



Exploring synergies between the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development and involuntary resettlement guidelines: the case of Mozambique's natural gas project

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Abstract

This paper explores synergies between the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, comprised of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as its roadmap, and existing involuntary resettlement guidelines. On one hand, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development views displacement as a humanitarian problem but fails to address the potential effects of SDG-induced processes of economic and physical displacement and involuntary resettlement. On the other, involuntary resettlement guidelines pay limited attention to the sustainable development of resettled people as well as to the society in which resettlement becomes embedded. This paper explores possibilities to establish synergies between the SDGs and involuntary resettlement by drawing on the case of Mozambique's liquefied natural gas (LNG) project, which was showcased in the Government of Mozambique's 2020 Voluntary National Review (VNR) of SDG progress. The paper will critically analyse how Mozambique as a 'donor darling' remains silent about displacement and resettlement processes induced by an LNG project that is used to show its commitment to multiple SDGs. The paper shows that there is a misalignment between how SDGs are used to evaluate a development project and how involuntary resettlement guidelines are applied to the same project. The paper argues that, to truly 'leave no one behind', the SDGs and involuntary resettlement guidelines need to be realigned by integrating SDG-induced displacement and resettlement into SDG10 on migration and inequality, into SDG16 on conflicts, and SDG17 on global partnerships.

Keywords Displacement · Involuntary resettlement · SDGs · Sustainable development · Mozambique

Introduction

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, comprised of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as its roadmap, views the worldwide rise in displacement as an urgent humanitarian crisis with significant potential to 'reverse much of the development progress made in recent decades' (United Nations 2015, p. 6). As a consequence, several SDGs include targets to reduce the vulnerability of displaced

persons and especially those affected by natural hazards; these include Target 1.5 on poverty reduction; Target 11.5 on sustainable and resilient settlements; and Target 13.1 on raising adaptive capacity against natural hazards. Migrants and refugees are more generally addressed in Target 8.8 on labour rights and Target 10.c on economic equality. In policy debates, forced displacement in the context of sustainable development centres on the importance of humanitarian relief and social protection for displaced persons (Cazabat 2018).

At the same time, the SDGs promote infrastructure development to mitigate climate change and enhance climate resilience or to help people and places most at risk adapt to climate change. For example, SDG9 directly addresses the need to develop sustainable and resilient infrastructure in the global South while SDG11 aims to make cities sustainable and resilient against natural hazards. SDG17 promotes

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the development of partnerships for infrastructure projects through international assistance and foreign direct investments to developing countries.

Sustainable and resilient infrastructure development often entails large scale land acquisitions that displace a large number of people. However, the SDGs hardly problematise land acquisitions as such. Consequently, little discussion takes place on how the promotion of sustainable and resilient infrastructure and their land-based investments might increase displacement despite the increasing plausibility (e.g., Warner and Wiegel 2021; Zoomers et al. 2017). For example, leading scholars in the field of development-induced displacement and resettlement have pointed out that: ‘For the current decade (2011–2020), and as the pace of infrastructure building accelerates, the estimated magnitude of forcible displacement is likely, on conservative estimates, to exceed 20 million people per year’ (Cernea and Maldonado 2018, p. 4).¹

This quote indicates that there are intrinsic links between the accelerating pace of infrastructure development promoted by the SDGs and increased forced displacement. Nonetheless, the debates on SDGs promotion and involuntary resettlement remain fully disconnected from each other. Discussions on involuntary resettlement are geared towards ‘managed resettlement’ and preventive or adaptive measures against climate-induced displacement (Arnall 2019; Hino et al. 2017). Less emphasis is placed on the responsibilities of investors and governments who are striving to achieve SDG targets through economic development that induces displacement and resettlement.

At the same time, to manage investment-induced involuntary resettlement, the World Bank established guidelines in 1980 for businesses, as well as national governments hosting businesses, to follow when their projects cause forced displacement (World Bank 2004). In some cases, such as Mozambique, national governments have actively integrated the guidelines into national legislation. However, in 2017, the guidelines were downgraded to ‘Environmental and Social Standards 5 (ESS5): land acquisitions, restrictions on land use, and involuntary resettlement’ (World Bank Group 2017) in such a way to integrate the International Finance Cooperation (a part of the World Bank Group) Project Standard 5 into the general lending framework of the Bank. Scholars are largely critical about this change because it weakens effective application of the previous guidelines and gives more decision-making power to private

businesses since IFC Project Standards had been made for private investors (Cernea and Maldonado 2018). The privatisation of the involuntary resettlement guidelines is also problematic because wider sustainable development beyond the particular project site will remain unassessed (Otsuki 2021a), including impacts on the host society and on the environment (Satiroglu and Choi 2015; Terminski 2015). This is paradoxical since the development projects inducing displacement often aim to promote national and regional sustainability.

