



TAKOUA BEN MOHAMED

GROWING UP IN MOZAMBIQUE

15 days in East-Africa with humanitarian aid workers of WeWorld NGO

GROWING UP IN MOZAMBIQUE

TAKOUA BEN MOHAMED

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NEVER STOP DREAMING

by Stefania Piccinelli, head of WeWorld International Programmes

A journey with many ordinary and extraordinary meetings. A tale that is both personal and universal. Takoua Ben Mohamed once again speaks through drawings and the written word to successfully narrate a vivid, full-colour, true and arresting story. This time it is the story of the Mozambicans, a people with a precarious past, present and future branded by a tangle of historical, environmental, political and economic turmoil that has left a deep wound. This tangle of complexities does not go unperceived: it can be breathed in the air, and Takoua picks up on it and absorbs it. What surfaces from this is a journey through the past and present of an African country devastated by a troubling colonial experience and a present era of endless cyclones and extreme natural events, besides escalating conflict in the north of the country.

The central figure in the narration is a child, Omar, from the city of Pemba, in northern Mozambique. Without naivety and with raw awareness, his firm voice describes the reality of his home context: the various facets of physical and psychological inter-generational trauma take shape among poverty, child labour, scarcity of resources, lack of drinking water, early marriage, poor health care, marginalisation of women, and serious environmental disasters. Takoua was accompanied on her journey by our team from WeWorld: along with other international organisations, local volunteer associations and the Mozambican civil protection agency, and with support funded by the European Commission, we strive to mitigate and prevent the devastating effects caused by climate change and endemic poverty. Nonetheless, it is never enough. Only through real ecological transition and a drastic reduction in emissions in our own countries – the ‘north of the world’ – can we really improve the lives of people who, like Omar, do not contribute to global warming yet suffer its consequences on a daily basis. What emerges from this account is a powerful political and social statement; a description that with piercing agility shifts from the public

to the private realm, striking to the core of the reader's personal thoughts. Its message resounds loud and clear: privilege is always relative, but questioning your own perception of yourself is as painful as it is necessary. In crossing northern Mozambique, Takoua – an Italian woman born in Tunisia – observes such extreme poverty that the experience makes her known concepts of poverty and injustice relative.

The remote and recent past are still alive in Mozambique. Yet so is its future. Its beauty, colours, smells and people's resilience show faces displaying simple, light-hearted – and, yes, perhaps unattainable – dreams that are nevertheless real and palpable.

And Omar has promised to never stop dreaming.

GROWING UP IN MOZAMBIQUE

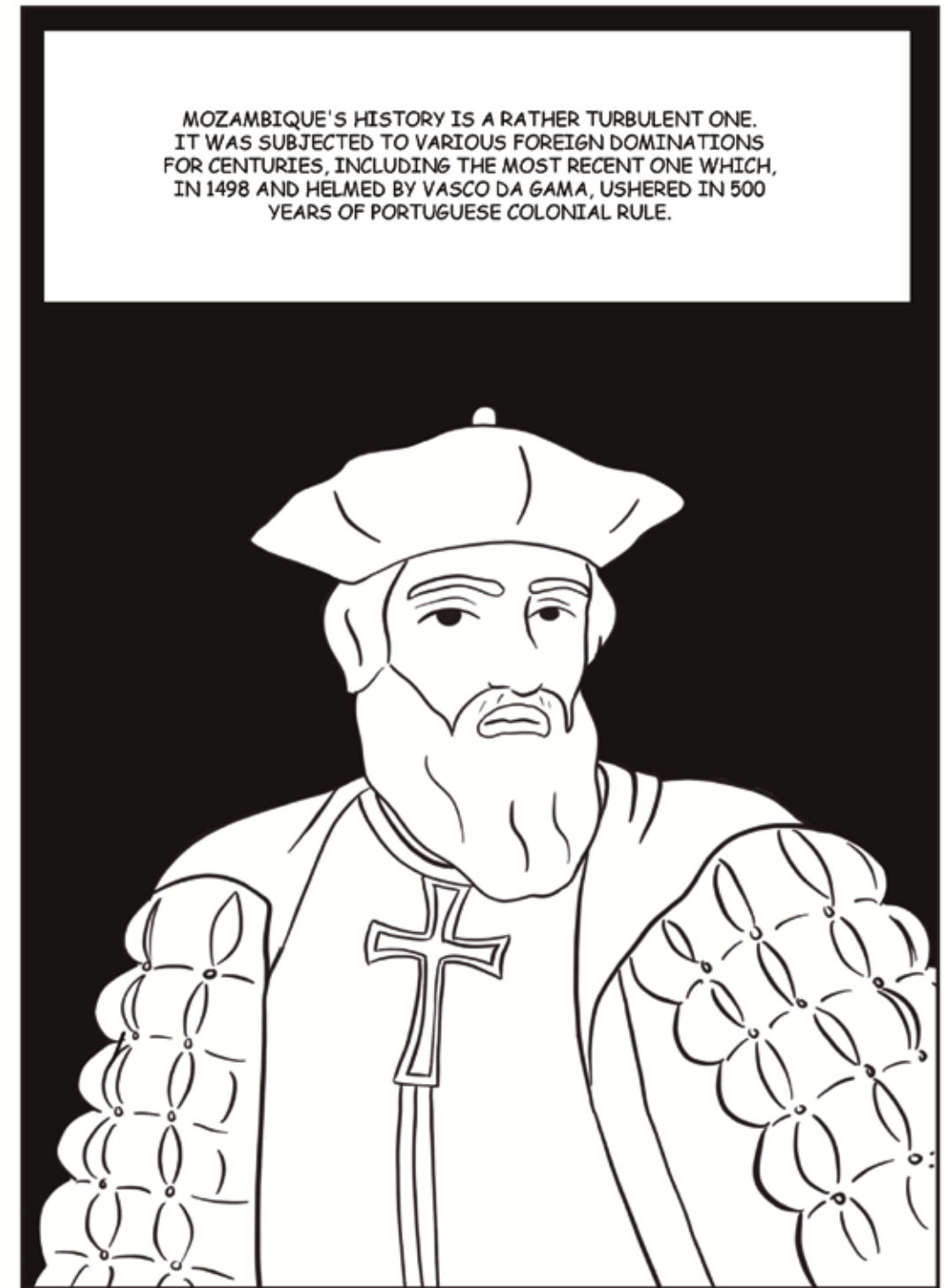
TAKOUA BEN MOHAMED

THIS NARRATIVE IS THE OUTCOME OF A TRIP
I TOOK TO MOZAMBIQUE IN MAY 2022, TOGETHER WITH
THE HUMANITARIAN ORGANISATION WEWORLD.

WELCOME TO MOZAMBIQUE.
BEM VINDO A MOÇAMBIQUE.



THE PAST.



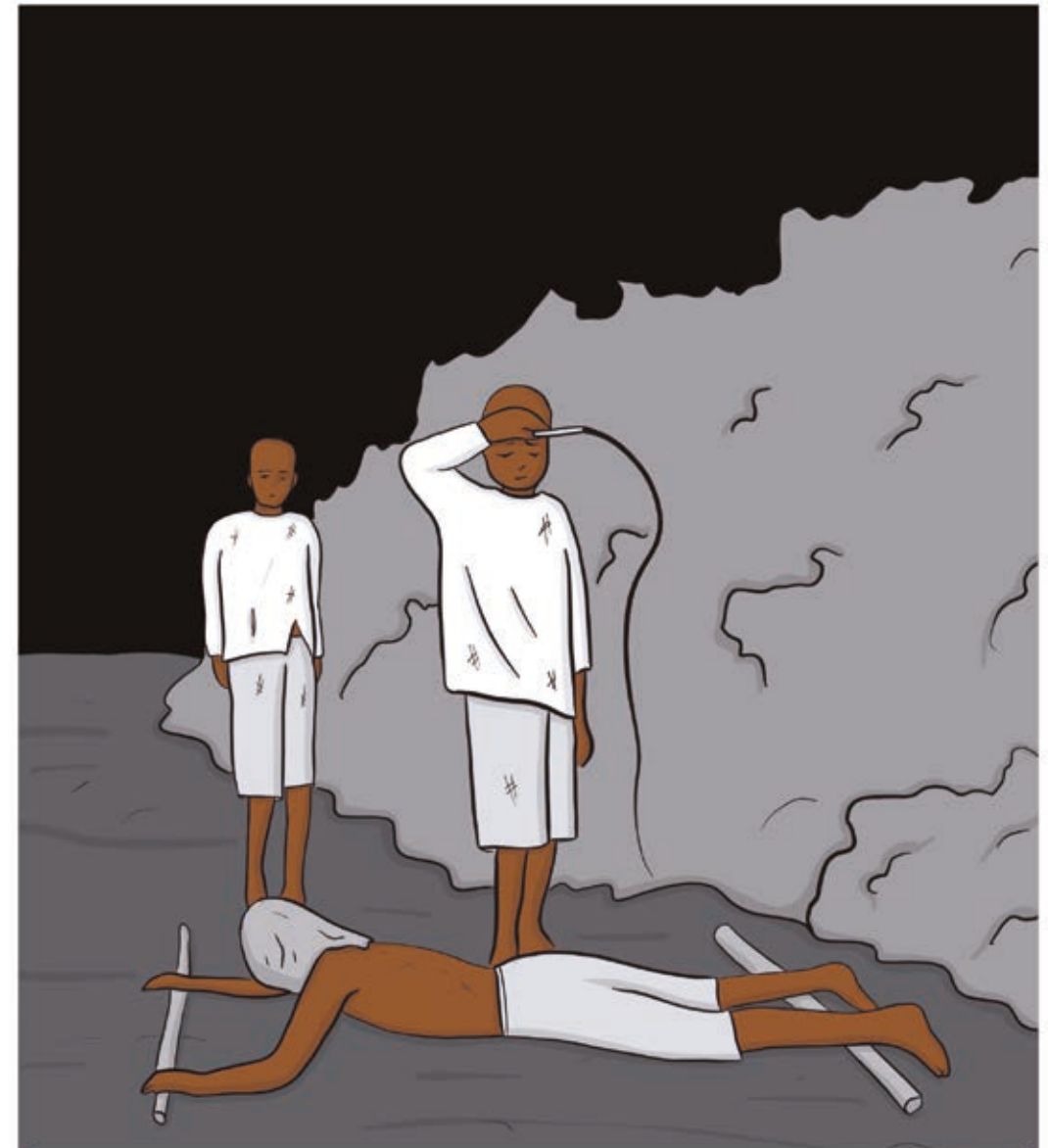
BETWEEN THE 1ST AND 5TH CENTURIES C.E. THE BANTUS MIGRATED FROM THE WEST AND THE NORTH ACROSS THE ZAMBEZI RIVER VALLEY, AND THEN GRADUALLY TOWARDS THE PLATEAU AND THE COASTAL AREAS, WHERE THEY SETTLED AND CREATED A COMMUNITY. STARTING IN THE 1ST MILLENNIUM C.E. THE GREAT TRADE ROUTES OF THE INDIAN OCEAN EXTENDED AS FAR AS SOUTHERN MOZAMBIQUE, TO THE ANCIENT PORT CITY OF CHIBUENE. THE TOWNS OF SOFOLA, ANGOCHE AND OTHERS STILL ALONG THE SWAHILI COAST BECAME PROMINENT HUBS FOR THE ARAB, PERSIAN AND THEN PORTUGUESE TRADE IN SLAVES, GOLD, IVORY AND OTHER RAW MATERIALS.



VASCO DA GAMA'S MEN THEN GRADUALLY OUSTED THE ARABS, AND THE PORTUGUESE CREATED A STRING OF OUTPOSTS MAINLY AS BASES FOR STOCKING UP THE SHIPS ABOUT TO SET SAIL TOWARDS THE EAST INDIES. IN 1752 MOZAMBIQUE FORMALLY BECAME A PORTUGUESE COLONY, BUT LISBON'S CONTROL OVER ITS HOLDINGS IN EASTERN AFRICA REMAINED MINIMAL. LAND USE WAS ASSIGNED TO EUROPEAN RESIDENTS ONLY, AND THE PORTS WERE ACTIVE PRIMARILY IN THE SLAVE TRADE, WHICH IN THE 18TH CENTURY WAS SEEN AS FAR MORE LUCRATIVE THAN DEALING IN GOLD OR IVORY.



IN 1891 THE PORTUGUESE CROWN GRANTED THE SOVEREIGN RIGHTS TO MOZAMBIQUE TO A LARGE PRIVATE COMPANY, COMPANHIA DE MOÇAMBIQUE, PRIMARILY UNDER THE CONTROL OF BRITISH MAGNATES. THE COMPANY EXTENSIVELY DEVELOPED THE COLONY, BUILDING RAILWAYS AND TRADING IN SLAVERY AND LABOUR POWER WITH THE BRITISH COLONIES, ESPECIALLY WITH SOUTH AFRICA.

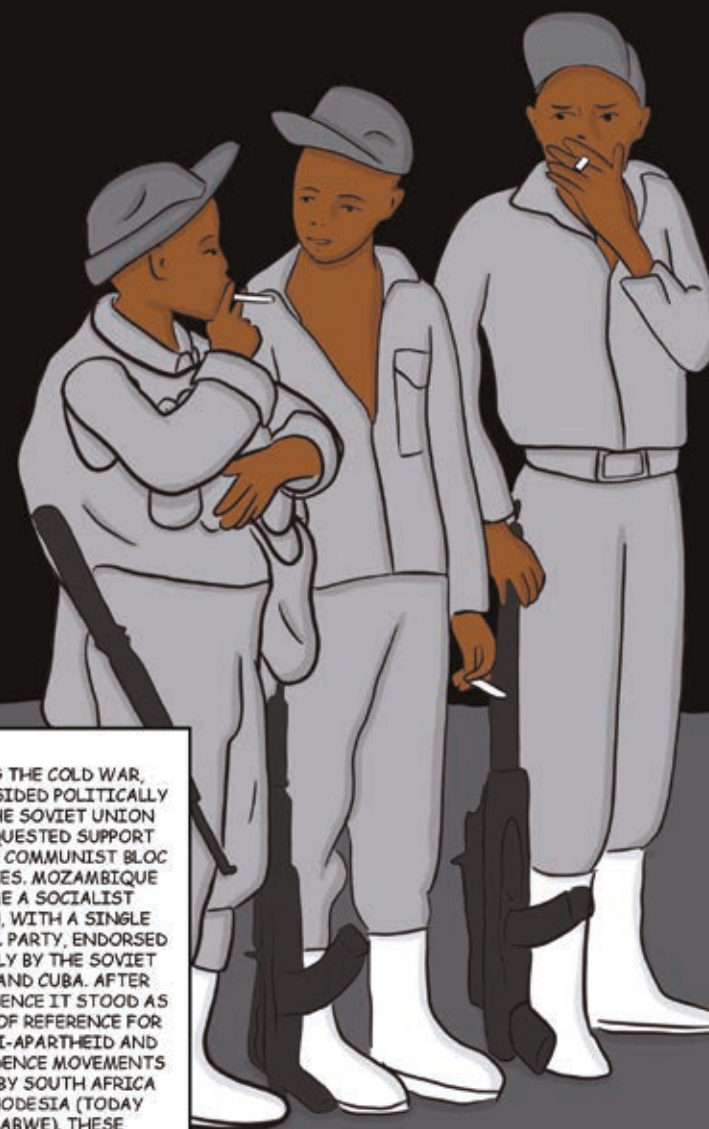


AFTER WORLD WAR II MOST OF THE POWERFUL EUROPEAN NATIONS EMBARKED ON A DECOLONISATION PROCESS, GRADUALLY RELEASING THE AFRICAN COLONIES FROM COLONIAL RULE. PORTUGAL - GOVERNED BY THE DICTATOR ANTÓNIO DE OLIVEIRA SALAZAR - CHOSE NOT TO FOLLOW SUIT. ADDITIONAL COLONIALISTS SET OFF FROM PORTUGAL FOR MOZAMBIQUE, AND EUROPEAN-ORIGIN RESIDENTS FURTHER INCREASED IN NUMBER.

NONETHELESS THE LOCAL POPULATION HAD ALREADY BEEN ROUSED BY INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENTS, MOST OF WHICH JOINED FORCES, IN 1962, IN THE ARMED 'MOZAMBIQUE LIBERATION FRONT' (FRELIMO). FROM 1964 ONWARDS, FRELIMO BEGAN FIGHTING A WAR FOR INDEPENDENCE. SHORTLY AFTER THE RETURN OF DEMOCRACY IN PORTUGAL, FRELIMO TOOK MOZAMBIQUE'S CAPITAL IN APRIL 1974, AFTER 10 YEARS OF FIGHTING. THE PORTUGUESE COLONIALISTS WERE EXPELLED OR FLED BY THEIR OWN MEANS. AND ON 25TH JUNE 1975, MOZAMBIQUE PROCLAIMED ITS INDEPENDENCE. SAMORA MACHEL, LEADER OF FRELIMO, BECAME THE FIRST PRESIDENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF MOZAMBIQUE, FOLLOWING THE COMMUNIST MODEL. HE REMAINED IN POWER UNTIL 1986.



DURING THE COLD WAR, FRELIMO SIDED POLITICALLY WITH THE SOVIET UNION AND REQUESTED SUPPORT FROM THE COMMUNIST BLOC COUNTRIES. MOZAMBIQUE BECAME A SOCIALIST NATION, WITH A SINGLE POLITICAL PARTY, ENDORSED PRIMARILY BY THE SOVIET UNION AND CUBA. AFTER INDEPENDENCE IT STOOD AS A POINT OF REFERENCE FOR THE ANTI-APARTHEID AND INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENTS IN NEARBY SOUTH AFRICA AND RHODESIA (TODAY ZIMBABWE). THESE COUNTRIES, WITH BACKING FROM THE USA, FINANCED THE FORMATION IN MOZAMBIQUE OF AN ANTI-COMMUNIST NATIONAL RESISTANCE ARMY, NAMED RENAMO.



DURING THE EARLY 1980S, RENAMO BEGAN A SERIES OF ATTACKS ON THE COUNTRY'S INSTITUTIONS, DRAGGING MOZAMBIQUE INTO A CIVIL WAR THAT, BETWEEN 1981 AND 1994, CAUSED ABOUT ONE MILLION DEATHS.



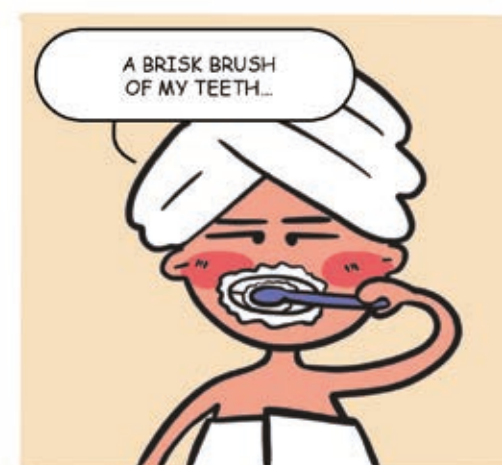
TODAY THE COUNTRY IS STILL LIVING IN AN EXTREMELY FRAGILE ECONOMIC SITUATION, WORSENERD BY THE FLIGHT OF CAPITAL ABROAD DURING THE COMMUNIST PERIOD AND BY THE DAMAGE FROM THE CIVIL WAR. FURTHER PROBLEMS WERE BROUGHT BY THE CYCLONE THAT RAVAGED THE COUNTRY IN 2000, LEAVING HUNDREDS OF VICTIMS IN ITS WAKE.

UNFORTUNATELY, ON TOP OF THIS ARE THE VARIOUS CONFLICTS OF AN ETHNIC-RELIGIOUS AND - ABOVE ALL - ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL NATURE, WHICH HAVE TAKEN SHAPE FOLLOWING THE DISCOVERY OF HUGE GAS RESERVES IN THE NORTH OF THE COUNTRY.



AN UNQUESTIONABLY COMPLEX PAST MADE UP
OF SLAVERY, CONFLICTS AND GENOCIDE,
WHICH HAS SCARRED A NATION WITH A POPULATION
THAT IS STILL TODAY FORCED TO ADDRESS
THIS TRAUMA.

THE PRESENT.

