



„To respect a woman as a person“

Women Economic Empowerment in Mozambique:
Examples from an Inclusive Business Approach
combining Baobab fruit commercialisation, life skills and nature conservation

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Economic Empowerment of Women in Mozambique: Examples of an Inclusive Business Approach combining Baobab fruit commercialisation, life skills and nature conservation

Unequal equality: The Gender Situation in Mozambique



Workforce participation in Mozambique is high, among women and men equally. However, especially vulnerable jobs are held by women. 80% of the working women in Mozambique are in the agricultural sector. Especially in rural and semi-urban areas they take care of the Machamba, which in rural areas is a piece of land used for subsistence agriculture.

Legislative rights provide gender equality, having the binary concept of women and men in mind. However, **customs are often in contradiction** to the law, especially in rural areas. In practice, literacy is lower among women compared to men, land is mainly owned by men, male relatives are priority in inheritance; hence women mostly do not possess the resources they work with, and therefore not granted freedom of decision.

Marriage below the age of 18 and domestic violence are prohibited by law, including spousal harassment. However, almost half of the Mozambican women are mothers and/or live in “union” before reaching this age. The government recently started to introduce a mechanism and structure to support women who experienced violence, yet not having the capacity to react to the real need. Roles of women and men, their extremely unequal situation, is mostly not perceived as such, but as “culture” or tradition. Roles are taught in early age by relatives, such as aunts to girls and uncles to boys – and repeated at community level by representatives of the large monotheistic religions.

A change gets visible among urban youths. Individuals and organisations publicly raise the topic. Urban challenges and opportunities, such as shorter ways to schools, job opportunities, higher living costs support the change.

Project name	Improving the framework conditions for the private and financial sector (ProEcon)
Commissioned by	Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung (BMZ)
Project region	Mozambique
Lead executing agency	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, GIZ
Duration	01.01.2017 – 30.06.2024

Integrated Partnership: GIZ ProEcon

Since 2017 German Development Cooperation in Mozambique supports Inclusive Business Models in the sector of Sustainable Economic Development Models. These are implemented mainly in the agricultural sector as an integrated development partnership with the private sector (iDPP), establishing a cost-sharing cooperation project with a private company. A key criterion is the potential and interest of the private company to integrate smallholders, especially women, into their supply chains. The aim is to **increase and improve production**, processing and the competitiveness of the company to ensure sustainability.

One such win-win of development and business has been achieved in the baobab value chain leading to better income and supporting the empowerment of the micro-level collectors, all of whom are women.

Considering the company’s interest to expand its supply chain, **BPM and the ProEcon project joined hands** in 2017 and signed an iDPP on a cost sharing basis with the objective of improving income and living conditions for 150 female baobab collectors and their families. The women have gained new skills in harvesting and pre-processing as well as a secure market with better prices of around 10 Eurocents per kg while BPM improved its supply of organic-certified quality baobab making the company more competitive in the international market.

Given the strong social impact of the business model of BPM, the economic viability and the potential for empowerment of women and for behavioral changes observed in during the first year of partnership, the **GIAE Mozambique** decided to take the initiative a step further and signed in 2018 an iDPP with BPM to organize the women collectors in an association, to develop new markets and products and to establish a pre-processing supply system on community level.

Project name	Green Innovation Centres for the food and agricultural Sector (GIAE)
Commissioned by	Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung (BMZ)
Project region	Mozambique
Lead executing agency	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, GIZ
Duration	01.03.2017 – 31.03.2024



Partner of ProEcon & GIAE in Mozambique:
The **Micaia Foundation** supports the **Baobab**
and other communities to develop
sustainable businesses in Manica province

Inclusive Partnership: Micaia & BPM

“This was lots of trial and error”, says Andrew Kingman, sitting in the small park at Chimoios “Praça dos Heroes” roundabout. The British social entrepreneur likes that small park in the centre of the capital of the Mozambican province Manica. “We lunched the company **‘Baobab Production Mozambique’** (BPM) in 2015 after three years of project work led by Micaia Foundation in the baobab-rich villages of northern Manica Province”, he remembers.