In this paper, we argue that it is necessary to realign and establish synergies between development projects promoted and evaluated in relation to the SDGs, international involuntary resettlement standards, and existing national guidelines. To explore concrete ways to do so, we draw on a case study of a liquefied natural gas (LNG) project in northern Mozambique. The Voluntary National Review of SDGs presented by the Government of Mozambique showcases the LNG project as a way for the country to achieve multiple SDGs. However, the project induced extensive economic and physical displacement and involuntary resettlement of at least 10,000 people in Cabo Delgado, one of the poorest provinces of the country. In this province, Islamist insurgencies erupted in 2017, and scholars increasingly discuss how the insurgencies aim to stop the LNG project to put pressure on the government (Bonate 2018; Namaganda et al. 2022; Neethling 2021). As the province has hardly benefitted from mega-projects such as the LNG project, pursuing the sustainable development of displaced and resettled communities could generally address the widespread social discontent that has enabled the rise of insurgencies. Yet, no connection has been made so far between the SDGs used to justify an extractive project for national sustainable development of Mozambique and the resettlement guidelines applied to the specific project, even though various SDG targets could further address the need to ensure a quality life for displaced people and so consequently alleviate social discontent.

To analyse the misalignment and the potential realignment between the SDGs and involuntary resettlement, we first review the literature and examine the SDG targets related to land-based infrastructure development with potential to induce displacement and resettlement. Methodology section then details the methodology of the case study of Mozambique’s commitment to the SDGs and data collection about LNG extraction in Cabo Delgado Province. Results section presents the results of the case study, with a particular focus on how involuntary resettlement is practiced in relation to the government’s commitment to the SDGs. In Discussion, we discuss the relevance of framing forced displacement and involuntary resettlement as an inherent consequence of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and how the 2030 Agenda and resettlement guidelines could cross fertilise to address the contestation emerging from an

¹ Estimates vary, but according to the consensus, between 15 and 20 million people are annually displaced due to development projects (Smyth et al. 2015); this significantly increased from the previously accepted estimate of 10 million people per year (Cernea and McDowell 2000).

SDG-oriented development project. Conclusions section provides a conclusion in which we explore the potential of the SDGs to explicitly shape an agenda for ‘resettlement for sustainable development’ as the SDGs continue to induce displacement and involuntary resettlement.

SDG targets, displacement and involuntary resettlement

Since the late 2000s, the international community has mobilised various investments to promote sustainable and resilient infrastructure development (Zoomers et al. 2017). Much of this development involves large-scale land acquisitions, defined as: ‘All methods of obtaining land for project purposes, which may include outright purchase, expropriation of property and acquisition of access rights, such as easements or rights of way’ (World Bank Group 2017, p. 53). Land acquisitions often involve displacement and especially affect vulnerable groups as discussed in the literature (Cernea and McDowell 2000; Mehta 2009; Oliver-Smith 2010).

While the SDGs do not explicitly address land acquisition, many SDG targets related to infrastructure development and land acquisition have the potential to induce displacement. Table 1 gives an overview of the relevant SDGs and targets in this context.

New infrastructure for disaster risk reduction receives the most attention in the SDGs. Four SDGs (1, 9, 11, and 13) promote infrastructure development to enhance the resilience of cities and protect human settlements against natural hazards. The target indicators for these goals include the number of countries adopting disaster reduction strategies against potential natural hazards as outlined in the Sendai Framework. This internationally-agreed framework was established as a response to the effects of the massive tsunami that hit Japan in March 2011 (UNDRR 2015). Building resilient infrastructure is a key strategy in the Sendai Framework for disaster prevention as well as post-disaster reconstruction. This involves various types of land acquisition for coastal and flood management or climate resettlement projects (Batubara et al. 2018).

Next to this, several SDGs promote new infrastructure development to increase agricultural productivity in rural areas (SDG2) or to stimulate economic growth and job creation more generally (SDG8). While SDG7 (affordable and clean energy) makes no direct connection to infrastructure development, its targets for achieving new energy production involve extensive infrastructure development. Increasingly, clean energy promotion takes the form of new renewable energy farms, nuclear power plants and hydroelectric dams. While nuclear power plants remain controversial, especially since the massive Chernobyl and Fukushima disasters

(Otsuki 2016), the need for less oil or coal-dependent energy production continues to justify nuclear power (Grossi 2020). The same dilemma applies to hydroelectric dams. Although dam construction is known to result in negative environmental and social impacts at the construction site (Waage et al. 2015), they are increasingly justified for the large-scale production of renewable energy (de Sherbinin et al. 2011). Both require complex power generation infrastructure or extended roads and worker housing which transform the areas where power plants and hydroelectric dams are embedded. In addition, the so-called green minerals and fuel, seen as sources of new energy needed to make the shift to a low-carbon economy, are opening new resource and land frontiers and large-scale land acquisitions (Church and Crawford 2018; Rasmussen and Lund 2018).

Transport infrastructure is another example of critical infrastructure development that is likely to involve land acquisition, displacement and resettlement (World Bank Group 2017). From its symbolic expectation of increased mobility to its promises of economic development, roads entail wide social and physical ramifications and, therefore, their implications go beyond what the SDGs (especially SDGs 2, 8, 9, and 11) currently envision. Particularly in Africa, roads connect inland production areas to large port cities from which commodities are exported worldwide (SDG17). In this vein, new development corridors—including highways and railways—serve as popular development models despite the corresponding displacement (Enns 2018). Within cities, and alongside the resilient infrastructure mentioned above, new rapid transit systems have become a top priority for many governments to reduce congestion and produce compact cities to address climate change (Hasibuan et al. 2014) as well as to promote road safety and human security (WHO 2017). Because informal settlements and poor neighbourhoods are usually the first to be destroyed, such improvements in intra-city transportation mostly lead to the displacement of poor residents (Patel et al. 2015; UN-Habitat 2014).

