

Report – LAND at Lunch: Investments and conflict in Cabo Delgado, northern Mozambique

April 2021

By Charlotte Stam, LANDac research intern

Since a few weeks the Cabo Delgado region in northern Mozambique has been in the news as insurgents have attacked Palma. Already thousands of people have fled the region and a humanitarian crisis is emerging. The news headlines especially focus on Islamic extremism, though increasingly bring to the fore other causes that may underly this conflict, such as investments in natural resources. On the 15th of April 2021, LANDac organized an online LAND at Lunch meeting to discuss this topic. About 15 people joined us and listened to the reflection of the situation in northern Mozambique by Emilinah Namaganda, a PhD candidate at Utrecht University and Alda Salomão, General Director at TINDZILA Land Governance Resources Centre and Senior Legal Advisor for Centro Terra Viva. An open discussion followed, which raised the question 'What can we do from our position?'. This report summarizes the LAND at Lunch meeting, discussing the different viewpoints on how to explain the situation in Cabo Delgado region.

Romy Santpoort, coordinator of the LANDac Professional Learning Programme and researcher at LANDac, opened the meeting with a personal reflection on the situation in northern Mozambique, especially in the Cabo Delgado province. The current situation there is making headlines around the world. Whereas these headlines initially focused on the Islamic extremists and the violence conducted in the province, increasingly more attention is also paid to the investments in natural resources in the region, and the displacements that have taken place in the wake of these investments. In 2018 LANDac, together with Shared Value Foundation, conducted an 8-week in-depth field research in communities neighboring the Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) investments in Palma district. Emilinah Namaganda, PhD candidate at Utrecht University and LANDac fellow, has been involved in this project and shares both her findings back then, as well as her more recent findings during her current PhD research on the expanding extractivism frontier in Mozambique and how communities are affected by those. Also Alda Salomão shares her views with us today. Alda has finalized her PhD research on land-based investments in Mozambique at Utrecht University last year and continues to be closely monitoring the situation through her work at Mozambican NGO Centro Terra Viva (CTV).

Marginalization in northern Mozambique

Emilinah highlighted that the current conflict is unlikely merely the outcome of Islamic extremism, but also results out of decades of marginalization, inequality and unemployment. The regional marginalization goes back to the colonial period and the civil war. Since then, not much has been done to develop the northern region of Mozambique. When natural resources such as gas, ruby and graphite were discovered and had attracted (international) investors, expectations in the region were raised regarding the socio-economic development of the region. Emilinah subsequently identified two main conditions that are contributing to the current tensions in the region. First, the expectations that were raised were not met, especially regarding employment opportunities. Secondly, there is inappropriate compensation and resettlement for people who are displaced by the project's development of the Cabo Delgado region.

When natural resources such as gas, ruby and graphite were discovered and had attracted (international) investors, expectations in the region were raised regarding the socio-economic development of the region.

Non-fulfilled expectations about employment

After the discovery of ruby, graphite and gas, expectations about employment and socio-economic development in the region were raised. Promises were made to the local community, such as that they would benefit from these natural resources. However, locals were mostly employed in manual jobs like cleaning, cooking and security, while for the more technical jobs, people from the southern part of Mozambique and abroad were employed and moved to the region. The reason for this was that the educational level and skills of the local communities was low. Instead of investing in training a significant group of local people, for them to be employed, only a few received trainings. Domestically, the government considered using its share of the gas to produce fertilizers and develop a gas-to-liquids project, the outputs of which could be both exported and used in-country; it also planned to construct a gas-fired power plant to produce domestic energy. Nonetheless, these plans have not yet been carried out.

Inadequate compensation for displaced communities

To allow the gas infrastructure to be built, thousands of people have been displaced. In the resettlement process, people often received a smaller plot of land than they had given up, in combination with a financial compensation to build new livelihoods. However, for many it was unclear how to reconstruct their livelihood and how to wisely invest the money. This has especially marginalized women and youth as the compensation was entitled to the head of the household, which is often a man. As there is less land available, youth especially find themselves in a limbo: the majority will inherit less land and they currently have little or no land. Furthermore, in many cases they do not receive compensation for the lost land.

