

WE SAW FIRE

*The little they had was left behind in the flight.
Now they have to build a new home together.*

A documentary film in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique





LOGLINE

After being forced to flee, a family builds a new home through perseverance, song and love. In a camp for people displaced by violence in Cabo Delgado, northern Mozambique, they struggle together to overcome the consequences of years of conflict.

SYNOPSIS

Vitória and her children were forced to flee after their village was violently attacked. They reunite with her son Momade and his family in a camp for displaced people in Cabo Delgado, northern Mozambique. The little they had was left behind in the flight. Through perseverance, song and love they try to overcome the consequences of years of conflict, psychological trauma and harsh living conditions. Now they have to build a new home together.



FILM FACT SHEET

Original title: **We Saw Fire**

Year: **2024**

Running time: **48 minutes**

Country: **Spain, Mozambique**

Genre: **Documentary**

Languages: **Ximakondé, Portuguese**

Locations: **Cabo Delgado, Mozambique**

Director & editing: **Santiago D. Risco**

Script: **Mariana Abdalla, Santiago D. Risco**

Music: **Hamid E. Martín**

Colorist: **Lara Vilanova CSI**

Production: **Sonsoles Galindo**

A film by: **Doctors Without Borders /
Médecins Sans Frontières**

TRAILER

<https://youtu.be/qNzN0dGHIOk>

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FESTIVAL SCREENINGS

Films Femmes Afrique, Official Selection (Senegal, 2024)

Festival de Cinema i Fòrum internacional de Drets Humans, Official Selection (Spain, 2024)

Barcelona Human Rights Film Festival, Official Selection (Spain, 2024)

Chennai International Documentary and Short Film Festival, Official Selection (India, 2025)

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ARTISTIC & TECHNICAL CREW

SANTIAGO D. RISCO is a filmmaker from Galicia (Spain). He studied documentary film in Barcelona and has worked in films directed by Victor Kossakovsky, Pere Portabella and Marcel Lozinsky. He is co-director of “Playing Somewhere Over the Rainbow”, premiered in Visions du Réel. His second documentary short, “Vai Chover”, was premiered in MIDBO in Colombia. As part of the analogue film collective Laboratorio Reversible, he is co-author of the experimental short film “Vecines”, premiered in L’Alternativa, Barcelona. His last short film, “A Miña Terra”, won the best Galician film award in MICE (Santiago de Compostela, Spain). As part of the audiovisual team of Médecins Sans Frontières since 2018, he has worked in contexts like Nigeria, Ethiopia or Mozambique.

MARIANA ABDALLA is a Brazilian native with more than ten years of professional experience in the humanitarian, social justice, and international development fields. She is passionate about narrative storytelling and communicating about the realities of underserved and vulnerable populations worldwide. She has worked with non-profit organizations throughout the Americas, and with Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in Brazil, Mozambique, Türkiye, Angola, Somaliland, and Kenya. Mariana is also the creator of “Finn”, an award-winning short film, and has completed a Master’s degree at the School of Media and Journalism at the University of North Carolina (UNC) at Chapel Hill, which she attended as a Duke-UNC Rotary Peace Fellow.



CONCEPT NOTE

More than 100 million people worldwide have been forced to flee their homes. In Mozambique's Cabo Delgado province, as in many other places around the world, it is violence that leaves people no choice but to run for their lives, leaving everything behind.

Without the possibility of dealing with the trauma of having witnessed or even lived through episodes of extreme violence, they must continue each day to start from scratch, not knowing when they will be able to return home or what has become of their loved ones whom they have lost track of.

The numbers are impressive, but are we able to understand what it really means for each of them? What haunts them, what keeps them going?

In *We Saw Fire*, accompanying Vitoria, Momade and Atija, we see and feel the hard conditions of a camp where a family must start a new life with empty hands. Together, with their children, they even have to build a new house from the ground up.

As we see how they seek seeds to be self-sufficient, try to get a health consultation or spend hours to buy some bags of rice, they tell us about their previous life, their hopes and dreams or fears. And when those feelings burst in songs improvised by Momade, we can glimpse the suffering and the need for peace.