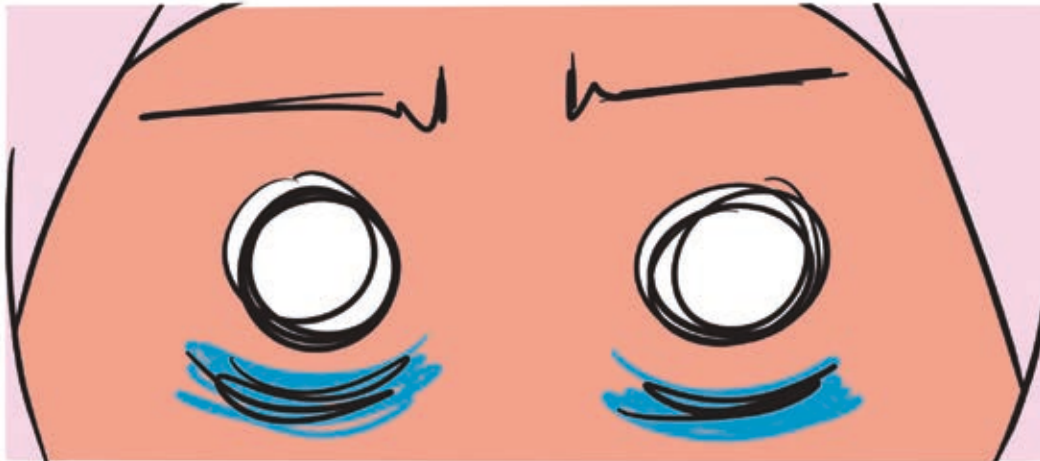


WHEN I REACH THE AIRPORT I'M BUZZING. UNDERSTANDABLE, AS I LAST WENT OUTSIDE THE EUROPEAN UNION TWO YEARS AGO. SINCE THE PANDEMIC, THE WHOLE PLANET HAS CHANGED, FOR BETTER AND FOR WORSE. AND I DON'T FEEL QUITE READY TO APPROACH A COUNTRY WHERE COVID-19 WAS NOT COPEd WITH WELL - PERHAPS SIMPLY BECAUSE THE VIRUS WAS THE LAST OF THE PROBLEMS FOR MOZAMBIQUE'S POPULATION...

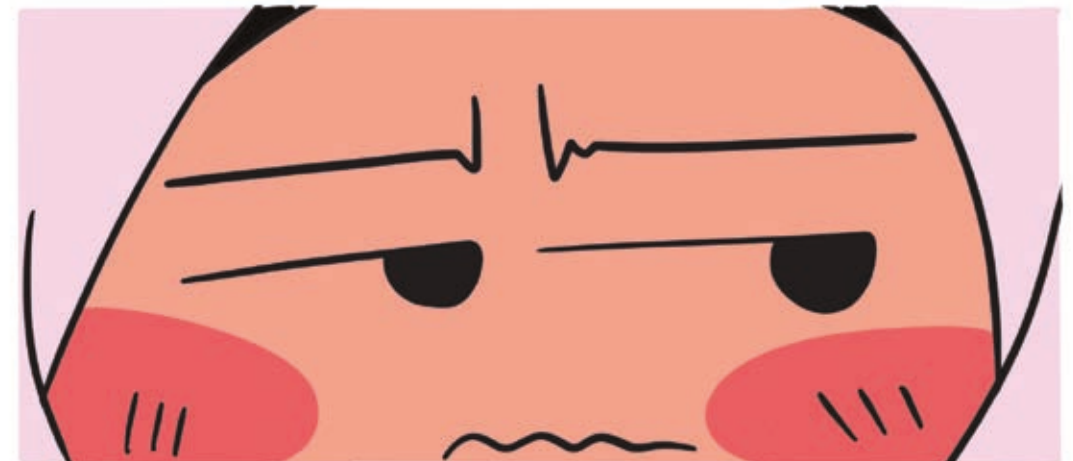
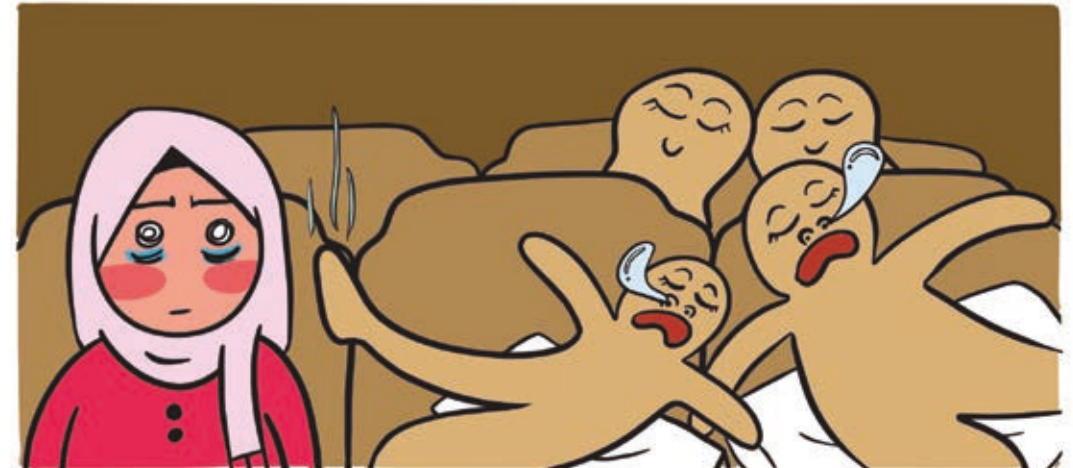


IN ANY CASE...
NOW WE'RE OFFFFFFF!

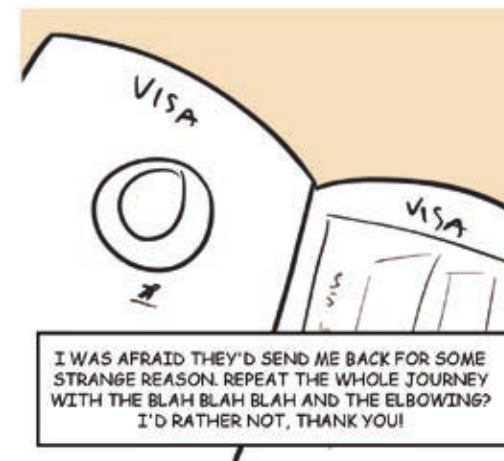
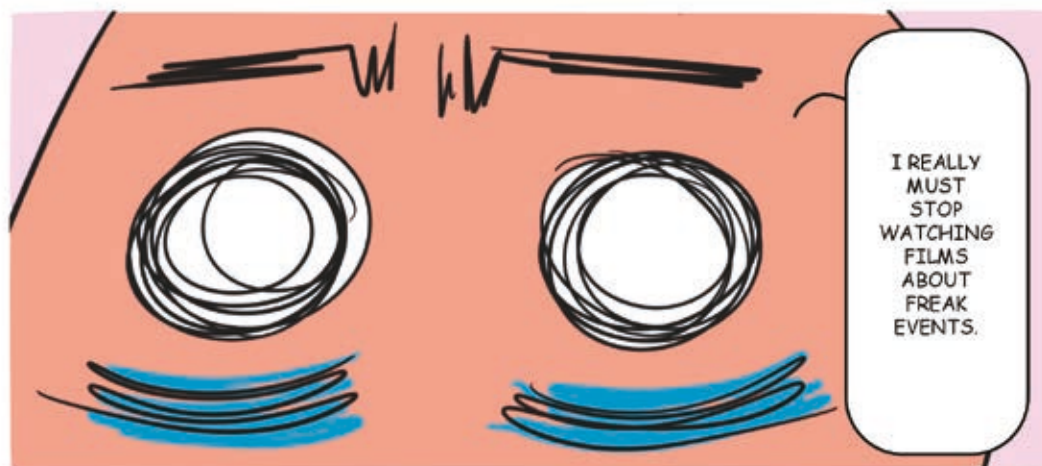
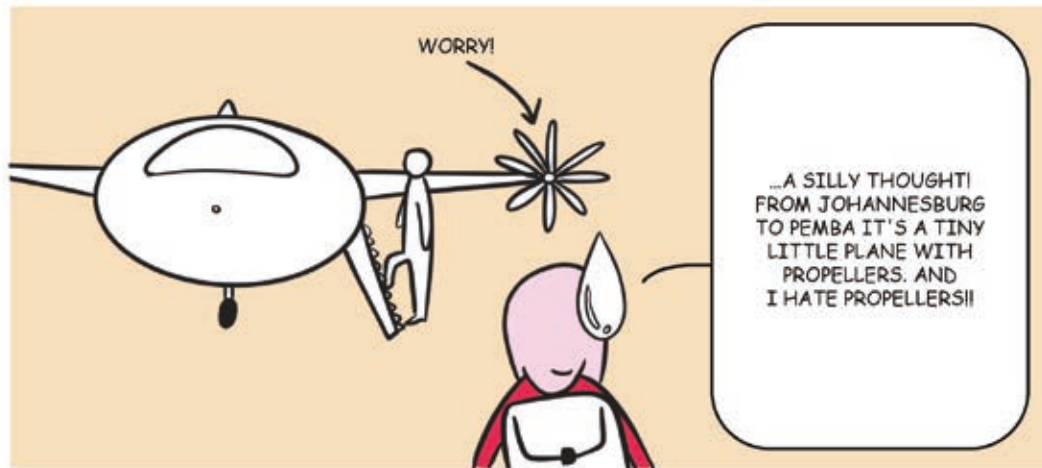


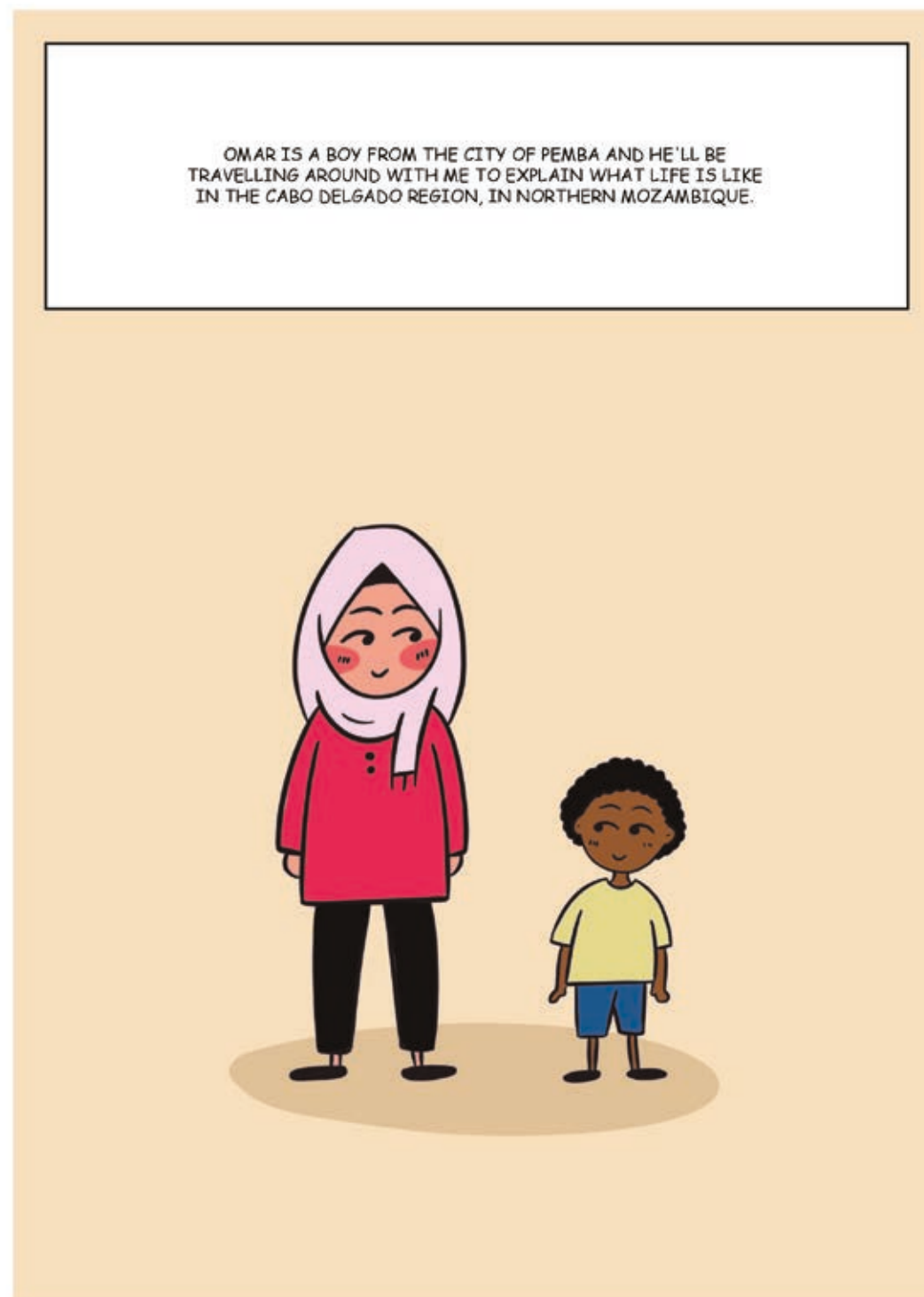
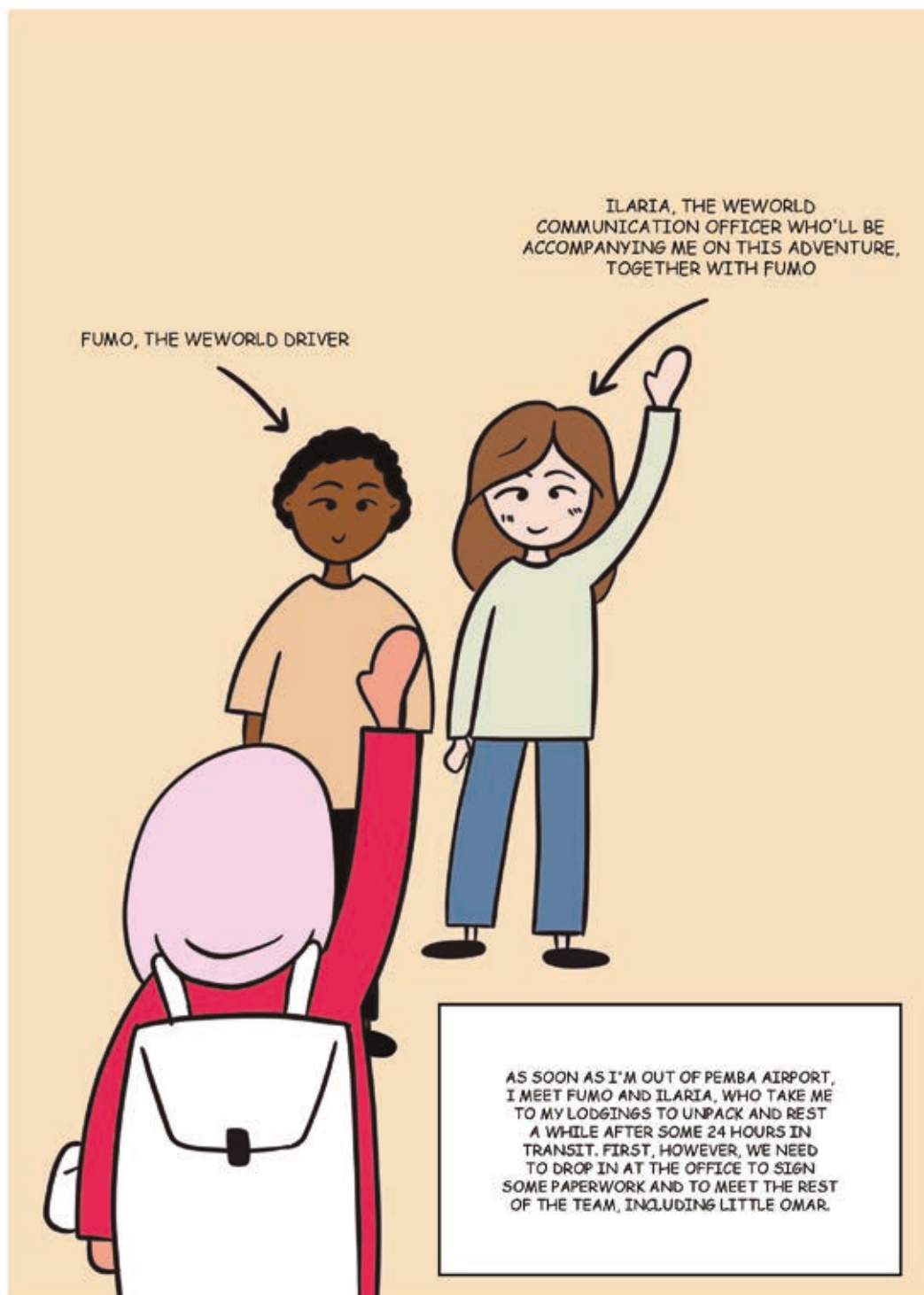


DURING THE FIRST LEG OF THE JOURNEY, FROM ROME TO DUBAI, I HAD HOPED TO READ A BOOK OR SNOOZE FOR A WHILE. INSTEAD, THE TWO LADIES SITTING NEXT TO ME HAVE BEEN CHATTING THE WHOLE TIME... BLAH BLAH BLAH... FOR FIVE HOURS IN A ROW, NON-STOP, WITHOUT EVER PAUSING FOR A BREATH!



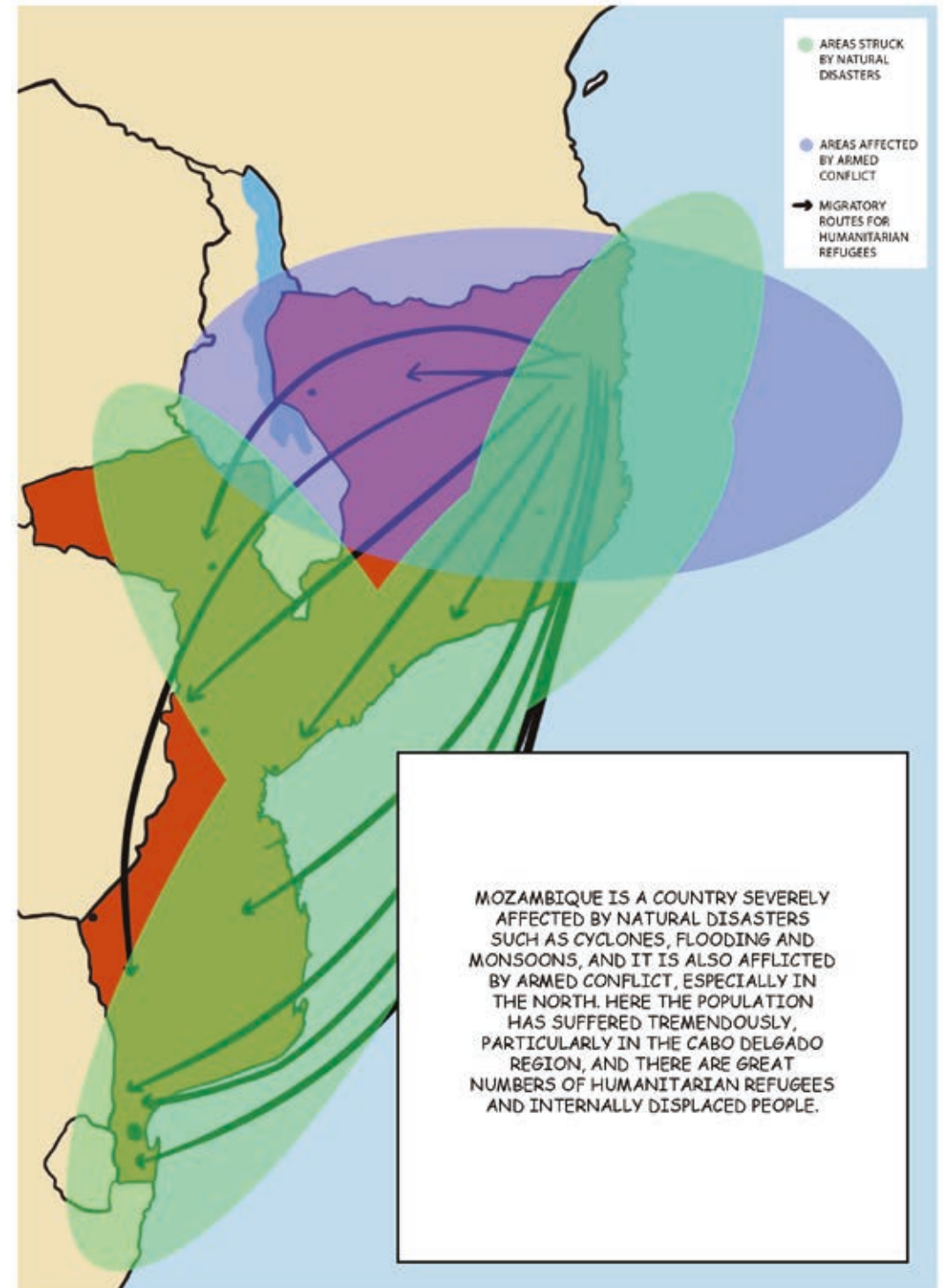
ONCE IN DUBAI, AFTER TRAIPSING AROUND THE ENTIRE AIRPORT WITH THE IDEA OF TAKING MY MIND OFF THE WAIT, I FINALLY GET ON MY SECOND PLANE, WHICH WILL TAKE ME AS FAR AS JOHANNESBURG. HERE TOO ALL HOPES OF DOZING A BIT SHOULD HAVE BEEN LEFT IN ROME... A VERY YOUNG FAMILY WITH AN ARMY OF CHILDREN ARE PLACED NEXT TO ME. AND THE KIDS OF COURSE SWARM ME IN CURIOSITY, WHILE THE PARENTS BLISSFULLY REST IN SEATS FURTHER BACK, ENJOYING A NAP. BETWEEN THE INADVERTENT KICKING AND ELBOWING, I JUST CAN'T GET OFF TO SLEEP. MAYBE I'LL HAVE BETTER LUCK ON MY LAST FLIGHT?





