



Women activists in Matola Gare, outside Maputo. Photo credit: Brett Eloff/Oxfam America.

# CHANGING LAWS, CHANGING LIVES

## Supporting Survivors of Gender-Based Violence in Mozambique

Survivors of gender-based violence in Mozambique face challenges in accessing legal justice and support. Formal justice structures are inaccessible, especially in remote areas, and informal procedures are often rooted in attitudes and practices that discriminate against women. Since 2008, Oxfam in Mozambique has partnered with small women's rights organisations through Fórum Mulher, a network of women's associations in Mozambique, to offer funding and support. One such group is AMUDEIA (the Association of Disadvantaged Women), a rural women's organisation which operates a care centre for survivors of gender-based violence. With Oxfam's support, AMUDEIA has been able to grow from an informal association of volunteers to an established organisation with the capacity to provide survivors with the legal and psychosocial services they need.



**OXFAM**

# INTRODUCTION

Over a third of women in Mozambique have experienced violence, and many survivors are unable to access support. Oxfam in Mozambique has been working to promote women's rights since independence in 1975, and ensure women's access to health services, education and land. Since 2008, Oxfam has funded and supported small women's rights organisations across Mozambique through Fórum Mulher (The Women's Forum). One of the success stories of this partnership is AMUDEIA, a rural women's organisation which runs a care centre for women survivors of gender-based violence. Through the programme, AMUDEIA and other members of Fórum Mulher have been able not only to grow their organisations and develop the skills of their staff, but also to work together as a network to lobby successfully for the passage of the Domestic Violence Law in 2009.

## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN MOZAMBIQUE

37% of all women in Mozambique have experienced some form of violence, and 45% of women who have been married have experienced violence committed by their husbands.<sup>i</sup> While progress has been made on laws and policies to protect women's rights, patriarchal values and beliefs – amongst other barriers – prevent these laws from being fully implemented.

**37% of all women in Mozambique have experienced violence**

Survivors of violence face obstacles to accessing justice and support. Almost two-thirds of Mozambicans live in rural areas, beyond the reach of the formal justice system. Instead, their only recourse is through an informal system, guided by traditional leaders and community courts, where justice is based on customary laws that often discriminate against women and girls.

Despite having nearly 40% representation of women in Parliament as of early 2014<sup>ii</sup> – among the highest in the world – women's ability to participate in decisions that affect their everyday lives is limited by cultural and religious norms which preserve men's dominance.

AMUDEIA works in Manhiça, a predominantly agricultural district along the major national road to northern Mozambique. Many men in the area are employed as seasonal workers on sugar cane plantations, while others leave their homes to work in the mines in South Africa. In this environment, family relationships are fragmented and domestic violence and other forms of violence against women are rife.

**45% of ever-married women have experienced intimate partner violence**

## SUPPORTING MARGINALISED WOMEN

AMUDEIA works to support women who experience violence. Its origins in the labour movement, AMUDEIA has expanded over time to become a place of mutual support and solidarity for the most

marginalised women in Mozambican society, including those who are HIV-positive, elderly, or victims of land grabbing.



A survivor of violence being assisted in AMUDEIA's care centre. Photo credit: Virgilio Mubai/AMUDEIA.

In 2007, AMUDEIA established a care centre for survivors of violence, and began to train women as activists around land rights and family law, so that they could educate other women in their communities about their rights with respect to these laws.

However, it soon became apparent that education was not enough. Survivors of violence needed practical legal and psychosocial assistance – but AMUDEIA did not have the capacity to provide it. At that time, the organisation was run entirely by volunteers and had limited infrastructure.

Efforts to secure justice for women were also falling short: not only was there no law to protect survivors of violence, but AMUDEIA's efforts to ensure that women received child support payments, alimony, and a fair share of their property in the case of separation resulted only in informal agreements with no way to enforce compliance. Activists began to be trained as paralegals, but there were no funds to hire lawyers to represent survivors in court.

## WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH OXFAM

In 2008, AMUDEIA and Oxfam began their partnership, with Fórum Mulher acting to facilitate AMUDEIA's development until it became sufficiently established to partner with Oxfam directly.

Fórum Mulher is a national network of over 80 women's rights organisations. It formed in 1994 in order to coordinate the activities of these diverse organisations to work together to promote women's rights in Mozambique. Through Fórum Mulher, Oxfam supported AMUDEIA through funding, assistance with strategic planning, financial and administrative management, and training of staff.

This partnership marked a radical change for AMUDEIA. With Oxfam's support, the care centre was transformed. AMUDEIA was able to develop the centre's infrastructure, hire qualified personnel, including lawyers and psychologists, and train eight new paralegals.

Oxfam also supported Fórum Mulher in building and co-ordinating a network of rural and urban women's organisations, including AMUDEIA, to lobby for the Domestic Violence Law to be passed. The network promoted debates at national level, orchestrated a media campaign, produced research, held marches and organised sit-ins at the National Assembly, where the law was under discussion.

These actions contributed to the approval of the law in 2009. This law represented a landmark for women in Mozambique – for the first time, women survivors of domestic violence had legal grounds for protection.

### Box 1: The story of Dulce Narciso – Paralegal

Dulce Narciso has been the coordinator of the AMUDEIA care centre since 2011.

