



E.S., chief of the village. District of Cheringoma.

Sofala Stories

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In the Cheringoma District, part of Sofala Province in Mozambique, the morning landscape is a quiet celebration of nature's beauty. It's a place where every dawn brings a renewed sense of calm and connection, a simple yet profound moment of peace that often fades away too quickly.

Starting the workday at 6 AM, as is typical in many tropical countries, allows you to savor this peaceful moment each day. However, when you are on a jeep jostling over rough terrain to reach the first of six remote villages for that day's data collection, the time to appreciate this tranquility is fleeting.

Mozambique's post-civil war recovery has been a complex and difficult process, particularly in terms of human and economic rehabilitation. The country endured a brutal civil war from 1977 to 1992 between the government (FRELIMO) and the insurgent group RENAMO. The war left deep scars on the nation's social and economic fabric, necessitating extensive efforts for recovery and reintegration, especially in provinces like Sofala – where one of the key challenges has been the reintegration of former combatants into civilian life.



MU., head of the small farmers co-operative, District of Cheringoma. She is head of household and mother of 4 children.

This includes not just economic reintegration but also the reconstruction of community ties and networks involving individuals which have been former enemies during the conflict. Which is why several development projects, including the one I was performing the baseline assessment for (DELPАЗ Sofala, implemented by the Austrian Development Agency and funded by the European Union), try to support this process by creating virtuous value chains in the local market.

Indeed, a livelihood project does not merely create income-generating opportunities. It instead fosters social cohesion and contribute to a more stable society, by addressing economic vulnerabilities and building trust and cooperation through market-based linkages.

As soon as the jeep comes to a stop on the side of the only gravel road in the area, a man in a suit appears before the car, his proud and intense demeanor signaling his authority as the village chief. His attire suggests high expectations for the outcomes of today's interviews, making it essential for me to focus on identifying the key issues the project needs to address.



Children going to the closest source of drinkable water, the Save river in the District of Maringue. The water is used both for drinking and agricultural purposes, but several accidents have been recorded due to the territorial resident hippos.

The international development sector is going through a massive collective effort to identify the best tools, methodologies and procedures to measure the impact of its interventions, as well as to collect good practices and lessons learnt based on replicable evidence. Nevertheless, there is still an element of utmost importance which is equally essential and hard to measure: the baggage of expectations, hopes and confidence in the promised change that is generated in the populations targeted by any development project.

This is because a food security project in the agri-food sector, such as DEL-PAZ Sofala, impacts more than just agriculture or agronomy. It encompasses issues of social inclusion, gender equality, political marginalization, institutional representation, and access to education and health services. Among the more than one thousand people my team and I interviewed in various villages across the province, these issues have emerged with indisputable clarity.



R.S., former combatant and the only owner of a motorbike in his small settlement, District of Chibabava. He is the only person who can carry the locally grown products to the district market, given the condition of the roads. Unfortunately, often doesn't have enough space on the motorbike and certain products are left unsold.

To ensure the sustainability and long-term impact of such an ambitious intervention, it is crucial that institutions foster knowledge-based ownership of the tools and expertise provided. For instance, an initiative aimed at increasing crop yields through land redistribution and the provision of resilient seeds and natural pesticides will lose much of its effectiveness if not paired with comprehensive training and continuous institutional support for the target populations transitioning into farming.

Another example that underscores the importance of a multidisciplinary approach in designing effective interventions is the need for access to essential services such as health centers and schools. These services are particularly crucial for women, who often juggle childcare and farming responsibilities. When the nearest health center is a day or two's walk away, parents are forced to choose between neglecting their fields or compromising their own and their children's health, as Gracinda, a small farmer from Ntcherazimo, confirms: "Last year, I had to leave my field for surgery, and since the district hospital doesn't have an operating room, I had to travel to



A stall holder in the district market of Cheringoma. She trades with few small farmers, solely from around the area of the market. Very few products are imported from villages farther than 10km from her town, mostly due to the bad conditions of the roads and absence of intermediaries.

Chimoio, a day away, and stay there for a week. Who was there to take care of my field while I was gone?" This dilemma significantly undermines the overall efficacy of any project.

Finally, the increasing complexities of environmental conditions driven by climate change demand more nuanced approaches, requiring comprehensive analysis at multiple levels. As Inacio shared, standing proudly in front of his small field of sorghum in the Maringue District: "In the past, we always knew when the rains would come, but now they arrive late or in heavy floods. It's been hard—our crops suffer, and we've lost so much to both drought and flooding. But with the training and guidance we'll receive, we're hopeful. Learning new ways to manage the land and deal with these changes will help us protect our crops and make sure we don't lose everything again."

It's an ongoing journey of trial and error, but one that is already showing promising signs of progress.



Two children in the Gorongosa District.

“I’m not sure if what I’ve shared will be helpful,” says Honorio, an elderly farmer from the Gorongosa District, as we sit under a towering acacia tree at the conclusion of the interview. “But I’m glad,” he adds, “that you’ve specifically come to ask me”.

All photos by author.



About the author

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