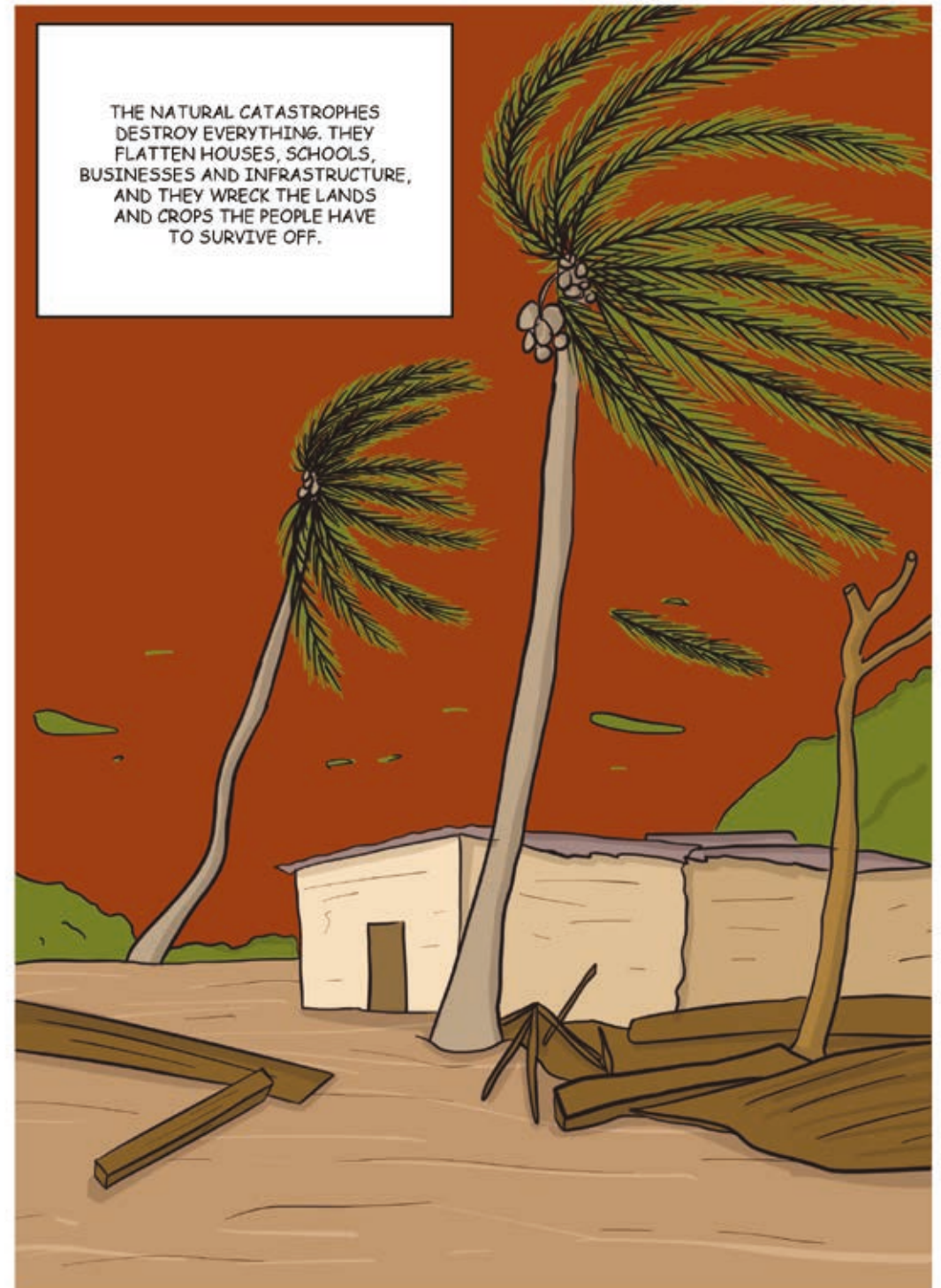


THE FAMILY.

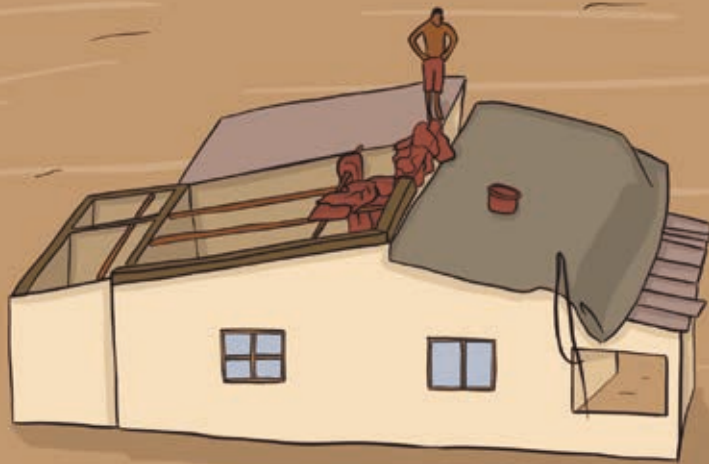


BUT WHAT EFFECT DO THESE NATURAL DISASTERS
AND CONFLICTS HAVE ON THE LIVES OF INDIVIDUALS,
FAMILIES AND SOCIETY IN GENERAL?

THE NATURAL CATASTROPHES
DESTROY EVERYTHING. THEY
FLATTEN HOUSES, SCHOOLS,
BUSINESSES AND INFRASTRUCTURE,
AND THEY WRECK THE LANDS
AND CROPS THE PEOPLE HAVE
TO SURVIVE OFF.



ALL TOO OFTEN THE BUILDINGS ERECTED IN THE TOWNS AND CITIES ARE NOT MADE OF MATERIALS THAT CAN WITHSTAND THE MOST AGGRESSIVE EPISODES, WHILE THE HOMES IN VILLAGES ARE BUILT OUT OF MUD AND STRAW ON SUGARCANE BASES... SO JUST ONE BOUT OF HEAVY RAIN IS ENOUGH TO BREAK THESE INTO PIECES. THEN, DURING THE RAINY SEASON, WATER LEVELS MAY ALSO RISE BY A FEW METRES...



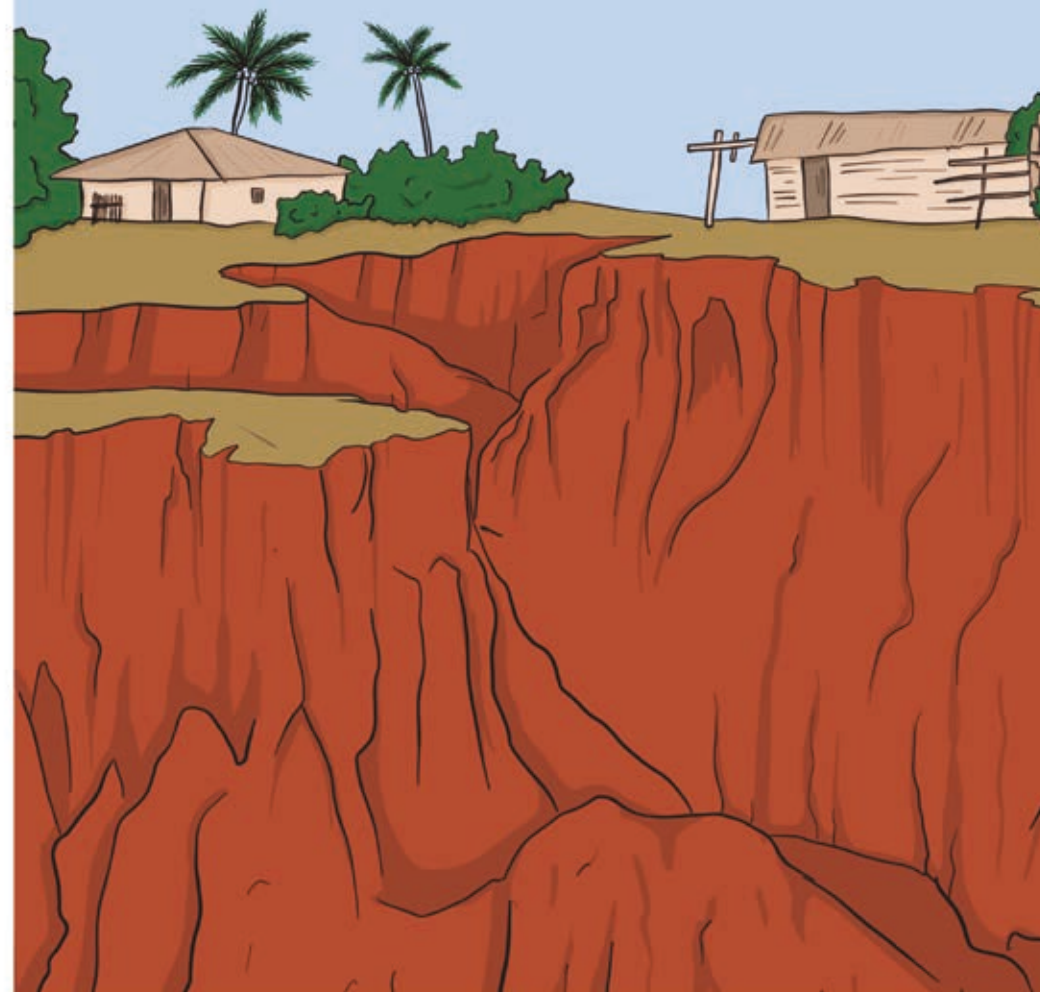
DROWNING IS RELATIVELY COMMON, AS ARE STAYING BURIED UNDER DEBRIS FOR DAYS OR GETTING SWEEPED AWAY BY STORM WINDS OR CYCLONES. THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE MIGHT DISAPPEAR FROM ONE DAY TO THE NEXT, OR BECOME PHYSICALLY DISABLED FOREVER.

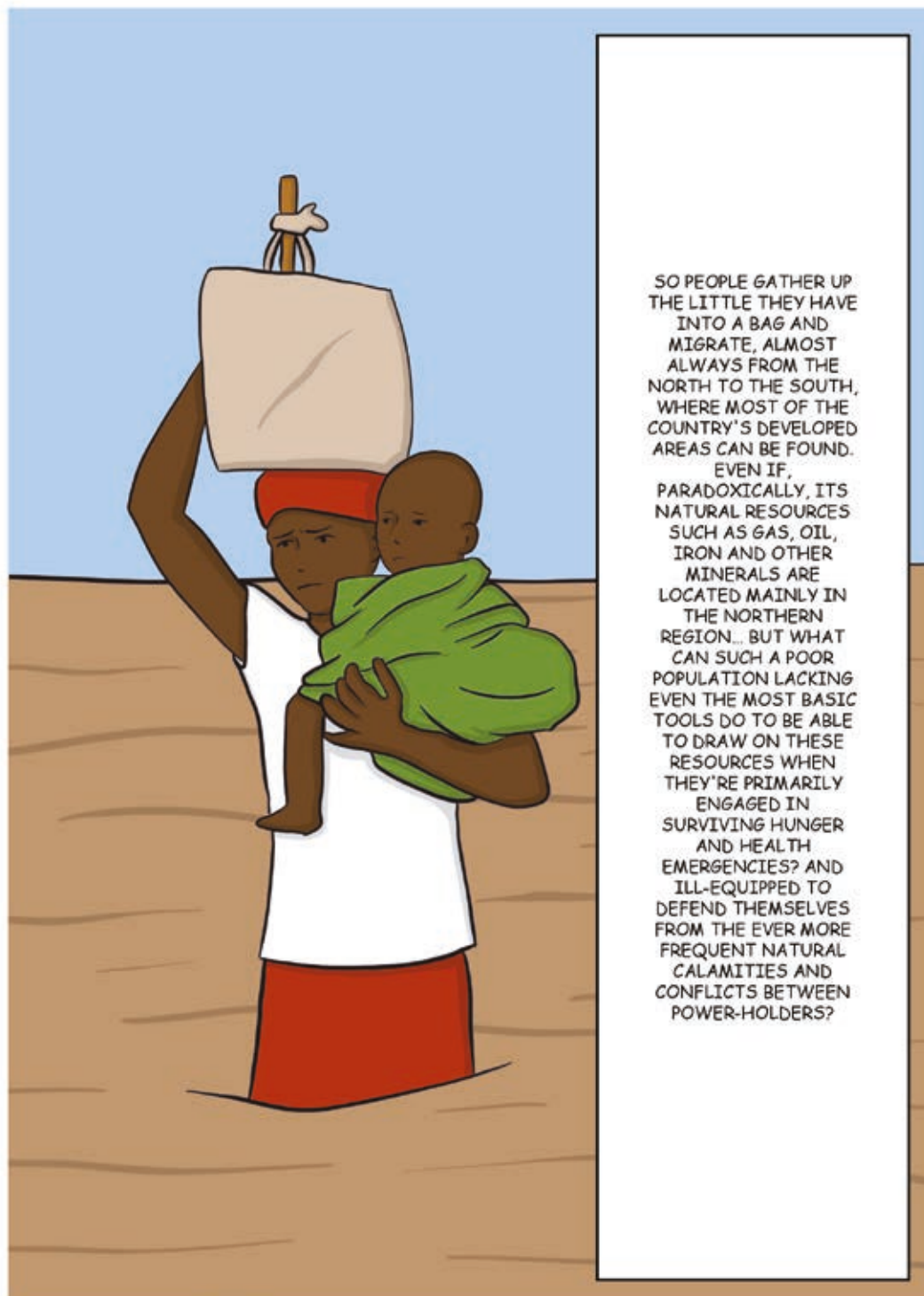


MANY PEOPLE ARE FORCED TO TAKE SHELTER UP IN TREES FOR DAYS ON END. WITHOUT FOOD OR WATER, AND WITHOUT SLEEPING. BECAUSE AS SOON AS YOU FALL ASLEEP, YOU DROP DOWN AND BECOME EASY PREY FOR WILD ANIMALS, SUCH AS CROCODILES. THAT'S WHY CHILDREN ARE TIED TO THE BRANCHES IN CAPULANAS.



EXTENSIVE AREAS THAT HAVE BEEN ANNIHILATED OR ARE AT HIGH LANDSLIDE RISK MEAN PEOPLE ARE UNABLE TO CROSS THEM TO REACH SAFETY ELSEWHERE.

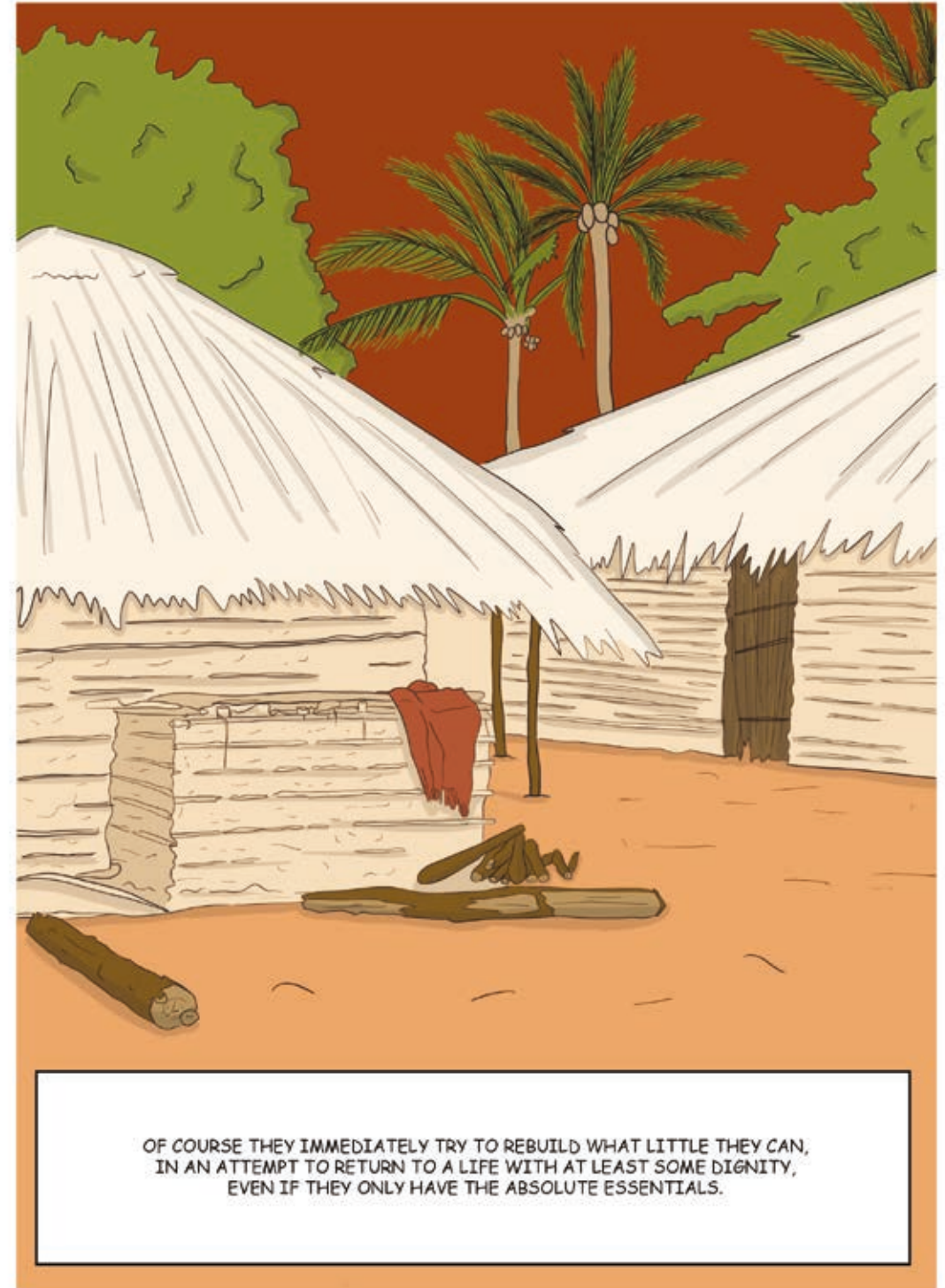
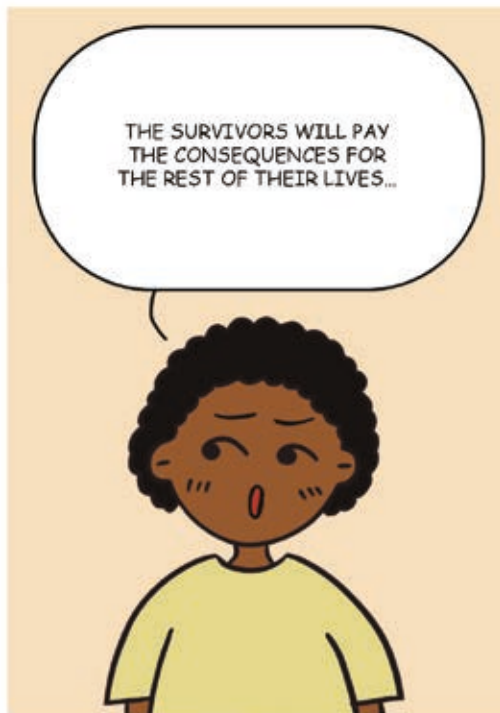