The company is a subsidiary of Eco-Micaia Ltd, the social enterprise part of the Micaia ‘family’. The reason why Andrew and his Mozambican partner, Milagre Nuvunga, established a social enterprise alongside the non-profit Foundation (in 2008) was that they recognised the need to move from subsidy (project funding) to investment in value chain development. With support from a UK-based donor, Micaia Foundation was able to help get BPM off the ground, funding training of the women fruit collectors.

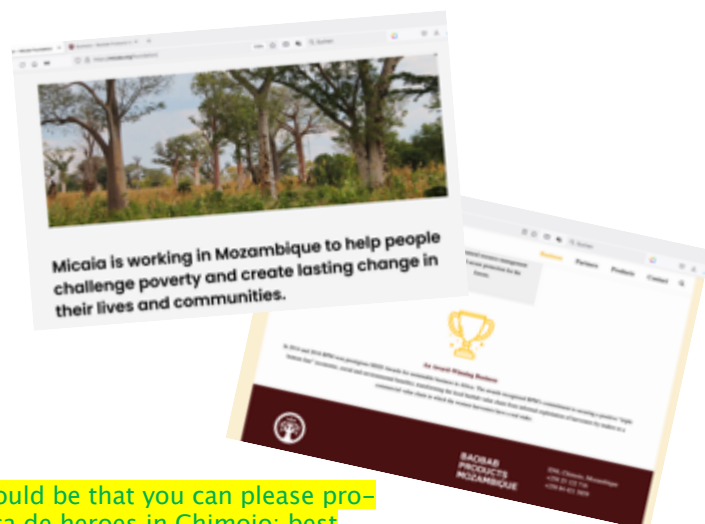
“**Local associations’ activities always depend on projects,**” Andrew says. He wanted community development on an auto-sustained base. The foundation, based on Kingman’s resources, supported the launch phase and is now mainly financed via BPM. “Nobody get’s rich with this, but the company has to make profit”, he says. And, additionally, the association of women Baobab fruits collectors hold a 20 per cent share of BPM. “They have a voice”, Andrew says.

They collect and their volunteers jointly with the BPM agents buy the collected fruits and organise the logistics. Some communities pre-process the fruits and BPM produces the powder which it sells to companies in several countries including in Europe. The Baobab powder is rich in vitamin and therefore used as “superfood”, as ingredient of many food products.

While BPM exports Baobab fruit powder to European and other countries, it is developing new products for the local market, including baobab oil, flavoured drinks powders, and even using the ground seed in chicken feed: “There are over 20 million potential clients in Mozambique. Why should we export to Europe? That wouldn’t be sustainable,” Andrew says.

Andrew worked already with associations in East and western Africa until he came in December 2007 to Mozambique.

During the **Covid-19 pandemic**, BPM’s clients in Europe suddenly restrained from their orders and BPM had difficulties to cover all its costs. ProEcon supported BPM with a part of the Covid funds. That gave the company some extra time – and finally BPM sold almost all their organic Baobab fruit powder in the region and could reimburse the GIZ support.



@Björn → Nicole: Better would be that you can please provide a photo from the praça de heroes in Chimoio; best would be the little park on the northern side and people below the trees. Picture should be done by you to be safe regarding the ©rights. Landscape mode please



The Region

Fire, draught and salty water

The districts between Tete and Chimoio are extremely dry. A tarmac national road connects the two provincial capitals, with plenty of old trucks on it, often with more than a Million miles on the odometer and tonnes of tree trunks on the trailer. Some stand for a few days at a cross road: Here the old main road between the two cities starts. It connects numerous small villages, some of them hard to reach. Along the sand road, sometimes, ruins of small colonial family farms appear; their white walls are covered by red dust. Among bushes rarely a small tree fights for survival, even more rarely the trees have leaves. Water is scarce and often the water from the pumps installed in some of the communities, from fifty meters depth, is salty. There are one or two minibuses per day connecting the villages with one of the towns for 140 MZN (1.85 €) – usually this is a pick-up truck called “My Love” because people stand and sit so close to each other that some love story started here. No way to get to town and back the same day with this privately organised public transport, mostly not even in two days.

