



Civil Society Dialogue Network

Gathering Civil Society Perspectives: The Perception of the EU in Mozambique

May 2024

Civil Society Dialogue Network

Snapshot Country Briefing Paper

The objective in writing this Civil Society Dialogue Network (CSDN) Country Briefing Paper was to gather a snapshot of civil society perspectives on the perception of the EU in Mozambique and recommendations for the EU's engagement in the country.

This Briefing Paper is the outcome of a conference call held on 7 May 2024 with 10 civil society participants, including international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and local civil society organisations (CSOs). Guiding questions were circulated to participants in advance of the call. Two additional INGOs provided written input following the call and their contributions were integrated into the Briefing Paper.

The primary focus of the Paper is on the Cabo Delgado province in Northern Mozambique, which has been the site of increased violence since 2017. However, some of the reflections and recommendations shared also apply to rest of the country and the EU's engagement in Mozambique generally.

The conference call was held under the Chatham House Rule. There was no attempt to reach a consensus in this Briefing Paper; it contains a general overview of participants' contributions, even where they disagreed. The key points and recommendations which are included in this Briefing Paper may not be attributed to any participating individual or organisation, nor do they necessarily represent the views of all the participants or the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO).

Civil Society Dialogue Network

The Civil Society Dialogue Network (CSDN) is a mechanism for dialogue between civil society and EU policy-makers on issues related to peace and conflict. It is co-financed by the European Union (Neighbourhood Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe). It is managed by the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO), a civil society network, in cooperation with the European Commission (EC) and the European External Action Service (EEAS). The fifth phase of the CSDN will last from 2023 to 2026. For more information, please visit the EPLO website.



This document has been produced with the financial assistance of the EU. The contents of this document are the sole responsibility of EPLO and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the EU.

© EPLO 2024

Permission is granted for reproduction and use of the materials. Please acknowledge your source when using the materials and notify EPLO.

General assessment of conflict dynamics in Northern Mozambique, and the wider region

The **dynamics of the conflict are very variable**; periods of relative stability are interspersed with episodes of acute violence. In 2023, there were fewer attacks by insurgents in the Cabo Delgado province as they undertook a “heart and minds” campaign, in which they tried to engage peacefully with civilians. Security forces also carried out fewer operations. In 2024, insurgents launched an offensive campaign under the slogan “kill them wherever you find them”, and there was a consequent upsurge in attacks. Currently, there has been an **escalation of violence in the southern districts** of the Cabo Delgado province, with non-state armed groups (NSAGs) conducting attacks in districts like Ancuabe and Chiure, while districts along the central coast such as Macomia and Quissanga have also experienced heightened violence.

This year, energy company **Total Energies issued a number of statements** about the security situation being under control and its intention to lift the force majeure declared in 2021 on its Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) project in the region. It is unclear whether there is a link between the uptick in violence by insurgents and Total Energies’ statements, but it is evident that Total Energies is a target for attacks.

With the upcoming **election** and the **withdrawal of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM)**, there is a risk of further escalation, especially in southern districts which are more vulnerable than the northern ones in which Rwandan forces (separate to SAMIM) are stationed. Overall, there is both ongoing violence and a risk of further deterioration in the whole province and region, thus there is a need for urgent attention and strategic interventions.

Key issues relating to peace and conflict which should receive increased attention

It is important to look at the **deep-rooted drivers of NSAG recruitment**. In the beginning, the insurgency was characterised by both socio-economic and extremist ideological narratives, but the latter have gained more importance over time. In particular, the “hearts and minds” approach used recently by insurgents allowed them to better integrate and gain favour with local communities, making purely socio-economic responses to the conflict less effective.

It is also important to understand the role of the Islamic State (ISIS) and international support for NSAGs in the conflict. As local leaders are eliminated in security operations, the role of ISIS and international actors increases, and the conflict is internationalised. The Mozambican Defence and Security Forces’ (FDS)

Civil Society Dialogue Network

capacity to combat violent extremism is poor, as is its relationship with local communities. **Non-military solutions to the conflict** need to be sought in tandem.