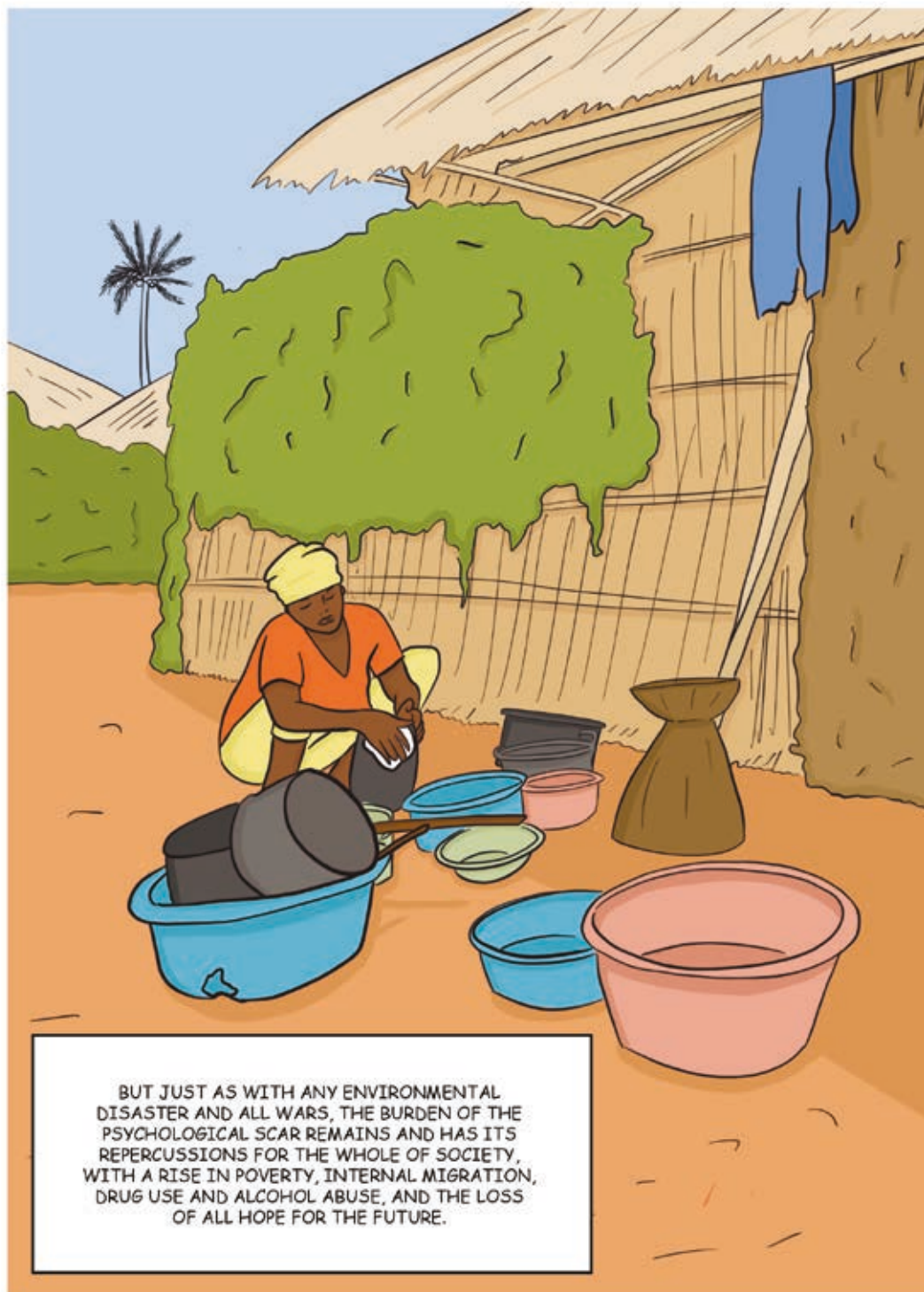


SO PEOPLE GATHER UP
THE LITTLE THEY HAVE
INTO A BAG AND
MIGRATE, ALMOST
ALWAYS FROM THE
NORTH TO THE SOUTH,
WHERE MOST OF THE
COUNTRY'S DEVELOPED
AREAS CAN BE FOUND.

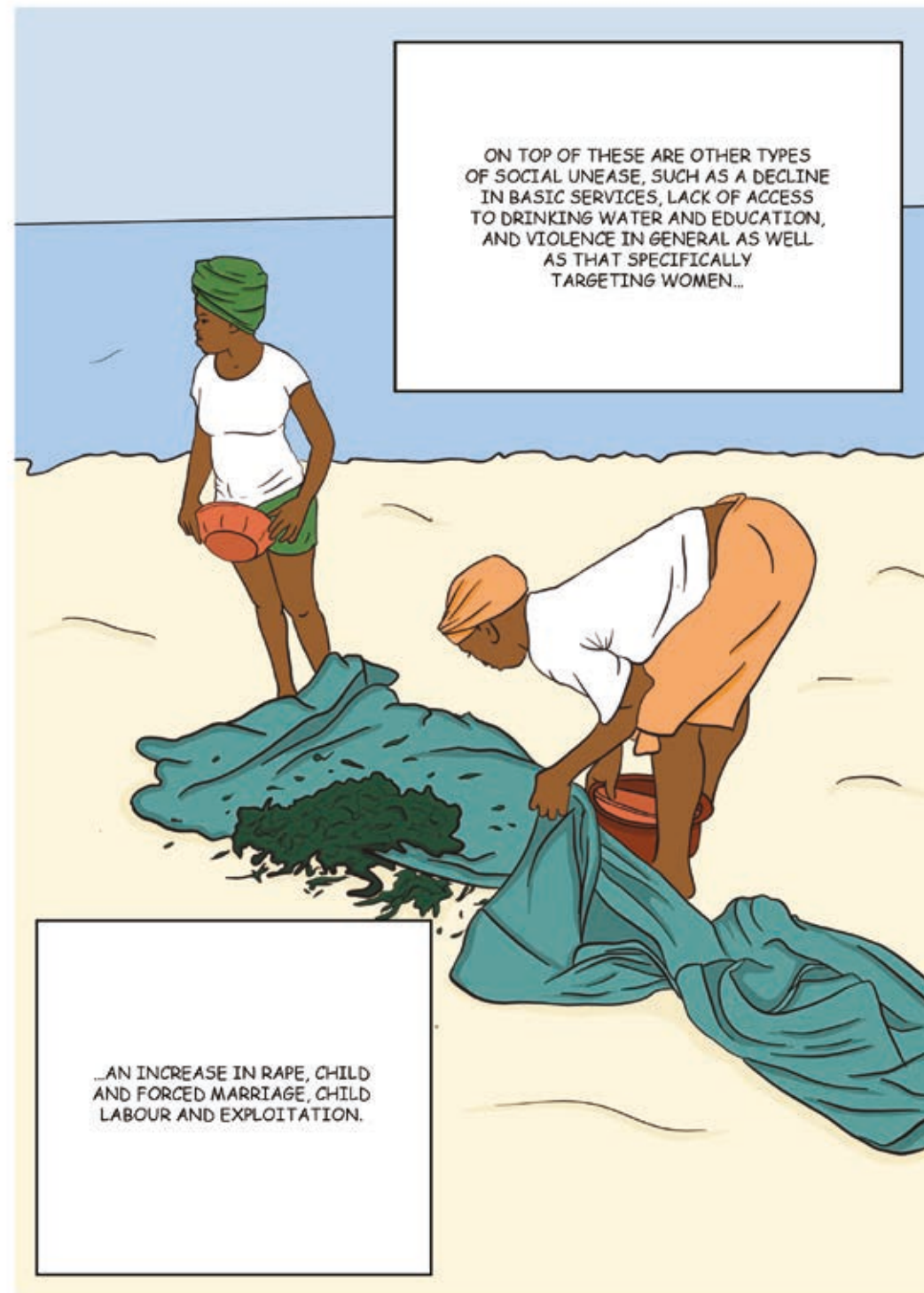
EVEN IF,
PARADOXICALLY, ITS
NATURAL RESOURCES
SUCH AS GAS, OIL,
IRON AND OTHER
MINERALS ARE
LOCATED MAINLY IN
THE NORTHERN
REGION... BUT WHAT
CAN SUCH A POOR
POPULATION LACKING
EVEN THE MOST BASIC
TOOLS DO TO BE ABLE
TO DRAW ON THESE
RESOURCES WHEN
THEY'RE PRIMARILY
ENGAGED IN
SURVIVING HUNGER
AND HEALTH
EMERGENCIES? AND
ILL-EQUIPPED TO
DEFEND THEMSELVES
FROM THE EVER MORE
FREQUENT NATURAL
CALAMITIES AND
CONFLICTS BETWEEN
POWER-HOLDERS?

YET THERE ARE OTHER EFFECTS THAT ARE PERHAPS
EVEN MORE DRAMATIC.





BUT JUST AS WITH ANY ENVIRONMENTAL DISASTER AND ALL WARS, THE BURDEN OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL SCAR REMAINS AND HAS ITS REPERCUSSIONS FOR THE WHOLE OF SOCIETY, WITH A RISE IN POVERTY, INTERNAL MIGRATION, DRUG USE AND ALCOHOL ABUSE, AND THE LOSS OF ALL HOPE FOR THE FUTURE.



ON TOP OF THESE ARE OTHER TYPES OF SOCIAL UNEASE, SUCH AS A DECLINE IN BASIC SERVICES, LACK OF ACCESS TO DRINKING WATER AND EDUCATION, AND VIOLENCE IN GENERAL AS WELL AS THAT SPECIFICALLY TARGETING WOMEN...

...AN INCREASE IN RAPE, CHILD AND FORCED MARRIAGE, CHILD LABOUR AND EXPLOITATION.

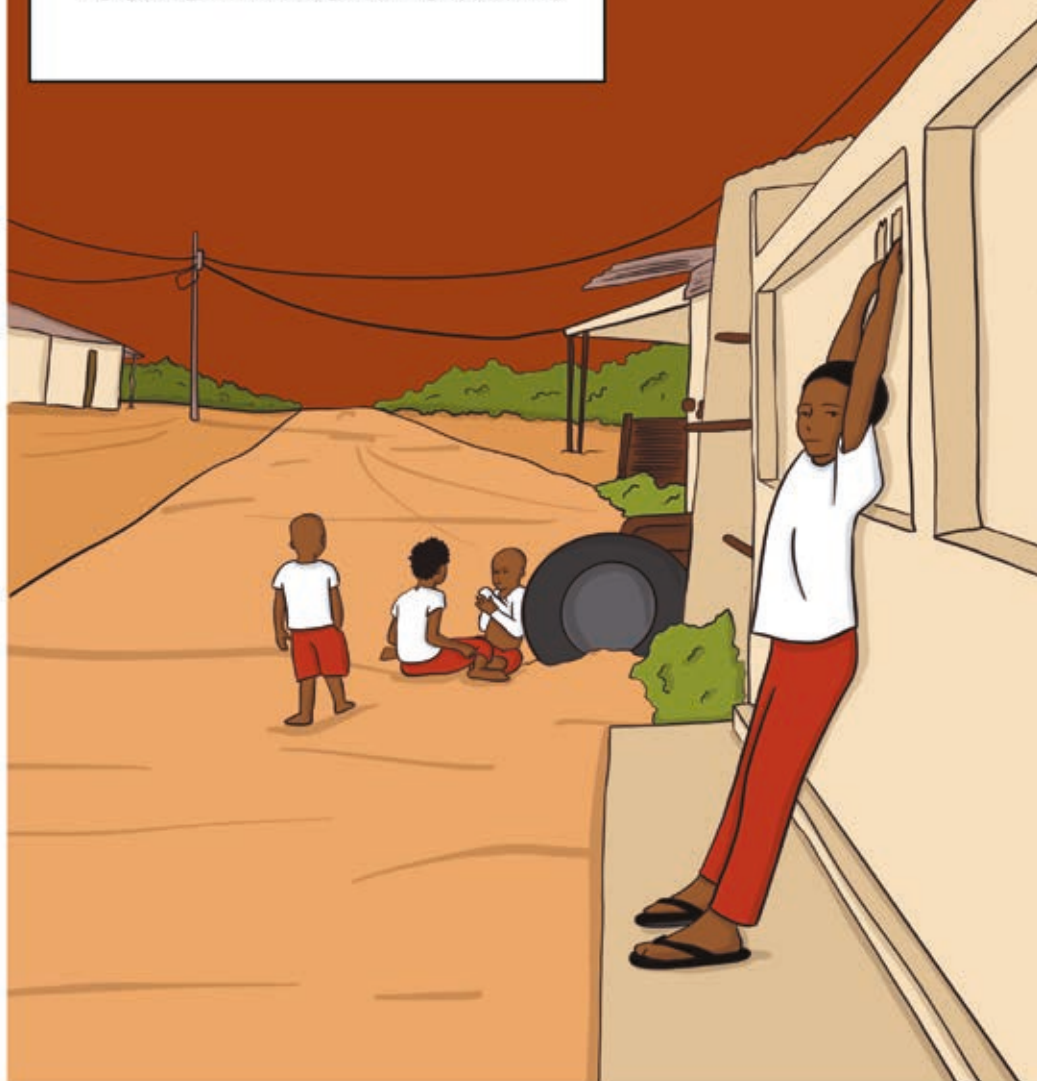
HERE MANY PEOPLE LIVE PRIMARILY OFF FISHING AND FARMING, BUT MOST OF THE TIME THIS BARELY MEANS SURVIVAL. IN FACT, ONLY A VERY FEW MANAGE TO SELL THE PRODUCE EXCEEDING THEIR OWN NEEDS AT THEIR LOCAL MARKETS. INSTEAD ALMOST ALL - MEN, WOMEN AND OFTEN CHILDREN TOO - ARE FORCED TO DO EVEN MORE TO SURVIVE: SOMETIMES THEY GO FAR OUT INTO THE INDIAN OCEAN FOR DAYS ON END, HUNTING FOR FISH, WHILE OTHER TIMES THEY TRY NEARER THE SHORE, WITH RUDIMENTARY NETS. THOSE WORKING THE LAND MIGHT SUCCEED IN HARVESTING A FEW VEGETABLES, SOME SWEETCORN AND A BIT OF TAPIOCA, BUT THE EXCESSIVE HEAT AND THE HEAVY RAINS OF RECENT YEARS ARE EVER MORE FREQUENTLY RUINING EVEN THE SMALLEST CROPS.



DRINKING WATER IS PRACTICALLY A LUXURY COMMODITY. ON AVERAGE IT TAKES AT LEAST TWO HOURS TO REACH THE NEAREST WELL TO FETCH WATER FOR DRINKING AND COOKING. INSTEAD, FOR PERSONAL HYGIENE NEEDS AND WASHING CLOTHES, WATER IS ALMOST ALWAYS USED AT THE NEAREST RIVER OR PEOPLE HEAD STRAIGHT FOR THE COAST. EVEN REACHING THE NEAREST MARKET TAKES A LONG TIME. TRAVELLING IS DONE ON FOOT, AND ANY RETURN JOURNEY IS OFTEN DIRECTLY BENEATH THE BAKING SUN, BURDENED DOWN WITH ALL THE WEIGHT OF THE LOAD.



MOST BOYS AND GIRLS CANNOT ENJOY A CHILDHOOD LIKE OTHER PEOPLE: MANY ARE INVOLVED IN CHILD LABOUR. THEY WORK ALONGSIDE THEIR PARENTS IN FISHING OR FARMING, OR AS STREET HAWKERS SELLING SMALL AMOUNTS OF PEPPER, GARLIC OR OTHER SPICES. THE UNLUCKIEST ONES SPEND WHOLE DAYS PICKING UP ITEMS WASHED UP ON BEACHES OR DISCARDED ON ROADSIDES OR RUBBISH DUMPS, IN THE HOPE OF RESELLING THESE OBJECTS OR BARTERING THEM FOR FOOD.



MANY OF THESE CHILDREN ARE ALREADY PARENTS BECAUSE OF EARLY MARRIAGE. FAMILIES GENERALLY HAVE MANY KIDS. AND OFTEN, DUE TO A SIMPLE LACK OF RESOURCES, THESE YOUNGSTERS ARE ENTRUSTED TO RELATIVES ABLE TO BRING THEM UP IN PLACE OF THEIR OWN FAMILIES. THIS WAY MANY BECOME ADULTS VERY QUICKLY - AND NOT OUT OF CHOICE BUT NECESSITY.



BESIDES HAVING TO WORK, A LOT OF GIRLS ALSO HAVE TO LOOK AFTER THEIR YOUNGER BROTHERS AND SISTERS. AND ALL TOO OFTEN THEY THEMSELVES BECOME MOTHERS AT A VERY EARLY AGE DUE TO FORCED OR CHILD MARRIAGE OR THROUGH RAPE. THIS IS ALSO A FACTOR IN THE INCREASED SPREAD OF AIDS AND OTHER SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES, WHICH IS EXACERBATED BY A POORLY DEVELOPED HEALTHCARE SYSTEM UNABLE TO PROTECT THE MOST VULNERABLE AND ONE THAT IS TOTALLY ABSENT IN RURAL AREAS AND THE REMOTEST INLAND VILLAGES.



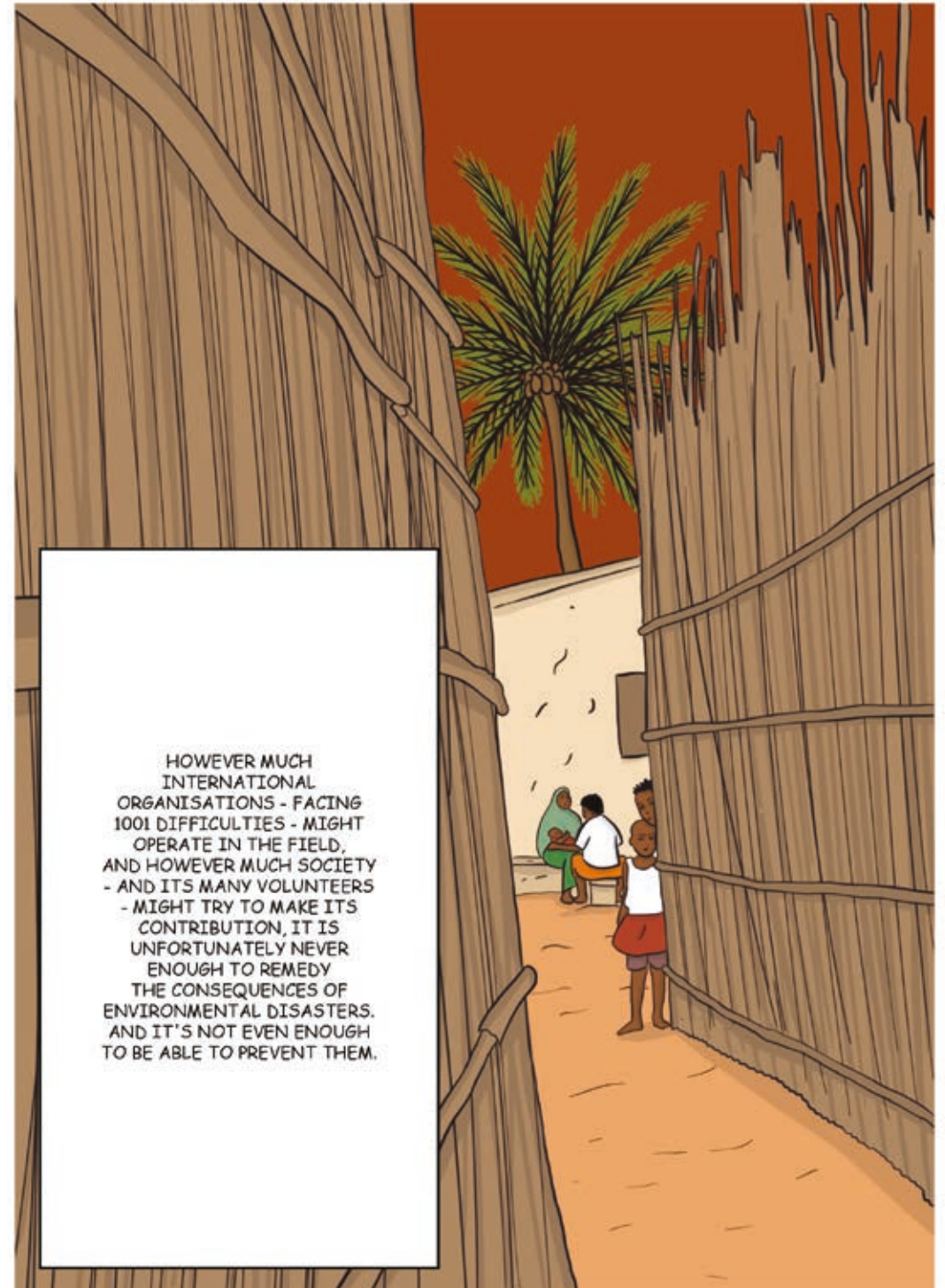
IN ADDITION, THE PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE PROVIDES NO CARE FOR WOMEN. THE PRIVATE SECTOR IS PATCHILY AVAILABLE AND IS TOO EXPENSIVE FOR THE POOREST PEOPLE, IN A COUNTRY WITH A TINY, EXTREMELY WEALTHY MINORITY AND A HUGE, IMPOVERISHED MAJORITY, AND AN ALMOST INEXISTENT MIDDLE CLASS. IN PRACTICE, HEALTH CARE IS A PRIVILEGE RESERVED EXCLUSIVELY TO THE ELITE. AND A MINIMAL SAFEGUARDING OF WOMEN'S, CHILDREN'S, PREGNANT WOMEN'S AND SINGLE MOTHERS' RIGHTS - JUST LIKE PHYSICAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL AND FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO PEOPLE IN DIFFICULTY - IS ACTUALLY AN INACCESSIBLE LUXURY FOR MOST. EACH INDIVIDUAL CAN ONLY ATTEMPT TO SAVE THEMSELVES.