SDG promotion also leads to outright land acquisition by governments to establish nature conservation and protected areas (SDG15). Although SDG15 does not mention the implications for infrastructure development or displacement, several scholars have illuminated the diverse impacts forest and wildlife conservation have on local communities’ access to land and livelihood activities (Fairhead et al. 2012; Spierenburg 2020). Also, tourism development more generally (often envisioned in nature conservation planning) leads to the development of new infrastructure and to the involuntary resettlement of the original inhabitants of protected areas (Cernea and Schmidt-Soltau 2006; LaRocco 2020; Otsuki 2021a, b). In other words, much of the global tourism development or ecosystem service production promoted by SDG15 has led to the enclosure of areas and infrastructure

Table 1 SDGs that may lead to land acquisition and ‘infrastructure-induced’ displacement and resettlement

| SDG | Targets related to infrastructure development | Examples of infrastructure justified by international organizations | Targets that directly address resettlement |
|---|--|---|---|
| 1 No poverty | 1.5 By 2030, build the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters | Critical infrastructure including water and transportation, resilient buildings and post-reconstruction infrastructure (UNDRR 2015) | N/A |
| 2 Zero hunger | 2.A Increase investment, including through enhanced international cooperation, in rural infrastructure, agricultural research and extension services, technology development [...] in order to enhance productive capacity of agriculture in developing countries | Rural roads, bridges, irrigation schemes (ILO n/d; Johannessen 2008) | N/A |
| 3 Good health and well-being | 3.6 By 2020, halve the number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents | Safe infrastructure for pedestrians, bicycle lanes and new road design (WHO 2017) | N/A |
| 4 Quality education | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| 5 Gender equality | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| 6 Clean water and sanitation | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| 7 Affordable and clean energy | 7.2 By 2030, increase substantially the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix 7.B By 2030, expand infrastructure and upgrade technology for supplying modern and sustainable energy services for all in developing countries | Solar and wind farms, nuclear power plants and hydroelectric dams (IAEA 2019) | N/A |
| 8 Decent work and economic growth | 8.1 Sustain per capita economic growth in accordance with national circumstances and, in particular, at least 7 per cent gross domestic product growth per annum in the least developed countries | Networks of roads and railway tracks, the capacity of electricity generation plants, length of telecommunication and electricity transmission lines | N/A |
| 9 Industry, innovation and infrastructure | All targets, but especially: 9.A Facilitate sustainable and resilient infrastructure development in developing countries through enhanced financial, technological and technical support to African countries | Resilient infrastructure such as roads, bridges and buildings (United Nations 2015) | N/A |
| 10 Reduced inequalities | N/A | N/A | 10.7 Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies |

Table 1 (continued)

| SDG | Targets related to infrastructure development | Examples of infrastructure justified by international organizations | Targets that directly address resettlement |
|---|--|--|--|
| 11 Sustainable cities and communities | All targets, but especially: 11.B By 2020, substantially increase the number of cities and human settlements adopting and implementing integrated policies and plans towards inclusion, resource efficiency, mitigation and adaptation to climate change, resilience to disasters, and develop and implement, in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, holistic disaster risk management at all levels | Critical infrastructure including water and transportation, resilient buildings and post-reconstruction infrastructure (UNDRR 2015) | 11.3 By 2030, enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries |
| 12 Responsible consumption and production | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| 13 Climate action | 13.1 Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries 13.2 Integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning | Critical infrastructure including water and transportation, resilient buildings and post-reconstruction infrastructure (UNDRR 2015); and national adaptation plans (UNFCCC 2021) | N/A N/A |
| 14 Life below water | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| 15 Life on land | 15.1 By 2020, ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial [...] ecosystems and their services, in particular forests, wetlands, mountains and drylands, in line with obligations under international agreements | Protected areas up to 17% of the terrestrial surface (CBD 2010) | N/A |
| 16 Peace, justice and strong institutions | N/A | N/A | 16.a Strengthen relevant national institutions, including through international cooperation, for building capacity at all levels, in particular in developing countries, to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime |
| 17 Partnerships for the goals | 17.3 Mobilize additional financial resources for developing countries from multiple sources 17.11 Significantly increase the exports of developing countries, in particular with a view to doubling the least developed countries' share of global exports by 2020 | Foreign investments in infrastructure development for export (OECD 2002) | 17.15 Respect each country's policy space and leadership to establish and implement policies for poverty eradication and sustainable development |

development that has economically, if not physically, displaced a large number of people (Agrawal and Redford 2009; Chatty and Colchester 2002).

