

Civil Society Organizations Dialogue

The role of community committees in promoting resilience
in livelihoods and social cohesion in Cabo Delgado

In person at the Pemba Express Hotel

On May 17, 2023, the Multi-Stakeholder Platform of the Northern region (MSP), in partnership with Azul Foundation and Aga Khan Foundation, co-hosted a Civil Society Organizations (CSO) Dialogue, an event with 24 in-person participants to examine how community committees can improve resilience, promote peacebuilding, and maximize emergency response in vulnerable communities as well as possible ways to better coordinate efforts across and share resources in different areas of intervention.

The dialogue was held in a round-table format, limited to organizations directly linked to the thematic areas of debate in order to promote the sharing of experience and collaboration between CSOs and representatives of Community Committees with distinct approaches, namely: Peace and Social Cohesion Committees and Village Development Committees.

The meeting had specific objectives:

- Understand how community committees can promote the socioeconomic resilience of vulnerable communities, social cohesion, and reconstruction efforts;
- Share experiences on what synergies are needed among CSOs to ensure complementarity, maximize impact, and avoid duplication of efforts and resources;
- Identify challenges faced by CSOs that have implemented interventions in similar areas and possible solutions.

Key aspects gleaned from the roundtable discussions

Main challenges faced by community committees

- **Formalization:** The absence and/or difficulty in formalizing these committees restricts their activities, especially in projects implemented in partnership with international entities, affecting financial sustainability. Part of the problem is related to the delay by local government authorities in responding to requests by the committees for this and other purposes.
- **Governance:** Low level of leadership turnover within the committees evidenced by certain leaders remaining in the same position for periods longer than 5 years. This fact is aggravated by the attempt to politicize the committees and by the observed difficulty of the leaders to adopt a different mentality.
- **Membership:** The committees show a lack of integration of individuals with an active role, as well as low levels of gender inclusion. For example, one of the committees has a ratio of only 3 women for every 40 members on the committees they serve.
- **Sustainability:** There is a lack of clarity regarding the institution responsible for receiving and managing the public funds directed to support the functioning of the committees. In addition, there is an over-reliance on active projects to ensure financial sustainability, resulting in the closure of several committees at the end of these projects. The competitiveness and lack of coordination among community committees represent another problem for their sustainability, as it hampers the efficiency and effectiveness of the actions carried out due to the unequal distribution of resources and duplication of efforts, as well as a fragmented and disjointed approach.

Potential Solutions

I. Formalization

- The creation of partnerships with the district government and the formation of associations to formalize the committees will increase the institutional legitimacy of these committees.
- There is a need to increase collaboration between Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and the government by establishing government focal points to facilitate interaction with the committees, keeping them updated on the committees' work plans, and maximizing synergies between the community, government, and civil society.
- Local governments should improve the coordination mechanisms between Local Councils and Community Authorities to ensure that local development issues are prioritized in the actions of community leaders.

II. Governance:

- It is essential to promote debates and trainings focused on inclusive governance, with the aim of empowering those involved and promoting a deeper understanding of inclusive governance practices and principles.
- The creation of representative advisory boards and committees is an important measure to ensure the participation and representation of diverse stakeholders in decision-

making processes. These bodies should be constituted in a way that reflects the diversity of the community and promotes the inclusion of different groups and perspectives.

- Measures also need to be taken to ensure that focal points designated to facilitate interaction with the committees are adequately supported. This includes the provision of per diems, where necessary, as a form of incentive and recognition for their work.

III. Membership:

- It is necessary to improve the selection criteria in the constitution of the committees, seeking greater inclusion and representativeness. The committees must become spaces for the exercise of democracy and the expression of freedoms, allowing the active and equal participation of diverse groups and individuals.
- It is important that the committees are representative, with a special focus on women's participation. This means ensuring that women have a voice and decision-making power within these committees, promoting gender equality and a female perspective in discussions and decision-making.
- Promoting events and lectures can be an effective strategy to increase the level of understanding about the benefits of committees to communities. These initiatives can engage community members to be part of the committees, strengthen social ties, and promote mutual understanding, contributing to a more harmonious and collaborative environment.

IV. Sustainability:

- To achieve financial autonomy of the committees, it is necessary to provide access to common resources that allow for collective income generation. This may include helping the committees create business plans for the financial sustainability of their activities.
- It is recommended to create community funds that benefit all members of the community. These funds should be managed by an appropriate structure and can stimulate community involvement in various economic activities, such as forestry, mining, farming, and loans, among others.
- It is critical to increase the level of community ownership of economic and social infrastructure. This implies actively engaging community members in general and committees in particular in planning, building, and maintaining these infrastructures, promoting participation and a sense of collective responsibility.
- It is important to avoid duplication of effort through an excessive multiplication of committees. This can be achieved through efficient coordination and a careful analysis of the need and relevance of each committee, ensuring the optimization of available resources. The empowerment of FOCADE (Cabo Delgado's Civil Society Organizations Forum) can be an effective strategy to coordinate clusters of committees. FOCADE can play a leading role in coordination, facilitating the exchange of experiences, the sharing of resources and collaboration among the committees, aiming at a more harmonized and synergetic development.

