



TAKING CHARGE OF OUR FUTURE: AMME CASE STUDY

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Associação Moçambicana Mulher e Educação (AMME) is a small civil society organization (CSO) in Zambézia province, Mozambique. AMME promotes women's education as a means to raise their cultural, social, and economic status in society. AMME also collaborates with school councils to develop interventions to support girls facing gender-based violence (GBV) and gender-related HIV/AIDS issues. Through these partnerships, AMME provides vulnerable girls with scholarships and sensitizes parents about the value of education for girls.

This is the story of how AMME, through its own drive and initiative, channeled its energies into making substantial changes that have increased the organization's credibility with donors, improved the quality of its interventions in communities, and positioned itself as a leader within the NAFEZA (Núcleo das Associações Femininas da Zambézia) network, of which it is a member. Drawing upon a healthy culture of shared leadership and the willingness of donor agencies to support institutional capacity through technical assistance and financial support, AMME demonstrated that significant and sustained organizational change is possible and can lead to more effective service delivery, enhanced legitimacy, and greater organizational stability.

Associação Moçambicana Mulher e Educação (AMME)

The Mozambican Association for Women and Education (AMME) was established in Zambézia in 1997. AMME's mission is to promote women's education as a means to raise their cultural, social, and economic status in Zambézia society.

AMME collaborates with school councils on developing interventions to support girls facing gender-based violence and gender-related HIV/AIDS issues. AMME supports vulnerable girls with scholarships and sensitizes parents about the value of education for girls.

This case study is told through the voices of AMME and the Capable Partners Program (CAP) in Mozambique, who were in partnership from 2009 to 2013. From 2009 until mid-2010, CAP Mozambique led AMME through a formative research and proposal-development process that culminated in a grant to implement HIV/AIDS prevention activities in Zambézia province. AMME was funded by CAP Mozambique through the end of 2013, when CAP Mozambique had to end the grant early due to changing PEPFAR priorities and resulting budget allocations. Since that time, AMME has obtained other funding and continues to develop and pursue its mission of promoting women's and girls' education. It is a well-respected, leading organization in Zambézia.

Adaptation of a research technique called the “Most Significant Change (MSC) Process” guided conversations with AMME staff. A facilitator solicited the organization's perspective on the most significant changes for both individuals and AMME as a whole over an 18-month period. In addition to information gathered from these interviews, CAP included evidence of AMME's improvements in the areas of social and behavior change communication (SBCC), report writing, and project design based on data from project assessments focusing on organizational systems and deliverables.¹

CAP Mozambique

The Capable Partners Program (CAP) in Mozambique was designed to strengthen the institutional capacity of Mozambican nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), faith-based organizations (FBOs), associations, and their networks to improve the service delivery of HIV/AIDS treatment, care, and prevention programs.

CAP integrated intensive capacity development of its Partners with grants to provide the organizations with opportunities to apply what they learned and demonstrate their capacities to affect HIV/AIDS at the community level. CAP Mozambique was managed by FHI 360 from 2006 to 2016 and was funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR).

This is a portrait of how AMME, with a bit of external support, seized opportunities to grow into an even more effective organization and become a model within its network and for civil society as a whole. In fact, AMME was one of the first organizations to be graduated by CAP—that is, to have met CAP Mozambique's rigorous standards and be recommended for direct funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) or another major donor.

Clear and Relevant Governance and Leadership

AMME is a national organization that at one time had delegations in 11 provinces throughout Mozambique. Over time, AMME delegations in other provinces became inactive, and it was only the AMME delegation in Zambézia that continued to implement activities in communities. By 2010, it was clear that AMME (Zambézia) was facing a crisis in leadership. Although a Board of Directors existed at the national level, it provided little support. In the absence of support from this governing body, members of the AMME (Zambézia) team were forced to fill multiple roles—providing oversight for the organization at the provincial level while also implementing activities as staff members. Those playing dual roles became increasingly overburdened. The situation reduced the organization's credibility as well as its ability to maintain the integrity of its program implementation. In addition, since AMME (Zambézia) was not a legally autonomous organization, donors were reluctant to fund it directly. Without strong leadership at the national level, however, funding through the national arm also became less secure.