Another type of infrastructure development requiring outright land acquisition and indirectly implied in achieving the SDGs entails infrastructure development for new resettlement projects or sustainable communities (SDG11). The industry of involuntary resettlement and land development is booming around the world (Rogers and Wilmsen 2020). Resettlement construction requires infrastructure such as basic utility services and roads to connect new settlements to host societies (de Sherbinin et al. 2011). Building resilient and sustainable infrastructure itself leads to the proliferation of new resettlement projects which cause chains of displacement, especially in high-density cities with limited space (Shannon et al. 2018; Shih 2017; Steel et al. 2017).

The review thus shows the way multiple SDGs promote infrastructure development and land acquisition to enhance climate resilience and ecological sustainability as well as promote economic growth. People who stand in the way of these projects run the permanent risk of being displaced outside their areas of residence and control (Oliver-Smith 2010). These people, already marginalised, often live in informal settlements or in areas where climate change-related risk is known (e.g., Maldonado 2019) and so are first in line for relocation or displacement. However, the SDGs are largely silent about such structural inequalities which are often exacerbated by climate resilient infrastructure development or simply by the promotion of new green and transition economies. These observations put into question the role of environmental justice in the SDGs (Menton et al. 2020) as well as the possibilities of making the global sustainable development agenda truly inclusive. As already mentioned by Scott and Smith (2017), the overall efforts of the 2030 Agenda to ‘leave no one behind’ paradoxically create ‘sacrifice zones’ and citizens who are excluded from the benefits of SDG-oriented development projects.

To address the injustice of forced displacement inherent in some development projects, the World Bank Group created the first international involuntary resettlement guidelines in 1980. The Bank applied the guidelines to mega-projects that it financed. After going through several revisions, the guidelines were turned into the new standards. Aiming to achieve multiple SDGs, the national governments active in receiving foreign investments apply the standards to their development projects. They also integrate them into national legislation and increasingly promote ‘resettlement with development’ (Tan 2020). However, the SDGs are not reflected in the involuntary resettlement guidelines and standards and, therefore, they fail to specify the responsibilities of governments and businesses in facilitating sustainable development in involuntary resettlement projects.

Mozambique is one country which presents itself as an eager actor to meet multiple SDG targets. At the same time, the country struggles to manage the wide-spread displacement, resettlement and contestation arising from various forms of large-scale land acquisitions (Hall 2011; Sassen 2014). In what follows, we use the natural gas project in Mozambique as a case study to engage with multiple SDG targets as well as involuntary resettlement since the project illuminates how the SDGs and existing involuntary resettlement guidelines, standards and national policies could be better aligned.

Methodology: a case study of Mozambique’s LNG project

Background on Mozambique’s commitment to the SDGs and involuntary resettlement

Mozambique became independent from Portugal in 1975 and, since then, the FRELIMO party² has led the national government. The party decided that the country’s future development was to be achieved through socialism and, during the early 1980s, it promoted extensive involuntary resettlement in the form of communal villages, following the Tanzanian socialist experiment to make a society ‘legible’ and consequently forming the basis for economic development (Scott 1995). Due to the social, economic, and environmental crises that engulfed Mozambique in the 1980s, and marked by the escalation of the civil war, floods, and poor economic performance, the government turned to international financial organisations including the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank in 1984. In 1987, the government introduced the Structural Adjustment Programme, which entailed the adoption of a free market economy, the privatisation of state companies, less government intervention in the economy, the reduction of redundant workforces, and fewer subsidies for social services (Viegas Filipe et al. 2021).

After the end of the prolonged civil war in 1992, Mozambique turned into a ‘donor darling’ (Kirshner and Power 2015). During the 2000s, the country became one of the main foreign direct investment destinations in sub-Saharan Africa, with an annual economic growth rate of 7–8% (Kirshner and Power 2015; Republic of Mozambique 2020). The country has reviewed some of its policies to further attract private investors. For example, the government has been reviewing the 1997 Land Law (Law no.19/97), which

² FRELIMO stands for *Frente de Libertação de Moçambique*, or Mozambique’s Liberation Front which was founded on 25 June 1962 in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania by Eduardo Mondlane (1920–1969).

guarantees the state ownership of land, in favour of a more market friendly tenure system (Ntauzi et al. 2020).

Nevertheless, Mozambique remains one of the poorest countries in the world with a 2019 Human Development Index of 0.456; this places the country 181 out of 189 countries and territories (UNDP 2020). The proportion of the population living under the international poverty line is 60% and, therefore, the FRELIMO government is eager to show its commitments to improve human development while staying engaged with investment-oriented economic growth. In 2020, the new President of Mozambique, Filipe Nyusi, established an office to administer the implementation of development projects promoting the SDGs across the country. Multiple SDGs are thus shaping the political agenda, not only to benefit the majority of Mozambicans, but also for the ruling party's short- and medium-term political goals.³ The national government has fully appropriated and reinterpreted SDG language to suit its market-oriented and climate-related policy framework. This language becomes especially apparent in the way the government reports on their SDG commitments and achievements in the Voluntary National Review as we see below.

Meanwhile, in 2001, as the World Bank's policy on involuntary resettlement was revised to become the well-known Operational Policy (OP) 4.12 (World Bank 2004), the Mozambican government applied OP 4.12 to development projects that induced displacement and resettlement. By doing so, the government showed that it assumed responsibility for guaranteeing compensation and avoiding additional impoverishment risk for forcibly displaced persons or communities (Cernea and McDowell 2000).