As there is less land available, youth especially find themselves in a limbo: the majority will inherit less land and they currently have little or no land.

No substantial effort was made to involve youth in the project. Emilinah suggested that the development of the project worsened existing inequalities and created new ones. There is not yet a systematic approach to solve these problems e.g. a local content bill that would ensure employment of local labor and purchase of local produce has not yet been passed.

Politics and power

For Alda Salomão, the link between land and the current insurgency was less clear. She argues that the problems in the area already existed before and that inadequate land governance might have accelerated the already existing inequalities. According to Alda, we also should look at who benefits from the conflict. Officially the LNG project has a license to occupy 7,000 hectares of land. However, the original plan was to cover 25,000 hectares. This would require the whole area to be cleared out of people. In this original plan the local community that was not qualified to work in the project had to be removed. More qualified people would be brought in from outside the area to work in the industry in Gabo Delgado. The government did not ensure that the displaced communities were properly and fairly compensated for losing their right to land and their assets. Even now, the government and the company are struggling to find enough replacement land; the project was approved before compensation for the displaced families was ensured.

To fully grasp what is going on and how it can be explained, it is important to ask the question who is benefitting from this situation.

The way that land was allocated might be one of the reasons for the insurgency, but this manner of allocating land happens in other regions in Mozambique as well, yet the recent violence seems to be specific for this region. Alda asks the question: 'Why aren't we seeing the same situation in other parts of the country then?'. To fully grasp what is going on and how it can be explained, it is important to ask the question who is benefitting from this situation.

We therefore also need to look at the economic interests of the elites in controlling the natural resources. Also, political disputes may have played a role in the marginalization of the region and the current conflict.

Discussion

An attendant, working at an NGO, explains that they are exploring what they can do to support the local people there. She argues that we should draw lessons from what has been happening to other places where Islamic insurgencies suddenly rose. Furthermore, there is a need to talk to the young people and understand their issues. They are marginalized and they feel like they have nowhere else to go.

One of the attendants of the meeting raises the question that if the violence is partly due to land-based investments in natural resources, why would the insurgencies attack villages and marginalized people – this might point to the fact that the situation is more complex and that is hard to know what has been the trigger of the violence. As much research has already focused on communities, maybe we should shift our focus to the political elites and the companies that are present in the region. Unfortunately, this is difficult as political processes are not so accessible.

Another attendant, coming from Cabo Delgado and working as consultant in land acquisition in the region, recognizes what Emilinah explained about the history of marginalization in the region. He argues that the region of Gabo Delgado has been neglected since independence. People living in the region feel that the land is only used to extract natural

resources, while the revenue is invested in the southern region. However, he does not see a clear link between the resettlements, land grabs and the insurgencies, as the problems already existed before. However, the project might have accelerated the feelings of alienation. Whereas land-related problems due to the investments might have added up to the other preexisting conditions in the region, another concern is what will happen to the land the people who are fleeing the region are leaving behind. What does this mean for people's and communities' land rights and what does it mean for their resettlement? One of the reasons of the current violence in the region might be exactly this; to clear the region of people altogether and avoid fulfilling legal requirements to occupy the land.

Concluding remarks

The situation in northern Mozambique is complex and there are multiple factors influencing the current upsurge of violence in the region. When trying to understand and explain the conflict, it is important to look beyond religion. We need to understand the underlying issues and consider who is benefitting from the land that becomes available as people are fleeing the region. There continues to be a need for exchanging information about the situation and to further explore what the interests are behind the current attacks, and who stands to benefit from them. Both from the Netherlands as well as in Mozambique, we need to continue to monitor the situation and, in the meantime, find ways to address the unfolding humanitarian crisis.

We want to thank everybody who joined us in the online discussion. Special thanks go out to Emilinah Namaganda and Alda Salomão for sharing their reflections with us.

This is a report by LANDac – the Netherlands Land Academy for equitable and sustainable development. For more information on our work, please contact LANDac's coordinator Ezra Litjens: e.t.litjens@uu.nl or visit our website: www.landgovernance.org