“When I came here four years ago, everything was green”, says Ana. The project manager of the Micaia Foundation regularly visits the communities, keeping networks, providing life skills trainings and advising the Baobab Fruit Association members.

Long distances, dry riverbeds and burned fields mark the northern interior of the Mozambican province Manica

Parts of the road pass through a hilly region. There it crosses riverbeds. Which are dry as everything around, especially now in the dry season. In the rainy season it may sometimes rain, but then it rains like cats and dogs. “If it rains in the rainy season, these ‘rivers’ keep the water maybe one or two days”, Ana says. The sandy ground does not hold the water.

Mid of October. The season for agriculture and collection of Baobab fruits just finished – the rainy season ahead. Continuing the road, one sometimes sees people working on fields, apparently in the middle of nothing between two long distanced villages. Smoke rises here and there, burned pieces of wood, straw and bushes lay around. The red of the sand gets mixed with black and grey. “People ‘clean’ the fields”, explains Ana. She advocates since years in the communities, that burning the rests is dangerous and destroys the soil. However, many still do so as this method appears more effective than digging the soil with old hoes.

Deforestation, often illicit, is the nightmare of the region. For many younger men it is a quick and profitable income source especially outside of agricultural season or if they don’t cultivate successfully. Bushes disappear when new fields are prepared: Every few couple of years, men take off and burn bushes and their wives clean it up for planting. Depending on a man’s age, most of them have two or more wives. While “Pai” (father) may have one field at least partly for commercial use, each “Mãe” (mother) may have her own field to feed herself and her children, which she has with the family’s “father”.

Children boys, aged eight to twelve years, herd the cattle. Goats are left to their own grazing. The income, especially of cattle, is managed by the families’ men. As it is the case for most financial income. Women are expected to care for food and do most of the work.

Only rarely do women possess their own livestock and can benefit from selling it. This is the case, if they are widowed without having been transferred to the husbands next male relative – as it is the custom – or if they managed to divorce despite having very limited access to resources.

When women get married, the groom pays a bride price. In this moment, parents have the possibility to negotiate conditions for their daughters, such as the consent of the future husband, that she finishes school. It also happens, that husbands have to pay a penalty to the parents or to the traditional leader, if they treat their women “too bad”, that it causes unrest in the community.





Baobab trees and their fruit's meaning for women

Baobab trees are the strong giants marking the central and northern interior of Moçambique. These slow growing, large and mythical trees are easily larger than four metres and can get several hundred years old. Their trunks are sometimes hollow and their wood too fibrous to be used for construction. Only the over five centimetres thick bark can be used as an alternative for cords. And their fruits: each fruit contains lots of seeds, encapsulated by some white brittle pulp which is rich in vitamin C, iron, potassium and nutritious and consumable for human.

The Baobab fruits, called malambe, have not been very much used in the past. Some people, especially women collected them between April and August and sold them for less than 0,5 to 2,5 MZN (<1.7 Eurocents) per kilogram to itinerant informal dealers, who sold them to companies. With the professionalisation through the Micaia Foundation and the company Baobab Production Mozambique (BPM), quality and prices increased.

Women are trained how and where to collect and pre-process the fruits in organic certified sectors. They are organised in an association which is soon to be a shareholder in BPM and therefore have a voice – and start having their income. Per kilo, each of the up to 2,800 participating women receives currently 7 MZN (± 9 Eurocents) and reaches between some hundred and up to 70,000 MZN per season (± 95 Euro). The fruits bought from BPM do have a defined minimum size and are certified as organic. Bags are provided by the company to avoid contamination with any other material.