In 2012, as the country attracted private investors to engage in development projects by relaxing the conditions for land acquisitions, the government increasingly adopted the International Finance Cooperation (IFC) of the World Bank Group's standards that oriented private investors. The IFC's 'Performance Standard 5: Land Acquisition and Involuntary Resettlement' emphasises the importance of avoiding displacement but when avoidance is not possible, investors should minimise displacement by exploring alternative project design (IFC 2012). The IFC Standard outlines procedures to address the negative impacts business operations might have on affected people and communities. The procedures include: compensation and benefit sharing; community engagement in consultation about land acquisition; the establishment of a grievance mechanism; and livelihood reconstruction and improvement (IFC 2012). Yet, to retain

the government's control over the procedures, the government also followed the involuntary resettlement policy of the African Development Bank (AfDB), which emphasises the importance of avoiding involuntary resettlement, adopting a rights-based approach to involuntary resettlement, making stronger provisions for vulnerable groups, clearly defining the unit of compensation and highlighting the procedures for expropriation and compensation at full replacement cost for land and property (African Development Bank 2015).

On the basis of IFC Standards and the AfDB guidelines, the government finalised and published new national legislation, Decree N° 31/2012 (Regulation on the Resettlement Process Resulting from Economic Activities). The legislation requires resettlement to contribute to the 'promotion of the citizens' quality of life and the protection of the environment' (Republic of Mozambique 2012, p. 5) as well as improving the socio-economic situation of resettled populations. As stated in article 5 on the purpose of the resettlement:

The resettlement aims at stimulating the socio-economic development of the country and guaranteeing a better quality of life of the affected population and social equity, taking into account the sustainability of the physical, environmental, social and economic aspects (Republic of Mozambique 2012, p. 6).

Since 2016, the Ministry of Land, Environment and Rural Development (known as MITADER, hereafter, Ministry of Land), which is responsible for involuntary resettlement in the country, has held bi-annual national meetings on resettlement to evaluate how resettlement is in fact practiced throughout the country. In 2018, the second national meeting's theme was to establish 'the Process of Inclusive, Secure, Resilient, and Sustainable Resettlement',⁴ which alluded application of the SDGs. Nonetheless, the linkage between SDG targets and the workings of involuntary resettlement standards was not discussed.

Data collection for the LNG case study

To examine the implications of misalignment between Mozambique's commitment to the SDGs and displacement and resettlement pertaining to SDG-oriented development projects, we first review the Voluntary National Review (VNR2020), presented by the Mozambican government at the United Nations High-Level Political Forum in 2020 (United Nations 2020). Mozambique was one of 47 countries to report on their SDG commitments and achievements.

³ *A Nossa Agenda é Desenvolver Moçambique* (Our Agenda is to Develop Mozambique). Speech of His Excellency Filipe Jacinto Nyusi, on the occasion of the Inauguration Ceremony as President of the Republic of Mozambique, 15 January 2020.

⁴ The Conference's venue was a hotel owned by the Chinese conglomerate in Chibuto, Gaza Province where a Chinese heavy sand mine company had displaced and resettled 500 families.

According to VNR2020, the Mozambican government officially incorporated the SDGs into its national development plan. To highlight this incorporation, the government presented the case of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) production in Rovuma Basin in northern Mozambique as the flagship project.

We zoom into the LNG project because it is known to have induced displacement and resettlement yet VNR2020 does not mention the process at all. We have worked closely with this project, and have collected qualitative data through document reviews, interviewing two experts working on resettlement projects, and participatory observation of the project area, following the project's resettlement process, which consisted of conventional pre-resettlement consultation, physical and economic displacement, and the accompaniment of calculation and provision of compensation, and grievance management as outlined in the international resettlement guidelines. We conducted secondary data analyses of the publicly available Mozambique Gas Development Project Cabo Delgado Province Public Participation Report (Anadarko, Eni, Environmental Resource Management, Impacto/2014) and Resettlement Plan Final Draft for Government Approval (Anadarko, Eni/2016).⁵ Together with the primary data derived from the interviews and participatory observation⁶, we have reconstructed the case study of LNG extraction below in relation to specific SDG targets and involuntary resettlement guidelines. By doing so, we will clarify how the misalignment between the SDGs and involuntary resettlement guidelines unfolds on the ground and the potential consequences.

Results: LNG extraction in Cabo Delgado Province

VNR2020: Natural gas for Mozambique's sustainable development

According to the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), since 2018, the member countries have been encouraged yearly to 'conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels, which are country-led and country-driven' (United Nations 2015, paragraph 79). The High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), consisting of both developed and developing countries and other stakeholders, voluntarily review the national reviews to highlight successes and challenges (United Nations 2020). Mozambique responded to this call in 2019, and presented

⁵ The entire resettlement plan consists of five volumes of over 1000 pages, available from: <https://mzlng.totalenergies.co.mz/en/sustainability/resettlement/resettlement-plan>.

⁶ The necessary ethical clearance procedure was followed in collecting the primary data.

its first *Voluntary National Review of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development* in 2020 (i.e., VNR2020). The Ministry of Economy and Finance took the lead in preparing this VNR2020, emphasising the ways that the country has been engaging with economic growth.