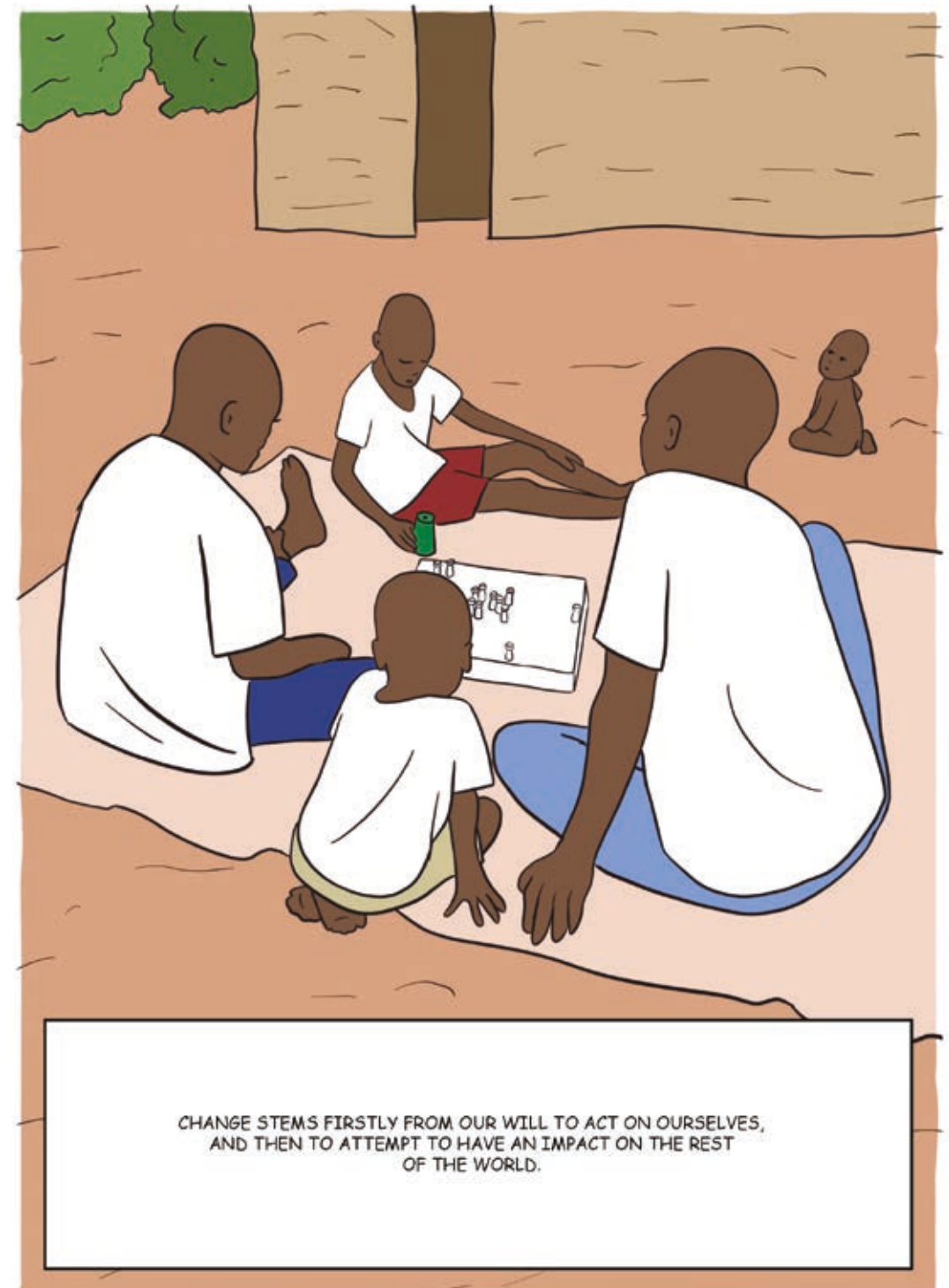
ALL WOMEN, REGARDLESS OF AGE, GET UP IN THE EARLY MORNING, WHEN A GRUELLING DAY BEGINS FOR THEM: CLEANING, COOKING AND LOOKING AFTER THE FAMILY, PLUS WORKING IN THE FIELDS, IN FISHING, AT THE MARKET OR IN OTHER PEOPLE'S HOUSES AS CLEANERS... COVERING KILOMETRES OF ROAD ON FOOT WEIGHED DOWN BY LOADS PLACED ON THEIR HEADS OR SECURED ON THEIR BACKS. A DAILY BATTLE IN A DESPERATE ATTEMPT TO BUILD A SLIGHTLY BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR THEIR SONS AND DAUGHTERS. SO THAT ONE DAY THESE CHILDREN MIGHT BE ABLE TO ATTEND SCHOOL AND ACCESS INFORMATION, BECOMING THE FRONTLINE ENGINES DRIVING THE LONG-AWAITED CHANGE.



HOWEVER MUCH INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS - FACING 1001 DIFFICULTIES - MIGHT OPERATE IN THE FIELD, AND HOWEVER MUCH SOCIETY - AND ITS MANY VOLUNTEERS - MIGHT TRY TO MAKE ITS CONTRIBUTION, IT IS UNFORTUNATELY NEVER ENOUGH TO REMEDY THE CONSEQUENCES OF ENVIRONMENTAL DISASTERS. AND IT'S NOT EVEN ENOUGH TO BE ABLE TO PREVENT THEM.



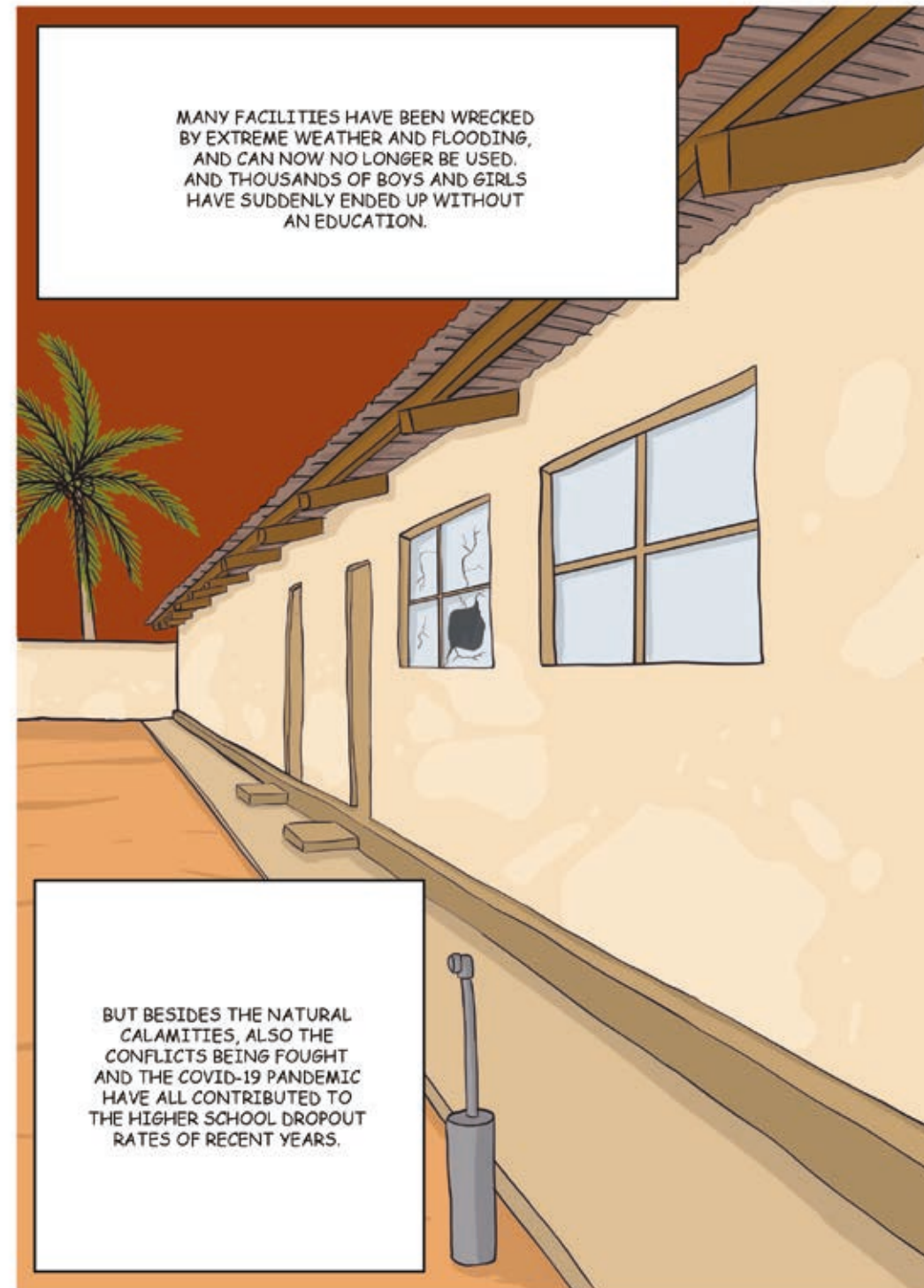
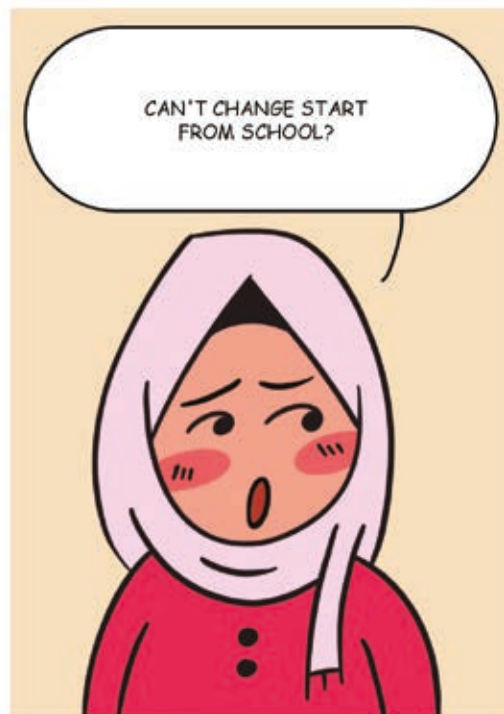
DURING PERIODS OF ENVIRONMENTAL CATASTROPHES
AND BLOODY ARMED CONFLICTS, SOCIETY TENDS
TO WITHDRAW INTO UNPARALLELED DIVISIONS,
WHERE THE RICH HOLD POWER AND THE STRONGEST
EXPLOIT THE WEAKEST.



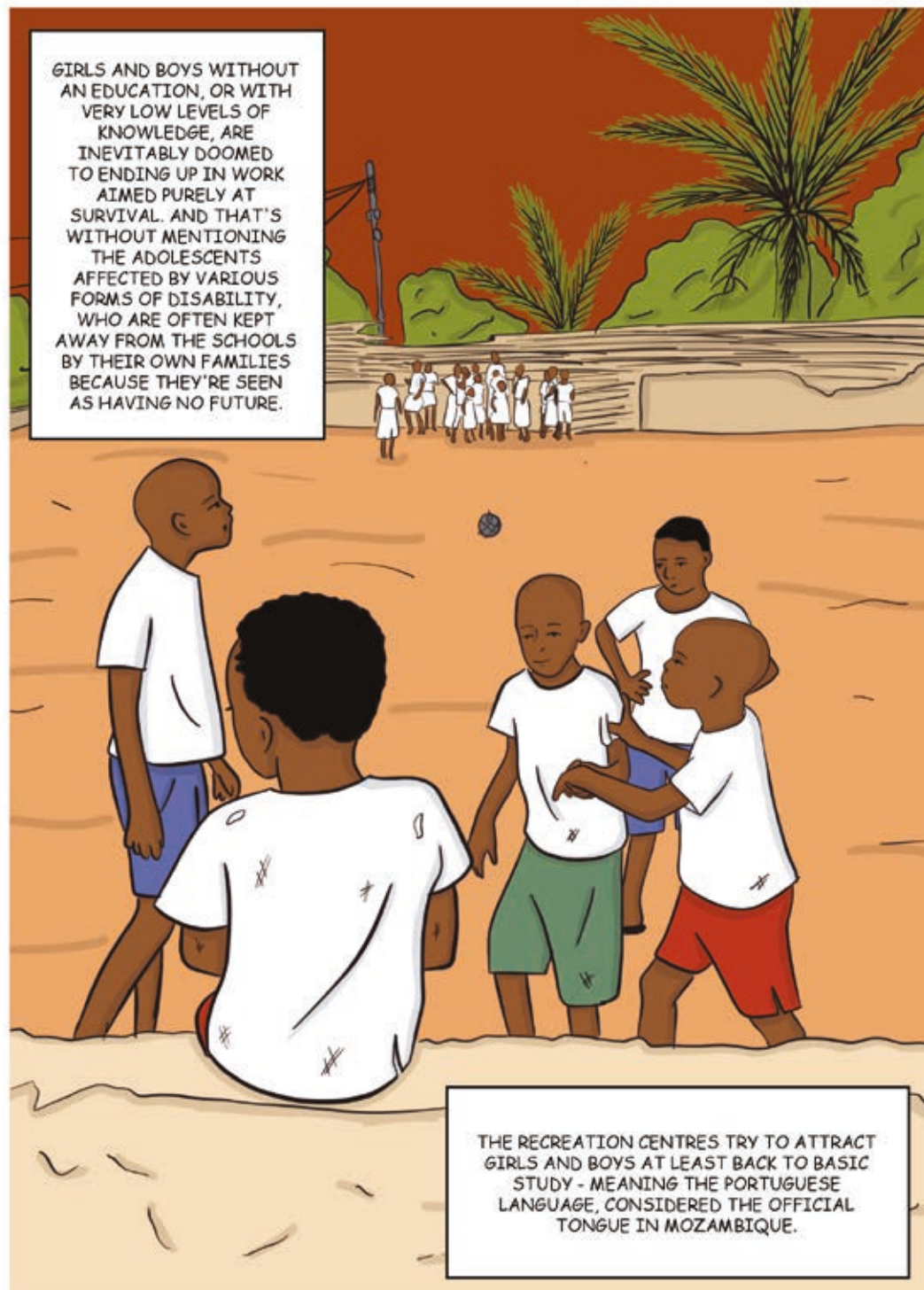
CHANGE STEMS FIRSTLY FROM OUR WILL TO ACT ON OURSELVES,
AND THEN TO ATTEMPT TO HAVE AN IMPACT ON THE REST
OF THE WORLD.

NOT LOSING HOPE IN THE FUTURE
OR OURSELVES - THIS IS OFTEN
THE VITAL FIRST STEP.

SCHOOL.

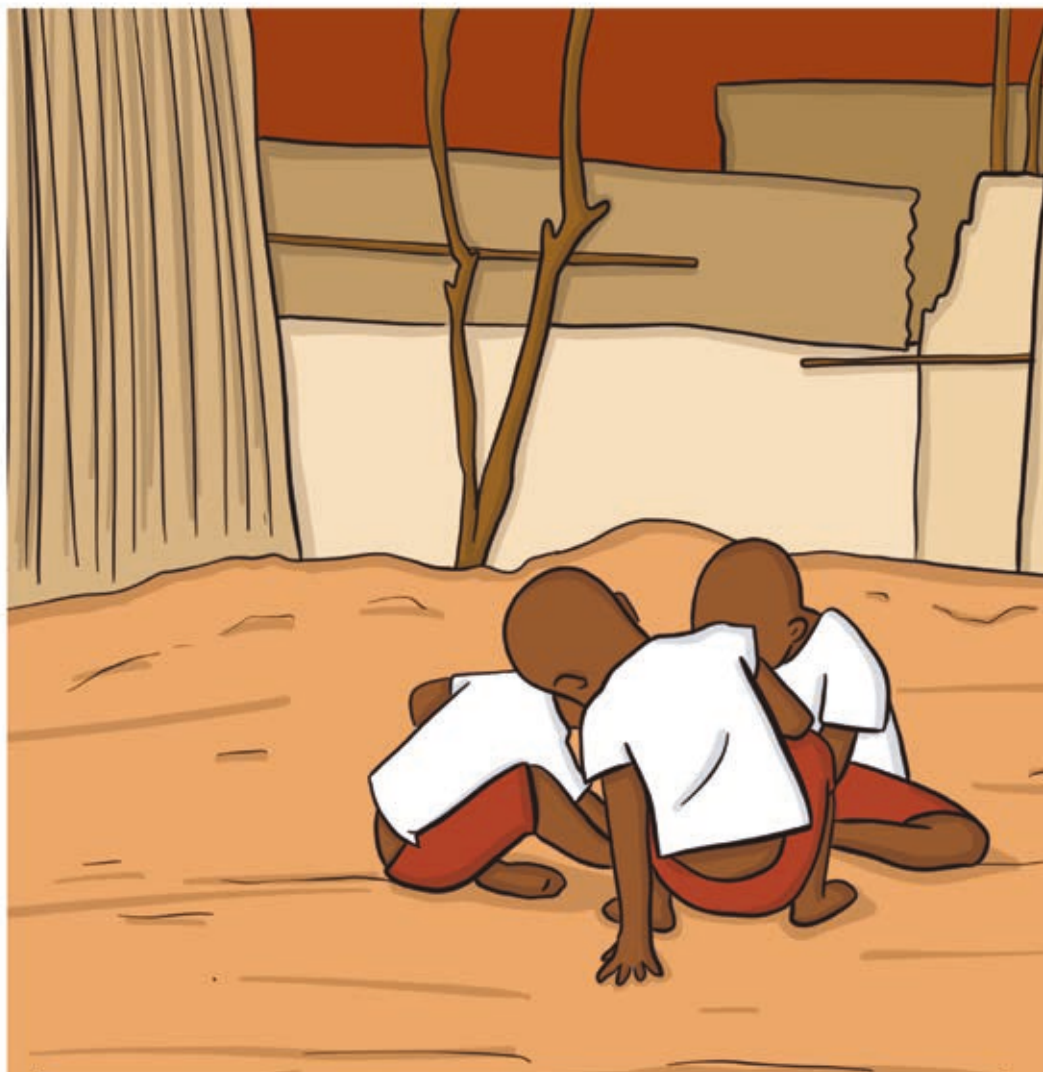


GIRLS AND BOYS WITHOUT AN EDUCATION, OR WITH VERY LOW LEVELS OF KNOWLEDGE, ARE INEVITABLY DOOMED TO ENDING UP IN WORK AIMED PURELY AT SURVIVAL. AND THAT'S WITHOUT MENTIONING THE ADOLESCENTS AFFECTED BY VARIOUS FORMS OF DISABILITY, WHO ARE OFTEN KEPT AWAY FROM THE SCHOOLS BY THEIR OWN FAMILIES BECAUSE THEY'RE SEEN AS HAVING NO FUTURE.



