Islamic Radicalization in Northern Mozambique

The Case of Mocímboa da Praia

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Introduction

At a time when Mozambique was still involved in a lengthy negotiation process aimed at ending the conflict that followed the 2014 general election results, on 5 October 2017 the country was stunned by news of an armed attack on state institutions in the Mocímboa da Praia district capital in Cabo Delgado province. This armed attack, by an unknown group claiming to practice radical Islam, was a new phenomenon in the Mozambican political process and raised a number of issues not only related to the group's nature and motives, but also to the political, social and economic implications of the phenomenon for the country.

Although national and foreign media have covered the phenomenon since the first attack, available information on the subject is still scarce. It has been increasingly difficult for journalists and researchers to gain access to places ravaged by the attacks. Since the armed attacks began in October 2017, at least six journalists have been detained: three foreigners and one Mozambican in 2018 and two Mozambicans in 2019 (DW, 2019). In addition, six criminal cases have been brought against individuals suspected of being linked to the attacks. Two of these cases, with 221 defendants, were tried by the Cabo Delgado Judicial Court and 57 were sentenced to prison terms ranging from 16 to 40 years. The remaining four cases, involving 50 defendants, have not yet been concluded (Achá, 2019). Nevertheless, the situation in the region remains tense, particularly the northern part of Cabo Delgado. Contrary to the government discourse that the situation is calm and under control, episodes of attacks continue with some regularity, causing fear and creating a climate of terror, particularly in remote villages and small towns.

Given this situation, researchers from the Institute for Social and Economic Studies (IESE) and the Civil Society Support Mechanism Foundation (MASC Foundation) carried out exploratory research with the aim of analysing the nature and factors that might explain the violence, initially in Mocímboa da Praia and later in surrounding districts.

This research report is the result of fieldwork between November 2017 and February 2018.¹ In this phase, the research sought to focus essentially on the origins of the group, its nature, financing mechanisms and how it spread. Specifically, the research sought to gather and analyse information around the following questions:

¹ Subsequently, in 2019 there were three follow-up visits to Cabo Delgado, one in February, one in March and one in April.

- How did the armed group carrying out attacks in Mocímboa da Praia emerge?
- What is its social base?
- What are its motivations?
- What gets some young people to join the group?
- What are the recruitment mechanisms?
- How is the group structured and how does it operate at the local level?
- What kind of training do they receive?
- Who is training its members?
- Does the group have any ideological basis?
- Where does its funding come from?
- How do local communities and their leaders respond to the group's attacks?
- Is there any kind of connection between the radical Islamic group and the *Al-Shabaab* groups in Somalia and Kenya?

The research was conceived as an important part of an IESE research project, still in its initial phase, entitled "State, violence and development challenges in Cabo Delgado". It was also intended to contribute to the future strategic plan of the MASC Foundation, focussing on preventing the radicalization of youth in the northern part of Mozambique. Some of the questions raised in this phase of the research will be revisited and deepened in the above-mentioned research project.

Methodology

As radicalization is a relatively recent concept in the social sciences and there is still no consensus on its definition, it has been the subject of much controversy (Neumann, 2013). The vast literature on the radicalization phenomenon produced in recent years reveals not only that the debate is complex, but also that the concept is somewhat elusive (Githens-Mazer, 2012; Sageman, 2004; Neumann, 2013; Borum, 2011; Wiktorowicz, 2006; Moghadam, 2005; Mandel, 2009). As Githens-Mazer (2012) points out, the radicalization concept has been used for a variety of situations, from forms of populism, to revolutionary acts contesting a declining political power, to the intensification of existing political orientations and behaviours, usually marked by a shift from peaceful activities to violent extremism (Githens-Mazer, 2012, p. 557). According to Neumann (2013), the debate on radicalization has been structured mainly around two positions.

On the one hand, the position that defines radicalization by emphasizing "extremist beliefs" - cognitive radicalization - and, on the other hand, the position that highlights extremist behaviour - behavioural radicalization (Neumann, 2013: 873).

Githens-Mazer (2012) considers that one of the weaknesses of research on radicalization is the absence of empirical studies that permit the elaboration of a specific definition of the concept. Nevertheless, these studies can be divided into three groups, depending on how they regard the radicalization phenomenon. The first group looks at the radicalization process. Radicalization is seen as, on the one hand, a set of stages through which an individual becomes a terrorist and, on the other, a change in beliefs and behaviours that fosters acceptance of the use of violence. The second research group looks at the radicalization phenomenon through causation i.e. it seeks to understand the possible causes that explain the reasons for the radicalization of an individual. Viewed through the causation approach, radicalization is also seen as an instrument to bring about change in a society, a way of reacting to a status quo or poor governance. The third research group defines radicalization in negative terms, i.e. it cannot necessarily be terrorism or violence (Githens-Mazer: 2012, p. 558). In this exploratory research, although we are interested in looking at the radicalization process, we focus on its causes and thus take a causation approach. In our view, this will allow us to understand better and explain, not only the reasons why a group uses religion to bring about violent changes in a society, but also the causes that led to the emergence of the group operating in northern Cabo Delgado, attacking state institutions and the civilian population in the name of a radical Islam. It is this approach that structures our research questions.

The research comprised a literature review on politics and religion, especially radical Islamic movements, in order to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon. Field work was carried out with local actors in Cabo Delgado and Nampula provinces for three and a half weeks between November 2017 and February 2018. There were three field trips during this period.

Lasting a week and a half, the first trip took place in November 2017, a month and a half after the first attack on Mocímboa da Praia. During this trip, the research team visited successively the districts of Mocímboa da Praia, Macomia, Chiúre, Montepuez and Pemba. The semi-structured interviews covered different groups of actors:

- Religious leaders who knew not only some influential group members, but also local youths who joined the group. In Mocímboa da Praia, the research team also interviewed religious leaders who denounced the group to the local administration in 2016;
- Parents whose sons joined the group;
- Local leaders of civil society organizations;
- Local government officials and some members of the Defence and Security Forces (DSF), particularly in Mocímboa da Praia district;
- Informal vendors.

The second trip took place in December 2017. The week-long trip allowed the research team to visit the coastal districts of Nampula province - Memba, Nacala-Porto, Nacala-a-Velha and Ilha de Moçambique - in order to find out whether there was any possible ramification of the phenomenon outside Cabo Delgado province.

The third field trip took place in February 2018 and lasted a week. During this trip the research team returned to Mocímboa da Praia and Pemba town, in order to clarify and deepen issues gathered during the earlier trips.

In order to complement the information gathered through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions were organized with residents in the Mocímboa da Praia district capital. In addition, the two destroyed mosques and an alleged training camp in Mucojo administrative post, Macomia district, were visited.

With the information gathered it was possible to reconstruct the life histories of some people who, according to local reports, were key figures in the group's actions, at least in the months preceding the armed attack of 5 October 2017. In order to protect informants, all the sources interviewed and the participants in focus group discussions are kept anonymous.²

² All interviews and focus group discussions were conducted in Portuguese.