In VNR2020, natural gas is described as one of the most important sources of potential economic growth in the context of the country's commitment to 'Sustainable Development for All' (Republic of Mozambique 2020, p. 2). In Mozambique's context, natural gas refers to one of the world's largest natural gas reserves, which was found in the Rovuma Basin located offshore of Mozambique's Cabo Delgado Province in 2010. In 2013, the US-based Anadarko Petroleum Corporation discovered additional natural gas reserves in the basin. The company announced its plans to produce liquefied natural gas in the early 2020s after the Mozambican government approved the environmental impact assessment and issued extraction licences to Anadarko and other oil companies such as the Italian ENI. In 2019, the French oil giant Total bought Anadarko's operation stake, and Exxon Mobile entered in the place of ENI. The discovery of gas and the international investments of major oil and gas giants quickly made Mozambique one of the most attractive foreign direct investment destinations in Africa. Since LNG is internationally framed as a potential 'bridge-fuel' that can operate as a temporary solution until a full transition from fossil fuels to full-fledged renewable energy occurs (Levi 2013), the country's commitment to *sustainable* development also seemed to be fulfilled through LNG extraction.

The following excerpt from VNR2020 clarifies how the government sees the LNG project:

Agriculture is the basis of the economy, however, the country's wealth of natural resources—especially natural gas and various minerals—has the potential to put Mozambique on an inclusive growth path that will enable the country to achieve its structural transformation of the economy and sustainable development ambitions.

However, alongside these developments, there is a growing concern in the country about environmental issues and the risks caused by natural disasters resulting from climate change (Republic of Mozambique 2020, p. 2).

While the government's concern is over environmental issues and natural hazards, which are *external* to the natural gas and mineral extractions, as we see below, the ambition to promote natural gas and mineral extraction has become increasingly characterised by social discontent and conflict. Moreover, general social discontent and conflict culminated into armed insurgencies, which led the LNG project to stall in March 2021. Even though scholars caution not to establish

a quick linkage between the LNG project and insurgencies, which the national government officially attributes the causes to foreign Islamist influences, evidence suggests that a lack of clear benefit and visualisation of inequality through the LNG project has been contributing to discontent in the region (Namaganda et al. 2022; Neethling 2021).⁷ However, VNR2020 does not mention the conflict in any of the development projects it reviews in relation to meeting the specific SDG targets, let alone the LNG project. Furthermore, it also fails to mention the possibilities that LNG project-induced displacement and resettlement could achieve sustainable development through the project. This is a missed opportunity since one important purpose of VNR is ‘to facilitate the sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned, with a view to accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda’ (United Nations 2020). If a consequence of implementing the SDGs is ultimately the halt of the project due to contestation that implementation causes, how such a situation could be avoided must be an important subject of discussion.

The disconnect between ‘sustainable development for all’ and involuntary resettlement

VNR2020 mentions that the LNG project is an example of Mozambique’s commitment to SDG8 on increasing employment and economic growth as well as to SDG12 on responsible production (Republic of Mozambique 2020). VNR2020 also describes how the LNG project contributes to infrastructure development, including offshore drilling facilities and pipelines; near-shore construction of LNG loading jetties, a materials offloading facility and restricted security zones; and onshore construction and operation of housing, construction camps and an airstrip for foreign workers and engineers.

Involuntary resettlement happened because the government eventually granted 7000 hectares (ha) of land use rights to the consortium of energy companies that established Rovuma Basin LNG Land Limited to facilitate infrastructure development for the LNG project. As a consequence, many households who actually lived in the project area or who relied on the area for livelihood activities (such as farming, fishing, and inter-tidal resource collection) were displaced and resettled.

In 2014, the consultant companies Environmental Resource Management (ERM) and the resettlement consultancy Impacto published a report on public participation concerning displacement and resettlement on behalf of Anadarko and ENI. It built on the earlier United Nations Policy

Note on Natural Resource Management and Extractive Industries in Mozambique, published a year earlier in order to discuss the process of Environment Impact Assessment (EIA). As Mozambique’s resettlement legislation obliges companies to obtain their operation license based on EIA, this report laid the basis of how to address impacts of the new LNG project on local, and especially marine, environments and livelihoods of fisher people as well as farmers. The report recommended physical displacement of at least two villages that consisted of 500 households and the economic displacement of 1000 households by applying both the IFC Standards and Mozambican legislation. The applications of the standards and the legislation were supposed to provide these households with sufficient compensation.

In May 2016, Anadarko presented the final draft of the Resettlement Action Plan (RAP) to be approved by the Mozambican government. As Anadarko was officially replaced by Total in 2019, this RAP continued to be officially implemented by Total. The RAP refers both to the Mozambican legislation and to IFC Standard 5, and clarifies the differences; it also clearly outlines what kind of compensation is to be provided to affected populations. More specifically, the RAP promises compensation for more than 900 fisherfolks and 2000 inter-tidal collectors who were expected to lose access to their fishing grounds and intertidal gathering areas.