THE RECREATION CENTRES TRY TO ATTRACT GIRLS AND BOYS AT LEAST BACK TO BASIC STUDY - MEANING THE PORTUGUESE LANGUAGE, CONSIDERED THE OFFICIAL TONGUE IN MOZAMBIQUE.

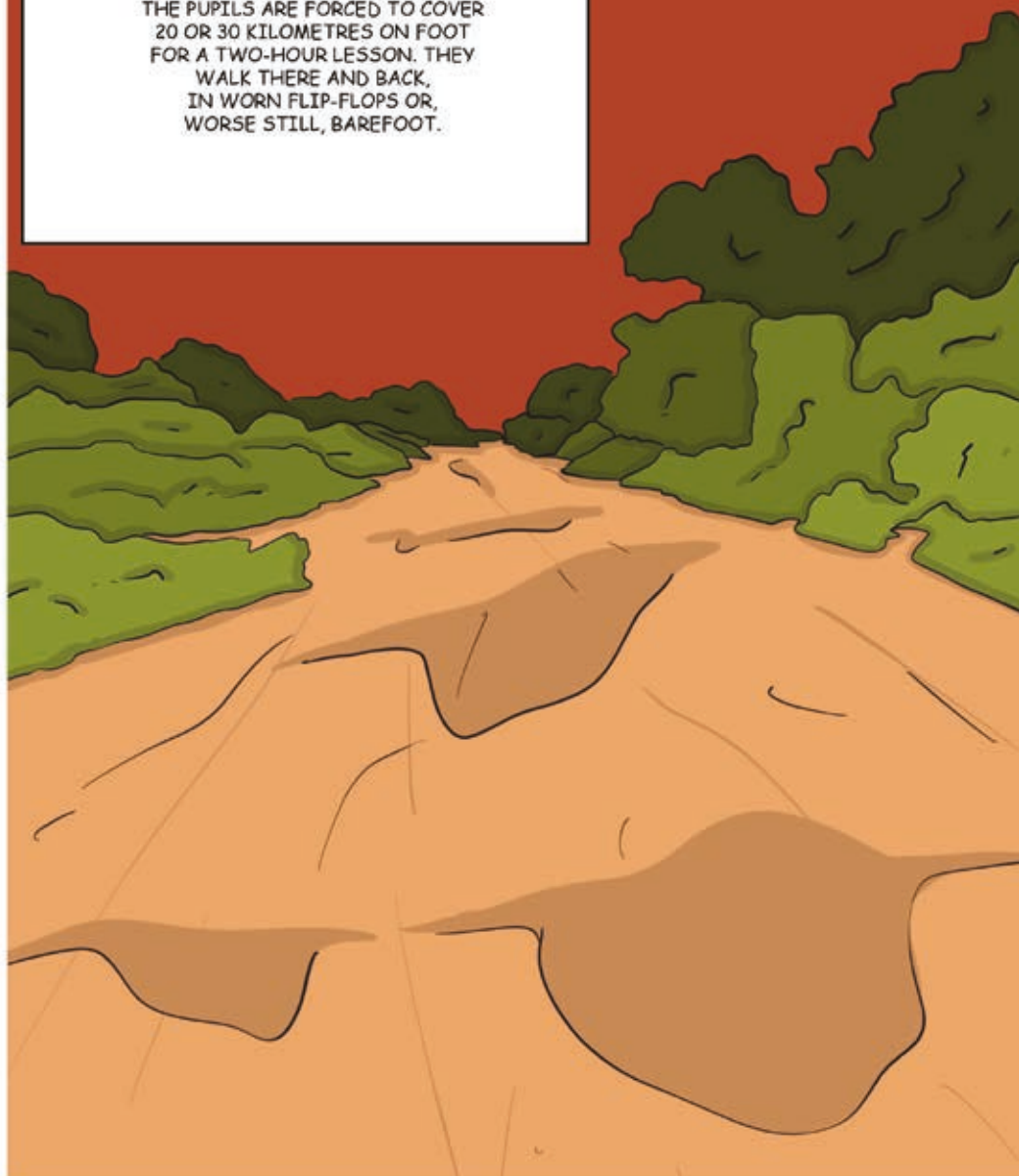
BECAUSE THE RIGHT TO STUDY SHOULD BE EVERY PERSON'S RIGHT.



WITHOUT EVEN A BASIC EDUCATION OR SOME VOCATIONAL TRAINING, WHAT CAN WE HOPE TO DO AS ADULTS? LITTLE OR NOTHING, CONDEMNED TO BEING STUCK IN THE SAME PLACE FOR THE REST OF OUR LIVES, SHUT INSIDE AN OXYGENLESS BUBBLE, IN A VICIOUS CIRCLE NAMED POVERTY. ECONOMIC POVERTY, CULTURAL POVERTY AND POVERTY IN ALL ITS POSSIBLE FORMS AND IMPLICATIONS.

AND IT'S EASY TO LOSE HOPE
WHEN EVERYTHING AROUND YOU
IS NEGATIVE AND EVERYTHING
IS LITERALLY FALLING TO PIECES...

THE SCHOOL FACILITIES THAT ARE STILL FIT FOR USE - EVEN PARTIALLY - ARE VERY FEW IN NUMBER. THEY ARE ALMOST ALWAYS EXTREMELY FAR AWAY, TO THE EXTENT THAT THE PUPILS ARE FORCED TO COVER 20 OR 30 KILOMETRES ON FOOT FOR A TWO-HOUR LESSON. THEY WALK THERE AND BACK, IN WORN FLIP-FLOPS OR, WORSE STILL, BAREFOOT.



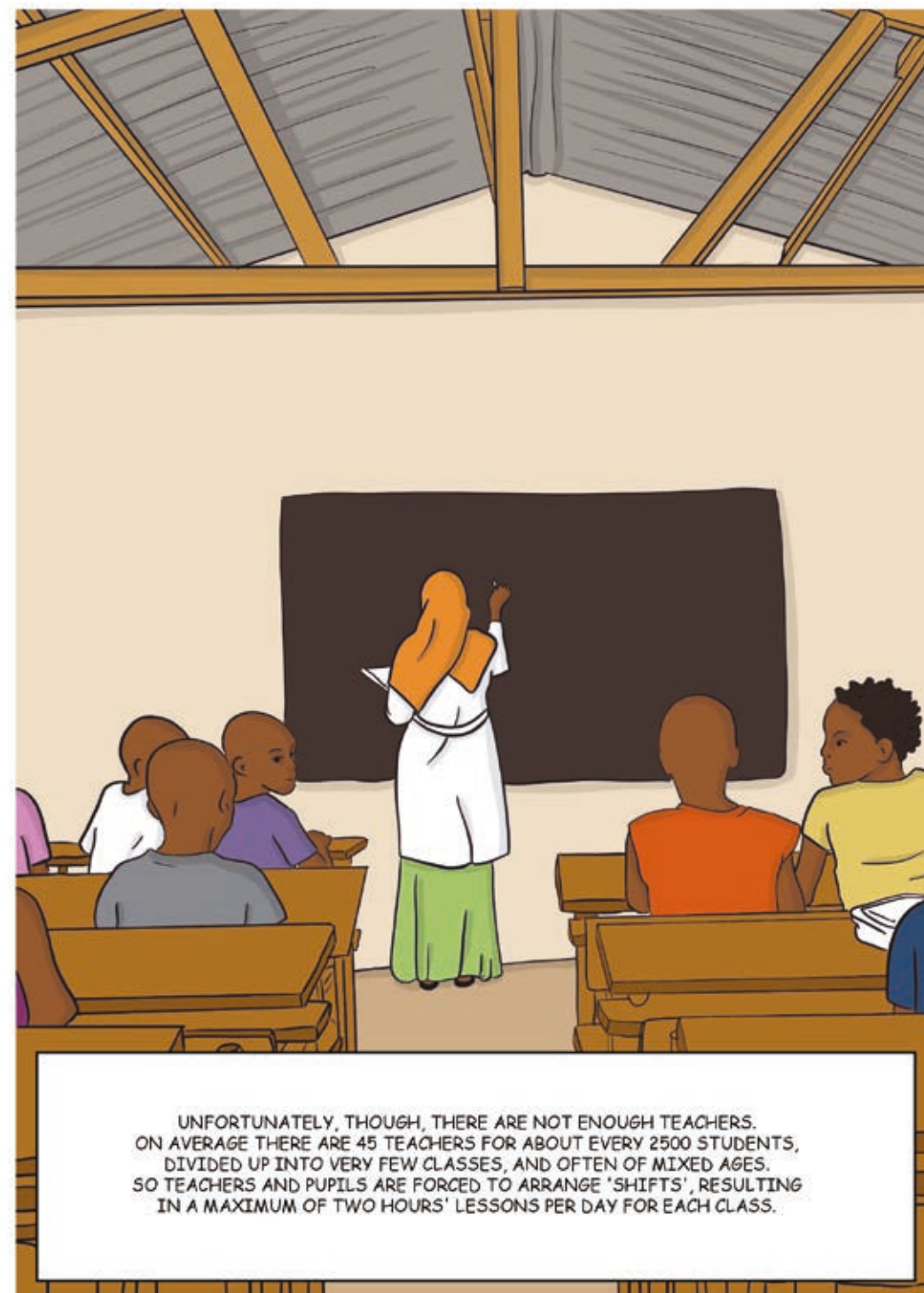
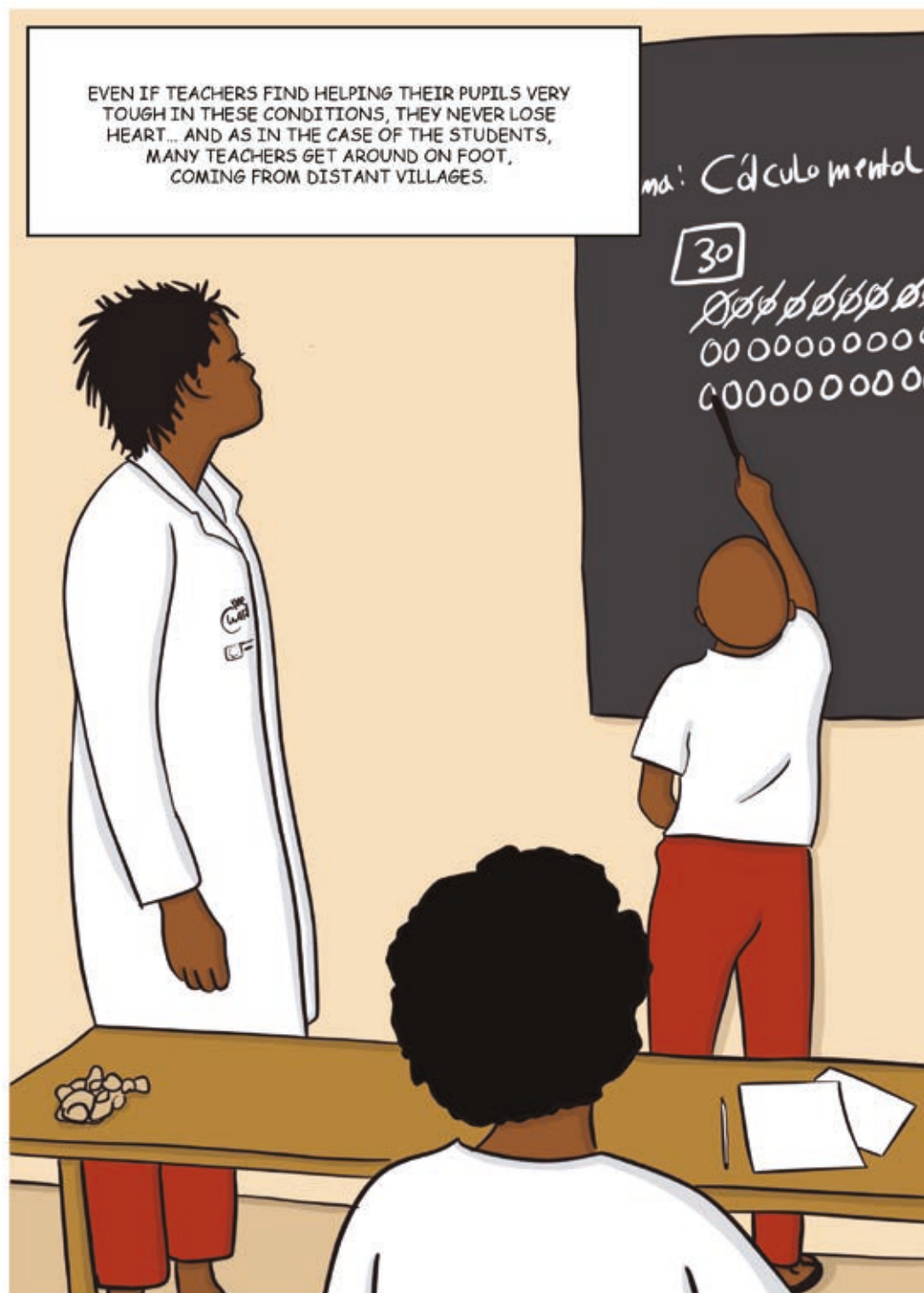
SUPPORTING AND NOURISHING HOPE BECOMES A MORAL DUTY.



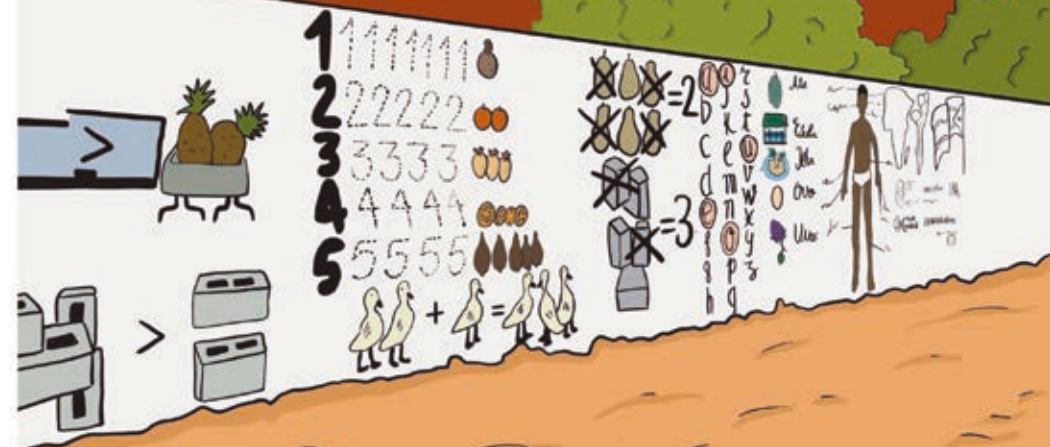
CONTRIBUTIONS FROM INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS SUCH AS WEWORLD, ALONG WITH EUROPEAN UNION FUNDING, HAVE MADE IT POSSIBLE TO SET UP MAKESHIFT CLASSROOMS AT SOME DAMAGED SCHOOLS, USING MATERIALS FOUND LOCALLY, ENABLING AS MANY PUPILS AS CAN BE ACCOMMODATED TO RETURN TO STUDYING. THIS OFTEN INVOLVES AN OLD BLACKBOARD HUNG ON A TREE TRUNK OR LITTLE MORE, WITH A VOLUNTEER GIVING THEIR TIME TO STUDENTS, IN A PLACE SHADED FROM THE SUN AND WITH NATURAL VENTILATION TO ALLEVIATE THE TROPICAL HEAT AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE. BUT PURPOSE-BUILT SCHOOLS DON'T ACTUALLY EXIST. AND THIS IS ONE OF THE REASONS - AS BANAL AS IT MIGHT SEEM - DISCOURAGING GIRLS AND BOYS FROM ATTENDING SCHOOL REGULARLY.

MANY BOYS AND GIRLS CAN NEITHER READ NOR WRITE. THEY DON'T SPEAK PORTUGUESE AND THEY BARELY KNOW THE LOCAL LANGUAGES ORALLY HANDED DOWN THROUGH THE GENERATIONS. IN TODAY'S CONTEXT, IT IS HARD TO SURVIVE WITHOUT BEING ABLE TO READ AND WRITE IN A COUNTRY'S OFFICIAL LANGUAGE, EVEN IF ONLY TO SORT OUT PERSONAL DOCUMENTS, TO BE AWARE OF YOUR RIGHTS AS AN INDIVIDUAL OR TO SAFEGUARD AGAINST DECEIT AS FAR AS POSSIBLE. IN SHORT, KNOWLEDGE IS AN IMMENSE RESOURCE, AND THE FIRST STEP TOWARDS ACHIEVING REAL AND FUNDAMENTAL PERSONAL INDEPENDENCE.

