

KEEPING GIRLS IN SCHOOL

BUILDING THE CAPACITY OF
THE WOMEN AND EDUCATION
ASSOCIATION IN MOZAMBIQUE

OXFAM NOVIB CASE JULY 2015



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SUMMARY

KEEPING GIRLS IN SCHOOL IN MOZAMBIQUE

Most girls in Mozambique do not even start secondary education, let alone complete it. Reasons range from early marriage to the long distances from home to school and economic pressures to help with household chores instead of studying. Oxfam Novib built the capacity of AMME, the Mozambican Women and Education Association, to help girls stay in school through scholarships and training activists to challenge social norms through school and community debates.

CASE DESCRIPTION

AIM OF THE PROJECT

The project aims to strengthen the institutional capacity of the Mozambican Women and Education Association (AMME) to promote greater gender equality – especially in education. AMME works in Zambezia, the second most populated province of Mozambique with 3.8 million inhabitants. Oxfam's funding and technical support helped AMME to promote socio-economic and cultural changes that contribute to girls continuing at school.

CONTEXT

While 94% of girls enroll in primary school in Mozambique, more than half drop out before the 5th grade; only 11% continue their studies to secondary level, and only 1% reach university.¹ Almost half of all girls aged 15-24 in Mozambique are illiterate. Zambezia scores particularly low on female literacy (21%, according to a 2007 National Statistics Institute study) along with a range of other social indicators: child mortality is more than twice as high as in the best-performing provinces, HIV/AIDS prevalence is 19.2% and the poverty rate is 69.4%, mainly affecting women and children living in rural areas.

Causes of students dropping out of school include poverty, distance from school, absenteeism of teachers, poor quality of education and the need to migrate with their families for seasonal agricultural work. Specific reasons for girls dropping out include greater expectations of help with household tasks (such as gathering and chopping firewood, fetching water, cooking and caring for the children and the elderly), sexual harassment at school, early pregnancy and early marriage: according to UNICEF, one in ten girls is married before the age of 15 and one in two by the age of 18.

Not only do parents tend not to see the value of educating girls, often girls themselves do not see much sense in studying, given the high unemployment that would face them on graduation.

¹ LIGADA. Adolescents girl's participation, on equal terms, in the economy, Feasibility study for an Urban Ligada Programme. Kerry Selvester – July 2014, DFID

WHY DID OXFAM NOVIB GET INVOLVED?

Oxfam learned about AMME in 2008, when it was looking for partners in Zambezia. AMME's activities and vision fit well with the aims of Oxfam's strategic plan in Mozambique: to strengthen civil society to allow people to know how to defend their rights, pressure the government and private sector, and advocate to defend social justice and the development and implementation of pro-poor policies. Specifically, one of Oxfam's objectives in Mozambique is:

"Citizens and organisations discuss and challenge norms, values and beliefs that build identities and relationships and gender roles, resulting in changes in individual and organisational practices that bring a more inclusive society and gender equality. Girls and women in Mozambique live in a society free of the fear of violence and discrimination, understand and demand to exercise their rights".

THE INTERVENTION AND RESULTS

Initially, AMME received a technical visit from Oxfam and undertook together a "Toolbox" assessment. This resulted in recommendations including establishing statutory governing bodies and a strategic plan. With technical and financial support from Oxfam, AMME underwent training in gender mainstreaming, producing financial reports and implementing a rights-based approach. Regular technical visits helped the association to consolidate systems and procedures.

With support from Oxfam, AMME selected and trained 30 activists – men and women in equal number – to work in schools and communities in the districts of Quelimane, Nicoadala, Mopeia, Mocuba and Morrumbala. Their role is to promote discussions in communities, schools, and churches on reproductive health, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and gender based violence. Discussions in schools are held four times a month with groups of 25 students separated by sex, and a session for both sexes. In communities, two debates are held a month.

The activists include teachers, who said that initially students were silent and shy in discussion sessions but slowly began to participate, with girls showing particular interest in the topics of domestic violence and sexual harassment. The teachers soon found that students were seeking them out with specific questions about STIs, pregnancy and early marriage. Students interviewed said the sessions were interesting and informative, and "warmed up" when the groups of girls and boys got together.

AMME works with community leaders to start discussions around gender-based violence, often perpetrated by men who drink. As many girls give up school after going through initiation rites, which traditionally indicate that a girl is old enough to be married off, AMME also started discussions with the matrons responsible for initiation rites. In May 2014 AMME signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Office for Assistance to Women and Children victim of Domestic Violence, to carry out awareness campaigns in schools and communities and train police on domestic violence and human rights.

AMME provides scholarships to 100 girls, 20 in each district, covering school fees for the 8th to 12th grade and supplying uniforms and other essentials such as books and photocopying. Students who live in rural areas too remote from school to travel every day are also provided with boarding. The scholars are selected with the help of the District Department of Education, Youth and Technology and community leaders, to identify those most in need.

To qualify for a scholarship, girls must have lost at least one parent. Many were living with family members who considered them to be a burden, and would have been unable to fund their continuing education from the erratic income their households earned from subsistence agriculture.

Girls with good enough grades – around half of them – are encouraged to train to become teachers. An example is Finélia, whose father died leaving her peasant mother to raise a family of seven, and who would have faced immense difficulties in continuing her studies without an AMME scholarship. Today she is an elementary school teacher in the district of Maganja da Costa, and says that she is happy because she likes the profession and is in a position to help her mother and brothers.

LESSONS LEARNED

The project shows that capacity building can help a local organisation not only to be more effective, but also to be more able to appeal to other donors. The organisation needs to be willing to work as part of a network and establish partnerships with government and civil society partners, and to be open to new approaches. On the broader issues, AMME's experience demonstrates the need to work in schools and communities to address the wide range of socio-economic and cultural factors that make it challenging for girls to continue with their education.

HUMAN INTEREST

“AMME has good initiatives that help schools. The discussion sessions help the school to prevent sexual harassment and scholarships for girls help students who would not be able to afford to attend secondary school due to poverty. Many are orphans of parents and living with relatives who are also very poor, or living alone taking care younger relatives.”

Educational Director of Sangavieira Secondary School in Quelimane

“In conversations with the community, we teach that marriage is not to make of the other a slave. We make people see that men and women have equal rights, and we also explain the law on domestic violence. These conversations help to inhibit the actions of men who think and practice domestic violence.”

Community leader “Eduardo Mondlane”, Mopeia district

“I go to school to change my life, to have knowledge, and in the future get a good job and change my economic situation”.

8th grade student in Sangavieira General Secondary School

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This document was written by Nelia Vera Taimo.

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Oxfam Novib
P.O. Box 30919
2500 GX The Hague
The Netherlands

T +31 (0) 70 3421621
info@oxfamnovib.nl
www.oxfamnovib.nl