmers, fishermen, petty traders, and unemployed youth with no or little schooling (Habibe, Forquilha and Pereira, 2019, p. 15). They struggle with social integration; the need to care for big households; and 'live in a constant fear of the unknown'. Most of them come from the area of the first attack, Mocímboa da Praia, but there are also

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[5] Mozambique's ruling, previously Marxist, party, the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO) and the anti-communist insurgent forces of the Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO) fought a civil war between 1977-1992, with several instances of renewed hostilities after the 1992 peace accord up until 2019.

Tanzanians and Somali among them, alongside others from the Great Lakes region, the Middle East and South Asia (ICG, 2021, p. 4, and p. 29). Most of them do not speak Portuguese but are fluent in ethnic local languages and Kiswahili.

Group members have various incentives to join the group: the need to survive and meet their families' basic needs; to have a sense of belonging, community, and security, and to obtain a purpose of life and solutions to their complex problems (Habibe et al., 2019, p. 21-28). On the one hand, the group aims to combat Maputo's military and political authority and gain local power including increased political and religious representation and a fair share of the socio-economic benefits. On the other, they seek to establish a new society in the province ruled exclusively by hardline, fundamentalist Islam (Gartenstein-Ross, Chace-Donahue, and Clarke, 2021; Heyen-Dubé and Rands, 2021[6]). 'Jihad [is] the right extremism' for them to build a new political, economic, and social order and tackle political and economic exclusion, social inequalities, unemployment, and corruption (Habibe et al., 2019, p. 23).

Morier-Genoud (2020) notes that religion is only a 'rallying point' for local youth, the main drivers are material deprivation, poverty, marginalization, and lack of perspectives. Indeed, many of the youth members were not attracted to the group because of ideology or religion, nor were they required to be 'sophisticated adherents'; it was enough to be committed to an explicit opposition to local government policies and local Sufi and Wahhabi Islamic leaders (Habibe et al., 2019, p. 25), the latter two considered as a deviant from the 'real version of Islam' (Feijó and Maquenzi, 2019, p. 3). Some analysts also think that Al-Shabaab has only gone through an endogenous transformation from a radical Islamist sect into an armed violent jihadi group (Morier-Genoud, 2020). The Mozambican government has claimed a 'theory of conspiracy' behind the insurgency, with external actors attempting to hinder the country's development (Habibe et al., 2019, p. 33). The opposition RENAMO president, Momade, considered it as merely a power struggle within the national elite for the control of Cabo Delgado's resources (Morier-Genoud, 2019). Mozambique, as many other African countries, indeed struggles with severe corruption and competition among the political elite for individual rather than collective enrichment (Habibe et al., 2019, p. 24). Party loyalty and ethnic belonging play a key role in securing power, access, and control, leaving certain groups feeling excluded from political representation and economic benefits.

The country's historic ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity and dividedness adds another layer to the dynamics of radicalisation. Feeling politically and economically long side-lined, the Muslim-majority Mwani ethnic group that dominates Cabo Delgado in terms of numbers promotes violent extremism to achieve justice against the 'invader', Christian-majority Maconde. The Maconde control political and

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[6] Heyen-Dubé and Rands (2021) claim that the group has already abandoned Salafi-Jihadism, which is also one of the reasons why the group is not vocal about its ideological foundations.

economic life in the province, just as key positions in national and provincial governments and in FRELIMO (Gartenstein-Ross et al., 2021). Cabo Delgado hosts a large number of former RENAMO combatants, who either have or not have gone through post-war DDR.

Finally, as Heyen-Dubé and Rands (2021) and Habibe et al. (2019, p. 28) describe, the group is mainly financed from the illicit local economy, including illegal trading of local natural resources, loan repayments, facilitation money to smuggling networks and human trafficking, including of sex slaves. In the longer run, the jihadist group might become more commercially than ideologically motivated due to their reliance on criminal proceeds.

The group's multiple motives are reflected in the selection of their targets: insulting local Islamic leaders in mosques; attacking state facilities such as police, defence, and security forces, economic establishments and convoys transporting gas; and raiding entire villages and civilians in urban areas, killing often indiscriminately regardless of religious affiliation or ethnicity (Feijó and Maquenzi, 2019, p. 5-6).