¹ See also the CAP Mozambique technical brief, “Harnessing Potential: Mozambican CSOs Demonstrate Substantial Organizational Growth with CAP Support.”

As a part of its organizational capacity development support, CAP Mozambique facilitated a participatory organizational assessment process (POAP) with AMME that addressed elements of governance and leadership.² Together, CAP and AMME explored governance issues, and AMME began to see clearly that legal autonomy would allow provincial members to elect its own Board, seek funding, and regain its credibility. CAP helped AMME see the advantages and disadvantages of becoming legally autonomous and helped it understand the true role of a Board of Directors and how one should function. It was critical for AMME to understand that the creation and maintenance of a healthy Board of Directors with clear roles and responsibilities was fundamental to enabling the organization to manage its activities transparently and reach a greater level of accountability within the organization.

Quickly [AMME members] internalized the information and took steps to legalize. All other organizations were resisting these changes, but [AMME] pushed forward for this to happen. They created statutes, mobilized resources to call an Assembly, and changed the structure of the Board with clear separation of roles.

—CAP organizational development coordinator

In early August 2011, AMME (Zambézia) became a legally autonomous organization with a newly elected Board of Directors based in Zambézia. From AMME's perspective, and that of CAP Mozambique, this was just the beginning:

We are feeling that this year has been positive for the organization. Others are treating us more seriously. We didn't have a lot of credibility. Now we feel solid. We feel that each person understands their place in the organization.

—AMME accountant

The organization [now] executes its activities transparently.

—vice president of AMME Board of Directors

For me, there is an impact. The president of the Board is putting into practice the role of the Board by overseeing what is going on. [There is] involvement of the Board in the activities of the organization. The executive staff members know when they need to call the Board. They insist to us that the Board needs to be there, and gives us reasons why.

—CAP organizational development coordinator

We participate in the work that the executive realizes. When there are difficulties, we open doors to see what is possible for us to do.

—vice president of AMME Board of Directors

Sometimes organizations sit back and let things happen to them; AMME took action. Its initiative, resourcefulness in requesting support, and culture of shared leadership opened the doors for it to establish itself legally as an autonomous CSO, enable the executive director to vacate her position on the Board of Directors at the national level, and open the provincial delegation up to increased oversight by a newly elected local Board.

² See also the CAP Mozambique technical brief, "Motivating Change: Mozambican Organizations Transform Themselves through the Participatory Organizational Assessment Process."

In 2015, CAP Mozambique surveyed 20 CSO Partners, including AMME, to identify improvements in internal governance and how such changes affected their organizations.³ For AMME, these included:

- an updated Strategic Plan
- annual General Assembly for Board and Fiscal Council
- clear separation between Board and staff roles
- regular Board meetings documented with minutes
- Board-approved policy and procedure manuals
- quarterly visits to field activities by Board members
- separation of project funds from organizational funds
- increased Board role in approving reports, proposals, and annual work plans
- input by the Fiscal Council on annual reports and work plans

Policies & Procedures

Mozambican organizations struggled to respond effectively to the varying policies and procedures presented to them by different donors. In addition, there were not many opportunities for these organizations to learn how to conduct the appropriate research and have the right conversations that led to the adoption of policies that are based on evidence, correspond to local laws, and are appropriate and sustainable for the organization.

Coherent Policies and Procedures

During the POAP, in addition to becoming aware of the governance issues AMME began to realize the constraints it faced in not having its own written organizational policies and procedures. In the absence of Board-approved policies and procedures, donors would require the organization to use the donor's policies and procedures. This meant that each project operated under a different set of rules.

According to AMME's program manager, "[This] made things difficult. Inside the organization there would be people with the same role but different salaries. [This] created conflict within the organization."

In addition, there were not many opportunities for organizations like AMME to learn what to do so that policies would correspond to local laws, be based on organization-specific data, and be appropriate and sustainable for the organization.