A *jihadist* movement in Mozambique? Elements for understanding the group's origins

When news of the armed attack on Mocímboa da Praia began to travel around the world in early October 2017, many TV channels, newspapers and social media discussions were raising questions about the reasons for the attacks and, above all, the identity and origins of the group that started them. In most cases the most common questions were: "Where does this Mocímboa da Praia group come from? Is it really an Islamic fundamentalist group? Is there Islamic fundamentalism in Mozambique? Are they not Renamo elements disguised as Islamic fundamentalists?" 3

According to the interviews and focus group discussions, the group that attacked state institutions in Mocímboa da Praia town on 5 October 2017 initally emerged in the northern area of Cabo Delgado as a religious group and then, in late 2015, it began to incorporate military cells. The group is called *Al-Shabaab*⁴ not only by local communities but also by its members. Its actions correspond to the religious fundamentalism of combating Western influence, the radical implantation of Islamic law - *Sharia law* - and fighting the enemies of Islam. The name *Al-Shabaab* means "youth" in Arabic. The Mocímboa da Praia group has links with the networks of *Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahedeen*, or just *Al-Shabaab*, a Somali-based *jihadist* group operating mainly in Somalia and in Kenya.

According to local Islamic religious leaders, the group was initially called *Ahlu Sunnah Wal-Jamâa* that in Arabic means, "adherents of the prophetic tradition and the congregation", although in Islam this term refers to any Muslim, in that they are called to follow the tradition of the prophet Muhammad. From the group's perspective, as the communities in Mocímboa da Praia were not following the Prophet's tradition, they wanted to take on the name *Ahlu Sunnah Wal-Jamâa* in order to set themselves apart from local communities, who they though were practicing a "degraded" Islam. However, for local religious leaders and Islamic communities, it was the group who preached and practiced a "degraded" Islam, that was not in keeping with the Prophet Muhammad's teaching.

This type of interpretation was because the largest conflict to date in terms of challenging the state, was led by Renamo. The term Al-Shabaab used in Mocímboa da Praia is analogous with the Al-Shabaab group operating in Somalia and Kenya, established in the 1990s as the militarized wing of the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC). In Somalia's case, at that time the group was small, but effective in carrying out its missions, with leaders dedicated to jihad. Some of these leaders had experience of action in Afghanistan. The militarized wing initially comprised former members of AIAI (Al Itihaad al Islamiya), a Somali Islamic organization formed in the 1980s by a group of Middle Eastern educated Wahhabis who fought against the dictator Mohamed Siad Barre's government. For a more detailed analysis of the origin of the Al-Shabaab group in Somalia, see: Menkhaus (2007a; 2007b); Menkhaus (2008).

At first, the group's members were mainly young people from Mocímboa da Praia. Their leaders had links with certain religious and military circles - fundamentalist Islamic cells in Tanzania, Kenya, Somalia and the Great Lakes region. 5 Some adherents had indirect links with spiritual leaders from Saudi Arabia, Libya, Sudan and Algeria, essentially through videos or people who had studied in those countries on scholarships funded by local and foreign businessmen, particularly loggers and illegal artisan miners from Tanzania, Somalia and the Great Lakes region. In these countries some their teachers had also been trained abroad, particularly in the Persian Gulf monarchies, where they were in contact with fundamentalist circles. In Mozambique, some of these young people are concentrated in the north and others in Maputo City⁶. As one of the Islamic leaders in Pemba said:

"(...) Our young people were led astray by their teachers who studied abroad... How these teachers interpret the Quran in very different to the way we teach it in our madrassas... Some of them are Salafist and other's Wahhabis... Salafism and Wahhabism are very dangerous theological currents... You can't teach these young people Salafism and Wahhabism... Nor should we bring these teachers who have been in contact with Salafists to Cabo Delgado and we should not send our children to watch their videos".7

In order stand out from other Muslim believers, members of the Mocímboa da Praia Al-Shabaab group sought to build their own identities, with special characteristics: they had their own form of dress, especially white turbans tied around their heads; they wore black gowns and short trousers that extended just below the knee; most of them had shaven heads and a large beard; They did not send their children to official schools, only to the Quranic schools (madrassas) that they built; they were always armed with bladed weapons (such as knives and machetes) to symbolize iihad8; they would incite violence and disrespect community leaders, particularly the Alimos, who they called "káfir"; and they would

Mocímboa da Praia lies on the migration route that starts in Somalia and enters Mozambique across the Rovuma, then exits to South Africa via the Ressano Garcia border. At the border migrants use fake documents, usually purchased locally, in order to leave Mozambique. It is said that there are two mosques in the northern region of Mozambique that are known to host migrant populations, usually of Somali origin.

In Maputo City these young people do not attend specific mosques and many of them are not in the job market.

Interview with B. M., Islamic leader in Pemba, Pemba, 4 February 2018.

The word jihad comes from the Arabic term jahd, meaning "to fight, to strive or to struggle." Jihad is a central concept of the Muslim religion and, in its Islamic context, has two primary meanings: the struggle for personal improvement according to the doctrinal norms of Islam and the struggle for the betterment of humanity by spreading the influence of Islam and and the prophet Muhammad. Jihad is used by extremist Muslims to justify terrorist actions against populations considered unfaithful because they do not observe the same religious principles. In the West, jihad is commonly called the holy war, and for this reason Islamic State (IS) militants are called jihadists.

Káfir is an Arabic term meaning unbelieving, infidel, or one who "conceals" or hides the truth. The term alludes to a person who rejects or disbelieves in Allah (God).

not talk to government structures or groups other than their own. In addition, their families were forced to watch videos of speeches by the Kenyan cleric Aboud Rogo¹⁰, who preached a radical Islam. Their wives were forced to cover their bodies and faces with burkas.

As time went on, locals in Mocímboa da Praia became increasingly aware of the *Al-Shabaab* group's presence. In the words of one interviewee:

"(...) Soon after settling here in Mocímboa we began to notice the difference: they brought with them bladed weapons, threatened our religious leaders and anyone who showed any opposition to their ideas. (...) They threatened death. (...) They were not based on what the Quran says."¹¹

When the group first appeared in Mocímboa da Praia (before 2015) there was confrontation between its members and local religious leaders. Following this confrontation, the group was expelled from the local mosques and began to meet in an unfinished building that was later transformed into a mosque, named after *Masjid Mussa*. Monetary and manpower contributions by group members transformed the building into a mosque. The group also met in the back yard of one of its members, known as Mussa Sabão.

How did local government react to the group's presence? Following many complaints by local religious authorities about the existence of a group with radical tendencies that was agitating mosques, local governments (in the districts concerned) had different approaches. While the district governments in Chiúre and Montepuez responded decisively to the group, causing its members to flee to neighbouring districts, in Mocímboa da Praia and Macomia the authorities said that this was an internal problem of the mosques, so it was up to the religious leaders to find a solution to the problem.¹²

Aboud Rogo was an Islamic extremist accused of funding the *Al-Shabaab* militia in Somalia. He was shot dead in Kenya and his death sparked violence and protests by hundreds of protesters. Rogo was the target of US and UN blacklist sanctions for allegedly supporting Somali *Al-Shabaab* militants.

¹¹ Interview with C. S., Mocímboa da Praia resident, Mocímboa da Praia, 7 February 2018.

In Mocímboa da Praia the district government's attitude towards the group was explained by the fact that some members lived with local government officials. For example, a wife of one of the group's leaders was a local administration employee. In addition, some local administration and police officials, if they had no money at the time, would obtain basic staples from stalls and shops owned by leaders of the *Al-Shabaab* group and pay at the end of the month.

Who were the key actors in the group?

