IDOS POLICY BRIEF

Internal Displacement, Informal Local Structures and Social Cohesion in Mozambique

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Summary

The conflict in Cabo Delgado province in northern Mozambique, which started in October 2017, has forced affected people to flee to safer areas within the province and to other provinces around the country, especially the neighbouring provinces of Nampula and Niassa. While the people displaced within Cabo Delgado remain visible to the government of Mozambique and humanitarian actors, those in places further afield, such as the city of Nacala in Nampula province, have become invisible over time. While this invisibility may be due to fewer people fleeing further afield, it is also attributable to the role of informal structures, local initiatives, norms and values in accommodating and integrating Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Qualitative research conducted in July 2024 with IDPs and members of the host communities in Nacala shows that ordinary citizens and community leaders play an important role in facilitating the integration of IDPs and promoting social cohesion. In view of this, the Policy Brief recommends national policies and practices as well as humanitarian interventions that build on informal structures, incorporate local initiatives and are sensitive to local social dynamics in the hosting of IDPs. It specifically recommends that:

- The government of Mozambique, through district administrations, decentralises resources to enable local communities to improve their informal and local work in the integration of IDPs and social cohesion of the community. National policies addressing internal displacement need to acknowledge the role of local communities and district administrations in handling the integration of IDPs. In line with this, district administrations

need to register host families and provide them with financial and material resources so that they are better able to assist the IDPs. Co-operation between formal government structures at district level, and informal community structures, would enable the government to support community efforts and improve host communities' and IDPs' trust in the state.

- The government, through formal and civic education, cultivates a sense of national identity as a counter measure to ethnic divisions and animosity that are detrimental to IDPs where the host communities belong to a different ethnic group. Mutual identification through shared nationality emerged as the main contributing factor to the positive reception and integration of IDPs in host communities in Nacala.

- District administrations familiarise IDPs with relevant administrative offices and make these offices accessible and responsive to IDPs' needs and grievances as a way of fostering IDPs' trust and confidence in the government and state institutions.

- District administrations establish robust follow-up mechanisms on whether IDPs are indeed receiving the humanitarian assistance sourced for them, respond to IDPs' allegations of exploitation and corruption and report to relevant state institutions such as the police for further investigation.

- Humanitarian actors address overall poverty reduction in host communities instead of limiting interventions to IDPs because this reverses the gains in integration and social cohesion made through informal structures and local initiatives as part of host community problem solving and solidarity with the IDPs.

The absence of state support and impact on institutional trust

The majority of IDPs who fled the conflict remain in Cabo Delgado province, which has 542,535 IDPs. Nampula has 35,756 and Niassa 4,473 (IOM DTM, 2024a). The IDPs in Manica (26,818), Sofala (79,730), Tete (9,445) and Zambezia (10,312) were predominantly displaced by natural disasters such as cyclones Idai and Kenneth in 2019 (IOM DTM, 2024a). IDPs displaced by the conflict are thus more visible in Cabo Delgado, where conflict is taking place, than in other provinces in the country. The government of Mozambique accordingly focuses more on Cabo Delgado, which results in some IDPs in the neighbouring provinces lacking visibility, recognition and adequate support. IDPs often do not receive state support and protection during flight. This continues when they arrive in a place of safety, which exacerbates and prolongs their suffering. Without state support during flight, especially in regions where poor road infrastructure and public transport services impede mobility, some IDPs sleep in forests and embark on staggered long journeys to safety with little to no food. These journeys can take months. Of the people who are fleeing the conflict in Cabo Delgado, 62 per cent travel by bus, 31 per cent by walking and 7 per cent by boat or canoe (IOM DTM, 2024b).

Fifty-five per cent of the IDPs live in host communities, while 45 per cent live in displacement sites (IOM DTM, 2024a). The fact that the majority of IDPs live among members of the host communities as opposed to IDP camps makes host communities pertinent to finding sustainable solutions to internal displacement. Due to the Mozambican government's limited capacity to address emergencies in an effective manner, most IDPs rely on ordinary citizens they encounter on the way to safety or in the host communities for food and shelter. In northern Mozambique, where citizens have endured protracted neglect by the government, some of them may not understand the relevance of the government to their situation

and their needs when they become IDPs. Without formal institutional support, when some IDPs first arrived in the host communities in Nacala they slept in open spaces such as school grounds and mosque premises because of lack of shelter. The top three priority needs of the IDPs are food at 96.1 per cent, shelter at 83.4 per cent and non-food items also at 83.4 per cent (IOM DTM, 2024b).

