

### Harvesting lessons for gender equality and women's empowerment: The case of Olima Wo Suka, Mozambique

*This case study shares some of the learning that is emerging around the challenges of addressing gender equality and women's empowerment in agriculture. Specifically, it looks at the case of CARE's Olima Wo Suka (OWS) project, which focuses on conservation agriculture in Nampula Province, Mozambique. It explores the perceptions of project staff in relation to the strengths and challenges they face in effecting change around women's lives in the context of agriculture. It also highlights some of the views of women and men farmers on the benefits and challenges of participating in the project.*

#### The context

While Nampula City has experienced economic growth in recent years, many districts still face acute poverty. The province experiences recurring drought and only 2.6% of the population have access to clean water. Illiteracy rates are high for women (77.1%) and men (63.5%).<sup>1</sup>

A gender assessment undertaken in 2008 for Olima Wo Suka and its partner project in Inhambane Province points to the challenges women face in accessing land and productive resources across the province. The assessment suggests that this is, to a large extent, because of men's control over such resources.<sup>2</sup>

Another report elaborates the social and gendered relations of power in Nampula and Inhambane, observing that, *"the labor division and the way it is represented by women and men expresses clearly the power relations within the household, down-grading women's social role and limiting their access to other resources, like education, and activities that require them to be away from home, such as marketing. The control of income (and its application), be it from family farm yields and/or from the work of associations, is almost always controlled by men."*<sup>3</sup>

It is with this context in mind that the case study explores Olima Wo Suka and reflects on some of the challenges and opportunities for the project to address women's empowerment and gender equality.

#### From design...

CARE Mozambique promotes conservation agriculture (CA) through a number of initiatives, including two projects in Nampula and Inhambane Provinces. Known

locally as "Olima Wo Suka" (Nampula) and "Wurime Ga Wuhlayse" (Inhambane), the two projects have the goal of improving the livelihood security of small-holder farmers.

According to the project's concept note, Olima Wo Suka seeks to meet its goal by improving crop yields, introducing sustainable soil fertility and water management systems, and reducing farmers' labor. The concept note does not include a specific goal focused on improving women's and girls' lives. Nor does it disaggregate targets by sex or other category (age, etc.), but rather considers more general targeting categories of "smallholder farmers" and "extension staff."

The project states the need for a robust monitoring system which includes a range of indicators on the performance of methods and farmers' opinions. It adds that the indicators are to focus on farmers' labor demands and their crop management practices. It also notes that the data is to be collected along gender-disaggregated lines to determine the benefits of different household members. However, only one gender-sensitive indicator is included in the OWS logframe as follows,<sup>4</sup>

*"Of those farmers who have been using OWS methods for 3 years, more than 50 % (30% of which should be women) have adopted at least four of the soil fertility and water management methods taught in the project."*



Olima farmers and staff, Nampula Province

#### to implementation...

The implementation phase added one objective, *"Women farmers will benefit equally from this project."*

The gender assessment undertaken in 2008 to inform the conservation agriculture projects in both Nampula and Inhambane points to ways that the project feels it will benefit women. It notes that, *"in line with CARE's commitment to ensure that 60% of its beneficiaries are*

<sup>1</sup> Osorio, Conceicao and Margarita Mejia. *The Social Relations of Power: Gender Relations in Inhambane and Nampula Provinces, Mozambique*, 2006, p 9.

<sup>2</sup> Collier, Edda. Report of consultancy to integrate a gender approach in conservation farming: *Identifying key gender issues and recommendations for integrating a gender perspective into conservation farming projects in Nampula and Inhambane Provinces, Mozambique*, Maputo, May 2008..

<sup>3</sup> Osorio and Mejia, 2006, p 54.

<sup>4</sup> Appendix 4, Olima Wo Suka project concept note.

women, the project hopes to significantly impact the lives of women. In particular, it is expected that the project will have the following positive impacts for women:

- A reduction in the demand for labor required to grow crops under the system promoted by the project;
- Improved nutritional status of household members;
- Sale of surplus production, and;
- Preservation of forest cover.”<sup>5</sup>

The assessment also provides a number of recommendations on how the projects might address gender equality more effectively:

- Provide training on gender equality issues for extension workers and other staff (including basic analysis and advocacy skills);
- Include key gender sensitive indicators in project log frames and develop guidelines to help staff monitor progress on gender targets;
- Related to the point above, develop [or adapt] instruments to track how the project has contributed to women’s empowerment (e.g. household decision-making and expenditure patterns
- Strengthen groups’ skills in governance and organization; and,
- Provide support to extension workers on how to adjust farming methods for households with chronically ill members (where women’s time and labour become even more important concerns).



To the field – with mulch!

### Benefits and challenges: View from the field

At the time of field visits in June 2008, it was difficult for women and men in the Olima Wo Suka communities to identify impacts *per se* as the project had not been underway that long. However, women (and men) spoke of some of the benefits they felt they had gained from OWS as well as some of the challenges they faced in participating.