The success and consolidation of such a group depends primarily on its leaders. The group's leadership consisted of national and foreign actors. Based on information gathered during fieldwork we have attempted to construct the following profiles of the group's main actors (for methodological reasons, they are identified by their initials).

A name that frequently arose was O. B. He was from Mocímboa da Praia and studied in local madrassas before leaving for Tanzania, where he was in contact with circles of Salafism followers. O. B. could speak local languages, Arabic and Kiswahili. Between 2013 and 2014, he was said to have created a small group of young people who gathered in his home with the aim of penetrating local mosques. Their intent was to change the way religious leaders in these mosques interpreted the Quran. A member of the Nanduadua community noted:

"O. B. and his followers passed through various mosques and tried to disrupt them. They even insulted the Alimos and elders by calling them *kafir*. Their interpretation of the Quran was completely different from that practiced in Islam. Many of us started to challenge them and they replied that we are not Muslims... we are *kafir* and we should stop praying in that mosque (...). When they caught a *Mwalimu* they asked why he was working with the Government and did not follow Islamic Law, why he became a State agent instead of being a servant of Islam... During prayers, they would gather on the verandas of the mosques and start to pray in their own way ... It was Mr O. B. who brought trouble [radicalism] here in Mocímboa, but the Government did not know (...)"¹³

Because of their behaviour, religious leaders prevented O. B. and his followers from attending local mosques. After his expulsion, O. B. and his faithful followers, mostly young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and many of whom without any formal education, began to pray in the home of one of their members and in very closed circles. According to our interviews, for the attack on state institutions in Mocímboa da Praia on 5 October 2017, O. B. had logistical and financial support from A. A. M.; AT.; N.; AT.; H. M.; S. M.; A. S. M.; among others. Who were these people?

A. A. M., a trader with various types of business in Mocímboa da Praia and Tanzania, was originally from Malindi village in Mocímboa da Praia. The local population considered him to be the leader of the *Al-Shabaab* group and the financier of the group., A. A. M.'s father - A.

¹³ Interview with in resident Mocímboa da Praia, Mocímboa da Praia, 8 February 2018.

M. - was a *Mwalimu*¹⁴ and a charismatic leader in the Malindi area of Mocímboa da Praia, where he had a mosque and madrassa, attended by young Malindians. One respondent had the following to say about A. A. M:

"(...). Before October [2017], Mr A. A. M. disappeared for two weeks. When he returned, he took his children away from Mocímboa... I don't know where to. Those who talked to him [Mr. A. A. M.] said that he had taken his children to study abroad. The truth is that the attack happened at dawn, on 5 October [October 2017],... and we never saw Mr. A. A. M. again; we only know that his business is still here in Mocímboa. He rented his stores to Somalis and Nigerians. You don't hear about him anymore. But we have proof that he is alive! He was spotted in the bandit zone [in the zone under *Al-Shabaab* control] (...)"¹⁵

N. A. was from Nanduadua neighbourhood. A small businessman in the informal market in Mocímboa da Praia town, he was known locally as one of the military commanders of the *Al-Shabaab* group and before the attack on 5 October 2017, he and his men reportedly participated actively in distributing weapons to different cells of the group in Mocímboa da Praia district.

N.¹⁶, from Milamba in the Mocímboa da Praia aerodrome zone, had businesses in the informal market. Like N. A., N. he was part of the military leadership of the Mocímboa da Praia *Al-Shabaab* group and was involved in the logistics of the attack on Mocímboa da Praia district command on 5 October 2017.

A. S. had small businesses in the informal market. He also owned sailboats and motorboats. Originally from Pamunda neighbourhood, A. S. and A. A. M., mentioned above, were linked to the group's financial area. He supported small loan schemes for young people to start their small businesses, not only in the local informal market but also abroad, especially in Tanzania.

H. M. was a young Tanzanian who had links with *Al-Shabaab* radical circles in Tanzania, Kenya and Somalia. He was a local trader with business in the informal sector, in money transfer and gemstone trading and was very influential in the intricacies of the leadership of the Mocímboa da Praia *Al-Shabaab* group. He was one of the people behind the military

¹⁴ Mwalimu means teacher in Kiswahili. In rural communities, the Mwalimu has great prestige and is very influential.

Interview with R. A., inhabitant of Mocímboa da Praia, Mocímboa da Praia, 7 February 2018.

We were unable to obtain the surname of N., but local sources said that he was one of the key people in the group's military operations and was in touch with foreign members of the group.

and religious training of the young people who joined the group. Locally, H. M. was better known as the "Great Commander" or "Chief Hassan". He was in touch with radical spiritual leaders in Tanzania and distributed audio-visual material from radical Islamic leaders such as Aboud Rogo, the Kenyan Muslim cleric who was an exceptional and passionate speaker with strong mobilizing power.

S. M., a local trader with some financial clout, controlled sea transport between Mocímboa da Praia and Tanzania and provided funds to help many young people from Mocímboa da Praia to start their own small businesses.

A.S. M. was a local trader with commercial links to Tanzania. Like S. M. and A. A. M., mentioned above, A. S. M. also helped young locals to start their own small businesses.

In addition to local actors, the group had key input from Tanzanian spiritual leaders such as Sheik A. A. and Sheik A. S. Speaking of these Tanzanian sheiks, a member of the Muslim community in Nanduadua neighbourhood added:

> "(...) Historically, Tanzanian sheiks have been widely accepted within the Muslim community here in the northern area, particularly in Mocímboa da Praia... when they first arrived in Mocímboa, Sheik A. A. and Sheik A. S. and even Sheik Hassan, were immediately welcomed by young Muslims... Some of these young people are traders in informal markets, others are peasants, carpenters, fishermen or unemployed and with no education (...) Most of them do not speak Portuguese... they speak local languages and Kiswahili (...). The sheiks could speak passionately and forcefully against the existing local religious leaders and the state... In their lectures they covered the problems of young people such as unemployment and poor living conditions and asked why they were poor when Allah gave so much wealth to Mocímboa da Praia? (...)"17

How did recruitment occur?

One of the issues in our research was understanding the recruitment of group members. How did it happen? What led young people to join the group? In Mocímboa da Praia, the Al-Shabaab group focused its recruitment efforts both locally/nationally and abroad, notably in Tanzania or the Great Lakes region. After the attack on 5 October

Interview with F. R. M., Carpenter, Mocímboa da Praia, 21 November 2017.

2017, many recruits came from the coastal districts of Cabo Delgado and Nampula provinces: Mocímboa da Praia, Macomia, Memba, Nacala-a-Velha and Nacala-Porto. Many recruits joined the group based on promises of cash, employment and, in some cases, scholarships abroad.

The Mocímboa da Praia *Al-Shabaab* group had established a heterogeneous recruitment network involving marriage ties, informal networks of friends, madrassas, mosques, informal trading businesses and community-based Muslim youth associations. How some of these elements made the recruitment network viable are described below.

Marital ties

Marriage strategies were one of the most effective tools for establishing the group. Men from Tanzania, Kenya or other countries, who settled in Mocímboa da Praia, were protected by local families because of marital ties. When they arrived, they married local women and received plots of land from their in-laws to build their houses, often in the same yard where the in-laws lived. Given their economic and financial power, they eventually became an important source of livelihood for these families and, in return, were protected. Marriages also contributed to the radicalization of members of these families as they began to attend the group's places of worship.

