

TRÓCAIRE LEARNING SERIES: Mainstreaming Gender in Programming

CASE STUDY 1 Participatory local governance in Mozambique: Mainstreaming Gender rights

Summary

A project supported by Trócaire in one district of Mozambique saw women's participation in local development councils increase by 54% in three years, from 117 women to 180.

This increased level of participation was matched by a qualitative change in the type of participation that women displayed on the councils, becoming visibly more proactive, agenda-setting, and taking part in decision-making.

1. Programme context

The Governance and Human Rights programme in Mozambique has a particular focus on building effective engagement between citizens and government officials (elected and appointed) at local level. The programme has been in place since 2009.

The government of Mozambique promotes a decentralised system of governance whereby local decision making is supported by local Consultative Councils (CCs). As outlined in Figure 1, CCs are organised at village/ community level; these village CCs then send representatives to the locality; who in turn send representatives to administrative posts, and on up to district level.

CC members are selected at village level by and from local civil society (representatives of the local forums, community committees, community authorities and economic, social and cultural interest groups). At each of the higher levels the CC members are selected by and from the level below.



Mainstreaming gender session with 20 women at the Consultative Council in João village. Photo credit: Kukumbi

At village level, CCs are exclusively comprised of civil society; while in a locality or an administrative post, the government-appointed head also sits on the CC. At district level, CCs include approximately 50% government representatives.

The Consultative Councils have responsibilities for oversight of local development planning, although not all function effectively. They also have recommendation-making authority over a local development loaning facility (final decisions are made at district level). This loan approval process often becomes the focus of their work, which can prevent them from spending time on more strategic local development planning.

This case study focuses on Trócaire partner Kukumbi's local governance project, and how staff from both Trócaire and Kukumbi promoted gender mainstreaming and women's rights within this project. The project worked with two Administrative Posts (sub-district level) in the district of Morrumbala in Mozambique. It aimed to raise awareness of decentralised governance structures, and to promote greater engagement with local government, especially via the Consultative Councils. In doing this, Kukumbi aimed to work with a broad range of actors: local officials (elected and appointed), churches, and citizens and their organisations. They engaged with CCs at every level: villages, localities, the two administrative posts, and the district.

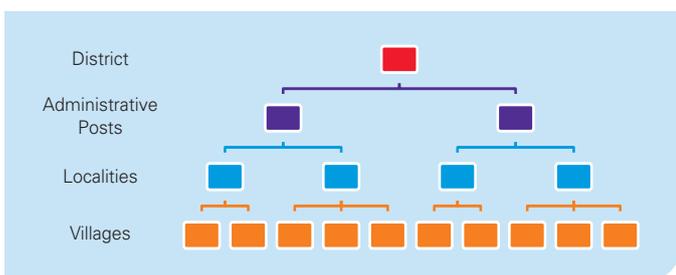


Figure 1. Decentralised governance structure in Mozambique

2. Women in local decision-making: project context

Even with regulations in place for citizen participation in local decision-making, decentralisation is not an automatically inclusive process. One of the aims of the GHR programme was to facilitate the inclusion and participation of the poorest and most marginalised people in decision making at local level. The Kukumbi project targeted CCs, churches and public institutions to promote better citizen engagement with decentralised planning and decision making.

It was clear at the beginning of the project that meaningful participation by citizens in decision making was blocked by widespread illiteracy, lack of awareness of the laws and rights associated with local planning, and a deep-rooted socio-cultural exclusion from politics. All of these issues affect women disproportionately. A summary of the experiences of 100 women members of 5 CCs carried out as part of Kukumbi's gender awareness sessions in 2011 revealed stark realities:

The majority of the women in the group did not know how to read or write, and all had suffered domestic violence. None of them felt that their ideas were heard, either in their own homes, or within the CCs. Their husbands had economic power over them: women farmed cereals, but when the time came to sell the crops, their husbands would take the money. Men also had total sexual power over their wives: women said that they were not able to negotiate safe sex with their husbands, and they did not know about the risks or strategies for preventing HIV. Overall, women said that they had responsibilities, but not rights.

