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GENDER, YOUTH, AND LAND TENURE: LESSONS FROM ZAMBÉZIA, MOZAMBIQUE

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INTRODUCTION

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded Integrated Land and Resource Governance (ILRG) program improves land tenure security for women and youth as part of broad-based economic empowerment. In 2020, ILRG’s Mozambique team assessed gender and youth relationships and decision-making structures regarding land access and use in a matrilineal context in Zambézia Province. The lessons learned in the assessment help clarify how gender and age inequalities interact with the process of delimitation of land boundaries and confirmation of land rights, as well as women’s and men’s land use and tenure security. The findings presented in this brief can guide decision-makers to design appropriate gender and youth-responsive activities and materials.¹

The Legal Framework on Land Rights

Mozambique’s National Land Policy of 1995 and the Land Law of 1997 establish that land belongs to the state and cannot be sold, alienated, or mortgaged, but that citizens can acquire land rights through inheritance, via peaceful occupation, and through application to the state.

Land use rights, known as a DUAT (*direito de uso e aproveitamento da terra*), can be held individually or jointly. Most rural residents acquire land rights through occupation based on customary norms and practices or by good faith occupation of at least 10 years.

The assessment involved qualitative field work in two communities in Ile District where delimitation of community and family land was supported by the Department for International Development-funded Land: Enhancing Governance for Economic Development (LEGEND) program in 2018 – 2019 and USAID’s ILRG program in 2019; both projects were implemented by Associação Rural para Ajuda Mútua (ORAM). The communities were also directly or indirectly affected by vast land concessions granted to Portucel, an international company investing in the production of timber for paper pulp and energy.

¹ The full study is available at <https://www.land-links.org/document/mozambique-gender-youth-and-social-inclusion-assessment/>. A summary of key findings and recommendations is available at <https://www.land-links.org/document/lessons-on-gender-youth-and-social-inclusion-in-zambezia-province-mozambique/>.

The projects supported the establishment and capacity building of community land associations, delimitation of communities, and subsequent delimitation of land parcels that had been previously acquired by families or individuals based on occupation. Together, LEGEND and ILRG helped form 25 community land associations and provided written declarations of land rights for over 13,000 family and individual parcels. Seventy percent of land titles were solely in the names of women and six percent were co-titled to a man and a woman.

KEY FINDINGS

Matrilineal and matrilocal customs underpin land rights for women: Ile District is dominated by a matrilineal and matrilocal social structure, which means that family land is inherited primarily by daughters, and husbands usually move to the wife's home upon marriage. Women are the main land users as many men travel periodically, and there is a high percentage of female-headed households. Women's birthright to land is largely unquestioned by men and women and only some men inherit land from their parents.

Yet men retain control: Traditional gender norms are very strong in Ile resulting in most women having little formal education and restricted physical mobility, which constrains them from obtaining information and economic opportunities. While men often leave to study, sell goods, or look for jobs, women are expected to stay and farm. Early marriages are common because marriage provides families with additional labor. Although land is inherited through the female line and women do most of the work on the land, the main decision-maker in most families is the man, including on land-related issues.

"The woman is trapped on the land with the children. Not many women send their man away, it is not easy to be alone and it is difficult to find another man, because she already has children with the first one."
- Olinda, community-based technician for ORAM

Divorced women keep the land: Women in the matrilocal system stay on the family land with the children after divorce or if her husband dies. A divorced or widowed man usually returns to his place of origin or marries elsewhere. Divorce is becoming more common but is not widely socially accepted. Divorce has negative economic and social implications for many women, since men are important providers of labor or cash, and because divorced women are often stigmatized.

As Land is Traditionally Inherited by Women, Men Need to Buy Land

João was born in Monegue and is one of the few men who brought his wife from another village to live in his own community. According to matrilocal traditions, his parents divided their land only between their daughters, leaving him with no land. He therefore bought land.

During the ILRG activity, he and his wife, Joanita, decided to co-title the land in both their names. According to João, co-titling gives him and his wife joint decision-making power over the land.

Even so, in the future João and Joanita intend to divide the land only between their three daughters. Their three sons will not get land, since they are expected to access land through marriage and relocation to their wives' homes.

Land purchases are increasing: As land is traditionally inherited by women in matrilineal systems, some men feel challenged by their lack of access to land. This becomes even clearer after delimitation and confirmation of land rights, as most titleholders are women. There is an emerging trend that men are increasingly buying land that they can control and hold in case of divorce or spouse death.

Youth are marginalized from land: Mozambique has a very young population; approximately half the inhabitants of Ile District are under 15. Upon marriage, young people (defined as those under 30 years old) depend on their natal family land to provide for their households. However, less than 14 percent of family parcels registered during the LEGEND project were registered to a person under 30 years of age. In addition, young women are particularly marginalized from decision-making around land.

Delimitation reduces conflict, but more productive farming requires more than land security: Land delimitation has led to a significant reduction in land disputes among neighbors. The land delimitation process has given many, especially women, a new feeling of security and control over their land, which

provides more incentive to invest in the land. However, few have access to the inputs and technical knowledge to leverage land security into more productive or higher-value farming.

Older men dominate decisions regarding land: Older men are the main decision-makers in the community, including on issues regarding land access and conflict resolution. Young community members are expected to respect the opinions of these older men. Land associations open up more opportunities to participate in decision-making, as opposed to traditional leadership structures, where women and youth have limited opportunities to engage.