Informal Networks of Friends

Informal networks of friends were instrumental in the youth recruitment process for the *Al-Shabaab* group. These networks facilitated political mobilization, as spending time with friends could increase the likelihood of participation in "projects" that involved collective issues. But when there was resistance among groups of friends, young recruiters would stop confronting those who thought differently. They often tried to indoctrinate the family and the circle of friendships. When this didn't work, they set tolerance aside and started to have their own intolerant worldview. One respondent recounts how his friends stopped talking to him:

"I had five friends and we were always together, but suddenly they began to behave strangely towards me... we were always discussing religion and the need to change the way we pray in our mosques. As we had different positions, they stopped talking to me and later started to live with people who thought the same way, and in very closed circles... Then I found out that they

were part of the Al-Shabaab."18

Informal or kinship-based networks of friends as a recruitment mechanism by the Al-Shabaab group in Mocímboa da Praia is nothing new. The literature on collective action is full of examples of this kind and demonstrates the importance of informal networks and groups of friends for recruiting individuals to participate in collective action, whether social, political or religious (Della Porta & Diani, 2006).

Madrassas

As in the case of mosques, local state authorities have no idea precisely how many madrassas there are in Mocímboa da Praia. Although they do not provide formal education, in a situation where the education system and public services in general are weak¹⁹, particularly in the most remote areas of Mocímboa da Praia, the poorest families have been resorting to madrassas²⁰ or Quranic schools, that feed and shelter children. Moreover, in the case of the Al-Shabaab group's madrassas, they spread a more militant form of Islam than the traditional one in the country. Over the years, children learn by heart each verse of the Quran until they become "hafiz" - someone who has memorized the entire holy book. Almost all Quranic schools throughout Mocímboa da Praia district, including the district capital, were in very poor areas, where the subsidized life of the madrassas, particularly those of the Al-Shabaab group around Nanduadua, was an alternative for the children of large families.

In addition to the study of the Quran, the Al-Shabaab group's madrassas also showed videos of sheik Aboud Rogo. Sheik Rogo's propaganda videos were discussed in madrassas and broadcast on the WhatsApp social network. The group also distributed flash drives with jihadist chants and propaganda videos showing the group's alleged military operations, as well as images showing how Muslims are persecuted around the world. Through these images, the group sought to entice young people to join the jihad cause.²¹ The messages that the group conveyed, often using visual codes that

¹⁸ Interview with A. K. M., informal vendor, Mocímboa da Praia, 22 November 2017.

According to Silva et al (2016), where the state's provision of services or control over territory is fragile, extremist groups are able to consolidate their presence. For example, the Somali state has failed to consolidate itself, having experienced several interventions throughout its history, and has been extremely dependent on international support. Somalia's homogeneity gives the false impression that it would be an easily governable nation. However, government vulnerability exacerbated by the secular clan regime, easy access to weapons, chronic poverty, external support for extremist groups, among other factors, favoured the consolidation of the Al-Shabaab group. For a more detailed analysis of state failure and radical Islamic movements see Silva, Y. et al (2016).

Madrassas are usually maintained by donations from the faithful and by boarding students.

²¹ In late 2017 a propaganda video (probably the only one so far) circulated with appeals about *jihad*. During fieldwork in Mocímboa da Praia we asked our interviewees if they recognized the characters in the video. To our surprise, without exception, all our interviewees said they recognized the young man who, wielding a gun and with a half-covered face,

appeal to young audiences (photographs, films and videogames), spoke of a struggle for ideals: "to defend the weak, oppose the strongest, help people in need."

As there is no uniform curriculum in a madrassa, not only in Mocímboa da Praia but also in the rest of the country, this makes them fertile places for the penetration of radical religious ideologies. For example, in the *Al-Shabaab* group places of worship and madrassas, it was taught that "in Mecca there is no pilgrimage... anyone who wants to make a pilgrimage should go to Somalia. Going to Somalia for the pilgrimage means Allah will give you paradise."²²

Internet and Social Networks

Growing internet access, associated with the spread of cell phones, has changed the way people interact and access information and participate in politics. Social networks are an extremely important way to convey a message to an audience. *Tweets* and *Facebook* posts convey emotions to the reader. Like other extremist groups, Mocímboa da Praia's *Al-Shabaab* group also used social networks such as *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *WhatsApp* and videos to recruit combatants. These media were also used to disseminate information about group activities and communication. The dissemination of videos was intended to influence beliefs and feelings that favoured recruitment. Most of these videos contained messages in Kiswahili and Arabic to pass on information to potential recruits who speak these languages. The messages in the videos had a clear *jihadist* content. The videos most circulated by the different *Al-Shabaab* group cells in the north are from Sheikh Aboud Rogo Mohammed, better known to locals as Aboud Rogo.

What messages does Aboud Rogo convey in his videos? In his speeches, he uses the "plot theory". It convinces very young people that they are living in a corrupt world, surrounded by people who are always lieing to them, and this makes them distrust everything and everyone – makes them feel "special". Violent extremists take advantage of the fact that young people are at a time in their lives when they question their lives and their identity, in order to convince them that they are "superior beings". They are told that what they feel is a "holy call" to help create a better world. Through such speeches, the *Al-Shabaab* was able to get young people from Mocímboa da Praia and northern Mozambique to start isolating themselves from the world in which they lived, and to join the group. The parents and Alimos of the mosques and the school lost authority over these

called on young people from Mocímboa da Praia and Mozambique to join the group.

Interview with S. M., local religious leader, Mocímboa da Praia, 23 November 2017.

young people, as the recruits started to consider them "impure", conveying a message that feeds mediocrity.

Consequently, in a short time the Al-Shabaab group enjoyed relative growth in Mocímboa da Praia that allowed them to expand from a small group of some 50 "agitators" in local mosques to an "armed force" of about 300 people. This group had the ability to attack the state and sow panic among local communities, forcing the central government to send troops to fight it.

What factors could explain the expansion of the group's armed actions beyond Mocímboa da Praia district? In our view there are at least three factors.

The first factor is the changing military situation in the area. After a number of DSF frontline outposts came under attack, they decided to withdraw from some of them to consolidate their main bases. Although this new arrangement protected the military, it made the civilian population more vulnerable to penetration by the Al-Shabaab group, particularly in the more remote areas of Mocímboa da Praia. Moreover, the army and police have difficulty conducting military operations at night. Well informed about their targets, the Al-Shabaab group launches most of its attacks at night and rarely encounters military intervention. According to our sources, the morale of the DSF troops appears to be low, especially in regular army units. The fatigue caused by the Al-Shabaab group's armed attacks, logistical problems and the feeling that the government is treating soldiers unfairly, especially as regards food and length of time they spend in the field, are a source of frustration. The soldiers are angry because they do not have enough food or medical assistance. Many of them in Mocímboa da Praia, Macomia and Palma think that their foodstuffs are being misappropriated. Indeed, some soldiers accused senior officers of taking their food and bonuses:

> "(....) We are tired of this situation in Mocímboa... Every passing day we have fewer logistics in the military camps... For many of us, in order to eat we have to ask the local people...our food ends up in the hands of our commanders....they say we have bonuses, but these bonuses have never reached the rank and file (...)"23

Our sources also said that the DSF lack appropriate military resources to effectively combat the group. Moreoever, over the past two years the Al-Shabaab group's approach has become more sophisticated, creating "spies" within local communities to

Interview with A. M., Border Guard Military Man, Mocímboa da Praia, 7 February 2018.

monitor the DSF movement in the area. This provides *Al-Shabaab* with up-to-date information on the possibility of an attack, thereby providing some protection for the group.

