

NORTHERN MOZAMBIQUE: A CRISIS DEEPENING AMID SHRINKING HUMANITARIAN SPACE

THE ISSUE

FRAGILITY: THE COST OF INACTION



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Northern Mozambique is facing a severe escalation of violence and displacement that threatens to undo years of recovery and stabilization. Recent attacks and funding shortfalls have created a perfect storm, leaving hundreds of thousands vulnerable and raising the specter of catastrophic consequences if urgent action is not taken.

ESCALATING CONFLICT AND MASS DISPLACEMENT

The conflict, initially concentrated in Cabo Delgado, has spilled into neighboring provinces, with Nampula emerging as a hotspot. Districts such as Memba and Erati have faced repeated attacks, mass displacement, and widescale destruction of homes, schools, and health facilities. As of mid-2025, IOM and OCHA estimated over 609,000 people remained internally displaced, alongside 701,000 returnees recorded earlier this year.

The situation worsened dramatically after September 2025. More than 200,000 people were displaced between January and October, and another 330,000 fled renewed insurgent attacks in the final four months. In one week in November alone, 66,000 people—mostly women and children—escaped after villages were burned and schools and health facilities destroyed.

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A HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM OUTPACED BY NEEDS

The humanitarian reset aimed to streamline aid architecture and prioritize development-oriented approaches amid global funding constraints. In Mozambique, this shift is colliding with a worsening emergency. By October 2025, only US\$73 million had been mobilized against a US\$352 million requirement for conflict response. Funding coverage for clusters ranges between 1% and 30%, while the number of operational partners has sharply declined.

This scale-down is occurring as needs remain acute, leaving gaps in food assistance, health services, and protection. UN reports indicate only 40% of those in need receive food aid, with frequent stockouts. Schools are increasingly used as shelters, disrupting education and social stability.

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The assumption that humanitarian needs would decline—creating space for development interventions—has proven false. Renewed violence, repeated displacement, and the destruction of infrastructure are eroding social services and reversing recovery gains.

Compounding the crisis is the abrupt withdrawal of USAID programming in 2025, which previously supported critical health and social services. The suspension led to 2,500 job losses, jeopardized 114 programs, and triggered systemic shocks, including disruptions in HIV treatment and maternal health services. Analysts warn these cuts have already caused excess mortality and deepened vulnerabilities in communities dependent on aid pipelines.

THE INDISPENSABLE ROLE OF NGOS

Despite shrinking budgets and coordination structures, NGOs remain vital. Organizations like WeWorld continue delivering assistance through a humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) nexus approach—crucial because the transition from emergency aid to long-term development is rarely linear.

Their work prioritizes education continuity for displaced and conflict-affected children, protection and support for teachers, and social cohesion initiatives to prevent recruitment by armed groups. Education functions as a stabilizing force, preserving human capital and strengthening community resilience.

WeWorld has piloted a Conflict Sensitivity Toolkit enabling local youth and communities to conduct participatory conflict analysis and lead social cohesion activities. Students, teachers, and parents are engaged in Disaster Risk Reduction school committees, receiving training, conducting child-inclusive risk mapping, and developing contingency plans that integrate conflict-related risks.

These contextualized DRR initiatives, combined with similar efforts at community level, empower communities and ensure sustainable, locally led disaster preparedness in areas facing overlapping conflict and climate hazards.

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A CRITICAL CROSSROADS

To prevent a deeper humanitarian catastrophe, the reset must be recalibrated to reflect on-the-ground realities. This means maintaining core life-saving services—food, health, WASH, education, and protection—while supporting flexible cash assistance and prioritizing front-line actors, including local NGOs and municipal services. Life-saving humanitarian interventions cannot be replaced by development programs; they must coexist and complement each other. This demands adequate capacity, sustained funding, and strong coordination at community and local levels to ensure integration.

Failure to act now will not save money; it will multiply costs in human lives and future recovery.

Northern Mozambique stands at a crossroads. Without urgent, context-sensitive action and renewed funding commitments, the region risks sliding into a cycle of violence and deprivation, erasing hard-won gains and leaving a generation without hope.

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