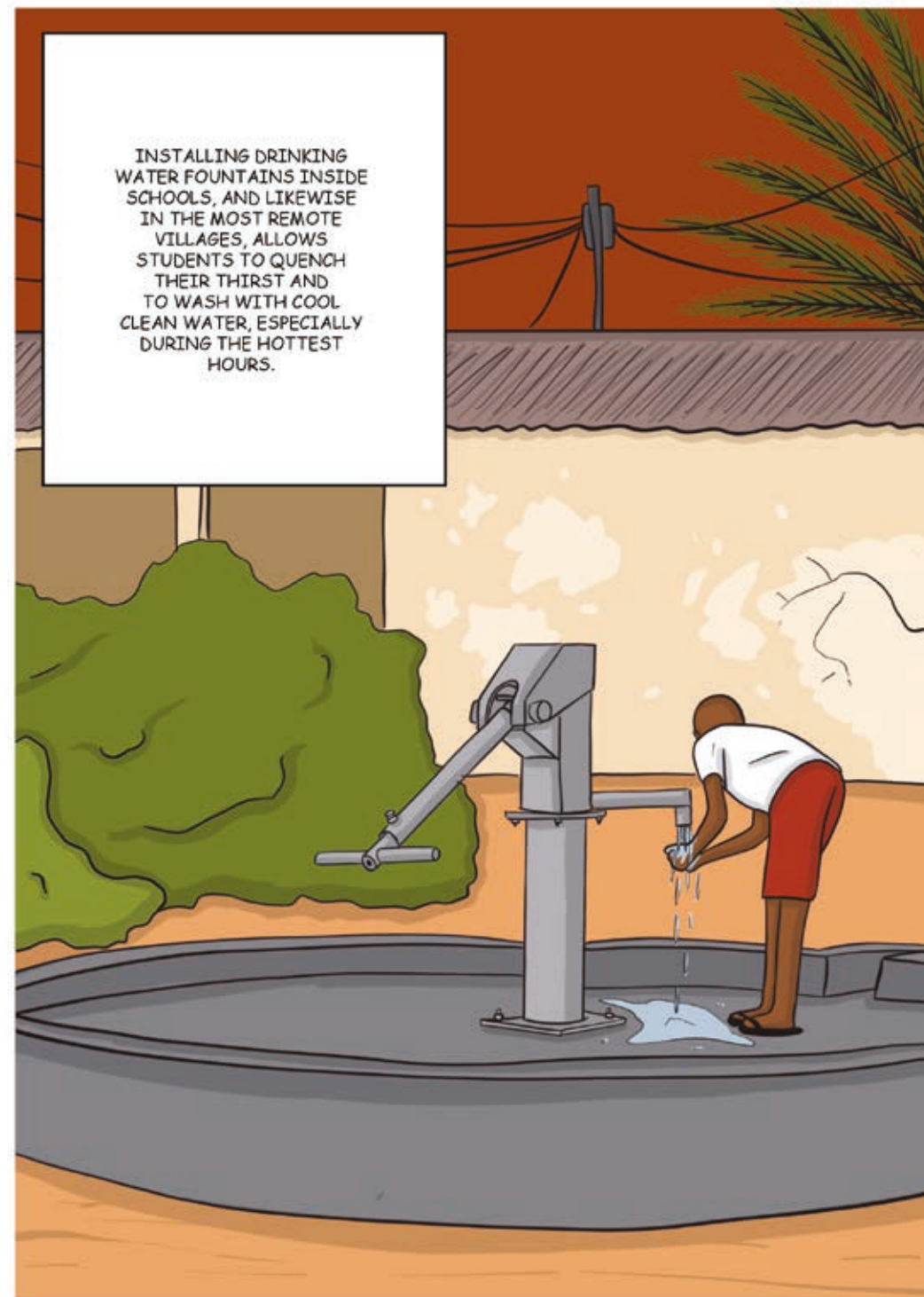
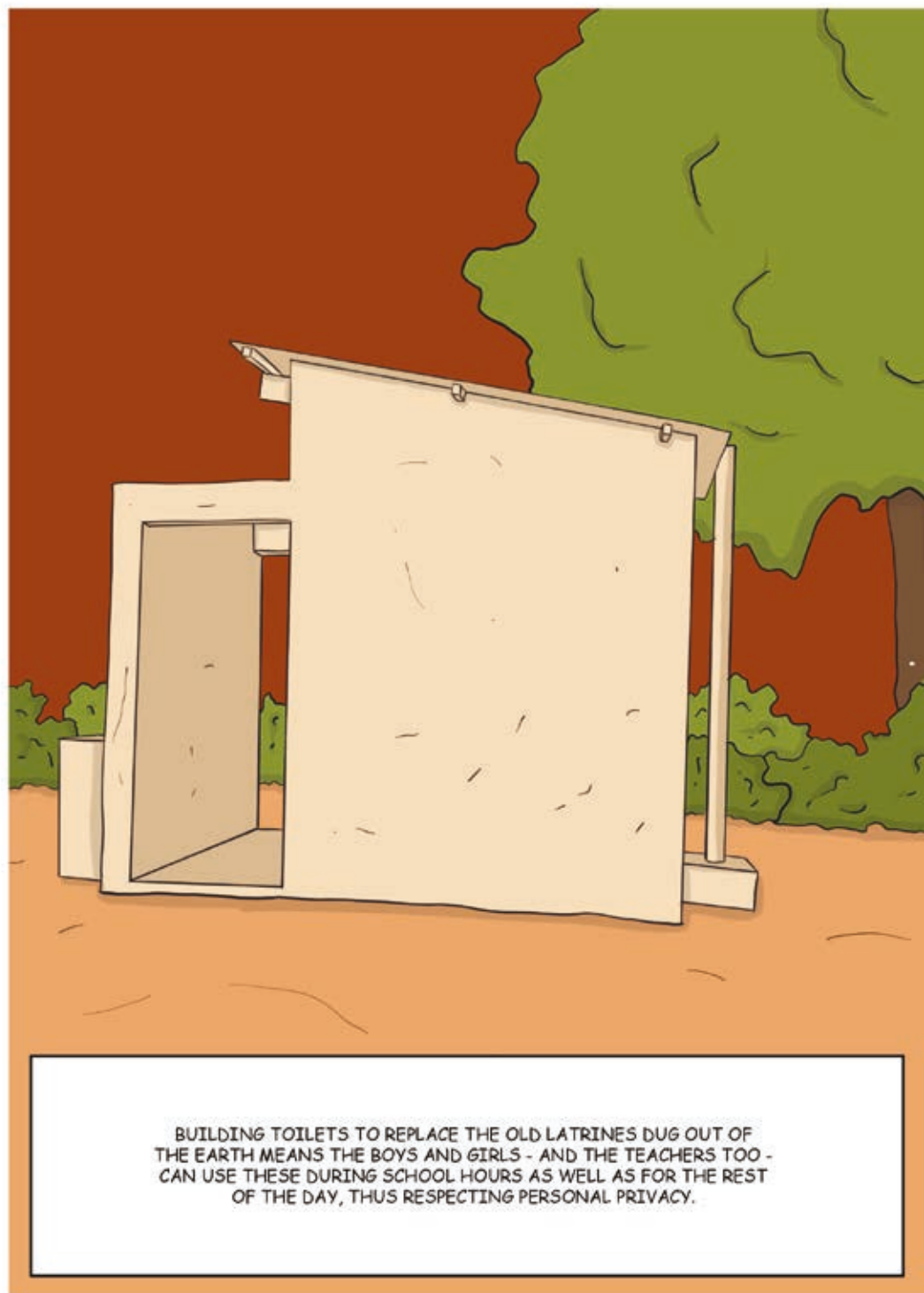




AS CAN BE IMAGINED, EQUIPMENT AND MATERIALS ARE SCARCE IN THE SCHOOLS. THERE ARE NEITHER PENS NOR PAPER, EXCEPT FOR THE SCHOOL KITS (A FOLDER, A PENCIL AND A NOTEBOOK) PROVIDED BY HUMANITARIAN ORGANISATIONS. NONETHELESS THESE ARE NOT ENOUGH FOR ALL THE PUPILS OR FOR THE WHOLE SCHOOL YEAR. SO TEACHERS WORK WITH WHAT THEY HAVE: ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS I SAW PUPILS USING STONES PICKED UP OFF THE GROUND TO DO MATHS CALCULATIONS.



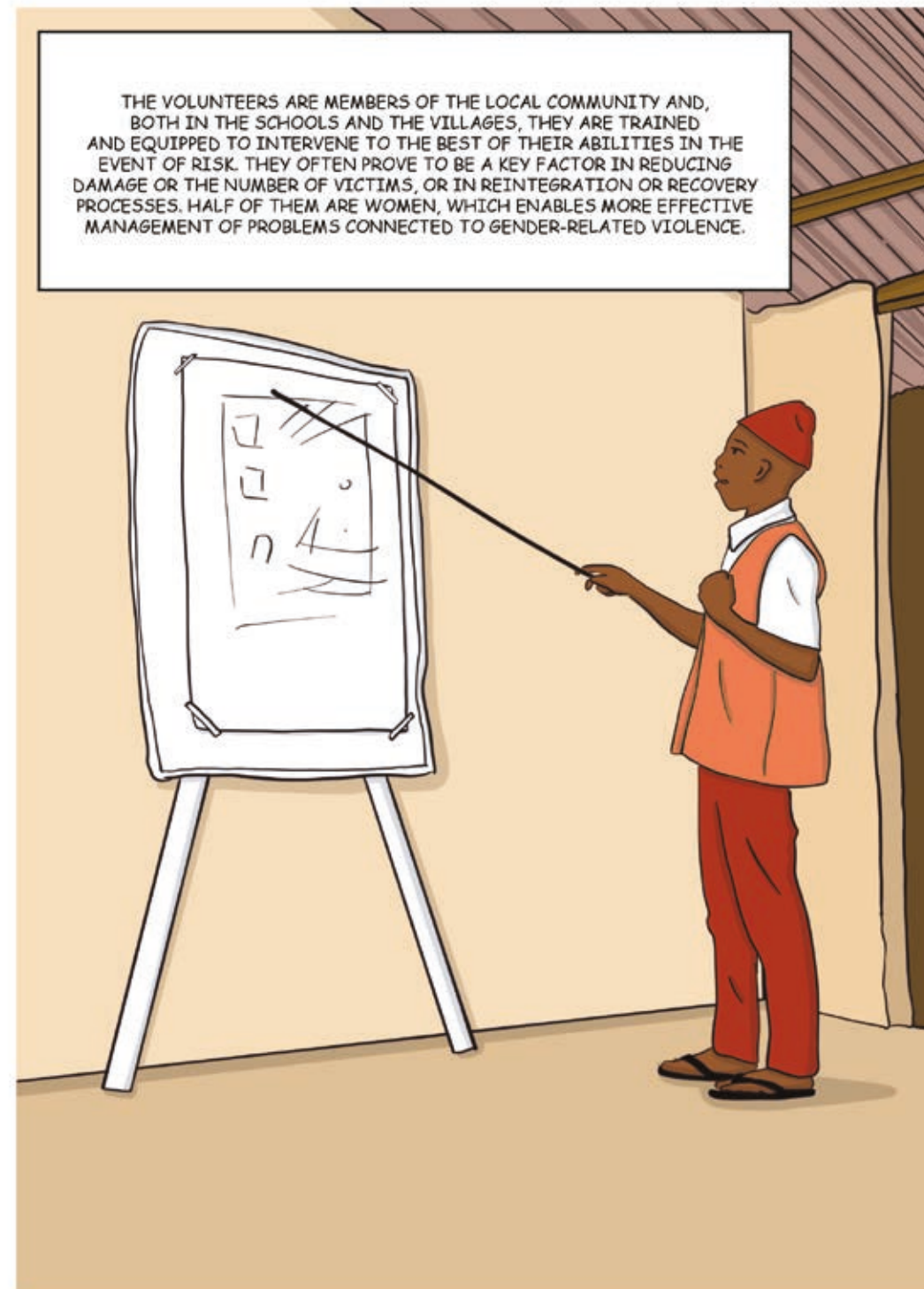
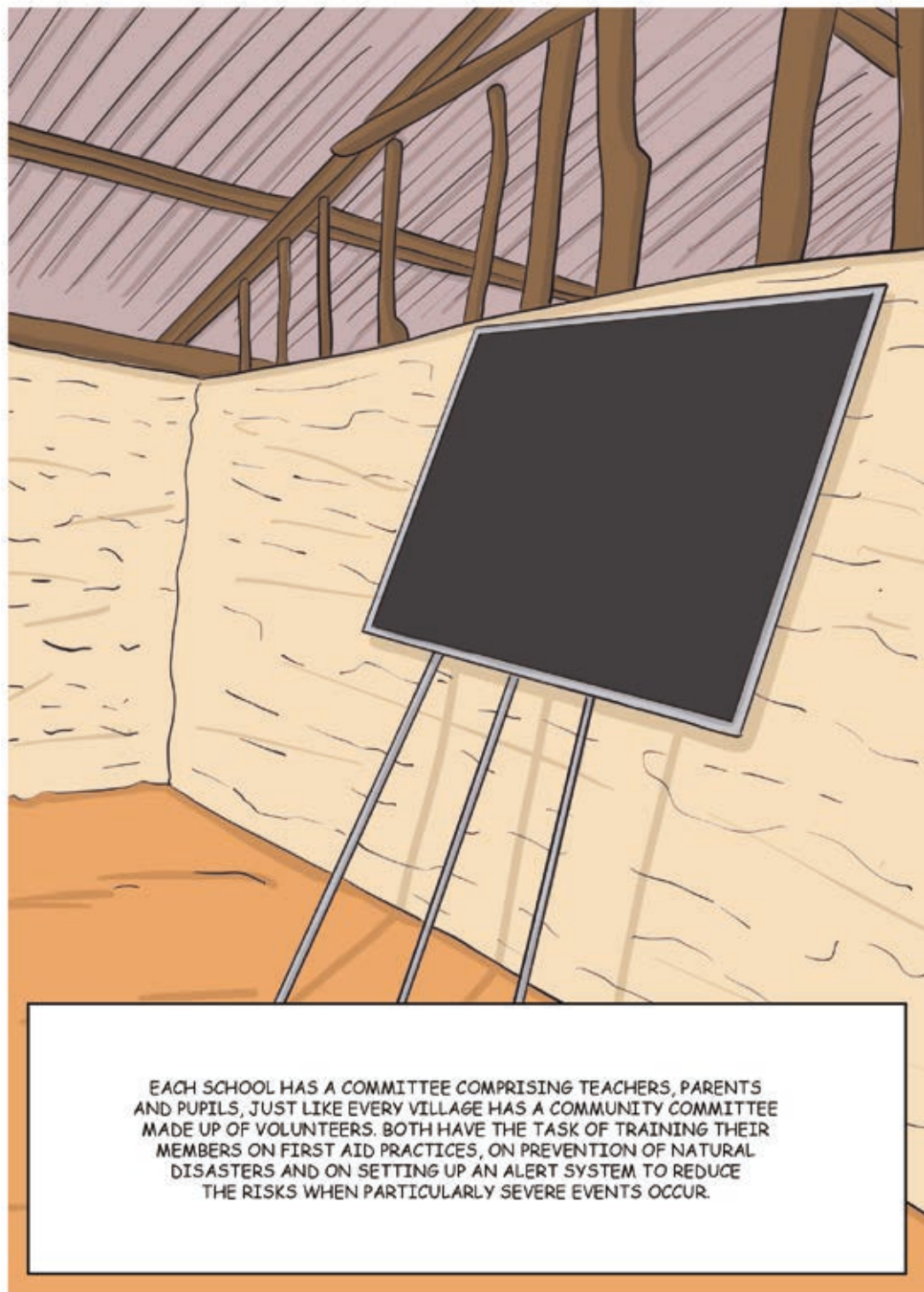
BOOKS TOO ARE NON-EXISTENT. VARIOUS ORGANISATIONS, INCLUDING WEWORLD, HAVE TURNED TO DRAWING TEXTBOOK CONTENTS ON WALLS SO THAT THEY ARE PERMANENTLY ACCESSIBLE TO ALL. EVEN THE SMALLEST RESOURCE NEEDS TO BE DRAWN ON TO SPREAD KNOWLEDGE...

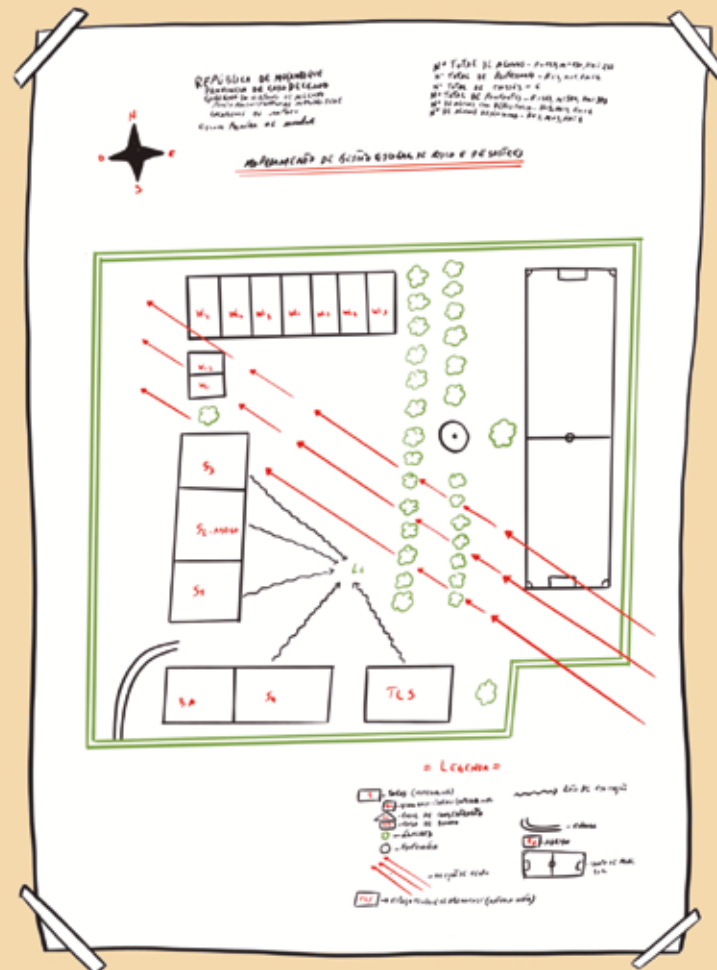




WATER IS A BASIC
NECESSITY, YET IT IS
UNAVAILABLE IN MANY
AREAS HIT BY DROUGHT.
A LARGE NUMBER OF
VILLAGES COUNT ON
COMMUNAL WATER
FOUNTAINS, WHICH
UNFORTUNATELY ARE
A RISK FOR CONTRACTING
DISEASES SUCH AS TYPHUS
OR SALMONELLA.

THESE DISEASES - AND OTHERS SUCH AS AIDS, YELLOW FEVER
AND MALARIA - ARE CLOSELY CONNECTED WITH POVERTY
AND WITH THE PRECARIOUSNESS
OF THE NATIONAL HEALTHCARE SYSTEM.





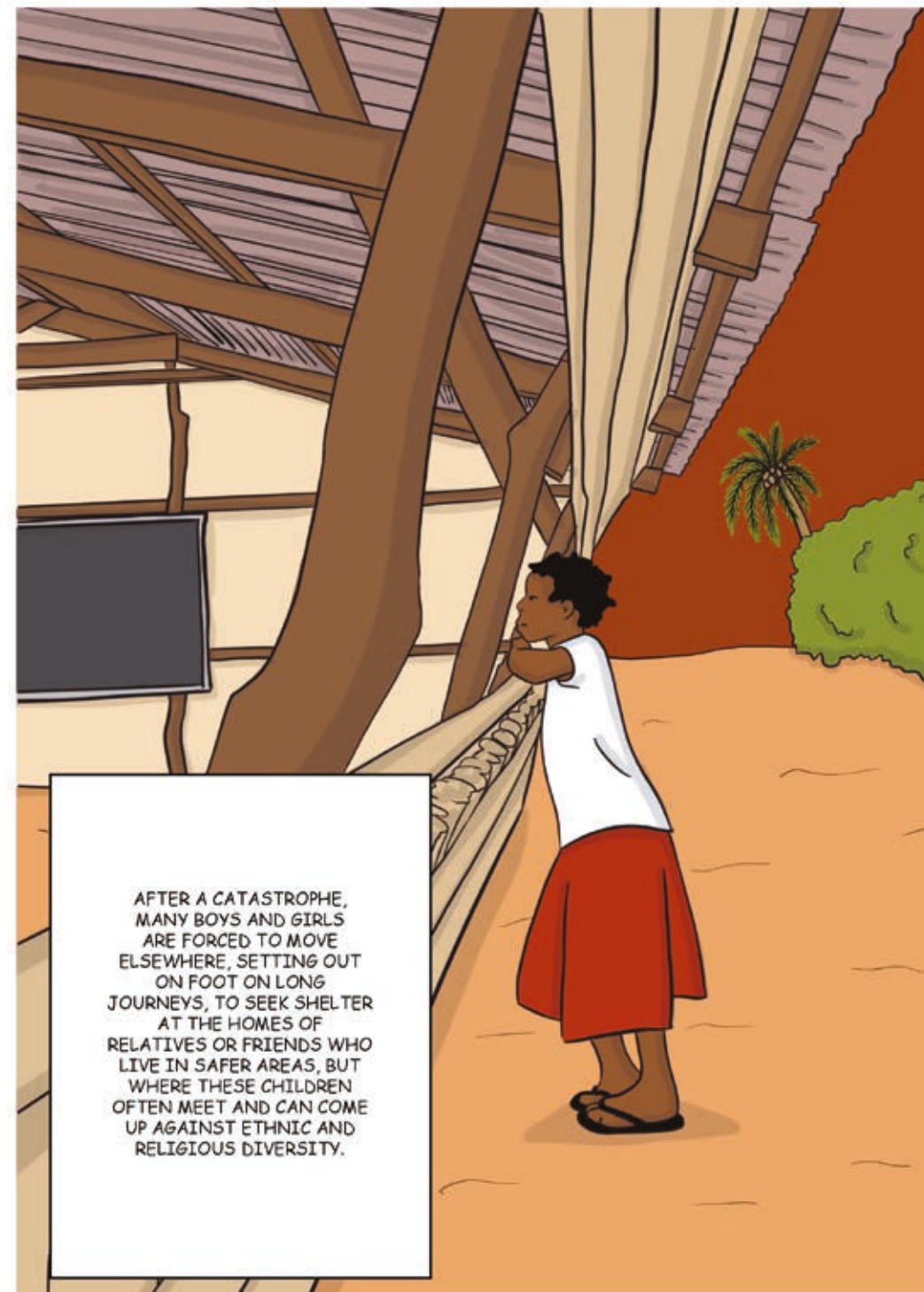
A MAP FOR RISK MANAGEMENT CAN BE FOUND IN EACH SCHOOL AND EACH COMMUNITY. THIS IS ON DISPLAY TO ENABLE COMMITTEE MEMBERS, VOLUNTEERS AND EVERYONE TO BEST DEAL WITH ANY DISASTER OR TO PREPARE A COORDINATED AND ADVANCE RESPONSE TO AN ALERT. THE MAP SHOWS, FOR INSTANCE, WHERE THE SHELTERS, EMERGENCY KITS AND SAFEST PATHS FOR MOVING AROUND ARE, OR WHICH DIRECTION A CYCLONE OR FLOODING CAN BE EXPECTED TO COME FROM BASED ON THE FORECASTS.