The decentralisation law in Mozambique states that women should make up at least 30% of members of all CCs, at all levels from the village up. In general, 30% has been seen as a target rather than a minimum standard, and at the beginning of the project it was clear that this was not being met. Furthermore, partners and Trócaire GHR programme staff could see that even when women did attend meetings of CCs, their participation was very limited: they were unlikely to speak, and they were not influential. None of the CCs supported by Trócaire partners had ever had a woman president.

If the project was to succeed in making local governance more inclusive of and accountable to the poor people of Morrumbala district, then major efforts were necessary to bring women into decision making spaces, and build their confidence to participate in those spaces.

3. Mainstreaming activities

Programme level:

There was strong commitment to mainstreaming in Trócaire's work at both country and regional level: this was encouraged and required of programme officers in all projects. From 2008 onwards, numerous activities were carried out to mainstream gender across the Governance and Human Rights programme. The most relevant for this case study were:

- Trócaire Mozambique appointed a **gender focal point** (the livelihoods Programme Assistant): she regularly shared relevant information and materials with the GHR programme staff (Programme Officer and Programme Assistant).
- All partners (including Kukumbi) in turn appointed a **gender focal point** from among their staff. While their level of authority was limited as many were junior technical staff, they served as a spark to remind programme staff to incorporate a gender response in their work. All of these individuals came together for training with a gender consultant; they also received materials regularly on gender-related issues from Trócaire.
- All projects were required to show how they were mainstreaming gender from proposal stage through to activities and reporting. The GHR staff used the checklist in the gender mainstreaming resource pack to help with this; they also used it on monitoring visits. The checklist was translated and shared with partners so that they would also be able to apply it to their work.
- **Partner meetings** were held annually, and the agenda always included a space dedicated to gender, through training, case studies, and other inputs. Over the years, the length of time given to gender issues increased, from a 45 minute session during a 2 day meeting in 2008, to a 4 hour session in a 3 day meeting in 2011. Partner meetings also incorporated field visits with an emphasis on meeting and talking to women.
- Partners were required to **disaggregate all of their monitoring data** by sex. Project reports now clearly outline the numbers of people involved in every strategy, and how many were women.

Project level:

Promoting gender equality in Kukumbi:

As part of its commitment to institutional gender mainstreaming, Kukumbi committed to increase the numbers of women on its paid staff. When a new field worker for this project was needed, a woman was purposefully recruited, resulting in field project staff of one man and one woman. Importantly, it was noted that the female field worker served as a strong role model at community level: her actions and her own level of capacity and energy modelled the role that women can play, even in rural Mozambique. During monitoring visits by Trócaire the women present congratulated both Kukumbi and Trócaire for having female staff members visiting them (both the Trócaire Programme Officer and Programme Assistant are women), and said how encouraging it was to have role models not only for themselves but also for men to see that women could hold traditionally male roles.

Dedicated objectives on women's participation:

When Kukumbi's 3-year project was approved, one of the four project objectives was directly dedicated to women's awareness and participation in local decision-making and leadership¹. The main activity organised to deliver on the objective of increased awareness and participation among women was training for women – both for existing members of CCs and other beneficiaries of the project.

¹ Increased knowledge and participation of women in the process of decision making and leadership at community level.

Acting on disaggregated data:

All reports and project documentation contain rigorously sex-disaggregated information. As a result, it became apparent that women's attendance at, and participation in, community meetings was far lower than that of men. For example, a project report from 2008 showed that just 24% of the participants across five CCs were women – and anecdotally, these women were not active participants at meetings.

For women to really benefit from political participation, increasing numbers alone is not sufficient. However, increasing the numbers of women who participate is an important first step on the way to empowering women to influence decision making. The project staff aimed to increase the numeric presence of women at meetings.

Field workers always reminded the local organisers that women's participation was provided for in the national decentralisation regulations, which stipulate that at least 30% of CCs should be made up of women. CC meetings were organised by inviting individuals and organisations in advance: the field workers learned to insist that women were specifically invited to meetings as well as men. When invitations were sent to an organisation (e.g. a local water committee), they would often stipulate that two people should attend, of whom one should be a man and one a woman.