Agents of BPM jointly with local women members of the Malambe Association buy the fruits from the collector women in the villages. They issue vouchers to the collectors, stating quantity in kilograms and price. Once the agents were in all 35 villages, they get the cash from BPM and provide it to the collecting women based on their vouchers, usually some days after buying.





The Baobab fruit collectors

Maria

Maria lives without a husband. She cares for three children of hers, has a few goats, a small hut and a fireplace in the middle of her small yard where she sits in the evening with women friends or her children. She has a small field for corn, sells peanuts and collects baobab fruits (malambe). “Since I am the vice president of the malambe association, the community respects me”, Maria says. Just a few months ago, she participated in a GIZ meeting, represented the association and was awarded for her engagement for the women malambe collectors association. Living without a husband is rare in rural communities, and not well received. Women, especially if young, may be a “danger to other husbands”, people believe. They may bewitch them, or men would give them money or food in exchange for sexual “favours” instead of using it for their own households.

But Maria trains women on baobab fruit collection and sale, coordinates via the association with the processing company, negotiates the sales conditions and prices and from time to time she is invited to trainings. Through her, women of the village can earn money and trust her for that. And they see that women can well live on their own, increasing their income, taking decisions for themselves, improving their living.

Thanks to the income from the malambe, which Maria collects, and from some small fees she receives for her association engagement, Maria increased her goat herd. A tiny, but out of real bricks constructed house is almost ready, providing a veranda and two rooms. Sometimes she even pays someone to help her out. While discussing, sitting on her fireplace, some ten children are around her. Nobody takes care of them. Playing is considered useless, a waste of time for the children, as long as they cannot help the family.

Two of Maria’s own three little boys go to school. That is not the case for all children, especially not after fifth grade, when schools are kilometres away in the next village. Just a few minutes before, she picked up the youngest of them at the crowded water pump, where he had waited for his turn. He is six years old. His slightly older brother holds a crinkled schoolbook in his hands and tries reading loud out short stories. He benefits from the presence of the translator of this interview, who provides attention, helping and motivating him to read. “I wish, that they will respect their spouses as person”, meaning as an individual with her own capacities, says Maria, asked what changes she would wish for the future of her boys.

A woman can live independently and improve her life without a husband. This is what Maria demonstrates to other women of her village.

When Maria leaves the village in her duty for the association, her children manage their life alone. She prepares the food for a couple of days: xima, a kind of corn flour porridge, curry sauce, some vegetables.

Maria is proud of what she achieved, and humble when talking about it. Still, she prefers to speak Portuguese only when there is no one who could translate from local language. “She feels embarrassed, afraid of grammatical mistakes and supposed limited vocabulary”, says the translator, a woman who is often working with Maria. It is also her who tells later the plans of Maria: She learnt to drive a motorbike. And she wants to buy a small motorbike, to easier carry the stones for her tiny little house, maybe the water from the pump, and other products to the markets.



Lídia

Lídia gets up at five o'clock in the morning, sometimes earlier. She sweeps the dust around the small clay hut, prepares the food for husband and children and the washing water for her husband. Two hours after her he gets up. On the way to the field, she makes some small diversions to the baobab trees, collecting the fruits (malambe). "We only collect those which fell down and which are not too small," she says. "The small and broken ones we leave for the animals, and that new trees can grow." If the field needs to be cleaned after harvest or a new field may be prepared, her husband comes later, helping to take old plants away and burning them. On other days, he takes care of his piece of land or helps the second spouse on her field. During the afternoon, he is in the village, either "doing business" with other men or repairing something. If there is much to do on the field, he may also help her in order to be faster and to finish work before the hard rains washes everything away. "Sometime, men go to the village to buy and sell things," Lídia says.

