



POLICY BRIEF 1 (NOVEMBER 2016)

Participatory Research and Learning for Community Action

Bridging the Gaps between Policy and Practice on Land Governance, Inclusive Business and Food Security in Mozambique

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Participatory diagnosis and community learning in Massingir District

Background

A multitude of large-scale and land-based investment projects, involving both public and private actors, have been initiated in Mozambique over the past several years. Despite claims of pro-poor and local development outcomes such as alternative employment opportunities and increased food security, major concerns surround the level of socioeconomic inclusiveness and environmental sustainability of these investment projects. Local communities, and especially marginalized groups such as women, often do not share in the benefits of investment. Instead, investments may infringe on the human right to a decent livelihood and food through negative impacts on local land rights, livelihood opportunities, and food security.

Through our interdisciplinary research project, *Bridging the Gaps between Policy and Practice on Land Governance, Inclusive Business and Food Security in Mozambique*, we investigated the impacts of large-scale and land-based investments in Mozambique at the intersectionality between land governance and land-user rights, business development, livelihoods, food security, and gender. Funded by the WOTRO Food & Business Applied Research Fund of the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research, the project was implemented by ActionAid Mozambique and local partners, ActionAid Netherlands and UU-IDS. Field research concentrated on two districts where a variety of private and public-private investments are located: Massingir District in the southern Gaza Province and Maganja da Costa District in Zambezia Province, in Central Mozambique. The research was guided by the following research questions.

Key points

- *Bridging the Gaps between Policy and Practice on Land Governance, Inclusive Business and Food Security* is a collaborative and interdisciplinary action research project initiated by ActionAid Mozambique and local partners, ActionAid Netherlands and the International Development Studies group of Utrecht University (UU-IDS).
- The research team aimed to:
 - Investigate the impact of large-scale and land-based investments on local communities especially in relation to women's livelihoods and food security;
 - Understand which policy principles and investment models can be most inclusive, gender sensitive and pro-poor, as well as environmentally sustainable;

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- Kick start community-driven learning and advocacy leading to sustainable development as well as sustainable livelihood trajectories;
- Provide recommendations for the Government of Mozambique, the private sector, donors, development cooperation partners and local communities for more sustainable business and equitable local development outcomes.
- Community Participatory and Empowering Action Research was conducted in Massingir District, Gaza Province in southern Mozambique and in Maganja da Costa District, Zambezia Province in northeastern Mozambique. Our research methodology was based on a Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA), Participatory Learning and Action Research (PLAR) for community empowerment and rural innovation at the community level (Box 1).
- Research activities and tools were diverse and ranged from household surveys and semi-structured interviews to participatory diagnosis, community visioning, community action planning, and action plan implementation. Research activities also featured the facilitation of community theatre and exchange visits between communities.
- The research revealed that despite pro-poor claims, large-scale and land-based investments, whether public or private, do not automatically contribute to sustainable development nor enhanced livelihoods and food security at the local level. In fact, analysis revealed a lack of communication between stakeholders and insufficient community consultation and participation, key components of equitable and sustainable development.
- Instead, the majority of community members, especially women, stated that the investment projects under study have increased their marginalization rather than empowerment. The Nante community in Maganja da Costa District remains particularly uncertain about their continued access to land and irrigation water to produce rice and other crops for their livelihoods and food security.



Map of Mozambique showing the research districts

Research questions

- How do large-scale rural investments impact on local communities and women in particular, especially in relation to women's livelihoods and food security?
- What policy principles and investment models can be most inclusive, gender sensitive and pro-poor, as well as environmentally sustainable?
- Can locally-rooted private sector development provide promising alternatives for sustainable and inclusive development and food security? If so, how?

This brief, one in a series of four briefs, elaborates on the methodological dimensions of the research which aims to contribute toward guaranteeing community and women's empowerment and the right to food for all. The other briefs in this series provide a general overview of the project as well as more detailed research outcomes for each of the districts under study.

Community Participatory and Empowering Action Research

Community Participatory and Empowering Action Research is key to bringing about changes in power that will ensure that women and men living in poverty can effectively secure their right (Box 1). Our approach was also central for kick starting community-driven learning and advocacy and for formulating sustainable trajectories for local development and livelihoods as well as for more sustainable investments and businesses.

In addition to broader local, national and international stakeholder consultations, policy analysis and desk research, participatory research was conducted in six communities and included the use of several participatory diagnosis tools followed by community visioning and community action planning; we also facilitated the implementation of action plans in selected communities. Through participatory diagnosis, communities and community groups analysed their past and more recent experiences in terms of power relations, land rights, livelihoods, and the impacts of land-based investments on household and community food security. Community and women's voices were carefully recorded and used for policy analyses. In Massingir District, we also facilitated community theatre and exchange visits for capacity building and learning purposes. Participatory research can embed or be effectively combined with similar or additional research methods at the community level; we integrated or complemented our research activities with semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, an analysis of the seasonal and daily work activity of both female and male community members, as well as a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities

and Threats). In Massingir District, we conducted detailed household surveys in combination with participatory diagnosis to secure a deeper understanding of the impacts of investments and their effects on communities and local livelihoods.