The second factor that explains the expansion of the *Al-Shabaab* group's actions is the fragility or even absence of the state in most of the remote areas of Mocímboa da Praia district. In other words, the *Al-Shabaab* group's leaders take advantage of the weak state authority presence so that, to some extent, the population in these areas is vulnerable to penetration by the radical group.

The third explanatory factor is that the *Al-Shabaab* group is receiving young people from other parts of the African continent, particularly Tanzania, Uganda and the Great Lakes region. It is said that some of these young people were involved in criminal circles and others had experience, particularly in *Jihad*.²⁴ An informal vendor in Pamunda said:

"(...) Every day, many young people from other countries come to join this group called *Al-Shabaab* (...) No-one knows exactly where they come from, but one thing is certain, they are not from here.... They speak a strange language (...) They are individuals with some experience of war... When they get here, they train our friends in military techniques... Many of them come here with firearms (...)"²⁵

One interviewee had the following to say about citizens from other countries in the ranks of the *Al-Shabaa*b group in Mocímboa da Praia:

"In December [2017] they attacked Makulo, which is 40 km from the town[Mocímboa da Praia]. They [the Al-Shabaab] gathered the people together and said: 'We don't want to hurt you... we want to raise our flag... here are people from Tanzania, Kenya'... and the speech was in Kiswahili. Their flag was black with white inserts. They [Al-Shabaab] said they were against the Government."²⁶

Mozambique is not the only case where violent extremist groups recruit foreigners to their ranks. According to Silva et al (2016) Al-Shabaab Somalis recruit both local and foreign guerrillas from other countries who sympathize with the iihadist cause.

²⁵ Interview with A.M., Informal Vendor, Mocímboa da Praia, 27 November 2017.

²⁶ Interview with R. I., local religious leader, Mocímboa da Praia, 8 February 2018.

Why did young people join the Al-Shabaab group?

The factors that lead people to join violent extremist groups have been the centre of attention for scholars and policy makers. There is no consensus on why people decide to participate in violent extremist groups. The literature points to various factors: psychological, ideological, philosophical, political and socioeconomic (Hinds, 2013; Cotte, 2015, Mcculough et al., 2017). Cotte, for example, emphasises that the roots of terrorism lie not in the individual, but in the broader circumstances in which terrorists live and act. In this case, the reasons that lead an individual to join an extremist group are external and not necessarily internal to the individual (Cotte, 2015). Similarly, Vetlesen (2005) argues that an offence stems from a combination of character, situation and social structure. To reinforce this perception of an external element that leads people to join violent extremist groups, authors such as Bandura (2002) emphasize the importance of acknowledging social conditions rather than viewing people as being predisposed to atrocious acts such as those related to terrorism. As he says, "Given appropriate social conditions, decent, ordinary people can do extraordinary cruel things" (Bandura, 2002: 109). Because of this external influence, the reasons why individuals unite and participate in violent extremist groups, as well as the drivers of radicalization, differ from country to country and group to group. So what may motivate Somalis to enlist in Al-Shabaab may differ from the factors that motivate Mozambicans to join the Al-Shabaab group. This also means that policy projects intended to address to violent extremism must be case-specific and not "one-size-fits-all". This emphasizes the need for each case of violent extremism to be studied in detail and understood in order to find more realistic and context-sensitive solutions.

In the Mocímboa da Praia case, what led young people to join the *Al-Shabaab* group? Our interviews found that young people had various kinds of motives. Some of these are considered below.

Poverty, Unemployment and Low Literacy

The first motivation detected by our research is quite pragmatic: the need to survive. Mocímboa da Praia's economy is virtually in ruins, particularly outside the district capital. The local government authorities are unable to respond to the demand for jobs and public services in the region, where more than half the population lives below the poverty line, and there are many chronically underemployed young people.²⁷

Many young people who joined the Al-Shabaab group in Mocímboa da Praia were in a critical phase in their personal development, most of them aged 18-25. This is the phase when there is the greatest emotional rift with their families

The informal sector is the only alternative for the survival for many young people in Mocímboa da Praia, who usually have little education, no professional qualifications and are responsible for huge households. One resident described the current situation in Mocímboa da Praia as follows:

"(...) In colonial times Mocímboa da Praia and Ibo were known as the capitals of Cabo Delgado... The capitals always had many opportunities... But since 1975 Mocímboa da Praia has become a district abandoned by successive FRE-LIMO governments... Today, young people in Mocímboa da Praia live from begging and work in the informal market...Those who have families with some money can go to Tanzania or get a boat to start their fishing business... It's very sad to finish 12th grade and end up selling peanuts in the streets of Mocímboa (...) When we complain they [the Government] say we are from RENAMO (...)"²⁸

Our local sources revealed that a significant portion of the people who joined the *Al-Shabaab* group were poor unemployed young people, many of them from broken homes, who dropped out of school or only went to Quranic schools and were doing informal trade in the town. So informal vendors in Mocímboa da Praia were an important part of the *Al-Shabaab* group's social support base.

With no job opportunities, living in poverty and struggling with social integration, these young people saw in the *Al-Shabaab* group the possibility of meeting their own and their families' basic needs. A local fisherman told us how his brother went to join the group:

"My younger brother joined the 'Al-Shabaab bandits' because of poverty and unemployment. Here in Mocímboa [da Praia], the [economic] situation for young men is bad. They [young people] can only survive if they leave for Pemba or Maputo. But where will they get the money to get to Pemba or Maputo? The alternative he [brother] had was to go join Al-Shabaab."29

Unemployed, and with jobs that do not allow them to "dream big" even while working in the informal market, these young people also joined the *Al-Shabaab* group in search of a community, guidance and solutions to their problems. Some of the young people from the

and major independence issues arise: what life project to build? What values to follow?

²⁸ Interview with M. C., Vila - Mocímboa capital, 25 November 2017.

²⁹ Interview with D. B., Pamunda, 27 November 2017.

informal market who joined the *Al-Shabaab* group were unhappy with the actions of the Mocímboa da Praia Municipal Council officials, particularly the market tax collectors and the Municipal Police. The informal vendors accused the town council of charging excessive fees that they felt prevented their businesses from being profitable.

Personal Fantasies, Seeking Adventure, Camaraderie and Creating a New Order

Behind the social, economic, political or even religious motivations that may eventually lead people to engage in extremely violent groups like *Al-Shabaab*, there is something else: personal fantasies, the pursuit of adventure, of camaraderie, of a purpose in life and identity. As occurs in other contexts, in Mocímboa da Praia, these "lures" were very attractive, especially for young people who felt that there was not much happening in their lives.

