

ENGLISH

Men in the co-pilot seat: transforming cultural norms with a gender perspective in Mozambique

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What are the challenges and opportunities for gender equity in diverse socioeconomic and cultural contexts such as those found in Mozambique? How do certain traditional cultural norms limit the role of women in society and reinforce gender stereotypes, hindering the empowerment of local development?

Through a study conducted with rural communities in Manica, Sofala, Tete and Zambézia, four provinces located in the central region of Mozambique, we identified some installed perceptions that lead women to have an overload of tasks, to find limitations in access to information, to training spaces or to carry out productive activities that can increase family income. These, as well as other findings, are shared below.

These provinces have in common a great ethnic and cultural diversity, as well as a history of armed conflict that has left deep scars on the population and local communities. Living conditions in rural communities are difficult, lack of infrastructure such as paved roads, electricity and potable water is a reality for many of them. They generally depend on agriculture (growing corn, cassava, rice and beans, among other foods) and fishing as their main sources of livelihood.

In addition, poverty and lack of access to basic health and education services are common problems that are exacerbated by the lack of capacity to adapt to the constant climatic events that shake this region. Especially:

- Increased frequency and intensity of rainfall that can cause flooding, landslides and coastal erosion. These phenomena can have a significant impact on agriculture and local infrastructure.
- Steady increase in average annual temperature, which negatively affects agriculture and other climate-dependent activities. High temperatures also increase the risk of heat-related diseases.

Sofala's local development marked by gender inequality

In the development of Sofala's household economy, men and women play an important role, although their roles may vary slightly. Men are generally responsible for preparing the land, planting crops, tending livestock and other agriculture-related tasks, although they may also engage in artisanal fishing and charcoal production. Many of them also work in paid jobs outside agriculture to supplement family income. Women, for their part, play a key role in food production and processing, as well as in caring for their children and family. In addition, women often participate in savings and credit groups and other community development initiatives, helping to strengthen the local economy.

Women often have an overload of tasks due to deep-rooted cultural norms, expectations about the role of women and gender inequality and which may be perceived differently by the rest of the family, for example some members may recognize and value the work and effort that women perform at home, while others may give little importance or even undervalue the tasks they perform. In some cases, the overload of tasks can lead to conflicts and imbalances in the distribution of domestic and childcare responsibilities.

There are other aspects related to gender inequality that affect the lives of women and their families, such as:

- **Limited access to resources:** women often have limited access to land, credit, equipment and technologies, which limits their ability to produce and earn their own money and leads to a cycle of poverty and dependency.
- **Discrimination in the labor market:** women tend to have lower wages, fewer opportunities for promotion and greater exposure to precarious and informal work.
- **Gender-based violence:** Women are more likely to be victims of domestic violence and sexual harassment. This negatively affects their mental and physical health, as well as their ability to support themselves economically.
- **Lack of political participation:** women are often underrepresented in politics and decision-making, limiting their ability to influence policies that affect their lives.
- **Barriers to education:** Girls often face such as lack of economic resources and early marriage. This limits their ability to develop skills and obtain better paying jobs.

Women driving transformation

Since 2021, Fundación Capital (FC) has been collaborating with the Ministry of Agriculture of the Government of Mozambique in the implementation of the *Rural Enterprise Finance Project* (REFP) and provides expertise on the *Graduation* methodology to reduce extreme poverty for 5,000 families in Sofala, Tete, Manica and Zambézia. The FC Graduation methodology includes different components in five phases:

1. Coaching with printed and digital material (18 months) - individual and group coaching.
2. Co-financed investment incentive (up to 820 MZN for 6 months).
3. Savings promotion (includes savings sessions in graduation groups and other means).
4. Technical skills training.
5. Access to financing (financing links).

With more than 10 years of experience in applying this methodology in Africa and Latin America, FC has incorporated two important innovations: i) working in partnership with governments to achieve greater scale, and ii) using digital solutions as part of its coaching strategy.

