



## POLICY BRIEF

# Challenges and Dynamics in the Exploitation and Management of Natural Resources in Niassa

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*Cover image: Canva, landscape from Niassa National Park in Mozambique.*



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## Mozambique is a country extremely rich in natural resources, most of which are still unexploited.

Of the most noteworthy natural resources, and which have attracted a great deal of attention, one may note, among others, coal, natural gas, rubies and graphite. In a list of 99 countries, statistics show that Mozambique occupies the 14th position among countries with the largest reserves of natural gas in the world<sup>1</sup>; 26th place in the list of 80 countries with the largest coal reserves<sup>2</sup>; fifth, out of a list of ten countries with the greatest reserves of graphite. Montepuez, in the northern province of Cabo Delgado, contains the largest and most valuable deposit of rubies in the world<sup>3</sup>. In addition, Mozambique has an immense and rich coast (the fourth longest coastline in Africa) and important areas of wildlife conservation, such as the Gorongosa National Park (PNG) and the Niassa Special Reserve (REN). However, the exploitation and management of these resources, although recent, has been the motive for a great deal of controversy, with the claim that they generate more risks than benefits<sup>4</sup>.

As part of the TIPS project (For a Peaceful and Inclusive Society in Mozambique) and taking Niassa province as a case study, this text has as its objective to analyze the challenges and the dynamics of exploiting the natural resources in this region of the country<sup>5</sup>.

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**1** See <https://www.worldometers.info/gas/>

**2** See <https://www.worldometers.info/coal/>

**3** For more details, see: <https://www.mining-technology.com/features/gemstone-mining-map-2/>

**4** On this matter, see for example, Rantala(2022).

**5** The TIPS project, which, in addition to IESE includes the IMD and Finn Church Aid, has essentially two objectives: (i) to contribute to the prevention of conflicts in the management and exploitation of natural resources, and (ii) to contribute to better social inclusion in the management of natural resources in Mozambique. The TIPS project, which is financed by the European Union (EU) has been under implementation since 2021 and covers five provinces, namely Cabo Delgado, Niassa, Tete, Niassa and Inhambane.

Niassa province, in northern Mozambique, is, alongside Cabo Delgado, one of those that contains immense reserves of rubies. Gold and graphite also occur in this province and it contains one of the most important areas of wildlife conservation, the REN. The work is the result of semi-structured interviews held between June and July 2021 in Lichinga city and in Mavago and Lago districts in Niassa province, involving informal miners, civil society organizations (CSOs), and state employees.

In this text, the analysis of the dynamics and challenges of managing and exploiting natural resources in Niassa, focuses on five aspects: Exclusion in access to natural resources because of political party allegiance; Conflicts between REN and the local communities; local elites and the usurpation of natural resources; Exploitation of natural resources in areas with a weak presence of the state and channeling by the State to the local communities of part of the revenue resulting from the exploitation of natural resources.

### Exclusion from access to natural resources because of political party affiliation.

This feeling is perceived above all in areas of great predominance of veteran guerrilla fighters of Frelimo, specifically in Lago and Mavago districts. In these places, the former guerrillas dedicate themselves to mining through some associations or cooperatives. For example, in Lupilichi (Lago) and Msawize (Sanga) the existence of other parties, particularly Renamo, is scarcely tolerated, much less the participation of their members in exploitation of the mineral resources, or even joining the local mining cooperatives or associations. Members of the opposition say that they are regularly targets of harassment in the villages and at the mining sites. The exclusion of members and sympathizers of opposition political parties from access to mining in these places is a potential source of social discontent, with unpredictable consequences.

## Conflict between Niassa Special Reserve and the local communities.

The occurrence of mineral resources such as gold and rubies inside the REN and the local community's need to exploit them has been a permanent source of conflict between the two sides. Both in Msawazi and in Lupilichi, conflicts have been reported between the operators of mineral resources, the Defense and Security Forces (FDS) and REN guards. Frequently the operators of mineral resources are victims of expropriation, accused of legal mining and of poaching. These are old conflicts and there seems to be no solution in sight. Because of this, the former guerrillas have presented constant complaints not only to solve the problems mentioned above, but also to demand greater access in the exploitation of natural resources<sup>6</sup>.

