

LG 4: XAI-XAI MUNICIPAL COUNCIL, GAZA PROVINCE IN MOZAMBIQUE



Hon Rita Bento Muianga
Mayor of Xai-Xai

Title: A leader, a mother, a wife, and a woman: The woman who defied culture to become a successful politician.

Quotable quotes

When I was running for office I contested with a man who despised me because I was a woman. But I stayed strong in the campaign and won the elections. This man didn't believe a woman could be a leader. But later he was humbled and accepted that women can lead.

Fact box

COUNTRY	Mozambique
COUNCIL	Xai-Xai
WHY SELECTED	Best case COE
Score when score card first administered	Count only the relevant 25 questions
Agreed score at summit/during verification	New score card
Population	116,343 people (2007 Census)
Key characteristics	62,517 women and 53,826 men
Contact person	Rita Bento Muianga
Designation	Mayor
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Description:Xai-Xai is located 224 kilometres Norwest from the capital City Maputo. According to Census of 2007 it has 116 343 inhabitants. The first Mayor was Faquir Bay Nalagi elected in 1998, succeeded by Isidro Assane in 2003 ant then by the current mayor Rita Muianga in 2008.

What was the situation of gender mainstreaming before the intervention by GL?

There was no equality between women and men in the past, both at home and in the council. Women didn't have much space. The women were there to give birth and take care of the family. In the beginning it was mostly men who were in leadership positions. Women didn't have much space and voice. The woman could not talk with her husband at the same level. She had to kneel down. The women were not supposed to be in the same place with the men. The boy-child was more favoured than the girls. Because they didn't have access to education they could not have access to decision making. She could not get equal pay with the men. The family used to get spouses for the girls or have arranged marriages. She was supposed to be submissive at home, could not eat certain foods like eggs, meat, and had multiple tasks. Even in the traditional structures the men dominated positions of authorities. In the past women in the community were mobilised only to dance and sing. But now we are sensitizing them to take up leadership positions and come up with projects that will benefit them.

How has life tangibly and demonstrably changed as a result of the intervention?

Now we are aware of gender equality and we work according to the targets in the Protocol unlike in the past when there was no change. The men have become more sensitized about gender equality. Training men and women together helped to change their mindsets. So now the women also talk in the meetings unlike in the past when men did all the talking. Now the men appreciate women's views and realised that women have important

contributions to make. The men appreciate and listen carefully and take into consideration what is good for the community. In the past women were not allowed to speak in public. They would organise, cook, dance and ask the men to speak on their behalf. This is what we are trying to change. We are encouraging women to take up leadership positions in the communities. The difference now is that the behaviour of women has changed. In the past women lacked confidence and did not support each other. But now after this training they learnt that women must value each other and support each other and be there for each other. The speech is now about 50:50 for all positions of leadership.

How do we know this change has occurred?

For example in the management meeting the head of finance and administration is a woman. There are more men in the management meeting. The management meeting is composed of 9 people, eight councillors and myself the mayor. Sometimes the men say let's do this and that but I tell them that we won't do that. They keep complaining but I tell them that I am the one in charge of money and I know how much we can spend. In the end they say you are right and we will do it the way you want. Sometimes we invite other people in the meeting, people like technical experts and representatives of the communities. We also have a consultative committee composed of 50 from communities. This consultation happens in the communities. They bring the needs of the people to the management committee. We have integrated 15 women in the policy council because of affirmative action. We didn't have any woman in the council before. The council has adopted affirmative action which is one of the priorities in our action plan. This happened this year. Now we have 2 women drivers in the city council. They drive city council buses carrying 100 passengers per bus.

What are the characteristics of this group that distinguish it from the others?

The only difference is that there is no gender mainstreaming in the other councils in the region compared to us who benefited from Gender Links.

Who are the poorest and most marginalised people in the community and how does the council reach out to them?

In the council there are funds allocated for people to do projects. This is decided according to the localities in the council. I go to all places to make sure that women benefit from these funds. People in the community are now making noise that how come you are always coming to make sure women get the projects? In this project of empowering women in economic entrepreneurship women are doing several small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in groups and associations. Some groups are engaged in activities like keeping chicken, tailoring, and agriculture. The women have also created an association to do ceramics but there is no money to do it. They have written proposals for making ceramics. We also have a programme for helping handicapped women with better housing. This is part of the action plan of the council. Women are targeted because the largest numbers of people are women and they are the ones who are the poorest in the community. The plan is to reduce poverty. Traditionally most of the men went to South Africa to work in the mines. Also many men also died during the war and others died from HIV and AIDS. HIV and AIDS also affect women. We have association of women living with HIV and AIDS. There are many widows in the community.

How can performance be strengthened in further?

There are 2 major challenges. One is financial. The council is willing to do more activities but we do not have enough money. The second problem is illiteracy among women. We are fighting to put more women in leadership positions but if she does not have qualifications, that is a problem. This hinders their appointment in position of decision making. People will

ask that how come you are appointing women when they are not qualified. We cannot appoint people just because one is a woman. To help these women, the council is giving scholarships to women to study. At the moment 5 women are benefiting from council scholarships. Two are finishing their training this year and the other three later. One woman is studying human resource management and the other public relations. They are training in the public service institution here in Gaza. The institution chooses people every year from the civil service for training. We give scholarships only to women because of the gender equality gap. Men are included in training and seminars so they understand what is happening.

What has changed in your life as the Mayor?

When I was elected mayor to work with the male dominated council I was scared. But now that I attended GL training my confidence has increased. In the beginning I had this confusion in my mind that I am a woman and a leader. I used to think more about being a woman than being a leader. This affected my decisions a lot. But this has changed. Now I think of myself as a leader more than I think of being a woman. This province is a male dominated province. When I was running for office I contested with a man who despised me because I was a woman. But I stayed strong in the campaign and won the elections. This man didn't believe a woman could be a leader. But later he was humbled and accepted that women can lead. I have now reconciled my different roles as a leader, a mother, a wife, and a woman. I have decided that everything has its own place. My husband supported me to run for office. When I consulted my husband he just advised me to follow my heart and he would be there to support me.