"Men's task is, to be aware of everything", Lídia describes her husband's tasks. He tells her, if anything at the hut needs to be repaired or what she should buy at the market of the village or when it's time to prepare the field or to harvest. "Men do the works on the structure of the house", says a man of the village. "Women put the clay on the walls", tells Lídia.

While Lídia is away, working at the field, her older children take care of the younger ones, bring water from the village's pump or they are at school.

On the way back, she carries the malambe to her house. "If our women have collected many fruits, we go to carry it home," the other man says.

Most women provide a share of their earnings to their husbands, who "let them collect" the malambe. If sums are below about six Euro, the husbands rather leave them the whole money.

Lídia's husband has built a kind of wooden rack, about two metres off the ground. Here she puts the malambe to keep it dry and safe from animals.

Lídia is happy, that her husband agreed, that she collects malambe. "Like this, I have some money, which I can use for the family," she says. She can buy soap, food, cloth, school-books for herself and her children – and a bed. Sometimes, when she receives the money from the malambe collection, her husband expects her to show, how much she earned. She tells him, what she would buy from it. Often she lets him have a part of the money in order that he lets her continue to collect malambe.

The Baobab fruit collectors



...Lídia

“It is good if our women earn some money”, says another husband from the village. “Like this, our spouses can buy their things themselves and we do not have to give them money,” he adds. Some husbands expect their women to give them a portion of the money they earned, if it is over 500 to 700 MZN (6.70-9.60 Euro). If the women received less, they rather do not ask for a contribution. “If our men don’t ask for our contribution to the family,” Lídia explains, “then others could believe that something is wrong.” “Men paid a bride price,” another man explains, and therefore “women have to contribute to the family’s wealth,” he describes his perception. It depends on the family, how the man uses the money: for the family’s wealth, e.g. repairing, or to support other spouses or for his pleasure. Some believe, it is better that the husband of the spouses collects the money until it reaches a sum, which can be invested, in buying a goat for example. “Women would spend it for the small needs, like food and soap, instead of investing it,” they argue.

Lídia is glad to earn her own money: “We feel like persons”

Some men support their children’s school education: In some villages school is only possible until fifth grade. To continue, children have to move to another village, too far to make the way every day. In such case it happens that the local leader rents or buys a small house in the nearest village, where children can live to continue school. Other community members may rent a space in these houses.



Usually, they invest in their boys. “A man can later support his family”, one man says. “When a girl is married, she will never visit her parents anymore.” Another man – carefully – shares his observation that educated young women can make their life in town. “And these ones then do come back and support their family”, he says. Another says, that studying and living in town is a danger for young women – they may become “prostitutes”, meaning they would not get married anymore or chose a man, with whom the father does not agree. “When a girl becomes a woman, does not so much depend on the age,” one says. “One sees when they are ready, and when they know how to fulfil their tasks. This is the moment when they can marry.”



About seven o’clock dinner is prepared. In most families, the husband eats first. “We have learnt that good food is important for our children, that they can grow and learn at school,” explains Lídia, why in her family some good parts of the food are for the children. She has participated in Micaia Foundation’s session on lifeskills and literacy.

Only late after getting dark Lídia’s day comes to an end. Her husband still sits with some other men and goes to bed in his own hut about two hours later.

Despite her obligation to share her small income, Lídia is glad to earn her own money: “We feel like persons”, she says. This money gives her the possibility, at least to some degree, to influence what to buy and how to spend parts of the little money they have. And it gives her good times, when being with other women while collecting or pre-processing the fruits.