In 2012, for example, the veterans complained to the former President, Armando Guebuza, of the actions, not only of the guards of the Niassa Special Reserve, but also of the police (African Review 2012). The veterans say that many of their children, who are in practice the ones involved in mining since their parents are now elderly, have been the victims of expropriation and imprisonment and are only released after paying large sums in bail. Mining in these places (Msawize and Lupilichi) is also characterized by the presence of thousands of foreign citizens, particularly from Tanzânia and from some countries of the Great Lakes region, who also have also invariably been victims of expropriation and of expulsion from the country, accused of illegal mining and of poaching in the Niassa Special Reserve.

In 2022, the persistence of these conflicts led the veterans not only to demand from the Niassa government more opportunities for access to mining rubies but also to complain of the ill-treatment suffered at the hands of the guards of the Niassa Special Reserve (Yussuf 2022).

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<sup>6</sup> This was not the first time that the veterans complained about access to mining, See, for example, Noticias (2018).

It should be stressed that it was acts of violence by the State against informal miners in Montepuez which, among other factors contributed to recruiting young people into the ranks of Al Shabaab in Cabo Delgado.

Evidence shows that a significant number of youths in Nangade and Mueda districts joined Al Shabaab to take revenge for the events of Namanhumbire in early 2017, where hundreds of local informal miners were violently tortured and their possessions looted, with some even losing their lives, in an operation which sought to install the company Montepuez Ruby Mining (MRM). There is also evidence that the violence against the informal miners and poachers in the REN had the same results.

We can support this statement by using two examples: one is Dardai Jongo in Cabo Delgado and the other is Maulana Cássimo Ali in Niassa, both prominent names in the insurgency in northern Mozambique.

Dardai Jongo experienced the death of his father, after he had been heavily tortured in the Montepuez ruby mines. According to the information we have gathered, Dardai Jongo's father was tortured by the MRM guards, known locally as "machete men" (Anakatana in Macua). Local reports say that the death of Jongo's father was one of the reasons which led Dardai Jongo to join Al Shabaab. Regarded as one of the leaders of Al Shabaab, Dardai Jongo became famous, among others, when, in April 2019 he put his profile on Facebook, with the flag of the Islamic State, and also when a gun with his signature was presented by the Rwandan army in 2021.

In Niassa, it is believed that the radicalization of the young Maulana Ali Cássimo, who was one of the most visible faces of the insurgency (before he was killed by government forces in late 2021), can be explained, among other factors, by his indignation at the attitude of the authorities towards the informal miners of Mariri, in Mbamba locality, Mecula district and towards the poachers in REN (Feijó 2021)<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> On the violence against the informal miners of Montepuez see, Chichava (2020) On Maulana Ali see also Chichava (2022).

However, it seems that lessons were not drawn from the case of Namanhumbir. Very recently, the compulsory removal was reported of about 4,000 miners from the Nsenguedzi gold mine, in Chifunde district, in Tete province.

Why are forms of collaboration not found between the mining companies and the informal miners? Why destroy the lives of people who for years made a living out of informal mining without giving them alternative livelihoods? These are some questions that deserve a deep reflection by the authorities, investors, and Civil Society Organizations that work in the extractive sector.

Locally, people, particularly young people, ask why only some Mozambicans have the right to benefit from natural resources in Mozambique and not the majority? To gain access to natural resources, do you need someone watching your back?

### Local elites and the usurpation of natural resources.

Like other places where the research took place, in Niassa there is also a negative perception of the behavior of some political figures linked to the ruling party, mostly natives of Niassa, particularly in the sector of mineral resources and land. These figures are seen as having grabbed vast swathes of land in this province. One of the examples most cited is the case of the land around the Chiuanga beach, on Lake Niassa, and of Lichinga, the Niassa provincial capital. The people we interviewed are not opposed to this land being in the possession of the elite, but they say they are against the way the land was acquired or attributed, which they regard as not transparent. They are also aghast at the fact that much of the land in the hands of this elite is not being used. There is also a perception that the mining sector is dominated by this elite. The elite is also seen as conniving in the old and chronic problem of the illegal exploitation of timber, in collaboration with foreign citizens, particularly with Chinese citizens.