3. Approach So Far to Countering the Insurgency

While radicalization in the province has already been happening in the preceding years, it was the October 2017 attack in Mocímboa de Praia district[7] that put Cabo Delgado in the centre of attention. Being under heavy pressure to contain the violence, the Mozambican government has so far taken a primarily military- and security-centred approach. Concerned of its sovereignty, the government initially intended to resolve the situation through own force, and (up until 2020) it did not accept any foreign help. It insisted that the insurgency is nothing else but a series of criminals' actions and foreign conspiracy to keep Mozambique poor (Nhamirre, 2021, p. 3). According to analysts, to some extent the socialist government also feared the threat of imperialism by asking other states to help to tackle its security problems. Furthermore, an international military intervention in Cabo Delgado, that is a major hub for trafficking illicit narcotics, which benefits, among others, members of the ruling political elite, would have meant increased scrutiny for the government (Cilliers, Louw-Vaudran, Walker, Els and Ewi, 2021).

As first measures, the government moved troops to the north, set up a regional military command and (in April 2018) passed a new anti-terrorism law that introduced heavy sentences (Faleg 2019, p. 4). It also concluded security agreements with Tanzania, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Uganda. However, the severely under-equipped, illtrained and low-morale national military and police forces were

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[7] Heyen-Dubé and Rands (2021) claim that the group has already abandoned Salafi-Jihadism, which is also one of the reasons why the group is not vocal about its ideological foundations.

unable to defeat the insurgents (Demuynck and Weijenberg, 2021), who continued to advance and kept attacking remote and urban areas, government buildings, economic infrastructure, banks and so on. In a video broadcast, they also made clear their intention of ruling instead of FRELIMO and by the Law of Allah (Nhamirre, 2021, p. 3).

As a response, the government resorted to contracting foreign private militaries with limited transparency towards the Parliament and the public on its costs and terms. The two-month deployment of the Russian private mercenary Wagner Group (in September 2019), followed by the one-year (April 2020 – April 2021) 'service' of the South African Dyck Advisory Group were also unsuccessful in halting the insurgents[8]. In the meantime, local militia, composed of Maconde war veterans in the province, also mobilised themselves to block Al-Shabaab's advance.

Finally, March 2021 marked a turning point in the government's approach after the group had waged a massive attack on the town of Palma, killing some 2,500 people, including foreigners working on the LNG plant, and displacing a further about 700,000 people. This event both proved the seriousness of the conflict and internationalised it. The government decided to accept support from Portugal in training special forces; from the United States in patrolling the coast and countering maritime narcotics trade; and from France in training Mozambican authorities on state action at sea. Rwandan troops of 1,000 also arrived in July 2021, although this was again not approved by either the Mozambican Parliament or the Council of Ministers, nor provided for by any military cooperation agreement between the two countries.

Following a technical assessment mission, and despite the Mozambican government's reluctance, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) also deployed a 3000-strong Standby Force to help combat terrorism through ground, air and maritime assets and personnel ('SADC mission', 2021). The SADC Military Mission (SAMIM) started its first offensives in August 2021. Local and international observers welcomed this development for two reasons: on the one hand, to ensure a coordinated regional response to a problem that has evolved into a regional security issue; on the other, to find local, African solutions to the problem that serves local needs in a durable manner instead of foreign dominance[9].

In November 2021, the European Union has also set up a (multinational) military training mission to train armed forces on operational preparation, counter-terrorism and the protection of civilians, humanitarian law, human rights law, and peace and gender ('Military Training', 2021).

Foreign troops – notably SAMIM and the Rwandan forces – have so far managed to significantly contain the advance of Al-Shabaab and the spread of extremist violence.

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[8] The government also engaged a third private company – a consortium of Burnham Global (from the United Arab Emirates) and Paramount Group (from the South African Republic) – in February 2021 to provide military training, equipment, and advice.

[9] The SAMIM mission is now expected to withdraw by 15 July 2024 (ACLED, 2024).

Regardless, the insurgents are still active across Cabo Delgado. As Nhamirre (2021, p. 9) notes, over six years of terrorist insurgency (and over a decade of radicalisation) cannot be turned back and defeated in just a few months. This is only the stepping stone towards building peace and stability in the province.