Her own life story gives her particular empathy into the situations of the women she works with: as a teenage mother, she developed a deep and personal understanding of the discrimination faced by many women in Mozambique, which drove her to become a women's rights activist.

In 2006, she trained to become AMUDEIA's first paralegal. The skills she developed through this training helped her gain the self-confidence to help other women who have experienced violence.

At first, it was not easy. As a young, single woman helping survivors of violence, she faced hostility in the community. "People called me a slut and a prostitute," she said. Sometimes she felt hopeless, but the desperate need she saw before her gave her strength.

Oxfam's partnership has transformed her work.

"The partnership came at an important moment," she says, referring to the fight to have the Domestic Violence Law approved. "This growth, and the way we operate now, is thanks to the support of Oxfam. In the beginning, we worked without any knowledge and means, but now we feel confident. And look – the results are huge! Victims know they can come to AMUDEIA before they go to the police or a tribunal."

In the future, Dulce hopes to train as a lawyer, as she believes survivors have a right to be represented by activists who truly have their interests at heart.



Dulce Narciso in her office. Photo credit: Edson Mussa/Oxfam.

The impact of the law for Mozambican women was thunderous. In 2010 alone, 10,000 women came forward to the police to speak out about their experiences with domestic violence. Between 2011 and 2013, Oxfam and Fórum Mulher worked together to respond to this outpouring by supporting organisations to develop the resources needed to assist survivors at community level.

However, with these gains came backlash. With more and more cases of domestic violence being reported and prosecuted, AMUDEIA's staff have been accused of splitting up families. Conservative leaders and uncooperative institutions are resistant to the challenge to local customs, and in this environment, many survivors of violence are pressured by family, colleagues and neighbours to withdraw complaints.

But the activists of AMUDEIA are undaunted. They make home visits and participate in trial sessions, so that survivors never have to stand alone. Where they face opposition from community leaders, they take steps to include those leaders in their activities, demonstrating to them the value of AMUDEIA's work.

Oxfam is currently supporting and providing training for AMUDEIA and other members of the Fórum Mulher network to develop innovative methodologies to address the underlying causes of violence. The planned approaches include working with men and boys to challenge patriarchal power relations, developing women's leadership and self-confidence, developing systems in communities and schools for the early detection of cases of violence, and exploring alternative safety strategies for domestic violence survivors who are unable to find shelter away from home.

## Box 2: The AMUDEIA Members of Parliament

“It’s oppression of men!”

“It’s for revenge!”

“The law will destroy families!”

When the proposed law against domestic violence was submitted to Parliament in 2008, these were some of the accusations levelled against the proponents by voices from across Mozambique, including religious institutions, journalists, and Members of Parliament.

It was a difficult time for women’s rights organisations, but they refused to stay silent.

With Oxfam’s support, AMUDEIA was able to play a fundamental role in mobilizing women from rural areas in Manhiça to have a voice in the debates in Parliament.

“We entered Parliament singing and playing whistles, applauding the pro-law speeches and condemning speeches against the law,” says former President of AMUDEIA, Maria Adozinda.

Around 200 women from AMUDEIA travelled from Manhiça to Maputo every time the draft law was discussed – they became so well known that they were called “the AMUDEIA Members of Parliament”.

“At first we were scared, but then we got used to it,” says Maria. “When I see a woman free of violence because of this law, I feel it was worth the effort.”



AMUDEIA members march. Photo credit: Adelson Rafael/Oxfam.

## IMPACT

The partnership with Oxfam has enabled AMUDEIA to support marginalised women more effectively. AMUDEIA’s care centre has become renowned in the area, and serves women from around the district and beyond. Between 2008 and 2013, around 3,000 women benefited directly from the legal and psychosocial services provided by the AMUDEIA care centre. Thanks to this success, they have been able to expand, establishing 28 new care centres around the country.

Oxfam’s support has also helped Fórum Mulher to form a more powerful network, increasing their voice and impact. The role played in the passage of the Domestic Violence Law is testament to the strength of this network.

# THE FUTURE

The fight for the implementation of the Domestic Violence Law is ongoing. The beliefs and attitudes of officials involved in implementing the law, from judges to police officers, need to be transformed if the law is to have a real impact on the lives of survivors of violence.

In 2014, the organisations that make up Forum Mulher's network have also been heavily involved in the process around revising Mozambique's Penal Code. With support from Oxfam, they raised concerns about the Code, and as a result, problematic articles about rape, child marriage and polygamy were withdrawn. However, the Code has not yet been fully approved – there is still work to do to ensure that the final version contributes to a political environment conducive to women's rights.

There is also a need for increased funding and capacity building of AMUDEIA's new care centres. Basic infrastructure and the capacity to offer thorough psychological support are among the biggest needs for their centres.

AMUDEIA has come a long way from its days as a small group of volunteers. As part of a strong women's rights network, and with the ongoing support of Oxfam, AMUDEIA can extend its reach even further as they work together to meet the needs of women survivors of violence in Mozambique.

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<sup>i</sup> National Institute of Statistics, "Mozambique Demographic and Health Survey", 2011

<sup>ii</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2014 ([http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/2223\\_A.htm](http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/2223_A.htm))

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The information in this publication is correct at the time of going to press.

Published by Oxfam GB under  
978-1-78077-819-8 in March 2015.  
Oxfam GB, Oxfam House, John Smith Drive, Cowley, Oxford, OX4 2JY, UK.