

## **VIOLENCE IN CABO DELGADO: A GROWING HUMANITARIAN CRISIS**

Seminar paper for course: GeoHumanitarian Action



**Submitted by:**

Rabin Ojha

[rabin.ojha@stud.sbg.ac.at](mailto:rabin.ojha@stud.sbg.ac.at)

**Submitted to:**

Assoc-Prof. Dr. Stefan Lang and Dr. Lorenz Wendt  
Department of Geoinformatics  
University of Salzburg

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## **Abstract**

This paper discusses the cause of the violence in Cabo Delgado and the social and economic impacts it has on people and locale. The purpose is to look at different geospatial and earth observation tools, and see how useful they can be and are being used in humanitarian assistance. Some of the organizations and their work in Cabo Delgado are looked upon. Overall, the idea is to understand a humanitarian crisis right from the start mainly focusing on the geospatial related applications on humanitarian support. But, this paper solely relies on secondary sources of information due to different constraints.

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## **1. Background of the violence**

There has been ongoing violence in Cabo Delgado, northern province of Mozambique since late 2017. The government and militant groups have been fighting against each other in different areas of Cabo Delgado and also in the neighboring province of Niassa. According to Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) et al.(2022), there have been hundreds of reported political violence events where at least 5300 people have lost their lives in Cabo Delgado only. The violence has generated more than 800,000 internally displaced people which is around 35% of the whole population of the province (Pirio et al., 2021). People are continuously moving within and out of the province in search of safety.

On the 5th of October 2017, a group of 30 armed men, of a group so called Al-Shabaab, attacked 3 police stations in the Mocimboa da Praia, a town in northern Mozambique, in Cabo Delgado province. 16 people including 2 police officers died in the attack. Again on 21st October, there was a clash between government forces and militants, which was assumed to be the same group, in a small village 30 km away from Mocimboa da Praia (ISS Today, 2017). Since then, there have been hundreds of attacks in the region as of today. Thousands of people have been displayed since the start of the insurgency back in 2017. Many of the attacks might have gone unreported. In 2018 alone, there were reported deaths of 218 people, of which the majority were civilians. Things only got worse in 2019. The number of people that lost their life due to different acts of violence rose to 644. The death toll increased to 1766 in 2020 (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED),n.d.). At the end of March 2020, Mocimboa da Praia was captured by militants and they were more violent in several other areas (Comins, 2020). Stickings and Agence France-Presse (AFP) (2020) reported that the militants beheaded more than 50 people in a local football field in early November of 2020. The government started seeking help from the international community. Following the incident, the United Nations and partners launched an appeal for international support to Cabo Delgado to support the conflict affected essential services (United Nations Office for the

Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 2020). In 2021, Rwandan and African soldiers were deployed in the region (Rwema & Nshimiyimana, 2021). The European Union started military training to help government forces fight against militants (Rupiah, 2021). According to ACLED, the (reported) death number was decreased to 1061 in 2021 as of 9th December, 2021.

The root cause of this violence goes back to years of exclusion from the central government. The marginalization of people and development of frustration in them over the years sparked the violence that is going on right now. Although Cabo Delgado, Niassa and Nampula, the three northern provinces, have great natural wealth and agricultural potential, they have the country's highest poverty rate (BBC News). People in the region claim the government is oligarchic. Despite having abundant resources, only a certain fraction of the society is benefited. In addition to social and economic factors, the rise of the violence is also attributed to the influence of radical preachers and growing extremism in the province. Weak public services, unemployment, corruption (Conceição João Faria, 2021). Cabo Delgado, Mozambique's muslim dominated province, has shown signs of this violence since a long time. In 2007, the frustrated youths started reviling the local leaders close to the government, in some regions . The militants have been motivated by grievances against a state that they see delivering little for them, despite the development of major mineral and hydrocarbon deposits. This all started boiling the resentment in the youths against the government which eventually came down to armed revolt in 2017(*Stemming the Insurrection in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado*, 2021).

## **2. Humanitarian Actors**

The first action to provide humanitarian assistance is reaching those affected places in order to provide the assistance. In the report from ACAPS (2021), Mozambique currently stands as the country with very high constraints to humanitarian access. ACAPS, which provides information to crisis responders, looks at different parameters like geography constraints, violence against humanitarian actors, restriction and

obstruction to services, etc. and compares humanitarian access levels in the whole world.

This means the people in Cabo Delgado have some serious restrictions and obstructions of access to humanitarian help and assistance. Having said that, humanitarian actors like the United Nations' World Food Programme (WFP), Red Cross, Médecins Sans Frontières / Doctors with Borders (MSF) , etc. are operating on various clusters of health, logistics, food and security, etc. for people in this region.

## **2.1. World Food Programme**

World Food Programme (WFP) is the one of the world's largest humanitarian organizations working on food security and emergency. They have been working to provide foods, improve food systems and promote good nutrition in 36 countries of the world. WFP works with the government bodies, other UN agencies, non governmental organizations and private entities to perform their operations.