3.1. DDR versus C/PVE: Linkages and Synergies

DDR is essentially a combination of four main elements to promote and create conditions for sustainable peace, security, stability, and development in post-conflict environments. Traditional (first-generation) DDR programmes used in the past start with disarmament: the collection, documentation, control, and disposal of all types of weapons and explosives held by combatants and often also by civilians; and the development of responsible arms management programmes (UNDPKO, 2010). This is followed by demobilization and reinsertion, through which combatants are formally discharged in a controlled manner (in designated sites, camps, centres etc.) and are provided with immediate transitional support to cover their and their families' basic needs (e.g., shelter, food, clothing, healthcare, short-term education, employment etc.) for a certain period up to around a year. This is followed by a long-term reintegration support, with an open timeframe, through which ex-combatants integrate back into civilian life and active socio-economic production. Participants of DDR programmes typically include adult male ex-combatants, but also women and children who usually fill support roles in armed groups (as cooks, sex slaves etc.).

Over time, as the characteristics of conflicts and the nature of armed groups have changed, DDR programmes have also evolved (Idris, 2016, p. 1). While traditional DDR programmes mainly focused on ex-combatants and included defined armed groups, the current, so-called second-generation DDR faces mixed types of (often radical, undisciplined and non-cohesive) armed groups with diverse motivations and many times blurred lines between combatants and civilians. First-generation DDR was normally started at the stage of peace, with the consent of the involved armed groups. Whereas in current DDR programmes, there is often no sign of peace yet and warring parties may be reluctant to participate. Second-generation DDR targets the broader community instead of individuals. It also promotes reconciliation between armed groups and communities, contains the level and forms of violence, and helps to rebuild and reinforce social institutions (Muggah and O'Donnell, 2015, p. 3).

Muggah and O'Donnell (2015, p. 5-12) also describe the emergence of a 'new generation DDR' that is even more complex and is connected to transitional justice, security sector reform and national development plans. It is more flexible and instead of following the traditional DDR 'formula', it is negotiated and adjusted to the local context. It often includes stabilization measures while peace is being negotiated. Very importantly, instead of the principle of voluntary agreement to participate, it can resort

to using force to engage the armed elements. It also incorporates Community Violence Reduction and active community mediation alongside a sociological approach to encourage former combatants to embrace new civilian identities instead of their privileged military ones.

C/PVE refers to non-coercive and systemic preventive measures that, in contrast to a security-based approach, address the drivers of adopting extremist views that potentially or eventually lead to terrorism (UNGA, 2015, p. 2). C/PVE activities essentially centre around four main elements: prevention, intervention, deradicalisation, and disengagement (Schmied, 2021, p. 70). The scope of C/PVE is very broad: it addresses any aspects that (may) push or pull individuals or entire communities to violent extremism. Some of these also form part of traditional conflict and violence prevention, peacebuilding, and development strategies and the strengthening of the state-society relationship. C/PVE has a whole-of-society approach, with concrete activities including, among others, cross-community dialogue; promotion of peace, democracy and human rights; education, job creation and social inclusion schemes; provision of livelihood assets and opportunities; sports, arts and spiritual programmes; strengthening of government and security sector (military and police) capacities; deradicalization programmes with religious and ideological debates (typically with detainees) and countering extremist propaganda in and through traditional and social media.

Today, in many contexts, DDR and C/PVE activities take place alongside each other. Fink argues that there is a 'natural nexus' between DDR, particularly second-generation and new DRR and C/PVE (including terrorist rehabilitation). While they do have differences, there are also several potential synergies among them and the two can ultimately inform each other (Fink, 2015, p. 66-74). Essentially, both aim at addressing immediate security concerns; stopping, and preventing violence; preventing recidivism; reinserting, and reintegrating previously violent actors into society; and enabling longer-term socio-economic development. Both aim to strengthen community resilience, foster constructive debate, and dialogue and promote education and economic opportunities. Both can take place in custodial and community settings. Both place an importance on the role that social networks, institutions and families play in shaping norms and violence (Cockayne and O'Neil, 2015, p. 147) and work to build and strengthen social bonds. Both focus on identifying 'legitimate interlocutors as credible messengers.'

Particularly in case of C/PVE, community leaders, faith leaders, women's and mothers' groups, and civil society leaders may serve as better interlocutors than foreign actors since the legitimacy and authority of the latter are often rejected by terrorist fighters. Lastly, to prevent recidivism, both C/PVE and DDR have a component of disengagement (to change behaviour, such as use of violence) and deradicalisation (to change cognitive aspects, such as ideologies and beliefs).