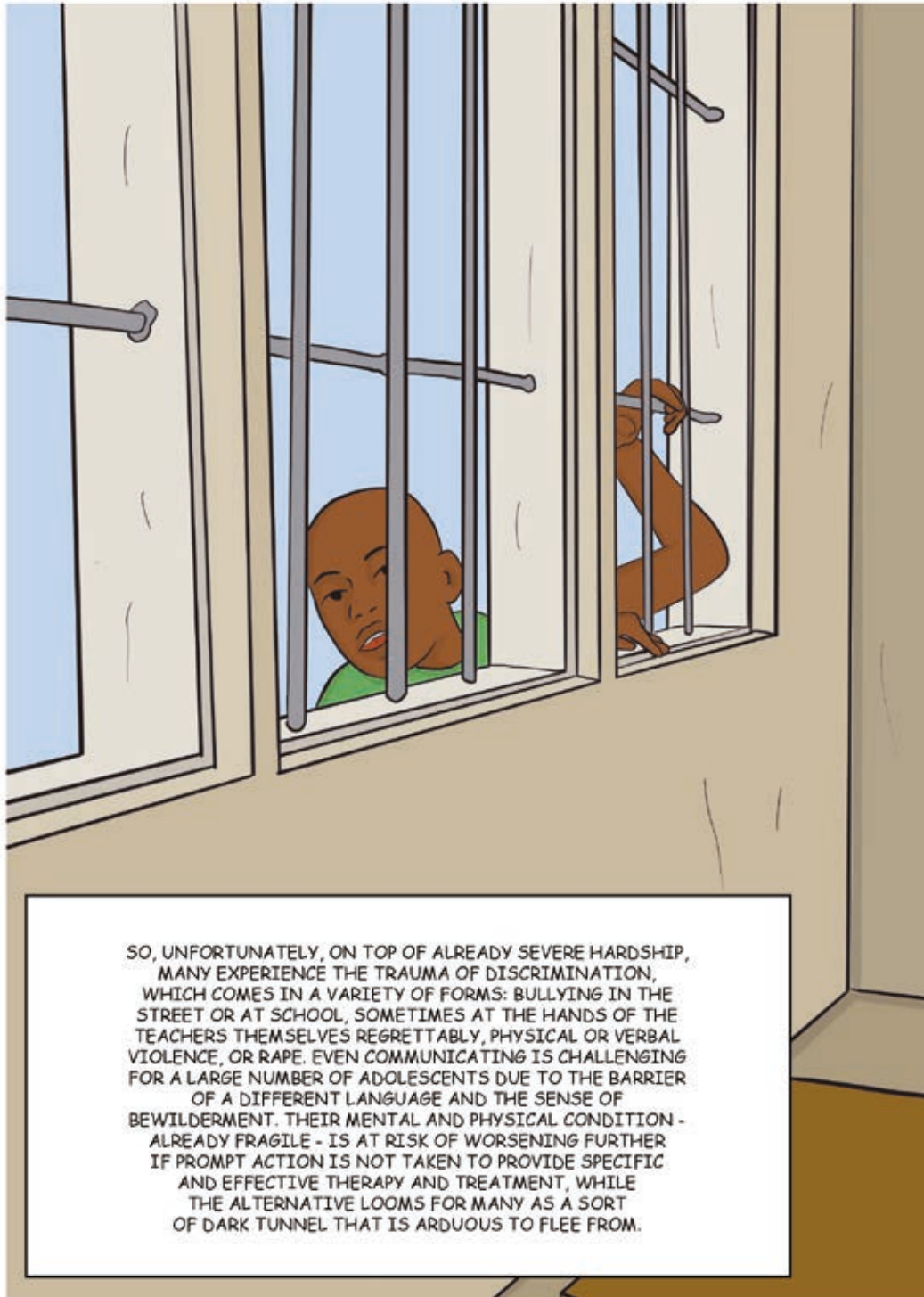
EMERGENCY KITS FOR RISK PREVENTION IN THE EVENT OF AN ALERT ARE STORED IN AT LEAST ONE CLASSROOM IN EACH SCHOOL. THESE CONTAIN FIRST AID INSTRUMENTS AND EQUIPMENT, HARDWARE SUPPLIES AND LIFE JACKETS.



REGULAR TRAINING COURSES ARE HELD FOR THE VOLUNTEER STAFF SO THAT THEY CAN LEARN THE BASICS OF CORRECT FIRST AID, WITH THE PRIMARY AIM OF CURBING THE NUMBER OF DEATHS AS FAR AS POSSIBLE.

HUMAN LIFE IS PRICELESS.





SO, UNFORTUNATELY, ON TOP OF ALREADY SEVERE HARDSHIP, MANY EXPERIENCE THE TRAUMA OF DISCRIMINATION, WHICH COMES IN A VARIETY OF FORMS: BULLYING IN THE STREET OR AT SCHOOL, SOMETIMES AT THE HANDS OF THE TEACHERS THEMSELVES REGRETTABLY, PHYSICAL OR VERBAL VIOLENCE, OR RAPE. EVEN COMMUNICATING IS CHALLENGING FOR A LARGE NUMBER OF ADOLESCENTS DUE TO THE BARRIER OF A DIFFERENT LANGUAGE AND THE SENSE OF BEWILDERMENT. THEIR MENTAL AND PHYSICAL CONDITION - ALREADY FRAGILE - IS AT RISK OF WORSENING FURTHER IF PROMPT ACTION IS NOT TAKEN TO PROVIDE SPECIFIC AND EFFECTIVE THERAPY AND TREATMENT, WHILE THE ALTERNATIVE LOOMS FOR MANY AS A SORT OF DARK TUNNEL THAT IS ARDUOUS TO FLEE FROM.



HOWEVER MUCH POVERTY I MIGHT HAVE EXPERIENCED FIRST-HAND, I CANNOT COMPARE MY HARDSHIPS WITH THEIRS.

HOWEVER MUCH I MIGHT TRY TO PUT MYSELF
IN THEIR SHOES, I FIND IT DIFFICULT
TO IMAGINE WHAT THEY'VE EXPERIENCED.

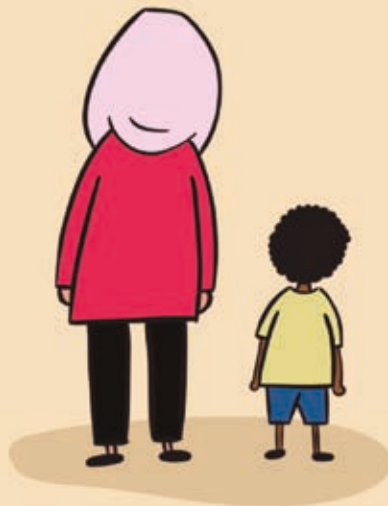


HOW MANY TIMES HAVE I HEARD THE SENTENCE "THEY WERE BORN
IN THE WRONG PART OF THE WORLD"? AND HOW WRONG I FIND
THIS STATEMENT. FOR ME THERE IS NO WRONG OR RIGHT PART
OF THE WORLD. THE WORLD SHOULD BE A SAFE PLACE FOR ALL,
A PLACE THAT TAKES CARE OF PEOPLE AND DOESN'T KILL.
A PLACE THAT CONVEYS LOVE AND HAPPINESS.

ALSO BECAUSE ALL THOSE SAYING THEY'RE IN THE 'RIGHT' PART
OF THE WORLD ARE IN FACT THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE BUILT
THE 'WRONG' PART WITH THEIR OWN HANDS, MARKING OUT
BOUNDARIES, PLUNDERING RESOURCES, ARMING TROOPS
AND COLONISING LANDS THAT ARE NOT THEIR OWN.

THE FUTURE?

THANKS, OMAR, FOR SHOWING ME THE CONDITIONS THAT MOST OF THE MOZAMBICAN POPULATION ARE LIVING IN. IT WAS IMPORTANT FOR ME TO BECOME AWARE OF ALL OF THIS. EVEN IF I NEED TO KNOW A LOT MORE, AND EVEN IF, LUCKILY, MOZAMBIQUE IS ALSO CULTURE, TRADITIONS, DRESS, SINGING, COLOURS, SMELLS...



MOZAMBICANS ARE LIKE BAOBAB TREES: STRONG, AND CAPABLE OF WITHSTANDING EVEN THE TOUGHEST STORMS AND THE MOST VIOLENT CYCLONES. A PROUD PEOPLE TRYING NOT TO BE KNOCKED TO THE GROUND DESPITE EVERYTHING.



THE BOYS AND GIRLS IN MOZAMBIQUE ARE FULL OF DREAMS THAT, IF SUPPORTED WITH STRENGTH AND BRAVERY, ARE NOT AS HARD TO ACHIEVE AS THEY MIGHT APPEAR. ALSO BECAUSE, SOMETIMES, JUST A WORD OF SINCERE APPRECIATION IS ENOUGH TO RESTORE HOPE THAT HAD BEEN GIVEN UP ON AS LOST FOREVER.



MOZAMBIQUE POSSESSES A BEAUTY I'D NEVER SEEN BEFORE. ITS BEACHES ARE STUNNING, ITS NATURE UNTOUCHED. EVEN IF TOURISM HASN'T TAKEN OFF DUE TO THE CHALLENGING ENVIRONMENTAL AND POLITICAL SITUATION, IT REALLY SEEMED LIKE A UNIQUE PARADISE TO ME.

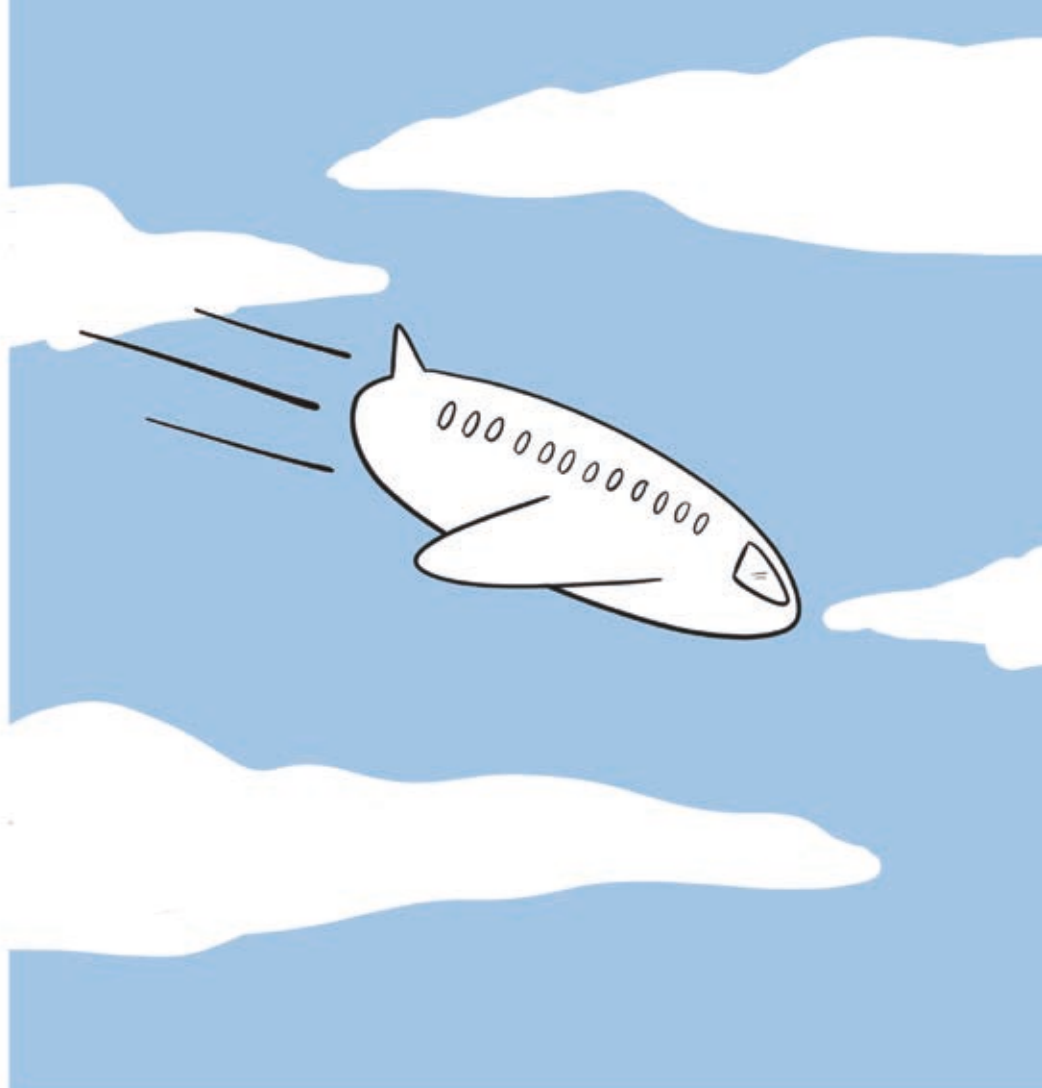
I DOUBT I'LL EASILY FORGET WHAT I'VE SEEN
OR THE STORIES TOLD TO ME BY OMAR AND THE PEOPLE
DIRECTLY INVOLVED. AND I'M HAPPY ABOUT IT. THIS WAY
I'LL ALWAYS BE ABLE TO REMEMBER THAT WE'RE NOT ALONE
IN THE WORLD, THAT MANY FAR-OFF COUNTRIES HAVE
A LOT TO SAY, AND THAT MANY REMOTE POPULATIONS
HAVE LOADS OF THINGS THEY CAN TEACH US.



EVEN FOR THIS REASON ALONE,
TAKING CARE OF PEOPLE - WHOEVER THEY MIGHT BE
AND WHEREVER THEY MIGHT COME FROM - IS OUR DUTY.

THE RETURN JOURNEY WAS MORE OR LESS AS TAXING AS THE OUTBOUND ONE. EXCEPT I HAD A TEMPERATURE (FROM SUNSTROKE) AND A COUGH (FROM THE AIR CONDITIONING BLASTED PRACTICALLY EVERYWHERE IN THE AIRPORTS). WHICH WAS USEFUL IN KEEPING AWAY THE CHATTERBOXES, THE ELBOWING KIDS AND THE VARIOUS STINKY FEET...

STILL, I HAVEN'T RETURNED AS THE SAME PERSON I WAS BEFORE.



WHAT'S YOUR BIGGEST DREAM, OMAR?



MY BIGGEST DREAM? Hmm... I often see planes fly over my village. Well, I'd like to be a pilot when I grow up.

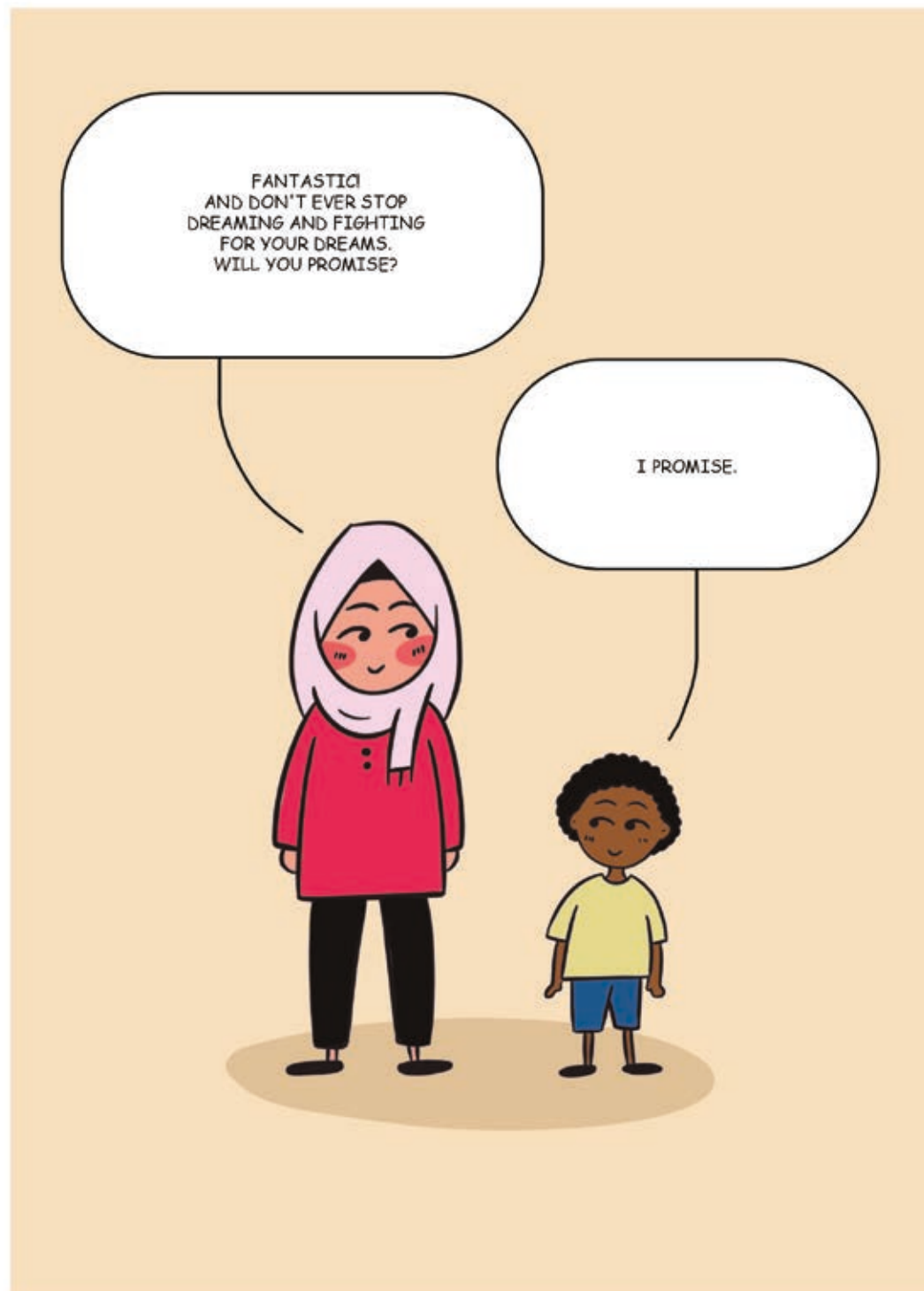


AND WOULD YOU TAKE ME AROUND, TO SEE THE WORLD, ON OTHER NEW ADVENTURES?



ME? SURE! YOU CAN COUNT ON ME!





I THANK ALL THOSE PEOPLE WHO TRY
IN THEIR OWN SMALL WAY TO CONTRIBUTE
TO BUILDING A BETTER WORLD.

I THANK ALL THOSE PEOPLE WHO NEVER STOP BELIEVING
A BETTER WORLD IS POSSIBLE.

SPECIAL THANKS GO TO WEWORLD FOR ITS SUPPORT.

AND MY THANKS GO TO ALL THE PEOPLE I MET
AND WHO GUIDED ME ON THIS ADVENTURE.

THE PHOTOS YOU FIND ON THE FOLLOWING PAGES
WERE TAKEN BY THE TALENTED ILARIA QUINTAS,
WHO ACCOMPANIED ME ON THIS WONDERFUL JOURNEY
THROUGH MOZAMBIQUE.

THANK YOU, ILARIA.



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TAKOUA BEN MOHAMED

Takoua is a Tunisian-Italian graphic journalist. Founding partner of the BM Entertainment Ltd film production company, she specialised in Animation Cinema at Nemo Academy of Digital Arts in Florence. She is the artist and author of the catalogue-book *Woman Story*, and the graphic novels *Sotto il Velo* ('beneath the veil', 2016), *La Rivoluzione dei Gelsomini* ('the jasmine revolution', 2018), *Another Way for Cambodia* (2020) – all published by BeccoGiallo – and *Il Mio Migliore Amico è Fascista* ('my best friend is a fascist', Rizzoli, 2021). She produced the docu-film *Hejab Style* for Al-Jazeera Documentary Channel, and contributes for various magazines, including *Cinematografo*, *D - La Repubblica delle donne*, *Piccolo Missionario*, *Confronti*, *7 - Corriere della Sera* and *La Stampa Origami*. Among the many awards Takoua has received are the Evens European Journalism Prize 2019, the MoneyGram Award 2016, the Premio Prato Città Aperta 2016, the Muslim International Book Award 2017, the Premio Tirafuorilalingua 2018 and the FIDAPA Award 2019 to women in business and the arts.



WEWORLD

WeWorld is a humanitarian organisation that has been defending the rights of boys, girls and women in 27 countries worldwide, including Italy, for the last 50 years. It does this by encouraging change and social inclusion, organising awareness initiatives and involving citizens and institutions to build a more just world.

WeWorld has been active in Mozambique for over 20 years in fostering women's empowerment, ensuring education for girls and boys, and working with the local communities to find solutions to fight the effects of climate change.



