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POLICY BRIEF 65

The voices of women and smallholder farmers in Mozambique's Beira and Nacala corridors

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Key messages

- Over the past two decades, the Beira and Nacala agricultural corridors have attracted capital investment and technology transfer. However, the flow of both has been unpredictable as they depend on the intervention of multiple actors and the dynamics of the global economy and global commodity prices.
- Along the corridors, the Mozambique government – with support from donors and international capital – has invested in transport infrastructure, but this infrastructure does not necessarily cater to the needs of smallholder farmers and women as it is not connected with feeder roads to collect farmers' produce.
- Politics at national and local levels has hindered the corridor development; this has been exacerbated by clashes between government forces and the armed branch of the opposition party, Resistência Nacional Moçambicana (RENAMO).
- Along the Beira and Nacala corridors, large agricultural development projects often trigger contestations over land and natural resources.
- Smallholder farmers cite poor consultation and information-sharing, and unfulfilled promises over fair compensation, integration of smallholders in value chains, and employment opportunities.
- Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and organised labour advocating for the inclusion of the voices of smallholders and women in planning and decision-making processes need greater support from the government, as well as from national and international capital.
- The alternative is to reframe development corridors and growth poles to focus on supporting existing smallholder land users, including training and inputs to improve productivity, and value chain development to enable smallholders, and women particularly, to expand beyond mainly subsistence-based agriculture.

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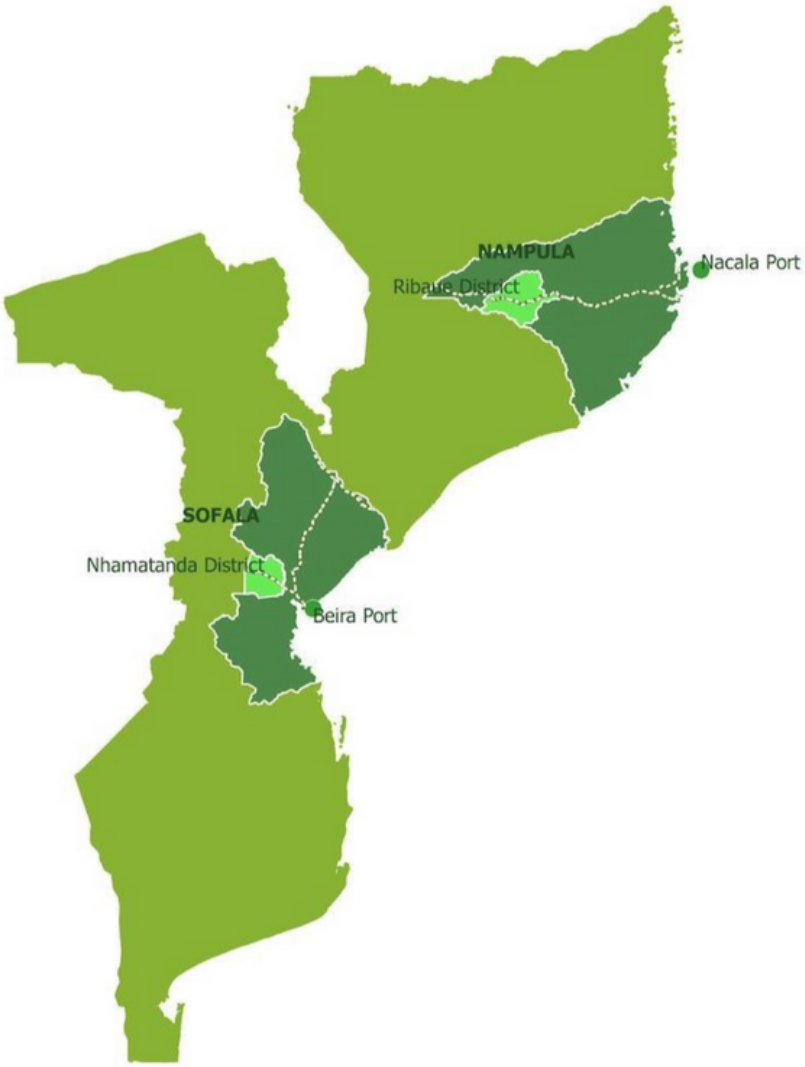

Map SEQ Map ARABIC 1: Map of Beira and Nacala corridors*

Background and context

The Beira and Nacala corridors were first created to support the Portuguese colonial economy [1] and since the early-2000s have been revitalised by the rehabilitation of the Moatize-Nacala railway line, which passes through Malawi.