There are also differences between them: while DDR is mainly reactive, C/PVE is rather proactive and preventive. DDR works at the level of broader group behaviour, while C/PVE focuses on individual-level conduct and outlooks (or only small group level at most), as radicalisation is a highly individualised process (Fink, 2015, p. 67). In case of DDR, where larger organised groups are the counterparts, group leaders have typically agreed to participate. In contrast, in case of C/PVE and terrorist rehabilitation, there is rarely any leadership agreement and ownership at the start.

4. The Case of Cabo Delgado: Building on Past Lessons to Counter Violence and Radicalisation

4.1. An Incomplete Peace-Building and DDR

Following – and thanks to – international, mainly Italian mediation, in 1992, the warring parties of FRELIMO and RENAMO laid down the arms and signed the General Peace Agreement in Rome. The United Nations Mission in Mozambique (UNOMOZ) was deployed and tasked to monitor the implementation of the agreement between December 1992 - December 1994. UNOMOZ played a critical role in putting (and keeping) the country on the path to peace and development, and its departure after its mandate expired left behind an incomplete DDR process (Reppell, Rozen and Carvalho, 2016, p. 7). Mozambique's newly elected government lacked post-conflict capacity and experience in DDR, which remained stalled in the first phase of disarmament. While civil society actors and the church and later also the government tried to move ahead the process, the demobilization and especially the reintegration of former combatants was not completed. As Ayissi (2021) notes, Mozambique continues to face the challenge of 'significant "remnants of war" comprising non-disarmed or inadequately demobilised ex-combatants', despite the large-scale peace-building and DDR effort, involving some 93,000 former RENAMO and FRELIMO troops. Reintegration is typically the 'Achilles heel of DDR' with those who have been successfully and sustainably reintegrated in Mozambique only forming the minority.

Following the departure of UNOMOZ, peacebuilding became 'synonymous with economic development'. While programmes such as the 7 Million Fund, the Peace Fund and the Development Observatory, which people associated with peace consolidation, were applauded, they failed to bring about sufficient and inclusive development opportunities and peace for the poor (Murdock and Zunguza, 2010, p. 63). Furthermore, while the Rome agreement brought peace on paper, Mozambique has been characterised ever since by a 'climate of negative peace' (Bussotti, 2021). Bussotti argues that the current Cabo Delgado events are another, more violent manifestation of this negative peace, with persisting socio-economic inequalities between the north and the south, and between the various ethnic groups.

4.2. Tackling Root Causes: Disarmament, Governance, and Development

The past three decades have shown that sustaining peace in Mozambique has challenges and there is no clear-cut recipe to how to do it. However, they have also pointed to a few underlying, systemic causes the addressing of which would contribute to tackling challenges including the rise of violent extremism.

As mentioned earlier, radicalisation and the choice of violent extremism is a highly individualised process. There are several push and pull factors which together may drive a person to violent extremist behaviour, typically through an individual pathway (UNGA, 2015, p. 7-10). Push factors are structural within the society and include elements of the context, for instance, socio-economic marginalisation and lack of opportunities, perceived or actual inequalities and injustices, human rights violations, prolonged and unresolved conflicts, poor governance, and radicalisation in prisons. Pull factors are psychological ones and refer to individual background and motivation. They range from individual or collective victimisation stemming from domination, oppression, subjugation or foreign intervention; distortion and misuse of beliefs, political ideologies and ethnic and cultural differences by appealing social networks and charismatic leadership; to material and social benefits offered. What is relevant and works in case of one person may not be that same in case of another, depending on multiple factors (Fink, 2015, p. 67). Rapoport's concept on the 'waves' of terrorism also point to the interrelation between the social and political culture in which a terrorist group rises, and the impact of this on group members and the motivation (UNODC, 2018).

Experience from the post-civil war period and peace-building efforts in Mozambique show, although not surprisingly, that inclusive and equal economic development and peace-building considerations must go hand in hand. The latest government plans such as the Agenda 2025 and the National Development Plan (2015-2035) explicitly recognise the link between peace and development, as well as the potential for the re-emergence of armed conflicts and related threats such as a growing gap between the rich and the poor, systemic corruption, partisan struggle for power etc. (Reppell et al., 2016).