WFP has been continuously providing monthly rations to people in Cabo Delgado. In February 2021, WFP and UNICEF partnered with the Government of Mozambique to conduct a nutrition survey in Cabo Delgado. The goal was to identify malnourished children for immediate treatment and also to plan programmes to prevent malnutrition in the future (*Mozambique: UNICEF and WFP Assess Malnutrition in Cabo Delgado | World Food Programme*, 2021). According to the survey, almost 21 percent of the displaced children under 5 years old are underweight (AfricaNews, 2021). WFP's United Nations Humanitarian Air Service has been providing vital air connections in the region for humanitarian actors to reach remote communities especially during the monsoon season and for delivery of cargo. They provide sessions on improved nutrition, treatment on malnutrition in children and women and partner with other bodies to establish COVID 19 treatment centers (*Northern Mozambique: "Too Hungry to Think Past Tomorrow" | World Food Programme*, 2021).

## **2.2. Medecins Sans Frontières**

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), also known as Doctors without Borders in English, is an international independent medical humanitarian organization. They provide medical assistance to people affected by conflict, disasters, etc.

Access to healthcare is very limited in Cabo Delgado due to the violence. MSF has been providing medical consultations to people and technical support to the local hospitals since their presence in Cabo Delgado in February 2019. They run health posts and mobile clinics in various locations of the affected zone. They provide psychological support to the people through different campaigns. MSF has been providing kits that include food, utensils, and other objects. They also support network of community health workers (*People Flee Insecurity and Violence in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique* | MSF, 2021). In addition to this violence, they are working in the sector of malaria, cholera, natural disasters, COVID 19, etc. MSF has also been working to improve access to water and sanitation for people in the IDP camps. They also provide assistance in the evacuation of people with critical medical conditions. MSF also has teams of specialists in logistics, water and sanitation, who are building latrines in the camps and providing drinking water (*Displaced by Violence, Trying to Stay Alive in Mozambique* | MSF, 2020).

## **2.3. International Organization of Migration**

International Organization for Migration (IOM) is part of the United Nations which works in the field of migration and supports migrants around the world. They are committed towards humane and orderly migration everywhere. Established in 1951, they have been working in the field of migration management, crisis response, international cooperation and management and global compact for migration. IOM has a dedicated system known as Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) to track and monitor displacement and population mobility around the world.

Platform like DTM is very useful to understand the scope of violence. It helps authorities to see the volume of people affected by the violence or any other disturbance and create plans according to the data. IOM's DTM teams are deployed to several locations across Cabo Delgado to collect data on displacement movements and humanitarian requirements. For this, IOM works closely with the Government of Mozambique and the obtained information is passed to other humanitarian actors to make their response planning more effective (*Displacement Continues Due to Insecurity in Cabo Delgado, Northern Mozambique*, 2020). IOM also produces situation reports every two weeks, which contains the number of people displaced by the violence, health situation, shelter situation, protection overview, etc. They have been conducting thematic surveys on displaced populations as well as coordinating with other actors to assist people in surviving their agony of displacement. The IOM's DTM teams conducted multi sectoral location assessments in IDP sites in Cabo Delgado and its neighboring province. The IOM's director general also appealed for international support for reconstruction funding for Cabo Delgado (Lusa, 2021).

## **2.4. Other actors**

Numerous other national and international organizations work in different parts of Cabo Delgado in sectors of shelter, education, sanitation, etc. UNDP, OXFAM, UNICEF, HELVETAS, ICRC, etc. are some of them.

UNDP supports local governments through reconstruction of public buildings, infrastructure repair and cash for work activities that boost the economic capacity of the people. UNDP's goal is to lay foundations for longer term governance and poverty alleviation programmes (*Leaving No One Behind*, 2021) .

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) stationed ambulances on standby to support the transport of wounded people to the Provincial hospital of Cabo Delgado. They donated infusion and dressing kits to the hospital. ICRC also coordinates with other authorities to follow the situation and respond to the crisis (*The Escalation of the Conflict in Cabo Delgado Affects Thousands of Civilians*, 2021).



### **3. Role of Earth Observation (EO) and/or GIS**

Remote Sensing technology has seen a tremendous rise in popularity over the last two decades, becoming an integral part of our lives. Space based technologies facilitated access to inaccessible terrain, helped humanitarian teams, support complex emergencies, and contributed to monitoring and verifying conflict zones. The advantage is their ability to provide near real time insights from the ground (Avtar et al., 2021).

Strong democratization effects in the use of Earth Observation (EO) and Geoinformatics (GI) technology emerged from the proliferation and availability of tools and level of maturity of information services in the GI and EO domain. Obtaining reliable information from the ground is often limited in crisis situations due to accessibility to the areas and time constraints. Utilizing GI and EO technology and choosing suitable tools, entails a proper match between both operational needs and service provision. (Lang et al., 2019).