What the *Al-Shabaab* group offered these young people was a new family and a new lifestyle based on a particular "ideology". Above all, *Al-Shabaab* gave young recruits from Mocímboa da Praia and other districts a sense of security, support and community – they satisfied the youth's emotional needs. For young people, *jihad* was "the right extremism"; they came to see Islam as important for challenging local authorities and building a new social and political order. Many of these youths felt that they were completely insignificant locally. Marginalized and unable to have any kind of impact, by joining the *Al-Shabaab* group they could challenge the existing leaders of the Mocímboa da Praia mosques. *Al-Shabaab* challenged local Islamic leaders by not participating in their prayers, insulting them and accusing them of being part of the Government. These Islamic leaders sought the help of local authorities to stay in power and expel these youth from their mosques. A local Islamic leader said:

"When the situation started here in Mocímboa [da Praia], other sheiks and I asked the government for help in preventing [Al-Shabaab] youth from attending our mosques. These young people [Al-Shabaab] entered our mosques wearing shoes, and others insulted us in front of other Muslim brothers. They even called us FRE-LIMO agents, when a sheik must be nonpartisan."³⁰

Another local religious leader emphasized:

Interview with A. Z., Shehe, headquarters village Mocímboa da Praia, 28 November 2017.

"These [Al-Shabaab] youths told us that we [local religious leaders] should stop doing what we were doing because we knew nothing about the Quran and that our mosques were 'tents'. They promised to kill me in order to control the mosque and accused me of receiving money from Africa Muslim³¹ and spending it on my-self."³²

Ethnicity-Based Identity Issues

When Mozambique became independent in 1975, despite FRELIMO's ideological discourse on national unity, distrust between communities and deep ethnic divisions in the various regions of the country were, and continue to be, a major obstacle in the process of building a national identity where all ethnic groups could see themselves. As in other African countries, political elites in Mozambique are tainted by fierce competition for access to and control over resources and regard the state as a source of personal enrichment (Bayart, 1989). This competition often encourages them to manipulate ethnic identities, such that loyalty to the ethnic community overlaps with loyalty to the nation. In the specific case of Mocímboa da Praia, this is manifested mainly through mechanisms for the distribution of public office and resources. The Mwani ethnic group feels excluded from political representation and economic benefits. A young resident had this to say:

"Here in Mocímboa [da Praia], the Makonde and young people who come from Maputo are trendy. We [Mwani] do not see anything... in order for our parents to live they have to work in the fields of the Makonde bosses... They are bosses and we are employees... This started a long time ago and it is not just today... We the Mwani are suffering... But one day this is going to have to change, we can't go on like this (...)"³³

Another interviewee added:

"Here in Mocímboa [da Praia], the number of Mwani who benefit from the former combatant's pension fund is very small ... When we apply for the former combatant's pension fund the Makondes have priority... Every month they have money to buy *capulanas* for their wives and we don't... Because of that,

A humanitarian non-governmental organization (NGO) operating in Mozambique since 1993. It has funded the construction of mosques and scholarships for young Mozambicans inside and outside Mozambique.

³² Interview with M.Z., Shehe, Nanduadua, 28 November 2017.

³³ Interview with A. I., Unemployed Youth, Nanduadua, 28 November 2017.

we Mwani are not respected by our wives... But what to do? They [Makondes] are in charge."34

An analysis of the profile of the young people involved in the Al-Shabaab group in Mocímboa da Praia (at least in the group's early moments), reveals that many were students in local madrassas. However, when they went to the group they were not necessarily attracted by its religion or ideology as such. Indeed, they clearly had only a superficial knowledge of Islamic theology. As the literature shows (Neumann, 2013; Bugart, 2016), membership of groups like the Mocímboa da Praia Al-Shabaab does not require ideologically sophisticated adherents. It is sufficient to have a feeling and commitment to the group's principles. In Mocímboa da Praia's case, one strong influence on the involvement of young people in the group was, among other things, the allure and feeling of "fighting for something" that they saw in groups of the Al-Shabaab type. Some respondents made a connection between the poor state of local education services and the area's vulnerability to penetration by radical religious ideologies.

In the words of one interviewee,

"The public school situation in northern Mozambique, particularly in the areas furthest from the district capital and administrative posts, is a clear example of decades of neglect that gives many Mozambicans, particularly the poorest, a feeling of being abandoned by the government, ... The regions of Mozambique that have no schools or other training alternatives for children and adolescents are areas with more penetration by the Al-Shabaab group. These young people believe they can change Mozambique merely by belonging to Al-Shabaab. For them, this society brings no benefit ... nor does it bring hope."35

The adherence of some of these young people to the Al-Shabaab group even surprised the local Alimos. An Alimo in one of Mocímboa da Praia's madrassas said:

"I was surprised when I saw that a number of youths who attended my madrassa were with the Al-Shabaab. Many of them only knew the basics of Islam but believed they would turn Mocímboa da Praia into a political capital of the AI-Shabaab."36

³⁴ Interview with A. F., Nanduadua, 28 November 2017.

³⁵ Interview with M. A., leader of a civil society organization, Mocímboa da Praia, 22 November 2017.

³⁶ Interview with S. E., Alimo in one of the Mocímboa da Praia madrassas , 22 November 2017.

During our fieldwork we learned about young people who had disappeared and then later phoned their parents and admitted that they had joined the *Al-Shabaab* group. These cases were never reported to the police for fear of reprisals. There were similar concerns in districts neighbouring Mocímboa da Praia. A fisherman shared his experience of young people who disappeared:

"My two sons left their wives and their children in my house. When I asked my wife why our daughters-in-law and grandchildren had come to live in our house, she couldn't tell me. My sons were away for five months without giving any news and no-one at home knew where they were. After five months, they called to say they were in Somalia to participate in *jihad* or holy war. It was through this call that we learned the whereabouts of my sons."³⁷

But there were also young people who decided to leave Mocímboa da Praia with the knowledge of their parents, supposedly travelling abroad to do business or learn Islam. One mother described how her son left and when he returned he was different:

"My son said goodbye to me, saying that he was going to Somalia to do business and study the Muslim religion. When he returned, he was no longer the same son we knew. He had become a very radical person and spoke of a Muslim religion that we who are over 60 have never heard of. When his father asked him, he replied that his father was not a Muslim, but a traitor to the ideals of Islam. From then on he began to mobilize his friends and colleagues in the informal market and many of them began to attend *Al-Shabaab* group meetings here in Mocímboa da Praia."³⁸

A similar account is from a father who also saw his sons leave his village to join the *Al-Shabaab* group:

"I saw my three sons leave to join the *Al-Shabaab* after selling their homes... My sons were not the only ones here in the village selling their possessions to join these '*Al-Shabaab* bandits'. My fishing friends also saw their sons disappear for three months after selling everything they had. When they returned, they came to our homes and neighbourhoods to try to convince people to join the *Al-Shabaab*.

³⁷ Interview with A. F., fisherman, Mocímboa da Praia, 23 November 2017.

³⁸ Interview with Z. T, peasant, Mocímboa da Praia, 24 November 2017.

Some of them didn't want us to say our prayers in our mosques ... they wanted us to pray in the backyards of their houses, where they themselves prayed, stating that there were only sinners in our mosques."³⁹

Another account shows how two brothers living in the same family had different attitudes:

"My brother didn't want to listen to our parents. He said they were old and knew nothing of Islam and went to the mosques of a sheik who did not even know the Quran. My brother ran away because he didn't want to listen to the advice of the elders. This is all happening to him because of his ambition for money and easy things."⁴⁰

Some interviewees said they had no control over their children when they decided to join the *Al-Shabaab* group and did not know what would happen to them with the military offensives launched by the DSF to stop *Al-Shabaab* actions.