While these plans are highly visionary, and were built through a collaborative drafting process, their long-term visions are not coupled with clear and strategic short-term objectives and specific details of implementation. On the one hand, this has the tendency to reduce people's confidence in the genuineness of government efforts to effectively tackle local problems, such as the grievances in Cabo Delgado. On the other, it leaves space for mismanagement of resources and corruption, fuelling further discontent. Bridging the gap between economic development that benefits all, the consolidation of peace-building and democratization is necessary to ensure that related push factors towards violent extremism can be eliminated and that the north's 'forgotten Cabo' (and the country itself) can revert back from conflict.

As Reppell et al. (2016, p. 21) also argue, this should be guided on an overarching peacebuilding plan, or in the absence of it, a coherent set of peacebuilding priorities and processes across the intertwined areas of social and economic development, natural resource investment, decentralization, and DDR. According to the ICG (2021, p. 6), the government's Northern Integrated Development Agency, set up in March 2020, should have the central role in leading strategic consultations with the local population in the province on how resources should be allocated going forward, in line with the 2021-24 multisectoral Reconstruction Plan for Cabo Delgado. This would help to ease tensions and start rebuilding trust with the disappointed communities, in addition to providing incentives to some of the militants to demobilise. Many security experts, government officials and community leaders are of the opinion, that it may not be possible to fully eradicate Al-Shabaab, thus the focus should be on stopping their expansion, squeezing their size, and winning them over through addressing their grievances including through gainful employment (ICG, 2021, p. 40). Channelling resources equally to the different ethnic and political groups, accounting for all development spending, involving RENAMO representatives in the development agency, and stepping up humanitarian assistance for the recovery of communities and livelihoods will equally be important to curb current tensions and avoid new ones.

As regards natural resources, the conflict-sensitive implementation of the 2014 Gas Master Plan – Mozambique's strategy to manage its LNG wealth and sustainable extraction –, should be paramount in addressing economic grievances and improve socio-economic conditions across Cabo Delgado. As Reppell et al. (2016, p. 18-19) also argue, given the dominant roles that private, for-profit oriented companies play in the LNG sector, their inclusion in macrolevel peace-building efforts should be important.

Similarly, the areas of decentralisation and political inclusion require more strategic government efforts and (political) will to tackle the insurgency in Cabo Delgado. Post-war institutional reforms have not created an equal space for the opposition RENAMO (greatly backed by the Mwani) to partake in local governance. The parallel local governance system[10] set up has only consolidated the ruling FRELIMO's position and power (Faleg, 2019, p. 2) vis-à-vis the opposition, paving the way for an insurgency. Greater local autonomy and inclusion in governance processes – i.e., tasks that have remained outstanding from post-war peace-building –, will be a pre-requisite for a sustainable solution to violent extremism.

Finally, disarmament (and the rest of the RENAMO DDR process) needs to be completed. Following the Rome Peace Accord, disarmament was not prioritised so as not to undermine the peace process in a context of mutual mistrust between the former warring parties (Faleg, 2019, p. 2). Thus, tens of thousands of weapons have remained in the hands of RENAMO combatants, who eventually used them again to try to force

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[10] The provinces and districts are accountable to the government, while municipalities have devolved autonomy in terms of resources, competencies, and power.

FRELIMO to cede power. Finally, the 2019 Maputo Accord for Peace and Reconciliation relaunched the DDR process, including a strengthened focus on demobilization and reintegration. The completion of the process will also positively affect the efforts to curb the expansion of Al-Shabaab, decreasing hinterland resources (arms, manpower and support) across Cabo Delgado.

4.3. Tackling Root Causes: Disarmament, Governance, and Development

The post-war period in Mozambique has seen the emergence of numerous **local peace-building civil society organizations (CSOs).** On the one hand, this was an organic process given the paramount task of bringing and maintaining peace in a country ravaged by decades of conflict. On the other hand, it was also a necessary step as the government had neither the capacity nor the experience in peace-building processes, including in DDR, and this gap had to be filled (Murdock and Zunguza, p. 60). CSOs have built capacities of community and civil society leaders on alternative dispute resolution; developed relations with national and international stakeholders; and gained influence and legitimacy in the eyes of the local population. As Reppell et al. (2016, p. 21) argue, the 'current strength of Mozambique's civil society comes at least in part from how it filled the space left by the UN and government DDR process.'