Cacilda

“In the beginning I was a ‘bit nervous’”, remembers Cacilda her first meeting with district authorities. As first elected president of the Baobab Fruit Organisation she had presented it to the authorities during an official meeting. “But then I told them everything we do,” she adds, trying to hide that she is proud of herself. She defended the association against attempts of authorities, to benefit from the women’s business. Through her work for the association, she gained recognition and self-confidence. Representing the members, she negotiates with the Baobab Fruit Processing company BPM about prices, for example: until 2019 the collecting women received 6 Meticaïs for each kilogram, now 7 MZN. Last year they were negotiating for 8 MZN, but due to the Covid-19 pandemic sales were in danger and the increase was postponed. As the association soon holds a twenty per cent share of BPM, she also advises the company, for example on the question which other villages to include: “The women from the neighbour village were, initially, not interested in collecting malambe,” Cacilda remembers. But now they changed their mind and BPM could start working with this community.

She also advocated for another village, which was hard to reach for the BPM trucks. Two years ago, women there had lots of fruits and it was agreed that the company sends a truck to pick-up the fruits. The woman waited. And waited. But no car came. The road was too difficult. Cacilda and the other association members sorted that out with BPM which now has a logistic responsible and the hard-to-reach village is the first on the truck’s tour.

On another occasion, Cacilda and the other association representatives advocated for the working conditions of BPM’s agents: during the season, they accompany the collection process in the villages, support logistics and are responsible for the final payment. Some of them live in tents during three month, some can rent a small house in one of the villages.

“I enjoy living on my own,” says Cacilda.

In Cacilda’s village, BPM has built a small hall where several hundred kilograms of baobab fruits are pre-processed and stocked. Cacilda, jointly with some other women baobab association members provides trainings to the local women. They also receive special new bags to assure that they do not use anything for transport, which could contaminate the organic certified fruits. By the end of the season, all meet at the pre-processing hall. Every woman brings one or several bags full of collected malambe. Each bag gets emptied, one after one. Broken and small fruits are sorted out, the good are weighted. Cacilda and the club members note the name, weight and value, the BPM agent signs and hands out a small voucher to the woman who brought the bag. And they explain what is written on it, as many women hardly know to read or calculate. The fruits are stocked dry on a wooden structure until all women left their bags and received their vouchers.



The Baobab fruit collectors

...Cacilda

“Sometimes, some women of the village argue, why they receive less than another woman with the same number of bags,” Cacilda says. This is, because most of them count the number of bags, but not the kilogram. The weight varies depending on the quality and humidity of the fruits and how the sac is packed. Cacilda and her colleagues then explain and settle the conflict.

From inside the pre-processing hall a pounding noise echoes through the village. The baobab club members hit each fruit with a metal stick to open it. If the pulp is thick and consistent, they stock it carefully, if it is crumbly or got larvae, they put it aside. It may still be used to feed animals. Lead Collectors such as Cacilda get paid 300 MZN (± 4 Euro) for each day that they work at the buying post.

At each state, the lead collector women and the Agent sign a form stating the volumes, the time of arrival and of departure. Once the agents have the data from all villages, they return to the company, organise the transport and the payment of all collectors women. “With this money we can buy shoes and notebooks for our children for school,” Cacilda’s colleagues add.

Cacilda is a widow. Traditionally, she and her three sons would have become part of the family of her husband’s brother. As an additional spouse probably. However, involving the local traditional leader “régulo”, she negotiated to keep living on her own and keeping her children. Her position in the association and her work for the community makes her be respected in the village. “I enjoy living on my own,” Cacilda says. That means, she can take more decisions for herself. Her mother helps her caring for her children, when Cacilda works for the association. Like for the last association’s general assembly, which Cacilda organised with the other board members: over 45 people from several villages met and exchanged on their baobab fruit collecting, processing and sales experiences.

“When my daughter will have may age, I wish that her children take care of her,” says Cacildas mother.



“When my daughter will have may age, I wish that her children take care of her,” says Cacilda’s mother. Children shall recognise, what their parents provided them, but things have changed. Novadays it would be more important, that also girls finish school, before getting married, the mother explains.