A key factor to monitor going forwards is the fact that during the **first ten years of the LNG project, Mozambique will not be receiving any revenue**. This is likely to breed further resentment among the population and may drive people to join NSAGs. In addition, the bilateral contracts between Mozambique and foreign investors include **Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS)** clauses which pose major risks to Mozambique's finances and sovereignty. For example, in the French bilateral contract, the Mozambican government is obligated to pay compensation for any losses incurred due to the conflict. This in itself has the potential to exacerbate the conflict, which would in turn have a significant impact on the perception of European actors, including the EU. At regional level, **anti-French sentiment** is growing and is likely to spread further. French control over the currencies of much of West and Central Africa is a source of debate, which also affects Mozambique's perception of France. There is a need to anticipate and assess these effects before conflict becomes worse. Europe has a lot of political and financial leverage while Mozambique has significant development needs, and the country is thereby compelled to accept unfair agreements. This can lead to negative perceptions of the EU and Europe, as is already the case in West Africa. Engagement should be based on a preventative basis, looking for trigger points and conflict drivers so that they can be addressed before problems occur.

In the current context, there is a need for economic development to create jobs, which will help address the root causes of conflict. The Agency for Integrated Development of the North (ADIN) is said to be insufficient and has been inactive in Cabo Delgado for the last couple of years. It is important that **non-military activities** also take place in the province so that communities can experience positive changes in their lives; education and capacity-building initiatives should be supported to ensure the population's livelihoods as Mozambique transitions to a labour-based, rather than resource-based, economy. **Tax evasion** is another important issue in the country, which limits the state's capacity for development.

The **shrinking of civil society space** is a major concern. This has come about through pressure on journalists and the adoption of laws on terrorism, money laundering, and on restriction of NGOs. Local elections in October 2023 featured a large protest vote. Many people are losing faith in the democratic process, and this pushes them to non-constructive solutions. At the same time, the government is restricting essential constructive pathways for communities and civil society to deal with issues.

Climate change is a key issue in Mozambique. Droughts, low crop yields, and other negative impacts can feed social instability. Climate, and its connections to social stability and conflict drivers, needs to be made a central element in EU programming and engagement in the country. Land rights are critical to risk management and should be taken into consideration in context and conflict analysis.

Civil Society Dialogue Network

There needs to be **continuous engagement with local communities** (e.g. local internally displaced persons (IDPs)) – including inclusive community dialogue and consultation. Women and young people should play a central role in any dialogue and peacebuilding efforts supported by the EU, while access to justice and land for women are crucial areas of focus.

As people are moving back into **ordnance-contaminated areas**, humanitarian actors and civil society organisations should have access to **risk education** to reduce the risks posed by explosive ordnance. This will hinge on the authorities' ability to recognise contamination and the need for appropriate risk education as part of the response. It is therefore important to engage with the Mozambican authorities on the topic of contamination.

The general perception of the EU in Mozambique

There are numerous **misunderstandings** when it comes to the EU's engagement in Mozambique, and no uniform perception among the population of the bloc's role. The perception differs depending on the geographic area and demographic group in question. Information can take time to disseminate due to language barriers.

On the one hand, from a long-term perspective, the EU's engagement has generally been perceived in a good light. There has been positive institutional support, including the establishment of watchdog groups, such as the National Human Rights Commission, and engagement with many existing civil society organisations (CSOs). However, given the current situation in Cabo Delgado, the perception of the EU is changing and it is viewed as being **less reactive to human rights issues** than before. While this may be part of an effort to be more diplomatic with the government, the public would appreciate clear positioning from the EU on recent events and developments, including lack of access for journalists, forced disappearances, and allegations of war crimes by SADC forces. The Mozambican government should be urged to develop mechanisms for investigating human rights abuses, and to ensure fair trials and provision of justice. The EU reacted very slowly to allegations of electoral fraud last year, to the point that members of the public questioned whether the bloc's silence was intended to preserve its interests in the oil industry in the country. Scrutiny of EU engagement in Mozambique is increasing due to the scale of the bloc's investments in the country, and strong positions on socio-environmental and human rights issues should not be ignored in the interests of such economic ventures.

Support from the EU is often poorly or mis-understood, particularly outside of Cabo Delgado and with regards to the type of support offered. People are unclear as to who is paying for what and what the economic benefit to Mozambique will be in the future, but they are aware that the EU is among the mix of actors providing support in the country. The EU's support has grown; however, a large proportion of

Civil Society Dialogue Network

financial support is dedicated to initiatives that people do not directly see on the ground, which affects perceptions of the EU. The overall feeling is that the EU is primarily interested in Mozambique due to investments by European businesses. The actions of European investors will continue to impact the perception of the EU, as will questions about the imbalanced return on investments made in the country. Many European embassies are shifting from aid to **aid and trade**. As the EU adopts a more interest-driven approach, the perception is one of a more inward-looking, protectionist, and exploitative EU. In light of this shift, it is important that protection of trade does not become the focus of peace programmes. There is a lot of public criticism and doubt in Mozambique about what the EU says it is doing. However, in places which have directly benefitted from aid, this perception is different.