Despite many challenges, predicting the outbreak of border conflicts is important to groups working on human rights and humanitarian issues. Since 1999, the availability of commercial HR images and advancement of computing technology have democratized the tools accessible to humanitarian organizations, not just the government. Many organizations employ satellite imageries for disaster response, crowdsourced mapping, conflict monitoring and monitoring human rights abuses on a regular basis (Wolfenbarger et al., 2015). The severe environmental impact resulting in conflict induced settlements can be verified through trends in vegetation cover of the study area. Areas with significant change can be further investigated in more detail. (Kranz et al., 2015).

Real or near real-time data are very essential to assess the situation. Dashboards and visualizations help to see the data on a larger scale and understand the distribution of data. The [ACLED's dashboard](#) is a great platform for conflict monitoring and political violence. Both the data and analysis is open for free use by anyone. IOM's [DTM](#)

captures, processes and disseminates information on migration and displaced populations and helps decision makers perform data driven decisions.

The availability of geospatial data in most of the developing and underdeveloped countries is quite limited. Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team (HOT), Missing Maps, Doctors Without Borders and numerous other organizations are taking the lead on creating open geographical data on OpenStreetMap. The created data can be used freely by the public. The collaborative maps of OSM have been used to support humanitarian efforts around the world as well as to fill important data gaps for implementing development frameworks such as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Herfort et al., 2021). The information on the ground such as roads, buildings, etc. are very important for planning humanitarian operations of different organizations.

It is necessary for the humanitarian actors to understand the context of the conflict at different levels before starting to get in some action. Geospatial Intelligence (GEOINT) uses aerial imageries, and geospatial data to help determine precise target coordinates, and depict geographically referenced activities on the Earth. GEOINT improves the quality and accuracy of information enabling faster and better decision making (*Geospatial Intelligence Crucial for Disaster Relief*, 2021). GEOINT enables policymakers and humanitarian relief organizations to best allocate personnel, medicine and equipment to support the relief effort (*Infographic: GEOINT Support to the Ebola Crisis | National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency*, 2015). As of mid 2021, the city of Mocimboa da Praia was a continuous hotspot for militants. Conflict on the land has been intermittently recorded while conflict on the shore has been more consistent (*Maxar Spotlight: Leveraging High-Resolution Imagery for Insight Into. . .*, 2021).

#### **4. Social and economic implications**

Most of the places in Cabo Delgado have poor economic and social conditions despite being one of the richest in natural resources in the country. Corruption, political and social tensions, poverty, and economic instability have built the rage in local people,

which is being exploited by militants for affiliating people with them (Stephanie & Minenhle, 2021) . The insurgency has posed a serious threat to society and economy in the region. Cabo Delgado is one of the poorest provinces in Mozambique. With this conflict going for over more than 4 years, the province is going to sink more and more in poverty and deteriorating social conditions. A large natural gas field was discovered by Italian oil and gas giant Eni in 2011, in an area, about 40 km off the Cabo Delgado coast. After the discovery, there has been billions of dollars investment by foreign companies in natural gas production. With the increasing risks, companies are withdrawing their projects as the government is failing to provide the security. The government is failing to protect the projects and people associated with it. In April 2021, French energy company, Total, suspended its work on 20 billion USD gas project in northern Mozambique and declared force majeure citing the violence (*France's Total Suspends Mozambique Gas Project over Jihadist Attacks*, 2021). This greatly disrupts the country's economy as it is very much dependent on natural gas export. The violence is hitting hard on the already difficult economy of the region. Mozambique's natural gas has potential to be a game changer not just for the country but for the whole Africa region (Uetela & Obeng-Odoom, 2016).

According to the 2019 data, around 58% of the population in Mozambique follows Christianity, 18.3% follows Muslim and others include rest of the religions like Jewish, Hindu, Bahai, etc. Only the two northern provinces have an Islamic majority - Cabo Delgado and Niassa (*2019 Report on International Religious Freedom: Mozambique*, 2019) . Killings of Christian people and burning of churches in the Muslim majority province can ignite the fire for religious violence in other parts of the country. The conflict is going to only escalate the tensions between religions in the country which is already in the state of massive destruction.

## **5. Conclusions**

The country needs to focus on creating an inclusive society and economy where all people feel included. Emphasis should be given to the citizens' access to education,

health, employment, etc. which in turn contributes to the alleviation of poverty. As a part of that, recently, the Rwandan and South African soldiers have joined hands with Mozambique military forces to carry out intervention against militants. Although the authority claimed a few months ago that it was safe for people to return homes, recent attacks into Niassa province by militants after terrorizing Cabo Delgado for more than four years say otherwise. And organizations working there say that the conflict is far from over and the humanitarian crisis still persists. Without substantial strategies, the violence doesn't seem to end anytime soon. The government's action alone is not sufficient to tackle this problem. This conflict in Cabo Delgado is growing to other neighboring provinces like Niassa. So, all the international communities and non governmental organizations should work together to stop this strong wave of violence.

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