Massive displacement requires direct involvement and visibility of state actors during flight and upon arrival of the IDPs in safe areas. Civilians who are directly affected by armed conflict may see the government as contributing to their suffering, become sceptical about its willingness and capacity to provide assistance and lose trust in it. This is particularly the case when the government does not take tangible measures to rescue civilians trapped in the conflict zone or assist those who have fled to safety. This reflects the situation of IDPs in Nacala, who received food only from the World Food Programme (WFP), which has since stopped. Caritas, a faith-based organisation, assists by facilitating the integration of IDPs and promoting social cohesion in some host communities, but its programmes are limited in scope due to inadequate resources and therefore leave out many IDPs. Although primary and secondary education (grades 1-9) is free in Mozambique, many IDPs cannot afford the school materials, which the schools do not provide, and payment for cleaning services at the school, among other costs. Many cannot afford, also, the nominal fee for access to healthcare at public facilities, which is between 25 and 50 meticais (US$0.39 and 0.78). IDPs reported not receiving assistance from local administration offices even when they visited these offices to ask for support. The government of Mozambique is as invisible in the IDPs' narratives as it is in their social and economic support structures. The lack of state resources and policy to support IDPs results in them seeking assistance from ordinary people in their host communities, which leads to them having little if any trust in state institutions as far as their own welfare is concerned. The lack of trust in the government's

capacity or willingness to address or prioritise IDPs' and host communities' needs results in many people among them appealing instead to non-governmental organisations to supplement the assistance provided by ordinary people in the host communities.

The Mozambican state also appears not to be involved in monitoring humanitarian activities by non-state actors from outside the host communities. This has left some IDPs vulnerable to exploitation by unscrupulous actors. For example, a standing grievance is that the IDPs' names are recorded and their pictures taken on various occasions, promises are given to source assistance for them. But the sourced food is distributed only to a handful of people and the trucks leave with the rest of the food, without explanation. When IDPs asked community leaders to report this misconduct to relevant authorities, this did not yield any results. It is not clear whether the community leaders reported and the relevant authorities failed to take appropriate action. The majority of the IDPs, especially women, lack formal education. Forty-seven per cent of the population are literate, 28 per cent of whom are female and 60 per cent male (Plan International, 2024). The low literacy rate exposes the IDPs, particularly women, to exploitation and abuse by unscrupulous actors. The IDPs also lack adequate information on the channels to follow in order to access relevant authorities and report their grievances in the event of exploitation. The limited interaction with the state through local administrations is a result of both the state not fulfilling its responsibility to citizens and the citizens lacking awareness of the state's responsibilities to citizens. As a result, citizens, both IDPs and their hosts, do not have much trust in the state's willingness or capacity to address their grievances.

In most instances, the IDPs and their hosts understand the role of national identity in their positive relations, but they see the state in reified terms that portray it as a distant and obscure entity, which does not have direct relevance to their everyday needs. For example, most of them were dismissive of questions on what they wanted the state to do for them, with some saying they had nothing to say about the state. Even when IDPs and their hosts may understand the state's responsibilities to them, its failure to discharge these responsibilities has resulted in the normalisation of such failure and erasure of expectations on the state. The absence of state intervention in humanitarian crises, and the failure by relevant authorities to investigate alleged exploitation, result in IDPs, who are unable to verify the identities of the unscrupulous actors, mistrusting people who arrive in the host communities to "ask questions", and conflating researchers with other actors.

Overall, the absence of state support weakens IDPs' and host communities' trust in the state and limits their identification and co-operation with state institutions. Even after several years of living in the host communities, most of the IDPs still do not have any contact with state institutions or local government authorities and are reluctant to contact them for support mainly because they do not trust that they will respond to their needs, especially after previous experiences of non-responsiveness. The host communities are also in the same predicament, as demonstrated by the state's failure to support them when they took the initiative to accommodate and integrate the IDPs.

Informality, local structures and networks in the integration of IDPs

The lack of tangible support from the government, and the discontinuation of assistance from agencies such as WFP, leave the IDPs in a precarious situation. This compels ordinary people in the host communities to provide material and moral support, guided by norms and values that emphasise hospitality, charity and solidarity with fellow Mozambicans in need. In contrast to state-centric approaches to problem solving, which stress the state's responsibilities to citizens in general and to IDPs in particular, host communities demonstrate the capacity to organise informal interventions that

result in positive reception, accommodation and integration of IDPs, as well as maintenance of social cohesion without material and logistical support from the government. The table below summarises the factors that facilitate or impede social cohesion in communities that host IDPs in Nacala.