CSOs can continue to play an indispensable role in helping to tackle violent extremism in Cabo Delgado. As Gwinyayi (2022) argues, strong local ownership and co-management are 'a critical cornerstone' in the province's 'dynamic, complex, and unpredictable violent extremist environment'. In their new 'mission', CSOs can build on their established image of being an 'impartial broker' (Reppell et al., 2016, p. 26) that works for and with the population. There are also several lessons to utilise from the previous (though in some areas still ongoing) peace-building phase (Murdock and Zunguza, 2010, p. 60-61). The strategic focus should again be on rural and local level conflicts, with a need to 'quiet the countryside'; and ensure that local conflicts do not escalate and destabilise the rest of the country. CSOs must again focus on the social fabric (while political, economic, and broader institutional and policy areas remain for the government); promote dialogue and peaceful resolution, shape minds and attitudes; and build relationships and skills, particularly important for the reintegration of combatants. In addition, involving and building the capacities of government officials in conflict transformation, conflict-sensitive and participatory governance, and development, remain important.

Religion and the church have an extremely strong influence in Mozambicans' life. Most people are Roman Catholic (27 per cent), followed by Muslims (19 per cent), Zionist Christians (16 per cent), Evangelical/Pentecostal (15 per cent), believers of pre-

Conversion faiths/traditional African religions (5 per cent), and Anglicans (2 per cent). Only some 14 per cent of the population are non-practitioner (INE, 2017a[11]).

The church was instrumental – in fact, the key protagonist – in bringing the civil war to an end and the parties to the negotiation table. There are various reasons and factors why this could succeed, which can also be 'exploited' in case of the Cabo Delgado conflict, given its religious layer. The churches' deeply-rooted position in the society, regardless of the denomination, provide them with a power of influence at all levels, from grassroot community level up to top-level leadership (Reppell et al., 2016, p. 7). During the civil war, churches were also able to create social cohesion and build unity in a very diverse society, believing in and promoting the values of diversity, tolerance, consensus, dialogue, and reconciliation (Murdock and Zunguza, 2010, p. 54-55, and p. 63). In addition, they managed to capitalise on political developments (such as the transition to a multi-party system, democratisation, institutional reforms etc.) to grow and seize the momentum for peace.

C/PVE literature highlights that religious re-education may form part of the package to demobilise, deradicalise and reintegrate combatants, especially if recruitment is (also) happening through religious networks and establishments (imams, mosques etc). It may not be relevant for every Al-Shabaab participant, however, as not all join out of reasons of religious ideology. At the same time, at group level it may encourage some level of community healing. The selection of the right interlocutor is key (albeit challenging in most cases) as experience shows that this essentially defines the success of the rehabilitation effort (Fink, 2015, p. 72). Government or law enforcement officials or other representatives who are seen as closely aligned to the opposite may not be considered as legitimate and trusted by Al-Shabaab to engage with on spirituality, theology, and ideology.

Given Mozambique's historical dividedness based on religious affiliation (in addition to geographic and ethnic basis), the promotion of interreligious dialogue and of the principles of cohabitation, respect, forgiveness, and reconciliation need to be sustained and intensified within the different orientations of Islam, Christianity, and other recognised religions.

4.4. Focusing on Youth, Women, and the Community

As described earlier, the great majority of Al-Shabaab members are marginalised and **disillusioned youth** who have resorted to violent extremism to seek solutions to their complex set of problems. The sense of alienation, frustration and powerlessness is a general trend among young Mozambicans across the province and the country, especially in rural areas and urban peripheries (Faleg, 2019, p. 5). Young people aged

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[11] For 3 per cent of the population, the religion is unknown.

15-34 make up 30 per cent of Cabo Delgado's population (INE, 2017b), and most of them have no or minimum level of education and functional literacy.

Thus, C/PVE and DDR efforts must treat them as a priority target group to tackle violence and its underlying drivers. The need to empower youth is also specifically high-lighted by the UN Plan of Action on Violent Extremism (UNGA, 2015, p. 17), recognising their central role in taking up the 'causes of peace, pluralism and mutual respect'. The Action Plan recommends activities, some of which are highly relevant for the Cabo Delgado context: the integration of young women and men in local decision-making and the political discourse; meaningful involvement in peace-building and C/PVE activities; mentoring programmes in preferred fields; community service opportunities; and small grants to young social entrepreneurs to develop their ideas on strengthening community resilience to violent extremism.