Our research process supported community and women's visioning for claiming land and food rights, for benefitting from land-based investments, and for advocating for renegotiated development. The research team also facilitated engagements between communities and community leaders and local stakeholders including local government, investors, and supporting NGOs to address local development challenges. As a result, our community-led research resulted in concerted community-led actions (Box 2 and Box 3). Community members, especially women, were able to articulate their observations, experiences and needs. Community voices revealed community positions and demands beyond the local level to reach national and international audiences, including key lobby targets. Rather than merely being represented by 'outsiders,' communities have spoken on their own behalf. This has made their messages and demands – including requests for policy changes, the need for improved policy implementation, and capacity development requirements – much more relevant and powerful.

These participatory research outcomes have further benefitted from a related ActionAid project in southern Mozambique which facilitated the work of women smallholder associations in the face of challenges resulting from expanding sugarcane estates. In fact, advocacy activities conducted in other locations have served as an example for Massingir communities on how to handle the challenges resulting from the expansion of the sugarcane estate.



Participatory diagnosis with Nhafuba community in Maganja da Costa District

Box 1. ActionAid and Community Participatory and Empowering Action Research

ActionAid believes that people-centred evidence, with women and girls at the core, combined with knowledge from in and outside the organization, enables power shifts. This brings about changes at local, national and international levels. Community Participatory and Empowering Action Research is key to bringing about changes in power that will ensure that women and men living in poverty can effectively secure their rights. Such research builds on ActionAid's HRBA and reflect circles (ActionAid 2010); it also draws in elements from Participatory Learning and Action Research (PLAR) (see for example Defoer et al. 2009) as well as community visioning for enabling rural innovation (Sanginga and Chitsike, 2005).

The research process also should – in and of itself – lead to change. Just as ActionAid believes that a human rights approach to development generally achieves the most effective, just and sustainable change, we believe that a human rights approach to research is the most effective as it can empower men and women and build solidarity between different groups by bringing different actors together; it can also influence decision makers to change. An approach based on human rights enables us to address the structural causes of poverty and to change power relations.

Key principles of ActionAid's research approach include:

1. People living in poverty are empowered by the research process and products. This means that communities are:

- a. Active in identifying research priorities;
- b. Active in using the research evidence for influencing change at different levels;
- c. Actively represented throughout the research outputs: voices are amplified through analysis, perspectives, quotes, pictures, and stories.

2. Research is characterized by strong analysis which:

- a. Involves the participation of people living in poverty and their movements directly (wherever possible) in identifying, thorough joint analysis and by bringing in new knowledge, strategies for change;
- b. Includes a poverty dimension;
- c. Includes a gender dimension;
- d. Looks at the interconnectedness of structural causes of a problem from local, national, regional and global perspectives;
- e. Looks at the roles and rights of various actors linked to a problem and the dimensions of power that characterize their relationship;
- f. Is rigorous, comprehensive, accurate and ethical.

3. ActionAid's work is linked across levels to add value as a federation so that:

- a. Evidence of rights violations at any level provides the basis for changes at other levels including local, national, regional, and international;
- b. Knowledge from different levels supports the identification of pathways for change.

4. ActionAid's work is innovative and engaging as a result of being:

- a. Bold in message, audience appropriate and accessible in language, and with a clear change strategy;
- b. Useful, timely and practical in influencing change around ActionAid's strategic objectives;
- c. Relevant and applicable at local, national and international levels, as measured by agreed indicators.

5. Research partnerships:

- a. Build solidarity and capacity between and amongst ActionAid and different research actors, communities or organizations involved in research;
- b. Build knowledge through partnerships.

Box 2. Massingir District snapshot

Over the past decade, pressures on land have escalated while livelihood opportunities and food security have deteriorated in Massingir District. This can be explained in part by the resettlement of communities from the Limpopo National Park in combination with the expansion of a sugarcane plantation and the granting of ecotourism land concessions. As a result of these land-based development projects, the amount of communal land has shrunk while population pressure has increased by way of forced resettlement to the central areas of the district. At the same time, few of the socioeconomic benefits promised by the respective investors have materialized to date.

Our research project, based on Participatory Learning and Action Research and rural innovation processes, aimed to assist communities with claiming rights to actively engage and benefit from local development. Activities toward this end included community theatre as well as exchanges between communities that have been affected by land grabbing. Through such mutual learning and capacity development, communities can better organize themselves to call on private actors to deliver on promised benefits and claim rights to land and food.