Due to technical and political reasons, the blueprints have not been followed and the government has not made sufficient investments to ensure the protection of smallholder rights, while their inclusion in governance processes is often marginal.

The voices of smallholders are often missing from the conceptualisation and implementation phases of agricultural development programmes, at times leading to the contestation of agricultural programmes.[2]

The Mozambique regulatory framework enables both small- and large-scale land investments while protecting smallholders. The government has been implementing a campaign to increase access to DUAT (Direito de Uso e Aproveitamento da Terra – 'the right to use and develop land') – a document that considers good faith and oral testimony in the protection of smallholders' land rights.

However, where large development projects are proposed and implemented, there are often contestations over land, resulting largely from the intervention of locally-based and national elites that exert pressure on local bureaucrats to disregard due processes in favour of investors or government projects. Locally, there are limited processes and institutions for smallholders to hold development projects accountable. When communities are affected, women who are already underrepresented in the leadership of formal decision-making institutions, bear the brunt of the effects of these interventions.

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The past two decades have seen the Mozambican government prioritise investments in the Beira and Nacala corridors to boost agricultural investment.[3] Around Beira and Nacala cities, Special Economic Zones have been established, and the government of Mozambique is planning to create other, similar zones dedicated to agriculture along both corridors. At the same time, international capital is building cash-oriented agricultural production on the basis of the former colonial economy in the region. [4]
For example, in the Nacala corridor, commercial agriculture has relied on foreign capital from large companies such as Mozambique Leaf Tobacco and Olam Mozambique, but also through medium-scale farming companies such as Agribusiness in Ribáuè, Matanuska in Monapo, alongside investors from Zimbabwe, South Africa, India, and China.

Apart from the planned rehabilitation of the Moatize-Nacala railway line, the very deep waters of the port of Nacala are seen as providing a shorter and cheaper alternative to the transportation of coal from Tete province to the Beira harbour. The Mozambique government sought to increase the agricultural potential of the area by developing value chains based on agricultural research. [5]

Therefore, in collaboration with Brazil and Japan, the government developed a draft Master Plan for the ProSAVANA project. [6]

A further project supported by a group of consultancy companies (the Project for Nacala Corridor Economic Development Strategies in the Republic of Mozambique: PEDEC-Nacala) sought to prepare actions to "mitigate various environmental and social problems including deterioration of the urban environment, industrial pollution, land conflicts and depletion of environmental resources". [7]
As a result, numerous companies and joint ventures have become key actors in the corridor after having acquired thousands of hectares of land in the Nacala region. [8]

This policy brief highlights the type of agricultural investments that are taking place along the Beira and Nacala corridors; the barriers that exist to smallholder participation in development projects, and the ways in which farmers' and women's organisations are developing innovative and effective approaches to boost their success.

Turning smallholders into commercial farmers?

Across its agricultural sector programmes, the government of Mozambique promotes smallholder associations as an effective way to interact with and distribute extension work to smallholders. The government hopes that a commercial agricultural sector will emerge from smallholder associations. In line with this vision, the government has implemented several projects:

Zambezi Valley Development Agency aims to promote sustainable development and boost investment in Tete, Manica, Sofala, and Zambézia by supporting technical training, agribusinesses, and infrastructure development.