Shifting gender norms in public meetings:

When meetings were held, women's participation was actively promoted. Agendas were arranged so that gender-related issues were included. There is a strong tradition in rural society whereby women will sit apart from men, at the back of the room, on mats: during this project, men and women were encouraged to sit together on benches. Women were specifically invited by the chair to input during discussions. All of these activities aimed to break down the powerful physical exclusion that women felt by being set aside from men in mixed groups, and to foster a sense of common issues.

Responding to changing power dynamics at a household level:

It was noted by the Trócaire GHR programme officer that awareness raising carried out with women as part of this and other projects led to them challenging very fundamental power relationships in their own lives, so it was very important to ensure that men were aware of what was happening, and that they could support it also.

Other projects within the programme made a point of inviting a few husbands to participate in away days carried out for women: these men came back and told their friends that women's movements and activities should not be seen as a threat, overcoming the suspicion that by promoting women's rights they will stop serving their traditional household roles. It is not clear from this project what the impact has been at household level of the empowerment work done with women in communities.

Impact of gender mainstreaming activities

The overall aim of the project was to ensure that the decentralisation process was implemented in the target locations, with participatory, transparent and accountable decision-making. As a result of the activities carried out to promote increased women's participation, the Programme Officer, Programme Assistant and project staff have observed the following impacts:

- **Increase in numbers of women participating:** Across the project, there is on average a 33% representation of women on CCs, which represents a fulfilment of the government minimum target, and a significant increase from the project baseline. The total numbers of women included in CCs over the course of the project increased from 117 at the beginning of the project to 180 three years later when the project ended.
- **Qualitative improvements in women's contribution/participation:** The major impact observed as a result of the project was the qualitative improvement in women's participation that could be observed in meetings. At the beginning of the project, women were less likely to attend organised meetings (eg Consultative Councils) than men were. Those women who did attend would sit at the back of the room, and would not speak. There was a sense that there were repercussions for speaking out of turn. By contrast, at the end of the project, the atmosphere in public or committee meetings was less formal. Women would interrupt men when they were speaking, to make a point. Furthermore, women began to raise issues for debate, or which they wished to see raised at the next level (eg from village CC to locality CC).
- **Gender specific issues being addressed by CCs:** It would be worthwhile to do greater analysis of the issues that are being raised in CCs now compared to at the start of the project: we don't have any comprehensive information about this. However, certain things are clear. Where the project overlaps with HIV work (also carried out by Kukumbi with Trócaire support), the issues brought to district level for inclusion in development plans tend to include access to medication and services for people living with HIV. Across the project site as a whole, two issues have gained a high profile and extensive support from CCs: the discouragement of early marriage of girls, and the promotion of girls' schooling. Both of these issues are explicitly covered in Kukumbi's gender trainings; awareness raising on these points seems to have had a direct knock-on effect on the agendas and decisions of CCs. Thanks to pressure from the CCs, other issues of concern to women have been integrated in the annual district development plan, including new boreholes in three neighbourhoods, one health post and four primary schools as well as one literacy centre. In addition, more women now attend literacy classes than previously.
- **Local expertise built:** Kukumbi is now seen within the district as a leader on the subject of women's participation in local governance, and has been invited by other local authorities to support the restructuring of CCs to ensure an increase in women's representation. There is widespread agreement that Kukumbi's contribution has been positive: for example, the presidents of CCs have encouraged their female members to actively attend the gender training sessions so that they could share their lessons with other women who were unable to attend. A significant buy-in to the concept of women's rights was generated.
- **Change in male attitudes:** Monitoring reports point to a shift in the attitudes of men, especially within their own families, about the role of women. Men say that they now do some tasks that are traditionally women's, including starting the dinner preparations and preparing children for school when their wives are out (rather than just waiting for their wives to come back and do it all). They also said they share the domestic chores. They also spoke about changing attitudes to women at home: that there is less use of "orders" to do this and that, as they now appreciate them as people with equal rights.