Challenges and lessons learned

Building the capacity of leaders and staff members of local community-based organizations and civil society organizations is a critical component of PLAR. As a result, the single biggest constraint of the approach is that it is time consuming and requires frequent facilitation at the local level. As a result, national or international NGOs and research groups may not be able to facilitate the research trajectory for the longer term. One means to mitigate this obstacle is to coordinate with or otherwise involve local extension workers and facilitators. However, both the rural extension and local government support systems are highly understaffed; they also do not have the necessary capacity to support demand-driven and innovative rural extension services and learning nor do they have the mandate to support community advocacy.

This research project has revealed that through facilitation and support, communities can self-organize for empowerment and pro-poor development. Nevertheless, a diversity of power imbalances are in action at the



Participatory diagnosis and action planning with Munda-Munda community members in Nante, Maganja da Costa District

Box 3. Maganja da Costa District snapshot

From December onwards, Maganja da Costa District is often affected by rainy season floods. In fact, the flood of January 2015 was particularly intense as it displaced hundreds of people and destroyed farms and irrigation infrastructure. The Dutch co-funded ORIO infrastructure development programme aims to support the rehabilitation and expansion of an irrigation and flood control scheme in this district.

Our study explored both the developments and the plans of ORIO to discern whether and how local communities, especially those located near the Munda-Munda irrigation scheme, have been or shall be involved or impacted. Comprehensive community consultations revealed that communities face challenges as a result of repeated project delays. This has raised concerns about community participation as well as future land and water rights. Moreover, the issue extends beyond community-level concerns. Recurrent and destructive floods in the Zambezi River Basin have become a major factor that has significant potential to determine the risks and ultimately the viability of infrastructural investments.

Our research project also worked with the Nhafuba community which resides on upland and sandy soils far from the river. This rural community faces different challenges related to erratic rainfall, drought and a lack of agricultural extension support. With the assistance of ActionAid's local partners, the community was able to organize into a legal association as a way to better demand for and accommodate support provided by the local government and NGOs.

community level, including those related to gender, and should not be underestimated. It is critical that vulnerable groups and individuals, including women, get and remain fully on board.

Conclusions and recommendations

1. **Community Participatory and Empowering Action Research** in combination with household surveys and broader contextual analysis, is essential for community-driven learning and advocacy as well as for pro-poor development in relation to land rights, inclusive business, livelihoods and food security in Mozambique. As such, any serious effort aimed at supporting sustainable and community-led development in Mozambique, including inclusive and sustainable business development, should be informed by **Community Participatory and Empowering Action Research**.
2. **Community Participatory and Empowering Action Research** methodology also advances a more sustainable development paradigm that is recommended not only for scaling up participatory action at the community level, but for kick starting genuinely inclusive and sustainable development that guarantees the right to food for all.
3. Using a Human Rights Based Approach and enhancing both community and women's voices are central to community research, learning and advocacy. Community exchange visits and community theatre enhance community ownership by rooting efforts in the community.
4. Despite pro-poor claims, large-scale and land-based investments, whether public or private, do not automatically contribute to sustainable development nor enhanced livelihoods and food security at the local level. In fact, analysis revealed a lack of communication between stakeholders and insufficient community consultation and participation. Both are key requirements for equitable and sustainable development.
5. Additional evidence emerged to refute pro-poor claims. The majority of community members, especially women and those located in Massingir District, stated that the investment projects under study have increased marginalization rather than empowerment. All communities stated that communication by and with both the government and investors has been weak at best but often inaccurate too, which has resulted in misunderstandings and a lack of trust.
6. The research project has catalysed community-driven advocacy. Community members, including women, have been able to discuss their demands with local government officials and investors; their voices have also reached higher level policy makers. The latter supports the call by ActionAid and its partners for the appropriate



Results of participatory diagnosis and action planning with Munda-Munda community members in Nante, Maganja da Costa District

implementation of important sustainability principles and frameworks including the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGTs), Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) as well as Business and Human Rights and Benefit Sharing principles and regulations, among others.

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Research and outputs

About

This Policy Brief is one in a series of four based on research project *Bridging the Gaps between Policy and Practice on Land Governance, Inclusive Business and Food Security in Mozambique*. It describes the methodology used in the research.

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Outputs

1. Acha, D., Wijnhoud J.D., and Otsuki, K. (2015). What will the future bring? Community voices on rice farming and other livelihood opportunities in the face of food risks in Maganja da Costa District, Mozambique. Paper presented at the LANDac International Conference on Land Governance for Equitable and Sustainable Development, 9-10 July, 2015, Utrecht, the Netherlands.
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Colophon

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