<sup>5</sup> Collier, Edda. Report of consultancy to integrate a gender approach in conservation farming: *Identifying key gender issues and recommendations for integrating a gender perspective into conservation farming projects in Nampula and Inhambane Provinces, Mozambique*, Maputo, May 2008..

Discussions with women and men participating in OWS groups in Meconta District, Muriaze (Nampula District), and Mecuburi Districts point to “husbands being generally supportive” of women’s involvement in OWS.” They added that since the introduction of conservation agriculture techniques, their labor has been reduced somewhat. Women noted specifically the reduction in their time spent on land preparation and weeding, and that they now have more time for their family, friends, and children. They also spoke of the benefits of organizing and sharing labor both in the household and in groups.

As for production-related benefits, women noted that they were still waiting for their recently applied mulch to break down into the soil, and that they expected to see the benefits of this application later in the year. Women also noted that while they had tended to buy seeds in the past, they were now saving seeds for use the next season. Saving seeds not only saved them from additional input costs, but also strengthened their self-sustainability.

Women and men in Muriaze Post Administrative talked about the challenges of marketing their produce. Above all, women highlighted the difficulties facing groups in organizing for marketing given the distrust between individuals and the difficulties faced in working cooperatively.

Women also talked about the need to improve their negotiation and business skills in light of their concerns over “middle men” or trading agents and the practice of “fixing” weight scales and prices. The president of one group also pointed to the challenges the group faced in opening a bank account because of members’ lack of knowledge of the procedures and lack of documentation necessary to do so. In response to the members indicating they did not have birth certificates, OWS extension workers revealed that the members could use voter cards to register the group.

The 2008 gender assessment report sheds light on a related problem as it observes that, “since many women do not have birth certificates many use [those] of their husbands to retain group membership once the group is legally registered, but this implies that women participate by proxy only and entitles men – who are not members – to some voice in decision-making.”<sup>6</sup>

Finding ways to strengthen women’s “voice” and participation in the project and decision-making bodies still poses challenges to OWS. One story recounted a woman who ended up in hospital after her husband beat her for speaking up in one of the groups. Women also pointed to cases where, after having earned some income, their husbands had taken the money for their own use “to drink.” Some women also revealed that some husbands resisted having their wives attend OWS training.

During a number of field visits with women, a male “observer” would almost inevitably appear at the sidelines

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

– noting the discussions and even jumping in to add his opinion. At times, the man would start to dominate the discussion and was asked kindly and politely to move on to allow women to discuss more freely their views and perceptions.

Overall, many women stated that their husbands were supportive of their participation in OWS – in great part because men also reap the benefits from reduced labor, improved soil fertility, and gains in yields. However, while a number of benefits were identified by women and men, a number of significant challenges – particularly in relation to barriers facing women – still face OWS.

### Programming strengths and challenges

In June 2008, the OWS program manager, senior trainers, and extension workers came together to discuss the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges (SWOC) of the project in relation to addressing women's empowerment and gender equality. Out of the group of those attending (16), only six – including the project manager – had had any training related to gender issues – and this was not specifically in relation to agriculture. Out of the group, only three (including the project manager and senior trainer) had had any training on participatory approaches.

The SWOC analysis briefly explored staff members' awareness about, and understanding of gender equality and women's empowerment. These are summarized below.

#### Staffing

During the SWOC analysis, project staff noted the challenges faced by the project in terms of recruiting female staff as well as that of high staff turnover. In June 2008, Olima Wo Suka was staffed as follows:

- 1 Program Manager (male)
- 2 Senior Trainers (women)
- 20 extension workers (10 male, 10 female)
- 1 M&E officer (Female)
- 1 marketing officer (man)
- 301 demonstrators (266 men, 35 women)

### Staff perspectives: Defining gender equality

Project staff looked upon gender equality as:

- A balance between rights, duties and obligations of men and women;
- Same rights and opportunities to speak and to be leaders;
- Sharing labor equally between women and men;
- Women and men having the same rights and opportunities to services and salaries; and,
- Equal opportunities and rights for women and men in all aspects of daily life.

### and women's empowerment...

Interestingly, project staff almost unanimously referred to women's empowerment as related to women's power to make decisions. Interestingly, the language that staff used to define women's empowerment pointed to their recognition of the power imbalances between men and

women and the control of power in men's hands. A number of definitions lined up as follows,

- “Giving women the position to take decisions”
- “Giving women the space to make decisions”
- “Giving women the power to decide”
- “Giving women the opportunities and giving them the capacity to take decisions.”

When asked if they felt gender issues were important or not to agriculture, one participant summarized the many, but similar observations as follows, “I feel that gender issues are very important in agriculture because [it is in recognizing and acting on these] that we can achieve a balance in social development [and rectify the situation whereby] women have always occupied unfavourable social positions.” However, another staff member's remark points to the need for improving sensitization and awareness-raising on gender equality, “They [gender issues] are not important, in general; most of them [women] suffer from [an] inferiority complex, [and] hesitate ... to contribute to certain ideas during [meetings].”