For these reasons, locally there is a perception that these political figures are one of the reasons for the perpetuation of poverty and conflicts in this province.

### Poor capacity of the State to control its territory, opening for the illegal exploitation of natural resources (zones outside of State control).

A further aspect concerns areas of illegal exploitation of natural resources by foreign citizens (particularly Tanzanians), where the State exercises no control. In general, these are areas of difficult access, such as some parts of Lupilichi. This is the case with Mpapa village which, according to local reports was created and dominated by Tanzanian citizens who exploit the gold as they please, due to weak inspection by the State. It should be noted that throughout the province there are conflicts opposing the State to foreign citizens, above all Tanzanians, accused of illegally exploiting natural resources. This situation has already led to the detention and mass expulsion of Tanzanian citizens, leading to uneasiness in the relations between the two countries<sup>8</sup>.

Although with some local specificities, the problems reported concerning the management and exploitation of natural resources in Niassa were found in all the places where we undertook research such as, for example, the locality of Nairoto, in Montepuez, in Cabo Delgado province<sup>9</sup>.

Hence, the problems reported about Niassa show that this province is not an island, and reflects the challenges that the natural resource sector faces throughout the country.

The tension around REN is worsened further by the fact that the same area where the community was forbidden to mine rubies has been farmed out to Fura Gems, a company of Mozambican and foreign capital. This situation puzzles the communities who say they do not understand why some people can have access to exploiting the natural resources in the REN buffer zone, while it is barred to others on the pretext that it is a protected area (Omar 2023).

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Saúte (2010)

<sup>9</sup> On Nairoto, see Carta de Moçambique (2022).

## On the 20% and the 2.75%.

According to the legislation on mining, land and the environment, all the communities who live in areas where natural resources are exploited are entitled to compensation from the companies that operate locally. For the extraction of forestry resources, the percentage of 20% was established, and for mineral resources, 2.75%. To receive these funds, the communities should be organized into Natural Resource Management Committees (CGRN). However, channeling these funds has been a motive for controversy throughout the country.

In addition to the delay in channeling the money, and in some cases the failure to channel any funds at all, various CGRN and CSOs complain of interference by the State and the Government in the use of the 20%: They say that the authorities dictate where and how the 20% should be used; that the community has no autonomy to decide what it thinks best to do with the 20%; this in part could lead one to conclude that the State and the Government think that the communities do not know what is best for them; which sometimes may not be true. In some cases, because they are not receiving the 20%, the population, particularly the CGRN, collaborate with the poachers.

A further aspect concerns the legalization of the activities of the CGRN, which is a painfully time-consuming process. For a CGRN to have legal existence, it must request authorization from the State and have its statutes published in the Boletim da República. Apart from its monetary costs, this procedure requires that the members have identification documents. To receive the funds, the CGRN must have a bank account. The same applies to the mining associations or cooperatives who also face challenges for their legalization and operation. The main difficulties in the legalization of the CGRN and of the mining associations or cooperatives concern not only the cost, which is beyond the financial possibilities of the local communities, but also the enormous bureaucracy involved and the lack of identification documents, which are practically impossible to obtain locally, given the precarious nature of public services.

The difficulties in legalization expose the informal miners, particularly those who have not yet been legalized, to harassment by the authorities.

## Recommendations

### **1. With regard to the 20% and the 2.75%.**

Since these are zone which have poor public services, the legislation should be adapted to local conditions. For example, to legalize the CGRN and channel funds, one cannot demand from the local communities the same which is demanded of communities that live close to the cities. Another example is that channeling the funds where there are no bank services can be done by mobile phone services, such as M-Pesa.

### **2. Conflict between the local communities and REN.**

REN and the CSOs, the State, and local communities should establish a platform that allows a harmonious and mutually beneficial coexistence. The establishment of social projects which the local communities can exploit natural resources within the REN buffer zone without endangering their own lives, or those of the animals.

### **3. Areas outside of State control.**

Since they pose an enormous risk to the country, strengthening the capacities of the State in these places should be an absolute priority. Unless courageous and daring decisions are taken, the country runs risk not only of losing immense resources, but also of fragmentation and conflicts.

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