What actions of the project have been strategic for this transformation?

Training in mixed groups: In order to work on gender issues, roles and social norms, a series of meetings were held in mixed groups. The project had planned for 50% of the beneficiaries to be women, but currently about 59% are participating. Here women have the opportunity to present their opinions and be heard by everyone (men and women), breaking the prejudice that the valid opinion is only of men.

"The beneficiaries learned about gender equality, we are all equal and we can do different tasks without distinction of sex. The beneficiaries also liked it because it improved their way of thinking and now they have family support in the activities, it was all very good". Group session. Facilitators, Sofala.

Influence of women on their partners, families and communities: Since only one member of each household participates in the workshops, the women beneficiaries of the program share what they have learned with their families and neighbors. As agents of change, they feel empowered when they manage to generate changes (improvements) in their family's way of life, despite the slow adoption by their partners as they do not accept it at first (behavioral change is a slow process), all topics of interest related to life skills, business management and financial education have been

shared by the women to their partners, and they to other men, causing a transformation in the life of their community.

Dona Anita Fernando, from the Búzi neighborhood in the town of Inharongue, says that "learning about gender equality in the Graduation workshops has awakened our vision and, to ensure inclusion, I always share what I have learned with my family (husband and children) and my neighbors. Today, my husband helps me with some household chores, such as taking care of the children, fetching water and helping in the fields, which has lightened my daily burden."

"Some men in my community criticize my husband when he helps me in activities that in my community have not been commonly practiced by men like (you are not a normal man, from the past a man could never sweep the yard, wash clothes or even bathe the children!) This is the time when my husband takes the time to clearly explain the importance of helping women with some household activities. He explains how busy the wife is and that nothing changes in the man when he helps his wife. So I see that my neighbors are changing because when I talk to my friends, their husbands also help them with household chores."

Women focal points and leaders of savings groups: During the selection process of the focal points for the savings groups, as well as in the election of the members of the management committee of these groups, the participation of women has been taken into account, giving them power to manage, guide and make decisions about the group, which changes some social norms according to which women cannot be leaders.

Mrs. Odete Zeca Caetano, from the town of Lula Lua, is the president of her group, she tells it in first person, and she never thought that one day she could lead a group where men and women would be part of it, today it is a reality, she makes decisions when necessary and all the members abide by them despite being a woman who makes the decision. I have inspired other women that we too can lead even men.

Mrs. Aida Charles Dramusse, from the same town, is a member of a savings group. Her husband is grateful for the initiative, as it has relieved him of the stress he was under to secure food for his family and saw the importance of increasing sources of income as it ensures resilience.

Business skills: The project has provided all beneficiaries with sufficient tools on life skills, business management and financial literacy, and about 59% of the beneficiaries are women. All of them have the ability to do business and bring income to the family

which can help the family to be more resilient and able to cope with some basic expenses.

"Uma vez que faço negócio, já expliquei à minha esposa que o negócio não é apenas para homens e agora a minha esposa também já vai ao mercado atender os clientes". Fernando Salha . 57 years old, agricultural producer and salesman (Guro, Manica).

Some conclusions and final thoughts:

Women's participation in the project has impacted the economy in several ways:

- **Increased family income:** By participating in income-generating activities, women were able to increase family income and contribute to improving the family's living conditions. This in the medium to long term can have a cascading effect in increasing purchasing power and stimulating the local economy.
- **Entrepreneurship:** The participation of women in the project has served to stimulate female entrepreneurship, which has led to an increase in the creation of small businesses.
- **Poverty reduction:** helped reduce poverty by improving the health and education of women and their families, causing an overall improvement in quality of life, and contributing to long-term economic development.

Ultimately, **women's active participation can have a significant impact on the economy, contributing to job creation, increased household income, entrepreneurship, access to resources, and poverty reduction.** It is therefore critical that the entire community is involved and committed to closing gaps and ensuring that women and their families have access to opportunities, resources and support to reach their full potential.