Staff outlined a number of areas where they felt OWS demonstrated strength in addressing women's empowerment and gender equality. Additionally, they pointed to different opportunities where this could be reinforced. From the perspective of field staff, OWS' key strengths are the presence of women extension workers who can mobilize women's groups as well as the existence of a number of different partner projects that work with women. One of the key opportunities presented was that of including a capacity building and training plan on gender equality and women's empowerment. This was augmented by the observation that there are also a number of projects in the region focused on gender equality; these could be tapped to support OWS.



OWS staff in the field

The most common weakness raised was that of a lack of information and skills about gender equality. In line with this, the greatest challenge noted was that of the lack of capacity to address gender equality as well as a lack of materials to support the work of those in the field. Finally, in trying to reflect on personal perceptions and views on addressing gender equality and women's empowerment in the context of agriculture, staff noted a



number of *personal* challenges they face. These are summarized as follows:

- Working with farmers and communities to create awareness [about gender equality and women's empowerment];
- Addressing the cultural and religious context [of women's empowerment];
- Working with women to gain better participation in development [activities]; and
- Addressing men's attitudes and behaviors towards women.

### Learning from OWS: Implications for CARE's agriculture portfolio

Olima Wo Suka provides a number of lessons for the agriculture portfolio in terms of the challenges and opportunities for both staff and communities in working to improve the lives of women and girls. This may require introducing what, for many agriculture staff and partners, are new skill sets.

In particular, OWS points to lessons in three areas:

**1. Learning agendas/capacity:** The SWOC analysis undertaken with OWS staff in Nampula Province confirmed that, while project management had received very general gender training, field-based staff in general, had not. They also lacked materials and tools to support their learning and action to analyse and act on the gender and power dynamics.

**Implications for the agricultural portfolio:** Meeting the goal of empowering women in the agriculture sector would be well-served by ensuring all agriculture staff participate in *ongoing* learning agendas and capacity strengthening around women's empowerment and gender equality – specifically in the context of the agriculture. There is great interest in cross-project and inter-country shared learning. Moreover, there is the need to make available tools and resource materials in relevant languages.

**2. Measuring impact: Gender-sensitive indicators and M&E:** In an early 2008 gender assessment, OWS suggested it would benefit women in a number of different ways. The OWS logframe only included one gender-sensitive indicator against which to measure impact.

**Implications for the agriculture portfolio:** While it is important not to create an unmanageable and unwieldy M&E system with too many indicators, it is important to include a number of key quantitative and qualitative GSIs against which the project can monitor change in women's lives and measure impacts, positive or negative.

Importantly, agricultural projects are well-served to work with men and women to define their own concepts and indicators of “empowerment” and “equality.” In so doing, impacts that are meaningful not only to implementing agencies and donors, but to the men and women beneficiaries themselves can be measured.

There is a clear need to move beyond measuring *impact* using “input” indicators (for example, percentage of women participating in *x* activity) and “output” indicators (for example, % of women adopting a particular technology) as proxies for real impact that substantially improves women's and girls' lives.

### 3. Working with men to support women's empowerment and strengthen agricultural livelihoods

OWS points to the need for agricultural staff and partners to work with men in processes of change leading to improved and empowered lives for women and girls. OWS also point to the need for agricultural staff to work with women and men farmers to strengthen intra-household capacity to discuss and decide issues in a way that is empowering and affirming for women.

#### Implications for the agriculture portfolio

The importance of engaging men in ways that diminish resistance to, and build trust for, women engaged in agricultural livelihoods women's roles and responsibilities and their involvement cannot be underestimated. A number of tools and approaches exist within CARE's agricultural portfolio to assist staff to work with men and women in this way. For instance, Appreciative Inquiry and the Income Expenditure Tree have been used effectively elsewhere.

In summary, this case study points to the need for the adoption or strengthening of new or different skill sets to inform the design and implementation of CARE's agricultural initiatives. These skills are not typically associated with agricultural training, but rather with social change. Reinforcing linkages with CARE's programs in women's empowerment and gender equality, capacity building, and impact measurement can go a long way to strengthening CARE's agricultural portfolio overall regardless of the focus of each specific project.

#### About a Place to Grow

While CARE has made gender equality a key focus of its overall strategy, it has not addressed this significantly in its agriculture portfolio. To redress this, CARE undertook a portfolio review under a project called *A Place to Grow* to explore the different strategies employed across a number of CARE's agriculture initiatives. The project also looks at programmatic, policy, and advocacy shifts needed for the greatest impact on women and girls engaged in agricultural livelihoods.

*A Place to Grow* is supported by the Howard G. Buffett Foundation. For more information, please contact: Late Lawson-Lartego, Director Economic Development Unit, CARE USA – Atlanta, 151 Ellis Street, NE, Atlanta, GA 30303, USA, [llawson@care.org](mailto:llawson@care.org); tel (office): 404 979 9167; fax: 404 979 9167.

This case study was prepared by Catherine Hill – Lead Consultant, *A Place to Grow*. The work was supervised by Late Lawson and Kevin Kamp of the Sustainable Livelihoods Cluster