



EXPERIENCES FROM THE FIELD

A STRATEGIC VISION FOR EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

More and more already fragile nations in sub-Saharan Africa are being forced to face the hardships brought by sometimes concurrent climate-, politics- or health-related emergencies. CUAMM's response is a long-term strategic approach based on solid networks and knowledge of local realities, to continue to foster resilient forms of development.

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In 2011, 22 of sub-Saharan Africa's 48 countries were classified by the World Bank as fragile, i.e., states whose institutions or governments are so unstable that they are incapable of guaranteeing their populations essential public services or security¹.

This fragility is one of the main obstacles to Africa's development. Despite the continent's overall rapid growth, many communities are being held back by extreme poverty, governmental instability, persistent socioeconomic inequality, conflicts and other forms of violence.

It is aggravated by the emergencies that have been impacting Africa with increasing frequency, including natural disasters, epidemics and the current Covid-19 pandemic, with both direct and indirect effects on its population. Conflicts are another driver of fragility: 2019 saw 25 state-based conflicts in Africa, four more than the prior year, as well as a record number – 13 – of conflicts due to interstate territorial disputes, and nine African countries experienced Islamic State-related conflicts within their territories².

The consequences of natural and environmental disasters – for example, rainfall variations in some areas – exacerbated food insecurity, which in turn worsened poverty and migration. In 2021, the African Development Bank (AfDB) reported that seven of the 10 countries most vulnerable to climate change are in Africa, with Mozambique topping the list³.

The situation has been made even more dire by the fact that most African countries are having to face one or more such crises concurrently, experiencing what is known as a “complex emergency”, where critical situations of a political, environmental, health or demographic nature occur in parallel⁴. One such example is Mozambique, where not long after the country was battered by two tropical cyclones (Idai and Kenneth) in 2019, a severe humanitarian crisis broke out in Cabo Delgado in 2020⁵.

Against this backdrop, Doctors with Africa CUAMM has continued working in the countries where we are present based on a long-term vision of development, while also responding to the critical situations that arose in some of them. Over the past three years,

as the COVID-19 pandemic raged on, CUAMM was compelled to intervene in:

- Ethiopia, providing basic health services to South Sudanese refugees in the Gambella region and in Tigray, the site of the ongoing civil war;
- Mozambique, providing basic health services and a response to the humanitarian needs of the international displaced persons (IDPs) fleeing Islamic terrorism in the Cabo Delgado area, as well as responding to the crisis following the Idai and Kenneth cyclones;
- Angola, where child malnutrition rose following protracted drought in the Cunene Province;
- countries such as the Central African Republic and South Sudan, where conflicts are causing growing instability and the interruption of services.

From day one, CUAMM has invested in the creation of resilient health systems with strong connections to the local resources needed when crisis strikes. Our approach involves considering each new crisis on four different levels⁶: 1. preparedness; 2. onset of trauma and alarm signals; 3. shock impact and management; 4. recovery and learning.

It's a matter of having the ability to be prepared – i.e., having a system whose financial, logistic and human resource capabilities are ready the moment an emergency strikes – on through knowing how to respond to its consequences, capable of absorbing, adapting to and positively transforming them⁷.

This is why CUAMM deploys its resources to strengthen health systems over the long term, working in the field on an ongoing basis to foster strong relationships with communities and civil networks and strategic and positive partnerships with local authorities, as well as investing in operational research as a tool for making our interventions more efficient and equitable.

Confronting Africa's instability and crises requires a far-sighted approach that understands how long-term development work and investments are the best way to lay the groundwork for rapid and effective emergency responses.

NOTES

¹ <https://blogs.worldbank.org/developmenttalk/what-fragile-state>

² <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/conflict-trends-africa-1989-2019>

³ *Climate change triggers mounting food insecurity, poverty and displacement in Africa*, Published 19 October 2021, Press Release Number: 19102021

⁴ David Keen, *Complex Emergencies*, Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2008

⁵ <https://reliefweb.int/report/mozambique/mozambique-humanitarian-crisis-grows-cabo-delgado-conflict-continues>

⁶ [file:///C:/Users/aa/Desktop/SG-NAEC\(2019\)5_Resilience_strategies.pdf](file:///C:/Users/aa/Desktop/SG-NAEC(2019)5_Resilience_strategies.pdf)

⁷ https://www.who.int/healthinfo/systems/WHO_MBHSS_2010_full_web.pdf

<https://www.afdb.org/en/cop25/climate-change-africa>

<https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/332441/Policy-brief%2036-1997-8073-eng.pdf>