

Starting from scratch

The MAMM programme in Nampula, Mozambique

Author: Lieve Lodewyckx, SNV Mozambique, Nampula, Mozambique < lievelode@gmail.com >

Capacity building for development is difficult at the best of times, but what happens when community structures have been destroyed, and there are no mechanisms to articulate local priorities? SNV's MAMM programme went back to the drawing board to facilitate the emergence of credible local partners.

Colonialism, a socialist one-party system after independence in 1975, followed by 16 years of civil war, have bequeathed a highly centralised and authoritarian system of government in Mozambique. Local civil society organisations are almost non-existent, and those that do exist are too weak to engage in dialogue with government.

In the 1990s, faced with external pressure from the international donor community, the Mozambique government launched a process of decentralisation and democratisation, aimed at improving the basic social infrastructure, service delivery, and initiating income-generating activities. This ongoing process involves strengthening local governance, promoting collaboration between local stakeholders and the encouraging the participation of local communities in the development process.

The MAMM programme

In 1997 SNV introduced a programme in four pilot districts in Nampula province ? Mogovolas, Angoche, Mogincual and Moma. This so-called MAMM programme was set up as part of a national decentralisation experiment led by the Mozambican ministries of Planning and Finance and of State Administration, with the assistance of two UN agencies (UNCDF and UNDP). The programme was to facilitate the drafting of regional socio-economic plans, in consultation with the most important stakeholders at the local level.

The MAMM programme also aimed to create partnerships between civil society organisations, communities and local government to ensure that the needs and priorities of communities were taken into account in the plans, to ensure accountability, and to support the institutionalisation of community representation in the planning process. Another objective was to enhance the negotiating skills of local communities, thus strengthening their position during interactions with local authorities in the district planning process. Part of the programme also involved strengthening local state institutions to make them aware of their responsibility to serve

communities, and improving their capabilities to respond quickly and adequately.

Local development committees

In order to encourage the participation of local communities in the planning process, a number of Mozambican professionals were identified to act as 'agents of local development'. They were to focus on organising local groups so that they could act together and present a common front with respect to the local authorities and other actors. This led to the formation of local development committees (CDLs) that would articulate the most urgent needs of their communities and advocate for these needs with other stakeholders. Between 1997 and 2006, 95 committees were created throughout the region.

Soon, at the instigation of the committees, community members began to work together to carry out many small projects, such as constructing and improving schools and adult literacy centres, cleaning access roads to their village and laying tree trunks across the rivers when bridges collapsed. In one case, the villagers built their own maternity home, organised training for traditional midwives, and thus contributed to a reduction in the maternal mortality rate. In other cases, the villagers built latrines, disposed of garbage, or provided materials and labour for construction projects. Parents were encouraged to send their daughters to school, rather than marrying them off at a young age. Together, community members introduced measures to put a stop to illegal fishing in local lakes and to prevent forest fires. They saved money to buy bicycles to carry sick people to hospital, or could be used by midwives so that they could attend deliveries in time. The committees led not only to material improvements, but also to greater involvement of and solidarity among community members.

In addition, with the help of a 'community development fund' at least 41 micro-projects have been created, worth a total of US\$ 119,000, which now are at various stages of approval or implementation. They cover education, health, water and economic sectors. The costs of these projects – financial and in kind – are shared between the fund (40%), the local community (58%) and the local government (2%).

Regular training for committee members, as well as frequent contacts between different committees, were organised so that they could exchange experiences and remain motivated. Special attention was paid to ensuring the equal participation of women at all levels.

The members learned to assess and analyse problems within their communities, and to discuss them with organisations and government departments. They also learned how to network in support of development activities, how to apply to the community fund for financial support, and how to manage simple projects of public interest. Many committee members acknowledge that the MAMM programme has helped them discover their own potential to solve development problems.

Multi-stakeholder processes

The members of local development committees are also having an impact on other community-based organisations (CBOs) of which they are members. Thus the committees are now collaborating with religious groups, agricultural associations, veterinary groups, savings and credit associations, school development committees and cultural groups, where they are able to use and transfer the knowledge they have acquired. For example, some members have become role models for saving and credit associations through their exemplary management of these financial services.

A number of NGOs in the region are collaborating with the committees, and a growing number of private companies have shown their interest in working in the MAMM region due to the obvious advantages of working with well organised communities. These partners are using the committees as points of entry into communities (thus saving time in community mobilisation). The existence of such committees eliminates the need for additional capacity building (thus reducing partner effort) to elaborate quality project proposals and implement them efficiently (thus reducing partner costs).

The results of the MAMM programme so far are encouraging. It appears that the efforts of the local development committees are beginning to have multiplier effects. Communities without one have begun to request similar help in order to establish their own. Some committees have found ways to access other potential sources of funding to mobilise further support for their micro-projects.

The role of government

The national government has adopted the district as the basic planning and budgeting unit, and has welcomed community participation in the full district planning cycle by highlighting the role of communities in various laws and official documents. Now that space has been created for civil society participation, local governance needs to be strengthened in order to improve the effectiveness of socio-economic development programmes in relieving the widespread poverty. The recent decision to allocate investment funds (approximately US\$250,000) for each district in 2006, and the use of those funds in the districts, should also contribute to the creation of an institutional framework for community participation, in particular in district planning.

The future

The strengthening of civil society and local communities has complemented the government's decentralisation efforts by mobilising the potential for popular participation. A number of local governors now recognise that communities can contribute important ideas and valuable local resources that will promote social development and encourage economic investments.

But in spite of an overflow of political statements, reality shows that the needs of the poorest are frequently regarded as being of minor importance in relation to other competing interests. Significant constraints remain, especially logistics (large distances, bad roads, poor

telecommunications and postal systems, and the lack of financial services), as well as small budgets, the lack of technical skills and wide gender disparities in all spheres, and in decision-making processes, all of which could undermine progress in achieving local development.

At the end of the MAMM programme period a new local NGO with the beautiful name of Akilizetho (?our ideas?) was created to continue the support to existing and new local development committees in the region. Much of Akilizetho?s success will depend on its ability to consolidate the identity of the committees, on the technical and organisational skills of its members, and on the donors? willingness to place their trust in this new organisation.

Links

[UN Capital Development Fund \(UNCDF\) Mozambique](#)

[UN Development Programme \(UNDP\) Mozambique](#)

Further reading

B. Pijnenburg (2004)

[Keeping it Vague: Discourses and Practices of Participation in Rural Mozambique](#). Dissertation, Wageningen University.

UNCDF (2005)

[Delivering the Goods: Building Local Government Capacity to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals](#). UN Capital Development Fund.

UNCDF (2005)

[Participatory Monitoring & Evaluation at District and Local Level: Mechanisms, Evidence and Practices](#). Working Paper 4, UN Capital Development Fund.