In 2018, the government authorised Total to build a resettlement village on its land,⁸ known as Quitunda Village, on 150 ha of land for 556 physically-displaced households. The plan also outlines compensation, including replacement land, for the 556 households as well as for an additional 952 households expected to lose access to cultivated, fallow or bushland and other terrestrial assets. Meanwhile, in 2017, armed insurgent attacks started to take place in the province near the LNG project sites in Palma District. It was reported that the presence of the foreign enclave and Quitunda Village in its vicinity attracted the insurgency’s attention (Bonate 2018). The government maintained that the insurgency had been influenced by foreign Islamist movements (Hanlon 2020). However, scholars and local activists increasingly refute this official narrative. Cabo Delgado is one of the poorest provinces in Mozambique, and much of the wealth envisioned by the LNG project was expected to benefit the southern part of the country (where the national capital Maputo is located) and, as the natural gas would be exported to Europe and China, the benefits of fuel development ultimately lie outside of Mozambique. The LNG project seemed to

⁷ Similar arguments have been made in oil rich countries such as Nigeria (e.g., Adunbi 2015).

⁸ In Mozambique, the land is nationalised and the government authorises user rights to inquiring parties.

aggravate existing social and economic inequality long experienced in the region.

As discussed in other involuntary resettlement cases in Mozambique, the implementation of the RAP is a way to address general discontent and promote social justice for affected people, especially those deemed to be displaced (Otsuki 2021b). However, delayed payment of cash compensation, due to the phased implementation of the RAP, benefitted some people while others had to wait; this frustrated those who had to wait for the benefit. In addition, the ‘cash’ compensation required a bank account, which the majority of the population in the region did not have. Opening an account also caused delays. Meanwhile, area roads were extended and infrastructure development took place which attracted people from nearby rural towns in search of business and employment opportunities. They started to ask for their assets (houses and farms) to be registered to demand their benefits from the RAP. The entire process was slow, requiring resettlement project experts to manage expectations. At the same time, by mid-2020, the Quitunda resettlement village came to be occupied by nearly 5000 internally displaced people, as insurgencies kept attacking the surrounding villages to put pressures on the government. Located in front of the LNG project site and its infrastructure, the resettlement village was considered to be a safe haven for displaced people even though areas around the project site were also exposed to armed attacks.

This entire situation finally led Total to completely halt the operation in July 2021. Meanwhile, the government still struggles to contain the insurgencies, and Total is providing humanitarian aid for displaced people. However, the question still remains whether violence could have been avoided or mitigated if the LNG project had more carefully considered the local context, including the historical marginalisation of the region. More importantly, public consultations and the resettlement plan that promises compensation, and new employment and development, exposed people to the idea that their life would change; this in turn raises their hopes. The delayed or missed delivery of such promises causes great frustration and disappointment, and once resettlement starts to take place but halts due to insurgencies, the inequality between project beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries becomes apparent, adding more discontent amongst non-beneficiaries (see Otsuki 2021b for a similar consequence in nature conservation-induced resettlement). These consequences highlight the need for an international mechanism to force the government to engage with project stakeholders on how to share the benefits of such a flagship project amongst citizens (e.g., through taxation or planning social and economic development in the region) beyond the rhetoric of economic growth and potential for structural transformation of the national economy.

In other words, we could argue that, if the government and gas companies were unable to link benefit sharing of the LNG project at the local level to regional sustainable development, VNR2020 could identify this misalignment as the challenge of their commitment to the SDGs. By doing so, the international community could learn from the country’s experience and develop new mechanisms to tackle the problem. As the international community is deeply involved in this flagship project, donors and investors could address the importance of collectively coordinating the implementation of mega-projects, the fair distribution of benefits, and the management of potential conflicts.

In sum, Mozambique’s VNR2020 shows that the LNG project in Cabo Delgado is an example of how the government contributes to multiple SDGs. The project is also known to entail extensive displacement and resettlement. According to Mozambique’s Ministry of Land, at least 20,000 people throughout the country since 2010 have been displaced and resettled as a result of over 50 infrastructure projects (Wetela 2018). This number is likely to be low, given that it does not include the number of resettled people of several large-scale resettlement projects that are known to be underway. Furthermore, as the LNG project’s latest situation demonstrates, resettlement attracts more people than planned and leads to unintended consequences. Both the government and business investors are expected to anticipate such new situations when their projects entail displacement and resettlement. The SDG framework can potentially help them recognise the possibilities that the SDG agenda, when it is implemented, could induce involuntary resettlement; it could also indicate possibilities of how they can deal with such consequences.

Discussion: Towards synergies between the SDGs and involuntary resettlement guidelines

Based on the review of SDG targets in relation to displacement and resettlement and our case study on LNG development in Cabo Delgado Province, we identify two areas where potential synergies between the SDGs and current resettlement guidelines and standards could be established. First, both the government and the international community could make a direct reference to inclusive resettlement planning in SDG10 on migration or SDG11 on sustainable communities. Indicators to ‘facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people’ (see target 10.7) should be amplified by including an indicator on the number of development projects that accompany resettlement action plans. In addition, international standards such as IFC Standard 5 or the latest ESS5 could be explicitly incorporated into development projects aiming

for sustainable and resilient human settlement buildings as outlined in SDG11. While ‘migration policies’ in SDG10 only refer to international migration and management of refugees or economic migrants, they could and also should include policies pertaining to persons internally displaced as a result of economic development projects. Establishing such policies on development-induced resettlement would also encourage businesses, such as oil and gas companies, to more effectively manage their resettlement action plans. These businesses usually have financial resources for resettlement buildings and related infrastructure development, but they generally lack the social expertise needed to facilitate stakeholder engagement and *sustainable* development processes with a long-term vision. This includes discussions and plans of how to shape sustainable development within the wider society in which their resettlement projects will be embedded.