Pre-Processing

Orlanda & Anifa

A few kilometres north of the district's capital Guro, a new building is constructed, about hundred meter from the paved national road. On its left side, a large structure made of small tree branches holds the baobab fruits delivered from the villages around, where no pre-processing centre is installed. The first room looks as good as new, clean like a never used traditional fish market with tables, benches and deepenings as if from a single mould of cement. Here women sort the fruits by size and quality and open them. Two men coordinate the work.

Two steps lead to the processing room. Here, Orlanda works on one of the two stainless steel racks. They are full of baobab pulp powder. At each end a whole is covered with a large bag. Taking off the last stones, fibres and chunks, eight women hands push the fine powder through those holes into the bag. "Micaia Foundation has changed our lives," says Orlanda. She works in a processing site, close to the district capital Guro. "To be employed feels good." She earns her own money, which she partly shares with her husband. "We decide together, what we need," she says. Depending on opportunities, sometimes he works in jobs and sometimes Orlanda. During four month per year, she refines the baobab fruit powder for a regular working time and salary.



**"We decide together, what we need," she says.
"The final decision takes the man, that's our culture."**

"The final decision takes the man, that's our culture," she adds. However, if she really would not agree to his decision, she would return talking of the subject.

The same processing as in Guro happens at the BPM fabric in Chimoio. Here, women and men jointly work on the metal racks. Additionally, the powder gets checked again for its quality and refined with newly purchased machines. Nine people work here permanently of which five are women. Another 16 are seasonal workers. About 100 tones of powder are currently produced per year. It is collected by almost 2,800 women from up to 35 villages in the districts of Guro and Tambara. 80 per cent of the production are exported to Europe, with most going to Germany where it is mainly used as food additive. "We also start experimenting with oil from the baobab seed," explains Anifa. She is BPM's supply chain manager.



... Orlanda & Anifa



“The baobab fruit association of the collectors women will hold a 20 per cent share on BPM, in order to guarantee durability”, explains Anifa. With this approach and the work of the Micaia Foundation and with GIZ’s support, they involve the communities as active partners. This provides the opportunity to realise Lifeskills trainings, which provide space to women and men to reflect on gender relations in the villages, to improve their diets and their agricultural capacities. “We talk about their wishes and how to get there. We also explain alternatives for burning the bushes when preparing or cleaning a field,” adds Ana, the Micaia project manager, as examples. “And we provide literacy trainings.” They strive for connecting a more sustainable use of the natural resources of the region with gender equality and income generation. Getting more resilient, financially and through the applied methods, will sustainably improve the social and economic situation in these districts. “And maybe it contributes to stop the deforestation,” says Ana, who still remembers how green the region was still a couple of years ago.

The Covid-19 pandemic

“During the pandemic, we were afraid to lose BPM”, Cacilda, the baobab fruit association’s president, remembers. There was less contact. That would have meant to lose the income source from the baobab fruits. “Many things changed in this time,” says Cacilda’s mother. For example, women used to give a high-five when they are laughing about something. Or they hand over their babies to each other to hold them. “That doesn’t happen anymore.” Although believing they had no case in their village, people take care. The malambe club members also advocated in the village to respect the safety measures against the virus.

BPM faced challenges to sell their products for a while. Export ways were cut-off, clients in Europe did not order the baobab powder as expected leaving BPM without means to purchase pre-processed baobab. The company received an advance payment from the BMZ Covid-19 funds via the GIZ/GIAE project protecting the annual income that Baobab brings to 2,800 women collectors. At the same time, the company entered a new market and sold most of its stock to South Africa. By now, visits to the communities became easier again and the season 2021 could be realised almost as usual. The association members now feel reassured. However, some changes continue: People have less physical contact to each other; the habit of high-five did not turn back so far. Women meet less and therefore talk less on private issues. In the past, also the life-skill trainings of the Micaia Foundation, which supports the malambe clubs with trainings and technical knowledge, provided the opportunity to create safe spaces. These moments, where women met and could exchange on their thoughts, were missing during the pandemic. Only with the 2021 baobab season, new occasions for women networking return. Slowly.