Table 1: Factors that impact on integration and social cohesion

Factor	Role in integration	Impact on social cohesion
Social networks through family and business ties	positive	positive
Shared nationality, collective memory and solidarity	positive	positive
Shared religious affiliation and local norms and values	positive	positive
Shared ethnicity	positive	positive
Ethnic differences	negative	negative

Source: Author

Various factors that are embedded in informal host community structures and local norms and values play a central role in the reception, accommodation and integration of IDPs into host community life. These factors include pre-conflict social networks built around migration between the IDPs' home areas in Cabo Delgado and Nacala, family ties between IDPs and members of the host communities, shared nationality, collective memory of the protracted civil war (1976 to 1992), shared religious affiliation, norms and values and shared ethnicity. These factors are at the core of mutual identification, trust and co-operation between IDPs and host communities.

Social networks through family and business ties

Before the outbreak of the conflict in Cabo Delgado in October 2017, some people in Nacala migrated to Cabo Delgado for economic reasons such as fishing (Forquilha & Pereira, 2022). Others also migrated between Cabo Delgado and Nacala because of social reasons such as marriage. Over time, the migrants established social networks and business ties in Cabo Delgado while at the same time maintaining family and friendship ties in Nacala. The outbreak of the conflict resulted in the migrants returning to Nacala and inviting people in their social networks in the conflict zone to flee with them. Migrants who returned to Nacala before the conflict broke out contacted their families and friends in Cabo Delgado with offers to host them. The return migrants from Cabo Delgado received support from family in Nacala. Pre-conflict ties therefore play an important role in building personal trust at individual level, which develops into social trust at community level for displaced persons who flee to areas where existing social relationships accelerate integration (Muhumad & Jaji, 2023). Social trust is one of the main reasons why community leaders in Nacala are able to welcome IDPs and quell isolated rumours, suspicion and stereotypes that portray them as members of al Shabaab, the militia that is fighting in the conflict in Cabo Delgado. IDPs and members of the host communities are also building new, post-flight social ties through intermarriages. Some members of the host communities also adopt unaccompanied young IDPs. These post-flight relationships bridge the local people/IDP dichotomy and promote social trust, mutual identification and co-operation.

Shared nationality, collective memory and solidarity

Since IDPs started arriving in Nacala in late 2017, host communities have managed to absorb the IDPs such that outsiders who are not familiar with local languages and accents in Nacala cannot tell the IDPs and local people apart. Community

leaders play a key role in mobilising local people and encouraging those who have spare rooms and houses to lease them to IDPs who can afford to pay rent or simply provide them on humanitarian grounds to those who cannot. Although the position of community leader is not a government position, community leaders generally command respect and are trusted as people who can be appealed to for solutions, which contributes to members of the host communities heeding their call to assist IDPs. The IDPs overwhelmingly identify the community leaders and neighbours as the people they trust and turn to for support and solutions. The mutual identification, trust and co-operation between host communities and IDPs result in the maintenance of social cohesion despite the arrival of additional people in poorly resourced communities. Although conflicts sometimes occur, for example parents getting involved when IDP and host neighbours' children fight as they play together, the IDPs and the community leaders view them as commonplace interpersonal misunderstandings rather than a manifestation of hostility towards the IDPs. The latter predominantly assess their relationships with members of the host community as peaceful, and those who wish to go back to Cabo Delgado attribute this desire to loss of income after flight and the need to regain self-reliance rather than to hostility and resentment by the host community.

The majority of Mozambicans (61.9 per cent) are multi-dimensionally poor (UNDP, 2023). Although many local people in the host communities in Nacala live in conditions of material deprivation, these circumstances do not generate hostility towards the IDPs, which contradicts literature suggesting that limited resources in areas that host displaced people lead to inter-community conflict. IDPs and their hosts can build trust and co-operation and use the limited resources at their disposal for the benefit of both communities. This happens especially in cases where both the displaced and local people live with a sense of shared marginalisation by the government (Muhumad & Jaji, 2023). Host community leaders in Nacala identify the IDPs by familial terminologies

such as brothers and sisters, which engenders mutual identification, co-operation and social trust, thus contributing to peaceful co-existence and the maintenance of social cohesion.

There is a general sense that the conflict in Cabo Delgado could happen anywhere in Mozambique, including in Nacala, and potentially displace members of the host communities in turn. This fosters understanding of the IDPs, empathy and solidarity traceable to consciousness or collective memory of the insecurity experienced during the protracted civil war from 1976 to 1992. Host community leaders welcome IDPs and encourage members of their communities to do the same by emphasising the IDPs' national identity, as opposed to their ethnicity for those who do not belong to the local Makuwa ethnic group, calling them "fellow Mozambicans". This is the term primarily used to refer to the IDPs. The IDPs readily adapt to the host community and experience a sense of belonging; although they are away from their home areas in Cabo Delgado, they are still in their country, living among fellow citizens, some of whom are their relatives and friends. Some of the IDPs initially fled to Tanzania but decided to return or were sent back to Mozambique by the Tanzanian authorities to seek refuge in their own country.

