



Joint Briefing Note on the situation facing children in Northern Mozambique June 2021

Context

The situation in Cabo Delgado, Northern Mozambique has seriously deteriorated over the past 12 months, with the escalation of armed conflict and attacks on villages and district capital towns, leading to significant civilian casualties and grave violations against children. At least 2,838 people are reported to have died in the conflict, including 1,406 civilians, although the true number is expected to be much higher since the conflict began in October 2017. In March this year, a brutal attack on Palma and its surrounding areas caused thousands to flee to the sea or into the bush, including many unaccompanied children who became separated from their parents or carers as they fled, or lost loved ones in the violence. An estimated 67,848 people are displaced from Palma as of 4 June 2021.¹ Children are suffering disproportionately in this conflict and need special attention.

The conflict has, so far, caused hundreds of thousands of children and their families to flee their homes, often having to leave with nothing but the clothes on their backs. At least 800,000 people are now displaced in the provinces of Cabo Delgado, Nampula, Niassa, Sofala and Zambezia as a direct result of violence and insecurity. This includes at least 350,000 children, who are currently in temporary accommodation, either in IDP camps or with family and friends, or have been moved by the government into new resettlement sites, where they will need to completely restart their lives. In too many cases, these children are living in squalid conditions, in need of food, clean water, shelter, and healthcare.

Protection concerns

We are disturbed by the targeting of children in this conflict, and horrific reports of grave violations against children including killing and maiming, abduction, recruitment and use, and sexual violence especially against adolescent girls. Children have been deeply traumatised by the violence and upheaval and require a range of support to help them recover. Many children have been separated from their parents and loved ones and are at heightened risk of violence. We are particularly concerned at the risks facing displaced girls related to their exposure to gender-based violence and sexual exploitation as well as their lack of access to reproductive health services and private, safe, and clean hygiene spaces.

Access to education

For a full year girls and boys were out of school due to COVID-19 closures or a lack of safe learning spaces. In Cabo Delgado, the huge influx of IDP children cannot be accommodated in the existing school facilities in southern Cabo Delgado, many of which lack proper WASH facilities to meet school re-opening criteria. Children must be able to exercise their right to learn and benefit from the sense of normalcy schools provide despite the terror they have experienced. Schools often provide a protective environment for children, we know the longer children are out of school the less likely they are to return, and this is

¹ [Mozambique - Emergency Tracking Tool Weekly Overview Report - 101 \(27 May - 4th June 2021\) \(reliefweb.int\)](#)

particularly true for girls. Lack of access to education is both a cause and a consequence of a rise in negative coping mechanisms affecting IDP girls such as a disproportionate share of household labour and unintended pregnancy; as well as rights violations including sexual exploitation and abuse and forced marriage.

Food insecurity

Across Cabo Delgado, Niassa, and Nampula provinces, 950,000 people are suffering severe food insecurity, 665,000 of them in Cabo Delgado itself, and 1.3 million people in Mozambique require food assistance.² In Cabo Delgado, almost one in every two children under five is stunted.³ Since over 90% of displaced people are staying in host communities rather than housed in resettlement centres, food and other resource pressures extend to host families as well as displaced people.

Vulnerability to outbreaks of disease including COVID-19

In a context of multiple and compounding shocks, lack of access to clean water and sanitation facilities, together with poor hygiene practices, have led to disease outbreaks. Cabo Delgado province remains one of the most affected with an outbreak of Cholera cases reported, reaching more than 4,916 cases and 55 deaths.⁴ The most affected Districts are Pemba, Metuge, Montepuez, Mueda, Chiúre and Ancuabe, according to government reports.

Root causes

Stopping this conflict cannot be achieved only through a militarized response. The root causes of this conflict lie in part in the underdevelopment of the country's northernmost province and the lack of opportunity for the population, including adolescents. It is crucial to address the needs of the people both through an immediate humanitarian response, but importantly by working longer-term across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus to address the root causes, the concerns of the people, and support the genuine development of the region in an inclusive, rights-based way that supports and empowers the population.

Recommendations

- The international community, including the UN and regional bodies, must, without delay, support the establishment of a peace process and engage in dialogue with parties to the conflict, while addressing the underlying causes of the conflict including decades-long underdevelopment. Any peace process must include diverse groups, ensuring the inclusion and meaningful participation of women and young people.
- All parties to conflict must respect international humanitarian and human rights law and uphold their obligations to the protection of children in conflict.
- The Government of Mozambique must guarantee unfettered humanitarian access, both for personnel and supplies, and facilitate prompt processing of humanitarian visas, and enable actors to respond to the crisis quickly and effectively.

² UNOCHA https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ROSEA_20210223_MOZ_Snapshot.pdf

³ Nutrition cluster needs analysis 2021 and WFP: <https://reliefweb.int/report/mozambique/escalating-conflict-northern-mozambique-pushes-thousands-hunger-and-desperation>

⁴ UNOCHA https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ROSEA_20210223_MOZ_Snapshot.pdf

- The Government of Mozambique must be encouraged and supported to improve its strategy and tactics to protect civilians and especially children caught up in this conflict.
- The Government of Mozambique and the UN must ensure that child protection interventions are included as priority actions in response plans. Agencies should systematically strengthen the inclusion of child protection in humanitarian assessments and carry out a comprehensive child protection assessment.
- The Government of Mozambique, the UN, and donors should address the specific needs of displaced girls, adolescent girls and host communities, including by investing in age- and gender-responsive sexual and reproductive health services so that girls and young women can prevent unwanted early pregnancy and access life-saving health care, including for survivors of gender-based violence.
- The Government of Mozambique should provide legal documentation for the displaced who have lost their national credentials and birth registration for children born in a displacement situation.
- The humanitarian community must work with the Government of Mozambique to ensure access to formal education for all school-aged IDP children, including formal registration of these children as official students. This may require establishment of schools in new 'resettlement villages' as well as temporary classrooms in locations with high IDP numbers.
- Donors must fully fund the Mozambique Humanitarian Response Plan which is only funded at 8.8%⁵ and at a minimum ensure that Child Protection is funded at the same level as the overall appeal.
- Swift action is needed to set up a Child Rights Monitoring Reporting and Response Mechanism, and perpetrators of violations against children must be held to account.
- In the medium term, long-term development needs must be addressed. All stakeholders should support initiatives to address the underlying causes of violence in Cabo Delgado, and promote economic development, gender equity and social cohesion in the north of the country. Additionally, in this complex context, with short and long-term risks and underlying causes of the crisis, we believe that a humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach could help to address the roots of conflict, reduce vulnerabilities, and promote gender equality.
- The Government of Mozambique and host countries must ensure any refugee and IDP relocations, resettlement, and durable solutions are informed by the internationally recognised principles of safety, dignity, and voluntary and informed movement. We also encourage the Government of Tanzania to fulfil its international commitments to make it clear that access for asylum seekers fleeing Mozambique into southern Tanzania will remain available and that every effort will be made to ensure their protection and basic needs are met. Humanitarian NGOs remain available to provide relief services should they be required and permitted to do so.

⁵ June 2021 <https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/1040/summary>