Women Step up to Leadership Roles

Amélia is a 23-year-old married mother of three. She inherited land from her mother and received a land declaration in her name. Amélia is an active member in her community land association and feels that she has learned a lot from project trainings.

Amélia explains that few women are active in community decision-making. Women tend to fear speaking up, with limited time and support from their husbands – Amélia’s husband did not want her to participate in the meetings. It takes someone with special courage to be active in an association, she says.

Women are generally poorly represented in decision-making: Women are marginalized in land associations and in the wider community, and lack information on land related decisions and opportunities. The land associations have female members, but few have meaningful influence. Reasons include harmful gender norms, women’s time poverty, and their low levels of education and literacy.

Risk of gender-based violence (GBV) shapes community participation: The assessment identified several examples of how participation in an association or in economic activities can generate mistrust and lead to serious problems for women, such as GBV, including intimate partner violence. GBV includes not only physical violence but also economic and social violence and psychological abuse; ridicule in society or in the home was often mentioned by women as a key reason not to speak up in meetings.

Short-term projects lack time and resources for social norms change and capacity-building: Land associations played an important role in the land delimitation process, but now lack a clear purpose. Despite social inclusion having been addressed when associations were established and during the first intensive months of the project, associations miss out on their potential as vehicles for broad participation. Social norms change and capacity building of associations requires much longer-term efforts than what is possible under projects focused on generating DUAT titles.

Institutions perpetuate gender inequality: Men’s control over community and family decisions is reinforced by multiple institutions. Ile District’s agricultural extensionists target one male farmer per community, who then works largely with other men. Portucel, a major investor in the province, works mostly with men as their local representatives. Even if companies want to engage with women, they lack the knowledge and tools needed to challenge gender norms and stereotypes that exclude women in the communities. Portucel tried to work directly with women in Ile District, offering them opportunities to work in the company’s seedling production or become community representatives that liaise with the company, but had little success, as women beneficiaries experienced conflict and violence at home.

“Portucel has a gender policy and an intention to benefit the women specifically, but we cannot go against the traditions. Even if the woman has an individual DUAT, there is always a man who has more power than her; there is always a man.”
- Senior Manager, Portucel

Co-titling may not be the best approach in matrilineal areas: Some development projects encourage co-titling to strengthen women’s land rights, an approach that can benefit women. However, matrilineal areas are unique in that most people expect land titles to be in women’s names. This may be a rare case in which co-titling can jeopardize women’s control, income, and safety,

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Land tenure projects should implement interventions that strengthen gender- and age-equality of land rights and build capacities to promote equality and women’s economic empowerment. Future activities should:

- a. **Ensure equal gender and age representation in land associations:** Encourage active membership and selection to key positions of women and youth – both men and women - and provide training and support to these representatives. Also provide capacity building to associations on gender equality and social inclusion.
- b. **Ensure access to training, information and opportunities that can improve productive land use:** Help female and young rightsholders to better realize the potential of their land titles by providing them with information and technical skills (perhaps through partnerships), taking into account unequal power structures and the limited availability and mobility of women.
- c. **Address harmful gender norms and unequal power dynamics between men and women:** Train men and women, including community leaders, in issues like the unequal division of labor, GBV, and the impacts of male-dominated family and community decision making structures.
- d. **Apply contextualized approaches to sole vs. co-titling:** Projects should assess in each specific case whether co-titling is the best solution for enhancing gender equality and consider possible unintended consequences of different approaches.
- e. **Build gender and youth-responsive capacity of investors, extensionists, and other external stakeholders:** Institutions should challenge harmful gender norms, enhance gender and age equality, and seek to increase women’s and youth’s access to agriculture support, job opportunities, training, and markets, while recognizing that this is a long-term process.
- f. **Use inclusive training, female role models, and gender champions:** Images, videos, and flash cards can be useful tools with people with limited literacy. Improve the design and implementation of communications and training activities, including the use of female role models to provide inspiration and showcase opportunities.
- g. **Prevent and respond to GBV:** Raise awareness about GBV within communities and among agencies that work there. Call attention to the risks of land delimitation inadvertently increasing GBV, whether physical, psychological, sexual, social, or economic, and provide ways of mitigating and reducing this risk.

Training Increases Women’s Opportunities and Creates Positive Female Role Models

Olinda, 26 years old, comes from a community in Ile. In contrast to many of her peers, her parents were supportive of her education through 12th grade.

In 2018, ORAM selected and trained her as a community-based staff member to facilitate land delimitation. Her educational level and proficiency in Portuguese were fundamental for this opportunity. Through this work, Olinda gained important experience and skills. After completing her work under one project, she continued working with ORAM.

Olinda feels that she can be an inspiration to other women when they see her working as a technician and driving a motorcycle. In Ile District, three out of six ORAM community staff are women; according to Olinda, this is very important for the work to be successful.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information, please contact Sarah Lowery, USAID Contracting Officer’s Representative for ILRG (sarah.lowery@usaid.gov), or Terra Firma (info@terrafirma.co.mz).

Further information on ILRG can be found at <https://www.land-links.org/project/integrated-land-and-resource-governance-ilrg/>.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Ugaz-Simonson, K. (2020). *Gender, youth, and land tenure: Lessons from Zambézia, Mozambique*. Washington, DC: USAID Integrated Land and Resource Governance Task Order under the Strengthening Tenure and Resources Rights II (STARR II) IDIQ.