There were also challenges when auditors came, because AMME did not have internal policies to back up financial and operational decisions. Operating under the policies of donors who did not always have a good understanding of field realities was difficult. According to AMME's executive director, "They would tell us, for example, you have to pay this much ... but we knew how much things cost in the province and the amount wasn't enough."

With CAP's ongoing support, AMME started to develop its own organizational policies and procedures. It was a long process, but the entire AMME staff was committed to making this happen. Selected by the full AMME membership, a committee of five individuals (including the Board president) sat together daily for two hours for two months, yielding human

³ See also CAP Mozambique technical brief, "Mozambican CSOs Rise to the Challenge: Good Governance in Practice."

resources and financial policies and manuals. According to AMME's program manager, "Now we can negotiate with donors. [We can] create conditions to have human resources that are competent. Now we can be more sure about the management of our organization."

The finance manual has lots of instruments that we used before, but they were not written down as policies. We used them because other organizations used them, but now we have our own tools. The manuals are based on the laws of Mozambique.

—AMME executive director

SBCC Technical Assistance

AMME has strong roots in the community and creates space for women's and girls' voices to be heard. The organization has been working with vulnerable girls in particular for a number of years and is justifiably proud of the brighter future it has provided to countless young women through scholarships and other support. When AMME began its partnership with CAP, however, both organizations identified areas where AMME had space to improve and grow.

Prior to working with CAP, AMME's approach to raising awareness about HIV/AIDS or the importance of educating girls was to deliver lectures in communities rather than to employ participatory methods such as discussion groups or interpersonal communication. In addition, it had not been exposed to the idea of consulting communities to inform project design; it developed projects based on its own perceptions of target communities. Therefore, introducing social and behavior change communication (SBCC) principles made sense to enhance AMME's work and, in fact, became the centerpiece of one of its projects.

As part of the package of support CAP provided for the new project, AMME received training and coaching in formative research to collect information from the community and inform project design. The SBCC approach provided the tools and theoretical framework to help the AMME team investigate and articulate the realities of community dynamics in the field and design a project to address both the social norms and individual behaviors that increased girls' risks of HIV.

The good thing about AMME is its openness to capacity building. After the formative research training, [AMME staff] realized they didn't have the capacity to transmit messages to their communities and asked for training in facilitation techniques.

—CAP Partner support officer

Another significant change noted by AMME and CAP was linked to how AMME promoted HIV/AIDS prevention in communities. In the past, AMME had used theater to illustrate the risks of HIV/AIDS prevention; but with the introduction of social and behavior change theory and practice, AMME began facilitating debates following theater events to engage individuals and make the issues become more real for each individual. AMME also saw the need to provide additional support to *activistas*, who had never facilitated debates before.

Embracing Strategic Approaches in HIV/AIDS Prevention Programs

Many Mozambican organizations had experience implementing HIV/AIDS programs, but not all had experience meeting the more rigorous demands of USAID or experience creating lasting behavior change through effective SBCC interventions in their communities.

Strategic SBCC approaches were relatively new in Mozambique, but can be very powerful in the hands of organizations with strong roots in the communities they serve. A systematic SBCC approach builds on the realities people face and offers pragmatic, accessible, and evidence-based solutions.

[We] changed our method of working. Before we did lectures and people did not understand our objectives very well. Now we have debates and are getting better results.

—president of AMME Board of Directors

We created a manual to support activists. Before activists didn't have a guide to help facilitate sessions, but AMME created its own manual.

—AMME field assistant

From 2010 to 2013, CAP applied its SBCC Assessment three times to measure AMME's growth as a behavior-change-implementing agent. The assessment measured three areas: Design/Planning, Implementation, and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E).⁴ From the baseline to the end line application of this assessment, AMME improved in all three categories, raising its overall score from 2.5 to 2.99 (out of 4) overall, or a 19.6% improvement.