This intimacy and sudden moments of self-expression bring us closer to them and closer to understanding what they are going through. It shows their strength,



their resilience and their solidarity: they share the little they have to help other people, newly arrived, in the camp.

The brutal experience of violence is hard to convey. Since the conflict started in 2017, they have lost their village, their living and their people, and the fear of violence arriving to where they have finally found refuge is always there.

The film creates a mood, with an expressive and abstract texture of images when Vitória, Momade and Atija share in their own words the traumatic

experiences they went through in the recent past.

The knots of the new house, tied one by one, the sweet sights to their children, the wrinkles on Vitória's face: it is time and gestures what gives weight to all these actions they take to keep on living, to overcome all they went through.

In order to feel them closer and understand them better, We Saw Fire shares time with this family and listens to them, while they resist and rebuild their lives together.

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Founded by doctors and journalists in 1971, MSF mission is also to visibilize and denounce the realities that our staff witness and to amplify the voice and the testimonies of the people directly affected.

'We saw fire' is an attempt to understand what it means to be displaced by violence, by sharing the daily struggle of Vitória, Momade, Atija and their children in Mueda's internal displacement camp.

MÉDECINS SANS FRONTIÈRES IN MOZAMBIQUE

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)/ Doctors Without Borders is a medical and humanitarian organization that has been working in Mozambique **since 1984** in responding to medical and humanitarian needs countrywide, including HIV, tuberculosis, malnutrition, malaria, cholera, natural disasters, COVID-19 and people displaced from their homes due to conflict.

In 2023, MSF has projects in the provinces of Cabo Delgado, Nampula, and Sofala focusing on **humanitarian and medical assistance**, planetary

health, sexual and reproductive health and HIV, respectively. MSF has been working in Cabo Delgado since 2019 to support access to healthcare for **people displaced by the conflict** or those returning to their areas of origin. MSF conducts mobile clinics and supports health centres and local hospitals, and the main activities include mental health services, primary and secondary healthcare consultations, health promotion, water and sanitation improvements, and distribution of essential relief items.

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THE **CONFLICT** IN CABO DELGADO

Cabo Delgado is a province in northern Mozambique, bordering Tanzania, that has been affected by an internal **conflict since 2017** between non-state armed groups and Government and allied forces. By the end of 2022, there were **over a million people internally displaced**. Throughout 2023, as the security situation became less volatile in some of the districts most affected by violence, over half a million people returned to their areas of origin, while some 630,000 remain displaced.

Despite these returns, insecurity persists in Cabo Delgado and the humanitarian crisis is far from over. Both returnees and displaced communities are still in **urgent need of humanitarian assistance**, particularly with food, water, shelter, education, and access to health and basic services. Most health infrastructures have been destroyed. The conflict has had a significant impact on mental health, as most displaced families have either experienced or witnessed significant incidents of **extreme violence**.

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THE PROTAGONISTS AFTER THE FILM

Visiting the family after watching the film gave me a glimpse of hope regarding the current situation in Cabo Delgado. The contrast between the dry, harsh landscape shown in the film and the lush greenery I encountered during my visit was striking. The land seemed to reflect the family's journey. Three years after being displaced, the family has returned to their *machambas* (a Mozambican term for small-scale farms) and is now living a life that resembles the one they had before the attacks. Their story is not unique. Since the conflict began in 2017, more than half of Cabo Delgado's population has been displaced at some point. As of August 2024, UN data

reports that approximately 580,000 people remain displaced due to ongoing violence. At the same time, over the past two years, around 630,000 people have returned to areas previously affected by conflict—particularly to towns like Palma and Mocímboa da Praia and their surrounding areas. Despite these returns, the crisis is far from over. Insecurity persists, and for many, displacement and resettlement remain part of daily life in Cabo Delgado.

Marília Gurgel, Médecins Sans Frontières
Field communication manager in Mozambique,
after a visit to the family in February 2025



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