Furthermore, as Nhamirre (2021, p. 9) points out, youth captured should be included in deradicalisation and social reintegration programmes, complemented with technical training courses to facilitate their local employment, including in the province's LNG industry. Training and educational opportunities can have both a responsive and preventive nature: to enhance constructive and viable employment opportunities outside extremist groups; to provide means of support upon release; and to discourage youth to join violent extremist groups out of economic necessity or to find solutions through the means of force (Fink, 2015, p. 70). Another lesson from the past DDR process is that providing support with and for reinsertion and reintegration prior to disarmament and demobilisation, e.g., through employment and education opportunities, can create incentives for defection (Idris, 2016, p. 2-3). Especially in contexts where poverty and un- or underemployment is among the drivers of extremist recruitment, formal and non-formal education opportunities (including via alternative means such as sports and arts) help to develop critical thinking skills, raise awareness about diversity and challenge extremist narratives (Fink, 2015, p. 70). This is the case in Cabo Delgado and highly relevant in the context.

In addition to youth, **women** should also be given a central role in bringing about and sustaining peace, and in tackling violent extremism including its multiple drivers. As noted by the UN Plan of Action on Violent Extremism (UNGA, 2015, p. 18), societies with higher gender equality indicators are less vulnerable to violent extremism. Concrete actions, recommended by the Plan, that are also applicable in the Cabo Delgado context include: the identification of specific drivers that lead women to join Al-Shabaab; the inclusion of women in national law enforcement and security agencies; the building of women's capacities in preventing and responding to extremist violence; and the addressing of specific needs women have either being affected by violence or as an extremist group member to be disengaged.

Research has found that while the predominant majority of Al-Shabaab members are men, there are also some women in their ranks. Women are typically used for

housework, food preparation and reconnaissance of enemy military movements. Many are also forced to marry or have sex with group leaders. Generally, they are found 'easy to indoctrinate' (Habibe et al., 2019, p. 28).

Beneficiaries of DDR and C/PVE efforts should include these women, and going further, those who are family members (spouses and daughters) of (ex)-militants. Women (and girls) tend to be vulnerable to being excluded during DDR programmes due to lack of gender-sensitivity and capacity to address gender-specific needs, the risk of gender discrimination and stigma, and limited access to information and services (Idris, 2016, p. 8). Rehabilitation of female group members must focus on their likely post-release activities (Fink, 2015, p. 77) which may be very different from those of men, given the differing social roles and responsibilities. Women's specific needs also usually include separate shelter and sanitation facilities, counselling on and treatment of sexual- and gender-based violence, and support with reproductive health, childcare, and vocational training (Idris, 2016, p. 8). As past RENAMO DDR experience also shows, uniform reintegration packages, that are not sensitive to the diversity of group members and their needs based on age, gender, socio-economic status, and other factors are rarely effective, especially if the support is not part of a broader socio-economic process. In case the man as primary breadwinner is detained (as a captured combatant) or is absent due to other reasons, women must also receive targeted support as head of household to ensure that extremist groups cannot step in and fill the gap (Fink, 2015, p. 77).

This leads to the importance of considering the **broader community** of individual (ex-)combatants in Cabo Delgado in DDR and C/PVE strategies, particularly in the reintegration phase. As Gwinyayi (2022) argues, a 'whole-of-society' approach should 'pro-actively engage all affected individuals, families, and communities' to prevent recidivism, mitigate further radicalisation, and strengthen community resilience. DDR (but also C/PVE) programmes are not or less effective if they are not fully adapted to the local context, do not respond to local needs, and do not build on local capacities (Idris, 2016, p. 7). This was also one of the shortcomings of the RENAMO DDR process, which focused mostly on the ex-combatants, without considering the capacities and needs of families and communities expected to absorb ex-militants.

Family, religious and community relations are also important when it comes to influencing personal level behaviour and transforming mindsets. Research has found that changing the beliefs and practices of key people, who can then instigate change in others who trust them, has the potential to deliver systemic transformation (Murdock and Zunguza, 2010, p. 63). In cases, such as Al-Shabaab, when youth also seek a sense of belonging, community, and camaraderie, building on community and tribal connections and leaders, who are important pillars of the local social structure, should be considered. Typically, youth have their family relations lost or weakened, and violent extremist groups manage to exploit that, unless the community can offer alternative sources of support (Fink, 2015, p. 70).