The World Bank's US$ 70 million Sustainable Irrigation Development Project (PROIRRI) aims to raise farm productivity by rolling out improved irrigation schemes in Sofala, Manica, and Zambézia provinces. In Tica, Sofala province, a successful 60-hectare irrigation scheme funded by both KULIMA, a Mozambique rural development NGO, and Gapi, a financial services institution, was handed to the 39-member (17 women and 22 men) Muda Massequece smallholder association, where they now grow sugarcane under a contract with Tongaat Hulett's Mafambisse Sugar Refining Mill. However, none of the other project beneficiaries has reported increases in productivity. [9]

A US$ 40 million rural development project in 10 districts of the Nampula and Zambézia provinces (SUSTENTA) aims to stimulate the rural economy by integrating 125,000 rural households into a network of 200 emerging small-business farmers and a network of 50 small- and medium-sized agribusiness companies to develop sustainable agricultural and forestry value chains. The project also aims to improve local government institutions and infrastructure.

While the Beira and Nacala corridors have attracted capital investment and technology transfers, both remain unpredictable due to their dependence on the involvement of multiple actors and the inconsistent dynamics of the global economy and global commodity prices. As a result, the incorporation of smallholder value chains has been marginal, and projects that do exist are dispersed, with strong spatial asymmetries.[10] At best, smallholders are integrated through contract farming schemes for a number of cash crops, selling crops to companies at an agreed price in exchange for technical assistance and inputs and, in some cases, for credit. [11]
Smallholders welcome contract farming deals, especially when combined with other income-generating activities, but occasional disputes have arisen between smallholders and contractors regarding the quality of produce and the resulting price. [12]
Despite broad consensus that agro-processing should form the basis of industrialisation, balancing the competing demands of smallholders and large-scale investors, foreign and domestic investment, and between food and other crops, is complex. [13]
Furthermore, project plans (in land tenure and agrarian policy) are devoid of an analysis of gendered power relations; such projects are unlikely to achieve gender equity.[14]

For example, while women have traditionally been key actors in the cashew sector, interventions to promote cashew production have usually excluded women, and they have lost jobs to men in the processing sector. [15]

As part of its 2018/19 agricultural campaign, the Mozambican government adopted the motto: “Mozambique, increasing production and productivity towards zero hunger” and rallied smallholders to increase production and productivity. However, smallholders are unable to increase production and productivity because they face challenges in commercialising their products, such as limited access to feeder roads and thus to markets.

Without easy access to markets, any smallholders’ surplus produce is wasted before it gets to market. Successful commercialisation is, therefore, mainly achieved by a few mobile, unlicensed traders who can afford transport to travel to difficult-to-access areas of production. Instead of boosting production, smallholders combine agriculture with petty trading and service provision, migration, and remittances to reduce vulnerability and to spread the risks.[16]

Therefore, the government’s calls for smallholders to increase production and productivity are not taken up because policies and projects are conceived and implemented without their input. Despite smallholders’ calls for roads to access markets, feeder roads, reliable information related to market prices, and established buyers, they continue to be the major challenge.

Turning smallholders into commercial farmers will require more than isolated project interventions. Experience shows that comparatively successful contract farming schemes, with selected crops like tobacco, sugar, and cotton, require extended and holistic interventions during key phases of the project and policy process – at inception, during implementation, and at withdrawal.

Smallholder participation in governance

While smallholders have access to Mozambique’s many government-created platforms for civil-society participation, several less institutionalised civil society-driven dialogue platforms exist at central, provincial and district levels. Since civil society-organised meetings cannot produce binding documents, the government rarely adopts their positions and proposals without broader mobilisation and advocacy work.

Government-promoted institutions often call civil society organisations to attend technical meetings but do not provide the relevant documents timeously, creating information gaps. This leaves civil society organisations with little information to adequately prepare, so they simply boycott such meetings. Because civil society organisations depend on donor funding and therefore have donor-driven priorities, they often do not have the funds to participate in government meetings and may lack expertise on some of the topics that the government wants to discuss.

At district level, councils were created to ensure broader participation of civil society alongside the District Service of Economic Activities (SDAE) but again these meetings only share (sometimes inaccurate) information and deal with present projects.