Shared religious affiliation and local norms and values

Muslim and Christian are among prominent social categories that facilitate the integration of IDPs. Muslims in the host communities welcome Muslim IDPs, while Christian IDPs seek support from churches and fellow Christians. While the conflict in Cabo Delgado is framed mainly as a religious conflict intertwined with economic grievances (Faria, 2021), the arrival in the host communities of IDPs from diverse religious backgrounds does not lead to conflict because of the tradition of mutual respect and tolerance between Christians and Muslims in Nacala. This long-held tradition of mutual respect among people of different religious beliefs embedded in local norms and values that promote tolerance, empathy, charity and solidarity

with people in need provides the foundation upon which the positive reception of IDPs is built.

As part of local norms and values, Christians in the host communities do not see the predominantly Muslim IDPs fleeing a presumably religious conflict as a threat but as fellow Mozambicans in need of refuge. Similarly, Muslims in the host communities do not see Muslim IDPs as espousing the same religious extremism championed by the militia fighting in Cabo Delgado. Although isolated incidents of such stereotyping can occur, community leaders take pre-emptive measures to resolve these problems before they escalate. The role of shared religious affiliation in facilitating the integration of displaced people and maintaining social cohesion has also been noted among Somali refugees and their hosts in Ethiopia and Kenya (Muhumad & Jaji, 2023). Members of the host communities in Nacala who assist the IDPs do not have much themselves but share their meagre resources in the spirit of empathy, charity and solidarity. Some members of the host communities lend the IDPs farmland (*machambas)*. In everyday interactions, members of the host communities provide food, money, rental or free housing and social, moral, emotional, spiritual and material support in times of illness and bereavement.

Shared ethnicity

The three main ethnic groups arriving from Cabo Delgado are Makonde, Makuwa and Mwani.

The local people in the host communities belong to the Makuwa ethnic group. IDPs who are Makuwa indicated that they did not feel like outsiders in Nacala because of the shared language and culture, which enabled them to blend with the local people. Shared ethnicity facilitated their integration and co-operation between them and the host communities. Shared ethnicity intersected with shared affiliation to Islam. The Mwani were able to integrate through shared affiliation to Islam, thus showing how shared religious identity can counteract the negative impact of ethnic differences.

Ethnic differences

Ethnic differences and historical grievances and animosity emerged as a challenge that countered the positive impact of shared nationality in fostering integration and social cohesion. The Makonde, who are predominantly Christian, generally spoke about hostility shown by the local Makuwa people. For example, most indicated that the local Makuwa people described them as violent – a description which forced them to keep to themselves. The absence of state-initiated mechanisms for conflict resolution, reconciliation, peace-building and counteraction of ethnic tensions in the host communities in Nacala results in community leaders assuming an important role in maintaining peace and social cohesion by emphasising unifying inclusive identities such as shared nationality and religious affiliation. Social networks and social categories that cut across ethnic identity provide channels through which IDPs and host communities can uphold inclusive identities, promote mutual interests and build cohesive communities.

Selective humanitarian assistance and social cohesion

Literature on displacement in conflict situations shows that humanitarian interventions that exclude host communities lead to or exacerbate hostility towards the displaced people who are the recipients of the assistance (Ali & Ocha, 2018). This is particularly the case where host communities are under-resourced and their members live in precarious conditions (van Baalen & Mobjörk, 2017). Before the WFP humanitarian assistance directed to IDPs in Nacala stopped, it excluded host communities, thus overlooking the fact that the materially deprived members of the host communities share their meagre individual resources with the IDPs, for example by providing free accommodation, food, agricultural land and other necessities. Some IDPs' experiences in Nacala show that humanitarian interventions that focus on IDPs and exclude their hosts can erode host communities' positive response to internal

displacement. Specifically, the exclusion from humanitarian assistance of host communities in Nacala led to some members of the host communities evicting the IDPs from rented or lent accommodation and repossessing farmland they had lent to the IDPs. Instead of alleviating the challenges that IDPs face, humanitarian interventions that are oblivious to local social dynamics and host communities' solidarity with IDPs can inadvertently create social tension and undermine efforts by host community leaders to ensure that the presence of IDPs does not degenerate into fraught relations and weaken social cohesion.