Although initially the *Al-Shabaab* group focused its recruitment on mosques, Quranic schools, groups of friends or even marital connections, later it recruited by promising them wages. Receiving a wage at the end of every month became one of the main reasons to join the group. In other words, the promise of money has become one of the recurring lures to attract fighters who live in conditions of poverty and unemployment.

Recruitment has also become coercive, using either death threats or terror in villages.⁴¹ The group is accused of recruiting women and children in the fields, mistreating and killing men, carrying out forced marriages and using civilians as human shields. One of the interviewees shared his family's experience:

"My brother, his wife and children were kidnapped by the *Al-Shabaab*. My brother was about to be killed but managed to escape. My sister-in-law and my nephews stayed with the [*Al-Shabaab*] men and we don't know what would happen to them. We are living in fear in the villages because at night they come to create terror and often end up taking whole families."⁴²

³⁹ Interview with A. S., fisherman, Mocímboa da Praia, 24 November 2017.

⁴⁰ Interview with A. H, youth, Mocímboa da Praia, 25 November 2017.

Recruitment under duress corresponds to the phase after the first armed attack on 5 October 2017. In this phase, the Al-Shabaab group had a more violent approach to the civilian population. This change can be explained by three factors:

a) local community structures had more control over the movement of young people;
b) the escape of some people from areas controlled by the group;
c) the intensification of violent action by the DSF.

⁴² Interview with M. A., fisherman, Mocímboa da Praia, 26 November 2017.

When we asked why the *Al-Shabaab* group killed men and held women and children captive, one member of the local community said that women and children (particularly the latter) were easy to indoctrinate. Women were used for housework, preparing food, and reconnaissance of military movements by DSF in the area. Many of these women were also forced to marry or have sex with leaders of the *Al-Shabaab* group.

Abducted people are also used as human shields. The *Al-Shabaab* prevents them from moving because they fear being attacked by the DSF if the civilians leave. Residents complain about the group's constant human rights abuses and accuse analysts of not paying as much attention to the problem as other crises. Life is very difficult in the areas it controls. There is no food and no assistance. One report we heard during fieldwork was from a peasant who lived for three weeks in an area controlled by the group in the interior of Mocímboa da Praia district:

"(...) When arriving in areas controlled by *Al-Shabaab* everyone, especially children and young people, were required to attend lectures organized by local *Al-Shabaab* chiefs. These lectures were given in Kimwane and Kiswahili and were about Aboud Rogo's speeches. They interpreted these speeches, and everyone had to listen... Life was very bad in the area. Anyone who tried to escape and was caught was killed (...) I managed to escape because I knew the bush better than they [*Al-Shabaab*] did".⁴³

Where did the money that financed the *Al-Shabaab* group from Mocímboa da Praia come from?

Our fieldwork found that the money used to finance the *Al-Shabaab* group's activities came essentially from two sources: a) the illicit local economy; b) donations. The donations came from people with connections to the group's leaders in Mocímboa da Praia. Money transfers were done electronically: Mpesa, Mkesh, Mmola. Of the two sources mentioned, the first (illicit economy) was the one that moved large sums of money to finance the group.⁴⁴ As in other countries facing violent extremism, funding for the *Al-Shabaab* group in Mocímboa da Praia and the surrounding districts (at least in the early stages) came from an illicit local

⁴³ Interview with M. H., farmer, Mocímboa da Praia, 7 February 2018.

According to Lara (2007: 65), terrorist financing increasingly comes from organized crime and illegal activities, because it has become more difficult for "sanctuary states to provide sufficient and continuous financial support to terrorist activities". Terrorists are thus increasingly involved in the intricacies of organized crime, using kidnapping, extortion, robbery, fraud, money laundering, hacking bank accounts, trafficking electronical components, gems, weapons and even human beings.

economy with links to clandestine networks trafficking in timber, charcoal, rubies and ivory, among other products. Some examples of trafficked products are given below.

Timber

According to our interviews, not only in Mocímboa da Praia but also in Pemba, timber trafficking is one of the illegal activities that has fuelled the financing and reproduction of violence by the *Al-Shabaab* group. A very well-established network with strong financial clout in Tanzania hired local people to fell timber and process it into planks. After processing, boats were sent to the Quiterajo area of Macomia and/or other islands to carry it to Tanzania or sell to Chinese buyers. One interviewee explained:

"(...) Powerful men linked to this *Al-Shabaab* group controlled much of the illegal timber trade in Cabo Delgado, particularly in Macomia...They came to Macomia, they corrupted local authorities... they recruited young people to cut wood... and they were paid very little ... But Al-Shabaab business leaders and their bosses in Tanzania and Congo ate all the money ... They got very rich and the young people remained in poverty ... The only thing the young people could do with money from the timber was to build a small hut and get married (...)"⁴⁵

The illegal timber business generated a huge profit for the group members involved. Just to give an idea, according to local sources, a wooden plank was sold in Tanzania for 2,500 meticais. About 50 thousand planks left every month, corresponding to 125 million meticais. An insignificant portion of these funds remained in the hands of the *Al-Shabaab* group's local leaders in Mocímboa da Praia and the surrounding districts. With these funds they financed youth activities in the informal market in Mocímboa da Praia through micro-credit schemes as an enticement, as well as trips by Tanzanian Muslim spiritual leaders to Mocímboa da Praia.

Charcoal

In addition to timber, the *Al-Shabaab* group was also involved in the production and marketing of charcoal. Large quantities of charcoal were transported by Tanzanian artisanal vessels for sale in Tanzania, particularly in Zanzibar or elsewhere. According to local sources, each sack of charcoal was sold in Tanzania for about 2000 meticais and

⁴⁵ Interview with O. I., Licensed logger, Pemba, 8 February 2018.

some 5 to 10,000 bags per week were shipped.

Rubies

Another source of funds was business linked to the exploration and sale of mineral resources, particularly rubies. Groups of illegal prospectors from Somalia, Ethiopia, Tanzania and the Great Lakes region have settled in the Montepuez region and established alliances with local religious leaders via marriage ties. They controlled much of the informal trade, not only in precious stones but also basic necessities, construction, fuel and car parts. They also financed local religious activity by building places of worship, including mosques and madrassas. Given the ongoing conflict between artisanal miners and Montepuez Ruby Mining (MRM), in February 2017 the Mozambican State launched a major offensive to expel illegal domestic and foreign artisanal miners. As a result of this offensive, the artisanal miners left and many of them lost their possessions. According to local sources, there were many illegal weapons in circulation that ended up in the hands of young people with links to the *Al-Shabaab* group in Mocímboa da Praia.

Ivory

Some of the districts around Mocímboa da Praia - Meluco, Macomia and Quissanga - are part of the Quirimbas National Park. These areas have been the target of heavy poaching, mainly killing elephants for their ivory, which is sold in Tanzania and in the network of Asian agents, particularly Chinese and Vietnamese. Not only large sums of money but also illegal weapons circulate in the poaching network. According to our sources, a significant part of this money and weapons has been used to support criminal activity in the region and, in some cases, in connection with the *Al-Shabaab* group of Mocímboa da Praia. As one interviewee explained:

"I know young people from here in Mocímboa [da Praia] connected to the ivory hunting and marketing network. They had guns and killed elephants to sell to the Vietnamese and Chinese in Pemba. Ivory tusks were exported through clandestine networks. Many of these young people became rich with money from the sale of ivory." 46

Information gathered in the field suggests that Cabo Delgado's coastal zone has become an area of intense activity linked to trafficking in timber, ivory, precious stones and even drugs, moving large sums of money that, in turn, help feed and finance vio-

⁴⁶ Interview with G. A., Mocímboa da Praia, 27 November 2017.

lent extremism linked to the *Al-Shabaab* group. The difficulty of passing drugs through Central Asia and Eastern Europe has increased drug trafficking along the so-called "southern route", with Tanzania and Mozambique as the main corridors for heroin and co-caine trafficking.