Methododology

This case study is mainly based on interviews and field visits held from 18 to 23 October 2021 in the Mozambican Province of Manica in the [districts of Guro and Tambara](#). The author visited five communities along the old national road from Chimoio to Tete: Nhamassanga, Nhalua, Demandfe, Lampa, Tsandzabue. In each of these villages (comunidades) group and individual interviews with about eight to ten women and six to ten men were held in separate sessions, including interviews with local traditional and political leaders (“régulos” and “chefe do beiro”). Especially women, but also men in this region mostly speak in local languages, partly mixed with Portuguese and English words. Therefore, Ana Mlambo, project manager at the Micai foundation and well known in the villages, guaranteed the confidence of the interviewees and supported the interviews with her local language skills and in-depth expertise.

The author also visited a pre-processing centre in one of these communities and in the city of Guro as well as the processing fabric BPM in Chimoio. The travel was organised and accompanied by Ana Mlambo and supported by the GIZ GIAE/ProE-con project. Interviews with the founder and director of the Micai foundation, Andrew Kingman, as well as with the GIZ project director Doris Becker were held in the capital Maputo. Some of the interviewee names are changed or statements are anonymised to assure the safety of the respective person.



Learnings

Women who live on their own, are often discriminated by their communities. If they fulfil functions which are important for other women, such as being the leader of an organisation, they gain importance and therefore respect. In such position they can influence perceptions on how families can be constructed. They are role models, seen by other and questioning mindsets.

Women in remote countryside often have no or almost no income. Gender accommodative business approaches, which provide jobs that would be accepted as “female jobs” can provide them with income. However, their husbands expect them to report and share their income with them, while these men do not do so. If income would not be cash money or is below a low threshold, men rather do not expect to receive a share of the women’s income. Therefore, combining the moments of payment with savings groups session or via mobile money could increase the probability, that women could decide themselves over their financial resources.

Women, more than men, lack access to school education. Many schools from the fifth year upwards are far away, so that students have to live in bigger villages or the next town. Some village’s families provide simple houses, where the youths then can live. Yet, they send rather boys to these houses, as they believe that young women (or girls) alone in town would become sex workers or get pregnant and that they would later not serve the family, but their husbands. Therefore, investment in girls is considered “less profitable” than in boys. However, these privately organised kinds of “boarding schools” could be an access point to improve girls’ access to education and to provide them with additional information regarding their rights and opportunities.

The baobab fruit collecting women are represented via their association and have a voice in the BPM company. This provides them access to market prices, information and training to improve the quality (inc. organic certification) and importance. The fact, that these women work on a common goal provides the opportunity for exchange on private topic, but also on experiences, which is different than the usual rather confusing moments at the water pumps. It provides the opportunity for networking between women and can be used as a lever also for other subjects, such as gender roles and rights including defence mechanisms against (gender based) violence and understanding of child education.

Similar approaches with other products can be used to bring men together. Although they have their moments of networking and “doing business”, bringing them together for learning purposes can provide moments where masculinity roles, advantages of gender equity/equality, GBV prevention, fair and discrimination-free interaction can be discussed.

Role models are perceived as “culture” or “tradition” and very often as not changeable. Men “invest” in women when paying the bride token and therefore women “have to serve”. A woman is respected if married. The first spouse in case of several spouses often enjoys more right to have a say, however decision is taken by the house’s “father”, the husband respectively. If a man dies, she and her goods “belong” to the brother or nearest male relative of the husband. Women have even lesser choice, as they don’t have resources to build up their own life. If in such moment, a woman has some basic income which does not depend on a piece of ground (which would be transferred to the husband’s family), such as collecting wild fruits or processing of goods, she could in some case negotiate with the help of elderly to continue to live on her own. Which later would give her more choice in how to organise her live.



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