Humanitarian interventions need to be sensitive to host community dynamics and collaborate with existing local structures that, despite the additional pressure on community resources deriving from hosting IDPs, are already facilitating the integration of IDPs into the host communities and maintaining social cohesion. Inclusive humanitarian assistance is important, considering that host communities may not see the IDPs as more economically disadvantaged and deserving than themselves. Some of the IDPs may have been well-to-do farmers, professionals and business people who live in better material circumstances compared to the local people. It is therefore important to ground humanitarian interventions in the realities existing in the host communities rather than on the customary assumption that members of host communities are materially better off than IDPs. When IDPs receive humanitarian assistance while their equally or more economically vulnerable hosts are excluded, this can have negative ramifications which, considering the social networks and ties that pre-date the conflict, can have more fault lines than just the IDP/host community distinction. Once the mutual identification, trust, co-operation and solidarity that exist between IDPs and host communities are eroded, it is difficult to restore the existing positive relations. In view of this, humanitarian actors need to target vulnerable households in the host communities instead of limiting their interventions to IDPs. They also need to involve the communities in setting the criteria for assessing

vulnerability (Davies, 2012). As the conflict in Cabo Delgado persists, long-term projects that aim to promote food security and self-reliance among the IDPs need to include economically vulnerable members of the host communities. This would help them avoid undermining local efforts or reversing the achievements that informal community structures and initiatives have made so far in facilitating the integration of IDPs and maintaining social cohesion.

Conclusions and recommendations

The state's obligation to protect citizens is more pertinent in displacement contexts. However, the Mozambican state has failed to prioritise the needs of IDPs in places such as Nacala, which leaves the IDPs without institutional support and exacerbates their vulnerability in terms of physical security and material needs. The majority of IDPs arrive without sufficient resources to re-establish themselves in the host communities, and turn to members of these communities for support. Host community social norms and values espouse hospitality, solidarity and care for the vulnerable, all of which play an important role in generating local initiatives in response to emergencies emanating from the conflict in Cabo Delgado. It is important for the national government to increase state funding and resources channelled to Mozambique's National Institute of Disaster Management (INGC) and decentralise them to districts, which can work directly with local informal structures and build on their initiatives. This would enable interventions by the state to respond to the needs of IDPs and host communities, and accommodate local integration efforts. When host communities perceive humanitarian interventions as coming from within and as considerate of local needs, social dynamics, worldviews and life-worlds, this enables host communities to see humanitarian interventions as an organic part of local norms and values and welcome them, thereby promoting co-operation between i) host communities and the IDPs, ii) communities and the state and iii) communities

and humanitarian actors. This can help forestall resentment and hostility, which are some of the unintended outcomes of exclusionary interventions in many displacement contexts. Relations between IDPs and host communities in Nacala show that humanitarian interventions are likely to achieve their intended objectives where they are sensitive to and complement existing local efforts in supporting IDP integration and overall social cohesion in host communities. In view of this, the Policy Brief recommends that:

- The government of Mozambique, through district administrations, decentralises resources to enable local communities to improve their informal and local work in the integration of IDPs and social cohesion of the community. In line with this, national policies need to acknowledge the role of local communities and district administrations in handling the integration of IDPs. This requires that local administrations work closely with community and traditional leaders who are aware of the needs of both host communities and IDPs. To this end, district administrations also need to register host families and provide them with financial and material resources so that their assistance of IDPs is more effective. Direct co-operation between formal government structures and informal community structures would enable the government to complement community efforts and improve host communities' and IDPs' trust in the state.

- The government of Mozambique, through formal and civic education and engagement with community and traditional leaders, strengthens national identity as a unifying factor that counteracts social categories such as ethnicity, that propagate exclusionary tendencies and negatively affect social cohesion

when host communities and IDPs do not belong to the same ethnic group.

- District administrations engage in awareness programmes to familiarise IDPs and host communities with relevant local administrative offices and make these offices accessible and responsive to their needs and grievances as a way of fostering their trust and confidence in the government and state institutions.

- District administrations establish robust mechanisms to address IDPs' grievances relating to exploitation by unscrupulous actors whose unchecked activities contribute to the sense of neglect by the government and detachment from it expressed by the IDPs. These activities feed into IDPs' lack of trust in the state's capacity to protect them and lack of trust for outsiders, whom they perceive as seeking to exploit them.

- Humanitarian actors end discriminatory humanitarian practices that target IDPs and leave out equally vulnerable members of host communities. Discriminatory practices exacerbate resentment and hostility towards IDPs, thus reversing the existing mutual trust and co-operation and disrupting the efficacy of informal community structures and local initiatives that are already using meagre community resources to support IDPs and maintain social cohesion.

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