

Assessing the Implications of PARP/A in Central Mozambique 2008-2011



Photo: Inge Tvedten

Despite severe structural political and economic constraints, people in the District of Buzi in central Mozambique have seen small but important improvements in their socio-economic conditions between 2008 and 2011. In addition to their own hard work, the proximity to the city of Beira is a major reason for the advances made. Rather than counting on economic growth to 'trickle down', the government should remove constraints related to agriculture and income and facilitate rural-urban interaction.

In a series of six studies, the local implications of Mozambique's Poverty Reduction Strategies PARP/A (2006-2014) have been monitored and evaluated by focusing on the district of Murrupula, the city of Maputo and the district of Buzi. Using a combination of quantitative and qualitative data, each site has been visited twice with a three-year interval. This brief sums up the main findings from the revisit to the district of Buzi in 2011.

According to national statistics, the central province of Sofala in which Buzi is located has seen a dramatic deterioration in its consumption-based poverty rate from 36.1 percent in 2002/03 and to 54.7 percent in 2008/09. There is nothing in the current study verifying such a negative trend, underlining the need to complement aggregate statistics with a focus on the local-level dynamics of poverty and well-being.

STRUCTURAL CONSTRAINTS

The structural constraints identified in the first Buzi study (2008) largely remained in 2011. Political decision-making, from the District down to the smallest communities, is increasingly dominated by the Frelimo party. In a context where the political opposition is strong, the main option for increased accountability would be to declare Vila Buzi a municipality – which is explicitly resisted for political reasons.

Economically, the formerly all-important Buzi Company is still closed. As a result the building mass is deteriorating and huge tracts of land lie idle. Plans for a bridge over the Buzi River and improved roads to the provincial capital Beira have still not been implemented, which has hindered investments from external capital. Agriculture remains the backbone of

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This Brief presents main findings from Picardo, Rachi, I. Tvedten and M. Paulo (2012). 'Mucupuki' Revisited. Assessing the Implications of PARP/A in Central Mozambique 2008-2011. CMI Report R 2012: 6. Bergen: Chr. Michelsen Institute. The project is funded by Dfid.

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ECONOMIC PROGRESS

Revisiting the same public institutions, the same communities and the same households as in 2008 reveals that important progress has been made – despite the structural constraints. The District Administration has improved its efficiency, and produce better and more analytical District Economic and Social Development Plans. The communication between the District Administration and the Administrative Posts, Localities and *Povações* has also improved.

In the Vila, the number of shops and marketing stalls and the variety of products has increased, partly due to a more extensive use of the Local Investment Fund - even though the Fund is still plagued by inadequate transparency and corruption. Contacts with Beira as the main market for goods and services have intensified, with people compensating for the poor public roads with a locally initiated boat service between Buzi and the provincial capital.

The most salient change in the community of Bândua is enhanced commercial activities; in Estaquinha the arrival of electricity; and in Nova Sofala the extension of the Barada missionary school and intensified boat-traffic to Beira.

Agriculture remains the main source of employment and income for 69.2 percent of the households (up from 64.2 in 2008), with the proportion of households involved in formal employment having dropped from 17.5 to 14.2 percent. Only 5.8 percent see self-employment as their main occupation, but considerably more are involved in the informal sector.

While only 14.4 percent of households sell agricultural products (down from 19.8 percent in 2008), the proportion of households involved in fishing – where 83.3 percent sell – has increased from 14.5 percent in 2008 to 26.0 percent in 2011.

On this background there has been an increase in household expenditures, most visible through improvements in the quality of housing. There have also been improvements in education and health institutions.

SOCIAL ORGANISATION

The flexibility of households in meeting socio-economic challenges is demonstrated by an increase in their average size from 7.1 to 8.1 members between 2008 and 2011, with female headed households having increased the most.

Looking more specifically at social mobility, the best-off households in our sample (*muthende*, *kuganha* and *mucupuki*) have been in positions to exploit the informal economy/fishing and improve their situation often with the help of the District Development Fund.

The poor (*mulombo* and *kombo*) show a more varied situation. While none have managed to move to the best-off category, several have improved their situation through hard work and against many odds particularly in informal trade and fisheries.

The very poorest (*umbwa*) are 'captured' in their poverty, with limited resources and social networks – often including their own extended family that cannot afford to support non-productive members.

The small but important improvements in social economic conditions in Buzi between 2008 and 2011, despite the continued structural constraints, clearly indicate the potential for further poverty reduction. Efforts should be made to open up political space by making clearer separations between the government and Frelimo and declaring Buzi a municipality; to improve infrastructure by constructing bridges and better roads and hence facilitate contacts between Buzi and Beira; and to remove economic constraints primarily by reinvigorating the Buzi Company and improve access to modern agricultural technologies and markets. The very poorest must be targeted with special interventions of social protection.