Impact of the implementation of committees in the Communities

Peace and Social Cohesion Committees

- Reduction of conflicts over access to basic services in resettlement centers: With the performance of the committees in promoting peace and social cohesion, allowing the displaced access to basic services available in the community without alienating native members, it was possible to reduce conflicts arising from the scarcity or lack of equitable distribution of these resources, promoting a harmonious coexistence and a better quality of life.
- Increased adherence to community events and activities promoted by the committees: With the implementation of community events and activities organized by the committees, there has been an increase in community participation and engagement, strengthening social ties, promoting community cohesion, and stimulating the active involvement of members in issues of collective interest.
- Marked reduction in cases of vandalism during food distribution in the centers: With the coordination and involvement of the committees in the internal processes of the community, including in the distribution of food in the centers, it allowed to establish more trustworthy management of both native and displaced community members.
- Reduction in early unions: The activities promoted by the committees, such as debates on women's rights and education, have contributed to raising awareness and reducing early unions, allowing girls the opportunity to continue their studies and develop fully before assuming marital responsibilities. This has contributed to greater integration of girls in schools and a reduction in early pregnancies.
- Legitimization of the committees as a consultative body in the communities: Through the effective participation and representation of the committees, as well as through the leadership demonstrated in times of difficulty, these bodies have been legitimized as consultation bodies in communities, allowing the voices and needs of the community to be heard and considered in decisions that affect their development and well-being.

Village Development Committees

- Active community participation in decision-making about actions with a direct impact on their lives, such as the construction of a maternity hospital. This allows the community to have a voice and influence in defining priorities and implementing projects that meet their specific needs.
- Participation in the design of community intervention projects, such as the construction and cleaning of drainage ditches. Community participation in the planning and execution of these projects ensures that solutions are adapted to local needs and promotes a sense of collective responsibility in the maintenance and care of these infrastructures.
- Dynamization of revolving credit in savings groups, providing self-sufficiency for families and economic empowerment. This measure allows families to have access to financial resources to invest in their productive activities, stimulating entrepreneurship and improving their living conditions.
- Empowering youth and women to design business plans for applying for loan financing. By involving youth and women in planning their own businesses and providing access to

financing, it is possible to promote financial independence and entrepreneurial skills, strengthening the local economy and stimulating sustainable development.

- Promoting food security through the provision of agricultural inputs. This supports households in food production, ensuring the supply of essential resources for livelihoods and reducing vulnerability to food insecurity.
- Building infrastructure such as access roads, drainage ditches, classrooms, and water wells with resources from the community itself. This approach strengthens the sense of belonging and responsibility of community members for their infrastructure, promotes local development, and improves the quality of life for all involved.

Coordination efforts needed among CSOs

- Promote complementarity in the interventions of organizations that operate in the same geographic space. This involves coordination and collaboration among the committees and other organizations that are involved in the region's development, avoiding overlapping efforts and maximizing available resources for more effective results.
- Design instruments that catapult the development of the village/community, based on the prioritization of areas. The committees should conduct a diagnosis of the community's needs and potential, identifying priority areas for intervention. Next, they must design strategic plans and implementation instruments that aim to drive development in these specific areas, aligned with the demands and aspirations of the community.
- Create clusters of committees that can streamline the sharing of experiences of best practices and implementation challenges of local development actions. This approach encourages knowledge exchange, mutual learning, and collective strengthening of the committees, allowing them to support each other and face common challenges. Sharing good practices also encourages the adoption of effective approaches and the replication of successful initiatives.
- Capitalize on existing groups that can facilitate the articulation between Community Leaders and Local Advisory Councils, aiming to increase the convergence of resources and efforts, as well as the generation of impact without duplication. The committees should identify and take advantage of existing community groups and structures, such as associations, unions, and religious organizations, among others, to strengthen cooperation and coordination among the different instances of local governance. This allows for the convergence of resources, the optimization of efforts, and the maximization of the impact of development actions.

Final considerations

- It is crucial to support the resilience of local communities through non-political committees that are dedicated to economic development, peace promotion, and social cohesion. These committees should be focused on community well-being, acting as facilitators and promoters of initiatives that strengthen the local economy and promote peace, and harmonious coexistence among community members.
- For community committees to thrive, they need to evolve from informal groups into legally recognized associations with a clear governance structure and the capacity to manage community development plans and resources. This formalization is key to

ensuring transparency, accountability, and the ability to access external resources more effectively.

- It is essential to safeguard the establishment of good relations between government entities and community committee representatives. This includes open and collaborative communication, as well as recognition of the role and importance of the committees as partners in the local development process. Cooperation between governments and committees strengthens the ability to implement projects and policies efficiently and effectively.
- The financial sustainability of the committees must be ensured from the beginning, otherwise they run the risk of ceasing to exist after the conclusion of the projects. This implies the search for diversified funding sources, capacity building for generating their own income, and the building of strategic partnerships with entities that can contribute to the committees' financial sustainability.
- Women's participation in community committees is still highly excluded in terms of numerical representation and weight in decision-making and leadership. It is critical to promote gender equality and ensure that women have meaningful and equal participation in committees, both in terms of representation and influence in decision-making. This requires implementing affirmative measures, strengthening women's capacity, and raising awareness about the importance of their active participation in community committees.
- It is critical to allocate adequate space for internally displaced people to live and engage in productive activities. This is to ensure decent housing conditions and to allow these people opportunities to support themselves.

Annex I - Participating Organizations

- Azul Foundation
- Aga Khan Foundation
- AVSI
- FOCADE
- E-35 Foundation
- Azul Peace Committee
- Village Development Committee June 25th - Metuge
- Nancaramo Village Development Committee
- CCA Alto-Gingone
- CCA Josina Machel
- CCA Eduardo Mondlane
- UPC-CD
- OCHA
- CESC
- PROMURA