Second, SDG targets that address conflicts (such as SDG16.a) could be amplified to include conflicts emerging from land acquisitions. The conflicts associated with displacement and resettlement embody not only humanitarian problems, but also social and economic problems and inequalities. They are so complex that they cannot be addressed in predefined timeframes for relief operations or in legal frameworks in which responsible actors are held accountable for causing particular grievances. As development scholars have long pointed out, development interventions, whether for economic growth or sustainability, can exacerbate ‘structural violence’ even when it is not intended (Arce and Long 2000; Farmer 2004). This means that there must be a recognition that conflicts may arise as a result of major infrastructure development (Rodgers and O’Neill 2012). SDG16.a should address capacity development for the governments and investors to be able to anticipate and plan for managing conflicts from project operations.

Widening the scope of specific SDGs could mobilise the variety of actors involved in infrastructure development for climate mitigation and adaptation and help to delineate responsibilities in line with the possible impacts of investment projects. In countries such as Mozambique that actively accept foreign direct investment and international donor projects, this requires active and collective coordination between various actors. In this vein, the oil and gas industry should not only be responsible for resettlement plans as a part of their investments, but also for clearly communicating their plans with local and national authorities as well as international donors and observers. Authorities need to be in touch with different international organisations which support long-term monitoring and conflict management in their resettlement projects. The SDGs could factor in such collaboration over an investment’s potential impact and its management, not only by promoting investments per se, as currently done in SDG17, but by supporting capacity

development for all the actors involved in the investment-resettlement continuum.

Ultimately, any national government reporting on their SDG achievements could also highlight their best practices in dealing with conflicts. Instead of turning a blind eye to conflicts, national governments should address any discontent that arises from investment as that which is inherent to infrastructure development and thus the SDGs. Citizens will benefit from such recognition and active discussions on how to ease the discontent and envision their sustainable development.

Conclusions

The objectives of this paper were twofold. The first was to clarify misalignment between the SDGs, international involuntary resettlement guidelines and national commitments to the SDGs in relation to infrastructure development and land acquisitions, as promoted in multiple SDGs that induce displacement and resettlement. The second objective was to identify particular SDG targets which could potentially address this misalignment.

We have shown that the SDGs recognise the people most at-risk face climate change and natural hazards and that the SDGs aim to stimulate infrastructure development that should reduce this risk. However, the SDGs do not recognise the paradox inherent in promoting infrastructure development that increases the risk of displacement as the development potentially leads to new land acquisition and involuntary resettlement. While international guidelines and standards for land acquisition and involuntary resettlement address the risks faced by displaced and resettled populations, such as through compensation and livelihood reconstruction programs, they are not incorporated into the SDGs and, therefore, they fail to incorporate a vision of sustainable development planning and ‘social inclusion’ more generally as promoted by the SDGs (Gupta and Vegelin 2016).

To illustrate this paradox and the shortcomings of existing guidelines, we discussed the case of natural gas extraction highlighted by the Mozambican government in its Voluntary National Review published in 2020, which showcases the government’s achievements on multiple SDGs. This project has structurally followed and met Mozambique’s progressive national involuntary resettlement legislation based on international guidelines and new standards. However, as the legislation focuses solely on individual projects and does not take the regional impacts of development into consideration, it does not align with the wider ambition of the SDGs to develop sustainable and inclusive societies in which no one is left behind.

We have argued that as long as the linkages are not established—between infrastructure-induced displacement,

resettlement, social exclusion and the achievement of the SDGs—the cycle of displacement and resettlement is likely to continue because the SDGs implicitly promote development projects that accompany involuntary resettlement. The Mozambican case study clearly shows that the SDGs and involuntary resettlement guidelines can no longer be considered separate agendas at the level of project implementation. In this sense, the SDGs, especially SDGs 10, 16 and 17, should more explicitly address those who have been internally displaced as a result of national and international infrastructure investment and development. By recognising this need, governments might allow investors to take responsibility for following up on conflicts in investment projects that induce involuntary resettlement and for generating an international and collective effort to find solutions to problems that are inherently part of the resettlement process.

Analytically, we have also argued the importance of recognising what is *not* mentioned in the SDGs, to step aside from project evaluations of the SDGs focusing on trade-offs and synergies between targets. There might be a need to look beyond the SDGs to incorporate other international agreements and guidelines that can reveal the consequences of the SDGs that are currently omitted (e.g., Saner et al. 2019). Recognising that the current sustainable development model omits action on development-induced displacement and resettlement is thus the first step towards integrating them as important subjects into the SDGs as well as into national reports presented by various governments of SDG achievements.

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