4.5. Human Rights, Transitional Justice, and Reconciliation

For peace to be sustainable, linking DDR and P/CVE to transitional justice and reconciliation and protecting human rights are crucial (Reppell et al., 2016, p. 13). This requires a solid, well-functioning, transparent and impartial justice sector that provides guarantees for citizens either victims or perpetrators of crimes. Effective access to justice helps to build a mentality among the population that conflicts can be resolved through legal channels and through an intervention of the state, instead of having to use violence.

The 1992 Rome General Peace Accord and the 2019 Maputo Accord for Peace and Reconciliation granted 'blanket amnesty' to both sides, which essentially protected perpetrators and denied justice to victims, among them women, who were particularly impacted by armed violence (Weimer, 2020, p. 8.). In addition, it deepened the trauma, fear, and hatred towards former combatants. No formal reconciliation or restorative justice opportunity was offered to the war-torn population (Reppell et al., 2016, p. 15). Communities developed reconciliatory justice mechanisms building on traditional practices, but these lacked any macrolevel institutional design and direction. Community-level justice mechanisms 'often [remain] the only option available to rural Mozambicans'. While community-level justice providers are important in certain contexts, including Cabo Delgado, ensuring access to formal justice mechanisms for all segments of the population is crucial, to offer institutional responses to violation of human rights. This would also help in reconstituting trust towards the state as well as between demobilised combatants and the communities they have harmed (Gwinyayi, 2022). This is particularly important in the case of Cabo Delgado as the government is willing to ensure amnesty to Al-Shabaab fighters.

Upon defection and/or demobilisation, combatants will require safe exit corridors with plans for reintegration into social and economic life, and as the ICG (2021, p. 45) argues, potentially also into the security sector in Mocímboa da Praia. Their human rights and safety will need to be respected, whereas high-level Al-Shabaab leaders will need to be prosecuted to also demonstrate to the public that justice is served in Mozambique.

The government has already been accused by human rights groups of arbitrary arrests and detentions, torture, and extrajudicial executions of Al-Shabaab members and suspected collaborators as well as national and foreign journalists. Therefore, upholding international humanitarian law and human rights standards is essential to avoid the danger of further alienating the local Muslim population (Faleg, 2019, p. 4), since this may lead to new instances of radicalisation and incentives for violent extremism. Field practice shows that good treatment in detention can also yield positive transformation among demobilising combatants (Fink, 2015, p. 73).

Conclusion

The existing factors and underlying root causes are conducive to prolonging the insurgency in Cabo Delgado (Gartenstein-Ross et al., 2021). A long-term prolongation also requires a long-term and sustainable (re)solution. As argued in this paper, a security- and military-based counter-terrorism approach must be complemented with a broader set of tools focusing on addressing the various root causes of the insurgency and drivers of violent extremism. A comprehensive political settlement, as Evans argues, is generally a more viable way to disarm groups and achieve peace than by way of military dominance (Evans, 2016).

The strategy shall build on the successes but also shortcomings, and thus lessons, of past peace-building and DDR efforts as they still influence the local dynamics and developments of the context. The strategy must also be adapted to the complex and changing situation in Cabo Delgado and the threats, motivations, and nature of the radical Islamist group in question. Existing DDR tools and practices need to be adapted and integrated with C/PVE, as well as terrorist rehabilitation, and community violence reduction under 'new generation' DDR, to disengage and demobilise violent extremists. This will require, on the one hand, technical support to Mozambique (given past and limited experience). And on the other, a strong government ownership and recognition of the fact that the ultimate key to success is in the hands of the state, being in control of all national resources and decisions.

Timely action is necessary before violence ravages further and chances for transformation and effective prevention (further) decrease. Given the shrinking national and donor resources, securing funds may also become more difficult over time in line with the global trend (as highlighted by Idris, 2016, p. 7). The evaluation of the effectiveness and impact of C/PVE and terrorist rehabilitation programmes have rather been challenging to date (Cockayne and O'Neil, 2015, p. 148) due to the sensitivity of the topic, and limited access to participants and data. However, regular monitoring and evaluation would be critical in the Cabo Delgado context to ensure that any resolution strategies can build on learning and evidence and innovate based on the evolving context. Finally, the main government and non-governmental actors and stakeholders involved, either national or international, need to continually exchange and share their plans, lessons, and good practices. This is to ensure that the military- versus human-focussed approach and the structural and institutional changes complement and do not undermine each other, (further) destabilizing the chance for sustainable peace.

Conflict of Interest

The authors hereby declare that they have no financial interest in this manuscript.

Notes on Contributor

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