The EU has a **tendency to primarily fund projects in the southern districts of Cabo Delgado** (Ancuabe, Chiure, Pemba, and Mecufi), leaving northern districts out. This is an issue for two reasons: firstly, it exacerbates the overall marginalisation of the northern districts (Nangade, Palma, Mocimba, and Mueda), and secondly it does not take into account grievances related to the presence of European investors. Overall, it is a symptom of the EU's **lack of understanding of conflict dynamics**, and cross-border dynamics more specifically. Aid should be delivered in a conflict-sensitive manner. This includes building mechanisms for consultation with local CSOs, including those based in Cabo Delgado, which have understanding of the local context.

Moreover, a lack of understanding of the nature of peacebuilding has been identified during conversations with the EU, other donor agencies, and civil society actors in Mozambique. Many actors were found to conflate peacebuilding with the “protection” or “social cohesion” work undertaken by humanitarian and development actors, yet no amount of humanitarian assistance, development, and/or infrastructure will address the root causes of the instability in the north. Funding must be given to peacebuilding initiatives which work to address horizontal and vertical trust deficits and directly address past grievances. By including a separate peacebuilding lot in the 2023 call for proposals, the **EU set an important example for the prioritisation of peacebuilding**, recognising the value of civil society-led approaches to addressing instability at its roots. It is important for the EU to continue to advocate (both internally and externally) for the vital role that peacebuilding organisations play, particularly in northern Mozambique.

Zooming in on EU security assistance in Mozambique

The EU's engagement on peace and security issues in Mozambique includes the EU Training Mission (EUTM Mozambique), a Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) military mission established in 2021 focusing on capacity-building with units of the Mozambican armed forces, in relation to the crisis in Cabo Delgado. The EU has also provided non-lethal military equipment through the European Peace Facility

Civil Society Dialogue Network

(EPF), including for the Mozambican Armed Forces/EUTM (€89 million), the Rwandan Defence Force in Mozambique (€20 million) and SAMIM (€15 million).

The **EUTM is generally well-perceived**, and not seen as distinct from the EU delegation. The training provided to the Mozambican armed forces is seen as a positive step towards ensuring greater respect for human rights and international humanitarian law, as it is known that abuses by security actors often serve as a tipping point for extremism. Whether or not the training has been robust enough or reached a sufficient number of security personnel is difficult to ascertain, as relevant data is not available. Nevertheless, changing culture and behaviour takes longer than two years. Meanwhile, vetting processes should be introduced for local Mozambican security forces, and the EU should ensure that members of the special forces trained by the EUTM/funded by the EPF are not deployed to suppress peaceful protests. Safeguards, conditionalities, vetting, and human rights due diligence processes should be put in place for all EU security assistance.

It seems that the EU-trained troops are facing the same problems in the field as the rest of the Mozambican army, and have not been as effective as expected, despite their better training; however, these forces have also been overwhelmed by requests from the general command. There are discussions about moving some of the trainers in the EUTM into Cabo Delgado to be closer to the theatre of operations, which **is seen as political since most of the trainers in the EUTM are Portuguese**. There is a narrative among some right-wing, nostalgic figures in the Portuguese military that they are returning to Mozambique, not as colonisers but as “liberators”, helping the Mozambican people fight the insurgents. The Mozambican government resists this narrative, but if a greater proportion of trainers came from other European countries, there would not be the same emotional linkage. It is important that EUTM training also takes into account non-combat aspects of the military’s role in coordination with the local government, such as emergency aid, medical aid, treatment, the transport of resources and food, as these components have not been well addressed thus far. The combat component should not be overemphasised.

Some people believe the EPF is being used to protect European business interests in Mozambique. There is **no transparency about EPF funding** from the perspective of the public. The general population believes that Rwandan and SADC forces are helping Mozambique as those countries are friends of Mozambique. However, there are questions such as to why the EU is supporting Rwanda to such an extent and not providing more to SADC. The details of and reasoning for such decisions do not reach the Mozambican public. There is a **need to communicate publicly about the EU’s funding channels and interests**, and to continuously engage and coordinate with local civil society and communities, including local IDPs, and to empower local CSOs.

Civil Society Dialogue Network

More **clarity on the levels of funding** provided for humanitarian assistance in comparison with military support could also be beneficial, to improve communication with the population, in addition to increasing transparency around the type of military assistance provided.