



REDE MOCAMBICANA DOS
DEFENSORES DE DIREITOS HUMANOS
RMDDH

Wednesday, August 24, 2022 | Year III, Number 31 | President: Prof. Adriano Nuvunga | English

Difficult experiences in shelter centers told by women defenders who became IDPs in Cabo Delgado

- For a long time activities related to the defense of human rights in Cabo delgado were assured by civil society organizations and influential individuals in their communities. Through their work and commitment to the common cause, they have gained space and admiration as spokespersons for the voiceless and as “informal advocates” for disadvantaged populations, especially with the advent of mega-projects in the province.



Nangua Reception Center 1/Metuge

Although lacking technical skills, armed only with courage and empathy, they were fighting ideological battles with local authorities in defense of the communities and were seen as *personas non gratas* by the rulers. It is these anonymous heroes who “put their chests to the bullets” in defense of the rights of the majority.

Today, these anonymous heroes live a new reality due to the conflict that has affected Cabo Delgado since October 2017. Many are in centers for internally displaced people, that is, outside their areas of origin. RM-

DDH/Cabo Delgado went to meet them to understand what are the main challenges they face; what it means to be a human rights defender and displaced at the same time; how do they deal with human rights violations being also in the condition of victims?

RMDDH went to Metuge District, specifically to the Reception Center of Nangua 1, one of several opened by the district government and the National Institute for Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (INGD) to accommodate thousands of people fleeing the attacks of violent extremists in the northern and central districts of Cabo Delgado.



Increases number of displaced people in Metuge reception centers, in Cabo Delgado - Rádio Moçambique

In Metuge, the green natural landscape that once predominated has been replaced by a new landscape of makeshift shelters. These are the tents that hide the suffering of thousands of Mozambicans, mostly children, women, and the elderly. The struggle for survival has become more important than human dignity.

“Things have gone worse. At that time we

received a monthly bag of rice, oil, and beans, and now we only receive them every three months. The situation is terrible and our children are having a bad time. The WFP¹ is the one who gives us help,” said a human rights defender who lives in the Nangua Displaced Persons Reception Center. 1.

The food shortage has reached such a critical level that it is forcing some people to leave

¹ World Food Program



Human Rights Defenders at the Nangua 1 Reception Center

the IDP centers at their own risk. Some people are returning to their home areas where the security situation remains fragile, others are leaving the IDP centers for the city of Pemba in search of new opportunities.

“In Pemba I got a job as a security guard for Médicos sem Fronteiras, but here in the IDP center I don’t do anything. I fled the town of Mocímboa da Praia because of the attacks and there I worked with SARCOM and MULEIDE. When I arrived in Pemba I went to present myself at the MULEIDE offices, but they said there was no space, it was full of activists. So I had to try to do other things to survive. I still want to work as a human rights defender, including here at the center for displaced people.”

There are other examples of human rights defenders who have had to reinvent themselves to meet day-to-day needs. “In Quissanga I lived better, I didn’t buy firewood or water. I made my own agricultural plot and the children ate it. I have fishermen relatives who

used to give me fish. Things have changed a lot, even firewood we have to buy. Sometimes we have to ask the local communities to exchange our rice with vegetables. These are things we never imagined we would do.

Despite the difficulties they go through in the reception centers, human rights defenders have been providing support to vulnerable people. In fact, they have been called upon to provide services to international organizations that support the centers, such as the IOM². “I continue as a planning and sexual and reproductive rights activist. Here I work in raising awareness and monitoring the sanitization of the center. It is a job subsidized by the IOM, and this helps me to buy school supplies for my children who are in Pemba, because they are fatherless. Although he was a teacher, to this day my children do not benefit from the survivor’s pension.”

Working as a human rights defender in the IDP centers is not an easy task. “We find it difficult to sensitize hungry people. Even

² International Organization for Migration

on clean-up days, I find it difficult to mobilize people who don't have soap to wash their own clothes. But I don't stop doing my job, I have to face reality. There are times that we are accused of receiving money. They say we get money and we tell them to clean on an empty stomach."

In addition to the difficulties of food and personal hygiene, human rights defenders speak of the lack of privacy in the IDP reception centers. Families live in tents that offer no privacy. Each family shares a tent, even though they have children, grandchildren, and even daughters-in-law. "In my house we are seven people and we sleep together in the same tent. We have no privacy. I have to escape into the bush to have sex with my wife."

A group of young girls also complained about the lack of privacy in the shelters: "We don't feel good because our mothers are suffering. Our parents sleep on the floor, we have no clothes and we cannot even charge our parents because we are seeing the suffering. We feel embarrassed because the space

is the same for my brothers, my parents and us. When the period of menstruation comes, since we don't have pads, we use cloths. And we have no way to hide those cloths from our brothers and parents. We feel embarrassed because we have no privacy and our parents can't afford to build a porch just for us.

Talking to human rights defenders who are displaced is not an easy task, as it means reopening wounds that have not yet healed. Often the stories are interspersed with the emotions and tears of those who have gone through traumatic experiences.

In the displacement centers a feeling of despair reigns. People are anxious for change, a change that will return them to their home areas in safe conditions where they always found the solutions to their everyday problems. People would never imagine that they could lose family members at the hands of violent extremists or suffer from chronic diseases such as hypertension, which has been identified as one of the main causes of mortality in the reception centers.



EDITORIAL INFORMATION

Property:	RMDDH
President:	Prof. Adriano Nuvunga
Editor:	Emídio Beula
Author:	Leandro Siteo
Layout:	RMDDH

FINANCING PARTNERS



Rua Dar-Es-Salaam, número 279, Bairro Sommerschild, Maputo - Moçambique **Contacto** +258 857645056
 Email : info@redemoz-defensoresdireitoshumanos.org @RMDDH_Moz rmddh_moz
 Facebook:@RMDDHMoz redemoz-defensoresdireitoshumanos.org/ **linkedIn**: rmddh