- **Some things have not changed – particularly in power relations between women and men:** There are still no CCs with female presidents, and at family level women still require their husbands' permission to participate in decision making. While the project has been positively received, power remains disproportionately in the hands of men, and of party structures. Those women who have been empowered are often embedded within party structures, and reaching beyond those is more challenging still. Nonetheless, it is clear from visits that at the very local level that this project operates, all the participants are extremely poor.
- **Consultative Councils at all levels were strengthened as a result of this project,** and benefits from this fact should accrue to women living in the district as well as men. This project built the capacity of members of the CCs and of leaders to engage with them; it also really worked to ensure that CCs carried out their full mandate (not just authorising small loans, but also influencing the agenda and budgets of district development plans). In addition to ensuring that women had more influence on CCs, the project also aimed to ensure that civil society was more influential, and that CCs were more representative of communities. Overall, the project leaves behind more functional, representative CCs.
- **Consultative Councils are still not very powerful: ongoing advocacy is needed:** There remains a power imbalance in decentralised decision making, which is dominated by top-down approaches. Empowering the CCs gives civil society a much stronger voice than it had, but if this voice is to have an impact for poor men and women, then it will be necessary to continue exerting pressure and making demands.

Lessons learned

Programme level:

1. **Never let up!** A commitment to gender mainstreaming means always asking about it. The programme team raised the issue of women's participation and power in monitoring visits, in annual partner meetings; they commented on it in their responses to six-monthly and annual reports. They were always as pro-active as possible, exploring questions and then making suggestions (for example regarding timing of radio programmes). They kept the issue alive and dynamic by providing materials, sharing reports, and sending resources to Kukumbi (especially to the gender focal point and Director).
2. **There is no short-cut to support partner organisations to become more gender sensitive.** The real key to driving change across an organisation is at management level: "focal points" or champions can carry out tasks, but the priority needs to be set at a higher level. Further, it's necessary to train the whole staff of an organisation, not just the gender champion. Administration and finance staff, for example, are most likely to spot if there is no budget for gender-related activities. Kukumbi have bought in to the mainstreaming agenda whole-heartedly, and are committed to hiring female staff: this has a very positive impact, especially at field level (see above).
3. **Reserve funds for gender activities:** whether for an extra course, materials, t-shirts or banners on commemorative days, it is good to be prepared to support some un-programmed gender equality promotion activities as they come up during the year.

Project level

4. **Dedicated work on women's rights is often necessary in addition to mainstreaming gender in all work.** Incorporating women's inclusion as a whole objective (one of four) within the project logframe facilitated a core focus on the issue, and enabled the sort of probing conversations necessary to drive mainstreaming forward.
5. **Invest in quality, facilitative training:** Kukumbi invested heavily in developing very specific training on gender roles and women's rights; and this was delivered by their gender specialist (as distinct from their field officers who did most capacity building and accompaniment). The training involved a reflective and facilitative approach where women took time to really explore the relevance of gender roles in their lives. This approach required comprehensive knowledge about women's rights, as well as very strong facilitation skills. The training was not an add-on: it was given the resources necessary and this is why it was successful. Aside from this the field staff introduced gender analysis at key moments in their regular capacity building cycle to keep the issue alive in the minds of the CC members.
6. **Context is important (and we don't control it)!** This project seems to have benefited from a positive trend nationally in favour of women's political participation which other donors are also buying into and promoting – including with Kukumbi – so they hear the same messages from others too, not just Trócaire. There is a national gender strategy, which actively promotes the inclusion of women in positions of power, for example in local authorities. Just as with the female field workers in the Kukumbi project, the visibility of women decision makers has a very positive modelling impact. The project capitalised on a positive moment in time for women's participation.
7. **Localise, build community power:** The existence of CCs at village level was crucial to this project. However, the members of CCs at village level are not members of elites – although they probably do have more power than others in villages. They are interested and engaged, and believe that their inclusion matters. This gives the structures real dynamism at a very local level, and means the changes they can bring about have relevance for the poorest people.
8. **Sustainability is key:** In order to ensure the future sustainability of the changes brought about by the project, in 2013 Kukumbi supported the creation of a province wide network of civil society in governance which included training of local groups. Trócaire also supported Kukumbi to strengthen their internal and organisational capacity so that it could continue these activities beyond the lifetime of the project.