Participants are merely expected to approve projects and have little say in what projects are undertaken and where funds are spent. Development Observatories found at provincial level also interact with civil society but mainly share information, with discussion often precluded by party politicians who accuse dissenting civil society organisations of being members of opposition parties. As such, no proper processes exist to examine project failures, present alternative solutions, or make recommendations to government. [17]

Smallholder associations have therefore mobilised locally, often only because international donors offer help and benefits, and sometimes with the support of external NGOs who undertake training, advocacy, and project implementation work. [18] Smallholders often join associations to benefit from government and NGO support in the form of agricultural extension services or "access to irrigation, access to a commercialisation network, participation in meetings with the District Administration, access to extension support, access to inputs and access to subsidies". [19]

Local government officials agree that most interactions with smallholders occur via these associations. Association members are encouraged to work on collective farms, but these are largely less productive than land farmed by individuals. This is because collective farms often experiment with project-related crops, while individual farmers focus on food crops.

Nevertheless, smallholder associations allow smallholders to interact with external actors as collective entities.

Donor-funded NGOs typically help smallholders build their capacity for negotiation and advocacy, and support smallholders with a mixed-service provision (e.g. agricultural extension) and awareness-raising about their rights. This is particularly helpful in areas within development corridors, where a negative track record of land concessions and poor community consultations have left communities anxious about losing their land to projects that do not fulfil their promises. [20]

Some NGOs also make a concerted effort to enhance women's participation in smallholder associations and encourage women to constitute women's groups. They have been instrumental in ensuring that the Land Law facilitates women's participation in community-level land-related decision-making while also ensuring that women are able to enforce their rights over the land. [21]
NGOs could further empower rural women during land delimitation processes by training NGO staff on "specific mechanisms to provide spaces for articulating local women's interests in relation to land during the process". [22]
However, NGO staff felt that while donor involvement was mainly positive, it often constrained what work they were able to undertake. [23]

Conclusion

The history of the conceptualisation and implementation of agricultural corridors along the transport corridors of Beira and Nacala in Mozambique shows that smallholders are marginal to these projects. Although Mozambique has a strong pro-smallholder regulatory framework and a set of institutions for citizen-government engagement, on-the-ground engagement with smallholders remains poor, while large-scale investments by state institutions continue, unabated. Therefore, smallholders have found other routes and institutions by which to engage the state and access capital to expose the problems and project failures related to large agricultural investments. These alternatives are often supported by donor-funded NGOs.

Since former president Armando Guebuza pioneered the concept of "open governance" in which high-profile dignitary visits create opportunities for direct interaction with citizens, smallholders have been capitalising on these opportunities to speak directly to public authorities. These occasions provide opportunities for smallholders to hold central and local government accountable for the implementation of agricultural policy and projects.

It is essential that existing spaces for engagement with the government are rendered more effective and that additional platforms are created. To this end, regular and more targeted meetings between the government, smallholder representatives and NGO partners could enable smallholders to hold both government and NGOs accountable for the projects they conceive and implement.

Recommendations

It is essential to include women and smallholder farmers in plans to develop the Beira and Nacala corridors and to ensure that their interests shape plans for the future of these regions. For this to happen, we recommend that the government of Mozambique, NGOs and other development partners:

- **Strengthen the role of community radio in raising awareness** of issues related to smallholder agriculture, in particular women's access to land rights.
- **Strengthen women and smallholder agency**, such as women's and smallholder farmers' cooperatives, to ensure that they effectively engage in the implementation and oversight of development corridors in the country.
- **Prioritise agricultural investments** that target small- and medium-scale producers, especially legitimate owners of the land.
- **Increase investment in infrastructure and support that will benefit smallholders and women farmers**, such as irrigation systems, extension services, agricultural inputs, seeds, technical knowledge, access to credit, and access to markets.
- **Support local and national NGOs to strengthen the voices of smallholders and women**, such as the Forum Mulher (Coordination for Women in Development); Academic Action for the Development of Rural Communities (ADECRU); and the Rural Association for Mutual Help (ORAM).

- **Support the work of legal NGOs advocating for women's rights** and their participation in local decision-making institutions, in districts along the corridors, such as WILSA (Women and Law in Southern Africa – Mozambique).

- **Support organised labour movements** such as the National Peasant's Union (UNAC), which engages capital and drives national-level advocacy campaigns to bring about policy change that will benefit smallholders and women.

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