Ideology

Initially, the *Al-Shabaab* group was predominantly a non-militarized religious organization. Gradually, the group became militarized, but without having either a sophisticated theological grounding or a clearly defined ideology, despite claiming that it practiced fundamentalist Islam. Nevertheless, the group had strong propaganda structured around explicit opposition, on the one hand, to government policies and, on the other hand, to local Islamic leaders. The group promoted persecution of the locally established Islamic order and instigated the most disadvantaged sections of the population to rebel against the political-administrative elites of Mocímboa da Praia. In their speeches to mobilize local communities, members of the *Al-Shabaab* group also claimed to preach morality. One respondent said that "they [*Al-Shabaab*] would tell us: cut off the thief's arm, stone the adulterer to death and do not fear the government. Do not participate in government ceremonies."⁴⁷

Moreover, in its interaction with the local population the *Al-Shabaab* group (at least in the early stages) argued that the solution to problems such as unemployment, widespread corruption in the officialdom, political exclusion and social inequalities lay in adherence to the puritanical version of Islam. The group also advocated joining the international *jihad* movement. Its leadership was based on the premise that *sharia* (Islamic law) must be imposed on the Mocímboa da Praia population. They prohibited their children from attending official schools and their members from having connections with local authorities, paying taxes and participating in electoral processes. They also prohibited their members from attending hospitals and wearing western-influenced clothing. According to local sources, their militants were unusually faithful to the group's radical ideals, and when speaking to their neighbours they considered themselves the sole guardians of the correct way to pray and practice the precepts of the Quran.

⁴⁷ Interview with A. F., Mocímboa da Praia, 26 November 2017.

Hierarchical organization and territorial management

In the initial phase, the Al-Shabaab group's structure in Mocímboa da Praja was based essentially on religious leaders, with no military component. In this first phase of penetration, religious leaders were responsible for managing religious spaces (mosques) and raising the awareness of their followers through religious cells. As with other groups of the same type, in the later phase (militarization) the Mocímboa da Praia Al-Shabaab group also established an organizational structure based on relatively autonomous cells with a flexible chain of command (Menkhaus, 2008; Pereira, 2013; Monteiro, 2012; Roque, 2010). According to field interviews, the group had multiple cells and individuals with varied powers and relative autonomy. To some extent, this gave the cell leadership some room for manoeuvre. The relative autonomy of cells is an advantage as it allows the movement to remain operational if leaders are captured or die. But it also has certain disadvantages. According to Pereira (2013), taking the example of the Somali Al-Shabaab, this type of political-administrative organization means that the Al-Shabaab cannot always manage the territories they conquer, eventually leaving their administration more day-to-day administration to clan-based authorities (Menkhaus, 2008: 6).

In the case of Mocímboa da Praia, when did the *Al-Shabaab* group acquire an organized political-military structure? Interviews in the field show that the move from a purely religious organization to a group with a military structure came after the clash between radical young people and local religious leaders. As one interviewee explained:

"(...) It is common knowledge that everything was done mainly by H. M. and his companions in mid-2014 and early 2015 to force the Islamic leaders here in Mocímboa into a dialogue on the situation of Islam. What they [Al-Shabaab] wanted was religious reform and renewal to, according to them, 'improve society'. They considered this society to be corrupt, materialistic and ignorant of holy laws. The religious leaders here in Mocímboa rejected the principles espoused by the Al-Shabaab group and because of that they [Al-Shabaab] started to be more violent (...)"

In late 2015, the leadership of the *Al-Shabaab* group decided to open training camps in the forests of Mocímboa da Praia, Macomia, Montepuez, Nangade and Palma districts. In

⁴⁸ Interview with S. O., Mocímboa da Praia, 29 November 2017.

addition to the woods, the group also used the back yards of members' homes for training purposes. According to interviewees, the first military cells were trained by a man named Benjamin, who was expelled from the Border Guard Police, and a Tanzanian merchant living in Mocímboa da Praia, H. M. Our sources stated that logistical support was provided by A. M., N. A., N., A. M. and S. M., already mentioned in the section on key actors in the group.

The leadership structure is headed by a kind of "supreme council" where decisions are made. It discusses issues related to group organization, ideology, politics and military strategy. It is not clear who are members of the "supreme council" or how many members there are, but there are several accounts of the existence of foreign combatants in this decision-making body. One person who has always been present in these meetings is H. M., a Tanzanian (referred to above), known for being a logistics strategist with close contacts in the *Al-Shabaab* networks in Kenya and Somalia, where he spent a some years fighting. Other important figures on the "supreme council" are the Tanzanian Sheiks A. A. and A. S. (also mentioned above), with higher education in theology from the great schools in Zanzibar and the Gulf countries, and highly respected in the youth groups of Mocímboa da Praia linked to the *Al-Shabaab*.

In addition to the "supreme council", apparently there are a number of small units created to implement its decisions. Some of these units just handle combatant food logistics issues while others deal with control over people living with the *Al-Shabaab* group, particularly women and children.

Final Considerations

This research report is a first attempt to address the phenomenon in order to understand the complexity of the dynamics not only in the origin of the *Al-Shabaab* group but also in the structure of the conflict and violence in Cabo Delgado. Almost two years after the first attack on Mocímboa da Praia (5 October 2017), the phenomenon has been the subject of multiple interpretations, from the (at least public) Mozambican government's preferred thesis of a conspiracy driven by external forces opposed to Mozambique's development, through the land conflict against the backdrop of the area's natural resources thesis, to the sect (Morier-Genoud, 2019) and *jihadism* theses, in the context of the growing dynamics of violent extremism in the countries of the region i.e. Tanzania, Kenya and the Great Lakes region.

While highlighting this last thesis (*jihadism*), our exploratory research has shown that the phenomenon is complex and requires profound multidisciplinary research that takes into account a multiplicity of historical, social, political, economic and religious factors. This is why, rather than draw conclusions, this report ends with a series of questions:

- Why is Mocímboa da Praia the epicentre of the phenomenon?
- How does the Mozambican state deal with the proliferation of religious institutions in the country?
- What are the implications of the Islamic radicalization phenomenon for investments in the country's northern region? To what extent can these investments heighten or reduce local cleavages and contribute to Islamic radicalization phenomenon?
- To what extent does the Islamic radicalization phenomenon affect current efforts to stabilize the country politically and economically?
- To what extent can regional dynamics (Tanzania, Kenya, Great Lakes region) influence the evolution of the phenomenon in Mozambique?
- What kind of policies (including security) does the country need to address the phenomenon?
- What lessons does the phenomenon bring to the state-building process in Mozambique?

These questions feed into the ongoing research program at the Institute for Social and Economic Studies (IESE) since early 2019, involving researchers from IESE and other research centres, entitled "State, Violence and Development Challenges in Cabo Delgado".

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