AMME PROVIDES A VARIETY OF LIFE SKILLS TO GIRLS AND WOMEN IN ZAMBEZIA (JESSICA SCRANTON | FHI 360)

Project Cycle Management

Technical knowledge alone does not make a successful project. CAP also provided support in the management of projects—not just to the leadership, but to all levels of the organization. It began with a grants management workshop for leadership and project staff to review the obligations of its grant, including support clarifying roles and responsibilities of key staff. CAP provided training and technical assistance (TA) to leadership, program, and M&E staff, on basic monitoring and evaluation, on how to create an M&E Plan and use data collection tools that would fit the standardized PEPFAR indicators, and how to clarify the flow of information within the organization. In addition to the policies and procedures support described above, CAP also provided support on internal controls and other aspects of financial management and on-going TA in financial reporting and administrative processes to

facilitate smooth implementation without disruption. The executive director, program staff, and finance staff were all asked to participate. During frequent TA visits, CAP staff provided feedback on field activities and aspects of project management, such as ensuring adequate supervision and analyzing monitoring data to improve project outcomes. This organization-wide capacity development helped AMME staff gain new confidence in their roles and their knowledge of the SBCC project.

[Before], when I was asked to explain a project, I didn't have the information myself to answer questions. Now I can write a narrative report and proposal. Now I can plan activities and don't have to wait for the coordinator to tell me what to do. Now I know how to monitor activities. [!] learned [this] from CAP Mozambique.

—AMME program manager

⁴ See also the CAP Mozambique technical brief, "Introducing Social and Behavior Change Communication to Mozambican CSOs."

With the support of different donors, we have improved our financial reporting. I think we are not as nervous as before at providing finances to donors or for audits. I received a lot of support from the CAP grants accountant.

— AMME finance and administration manager

AMME demonstrated other measurable improvements: AMME improved its report writing skills by over 20 percent from the baseline to end line application of CAP’s Report Writing Assessment. In the baseline, AMME scored 32.5 points (out of a maximum of 54 points), followed by an end line score of 39.14 points. AMME’s proposal development capacity was measured at two different times, and its score increased from 69.25 to 78.5 out of 100 points.

Conclusion

The changes evidenced in just a few years’ time were startling. Staff members within the organization understood their roles and had the capacity they needed to implement activities more effectively. They had the tools they needed to manage project finances, collect data, plan activities, and develop proposals for other donors. They also used these tools in projects funded by other donors—expanding the reach of benefits reaped through training and practice to other teams within the organization. They were able to clearly describe the project to outsiders and describe the differences in results between conducting lectures and facilitating debates.

I feel very proud when other organizations talk about the kind of communication that happens inside AMME. Everyone here knows everything. We have a circle of information inside the organization.

—AMME program manager

AMME consistently took new knowledge and applied it. The organization embraced principles of accountability and transparency in the development of its Board of Directors for the newly autonomous organization. AMME used the concepts and tools introduced by CAP in the development of its M&E system and applied them—as well as other reporting templates from CAP—to other projects. The organization has drawn from training in project-cycle management when seeking funding from other donors. AMME incorporated a new SBCC technical approach and, through it, adapted how it worked with *activistas*—guiding them through SBCC methods and providing manuals and additional coaching support—to see greater impact in its other projects. This initiative is noteworthy and set a new bar in Mozambique among the organizations CAP supported.

Usually organizations just look at what they are doing for this project and do not see how it can help the entire organization. AMME learned how to use [what it learned from CAP] to go further than this project.

—CAP organizational development coordinator



AMME WORKS IN SCHOOLS TO PROMOTE GIRLS’ EDUCATION AND ADDRESS GBV AND HIV/AIDS ISSUES . (MAURO VOMBE | FHI 360)

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Over a relatively brief period of time, AMME instituted a number of positive changes, enabling it to better serve the needs of its communities. With increased clarity of organizational policies, active oversight by an autonomous, locally elected Board, and new tools and capacities in project design and management, the organization gained credibility and more support from stakeholders and beneficiaries. Improvements in technical aspects of project implementation, based on SBCC theory, have increased AMME's impact; vulnerable girls in Zambézia are more likely to have chances for a better future.

This case study highlights just how far an organization can go when it is open to considering new ideas and investing its own time and energy in its development.

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