



With Support from Save the Children Mozambique

**CASE STUDY:**

## **Better Choices for Children: Community Grants in Mozambique**

**Diversifying the Range of Responses to Support the  
Livelihood Security of Orphans and Vulnerable Children**

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# Better Choices for Children: Community Grants in Mozambique



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# I. CONTEXT

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## A. Socioeconomic Overview

Children account for over half the population of Zambezia Province in Mozambique. Of those, many live in difficult circumstances. In rural areas, people earn very little, and many children living in the province often lack nutritious food and adequate shelter. HIV & AIDS plays a considerable role in affecting livelihoods with an estimated prevalence rate of 19% (Source: National Aids Council of Mozambique (CNCS), 2007). Many children care for sick and dying parents for extended periods of time. After their parents die, these children continue to struggle. Although they are often taken in by aunts, uncles and grandparents, households are consequentially faced with more mouths to feed. In the worst cases, with no relatives to rely on for support, orphaned children are left homeless to fend for themselves.

## B. Purpose of intervention

In light of these many vulnerabilities experienced by children, Save the Children in Mozambique has responded with a Livelihood and Social Protection Grants Scheme. Also known as community grants, this initiative was first piloted in rural Morrumbala District in 2004. The direct transfer of cash to communities and households is a growing and progressive area of social development, where families and communities are given the dignity of choice, encouraged to be innovative, and provided with the financial support to better address the problems they face. The community grants scheme has been an opportunity for Save the Children, district governments, and community groups to work together in providing care and support for orphans and vulnerable children. We believe it is a strong model for an NGO-government-community partnership at the district level.

In 2008, Save the Children's three countrywide programs underwent a unification process in Mozambique and now operate as one program in five provinces. Currently, the community grants project is implemented in two districts of Zambezia province (Morrumbala and Mopeia), and there is potential for expanding the program within the country. Save the Children has a strong relationship with district governments, local associations, faith-based organizations, and other community structures in other Zambezia districts and provinces. Consequentially, we believe that expanding the project through the support of Save the Children is a possibility in the short-term with our capacity and expertise in fundraising and project design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. In the long-term, Save the Children could provide technical support for the development of market-oriented small-scale producers schemes for projects focused on rural development to the Ministry of Planning and Development (MPD) and

district governments, which have provided funding through the “**Investment Fund for Local Initiatives**”<sup>1</sup> (FIIL). More specifically, the District Aids Nuclei and District Directorates of Women and Social Action (though low in capacity in many districts) are appropriate potential government partners that could implement a community grants program.

On the one hand, expanding the community grants program would likely be most successful in districts where there is a tradition of association-building or community members already working collectively to assist marginalized groups. On the other hand, Save the Children is interested in the emergence of new civil society groups in areas where there is less of this tradition to form groups to support vulnerable children. This was the case in Morrumbala and Mopeia approximately six years before the launch of Save the Children’s grants program.

### C. Description of target group/clients/members

Currently, the community grants scheme is carried out in rural Morrumbala and Mopeia Districts, in addition to peri-urban areas on the outskirts of Quelimane in Zambezia Province. Since 2004, about 140 community groups have been awarded grants, which have benefited approximately 18,500 children and 4,300 adults in Zambezia Province. On average, each grant is about US\$1,200.

Save the Children awards this amount, because we believe that it poses a limited risk to the organization and our donors. In most cases, our program was the first time that community groups in Morrumbala and Mopeia had access to grants. The amount is reasonable for groups to manage on a first time basis with an understanding that ‘good performers’ are eligible for repeat grants for higher sums of money. At the same time, this amount is large enough to support micro-projects which would have a lasting and notably positive impact on vulnerable children.

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<sup>1</sup>The Investment Fund for Local Initiatives (FIIL, Fundo de Investimento de Iniciativos Locais) is money given to each district each year for loans for local projects to create jobs or grow food. Although the transfer is now more than 10 million meticalis (about \$375,000) per district per year, it is still generally called the “7 million” after the initial payment made in the first year, 2006.

## II. DESCRIPTION OF METHODOLOGY

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### A. Summary of design concepts

Community grants are small, flexible and accompanied by technical support. They are awarded to community-based initiatives that aim to address the challenges faced by the poorest and most vulnerable children and their families. They also assist the communities to diversify the range of responses. This includes teaching children livelihood skills such as carpentry and animal husbandry as well as fulfilling basic needs such as building houses for orphans, acquiring school supplies, and helping children register for various social services.

These classes are taught by adults living in the areas in which the projects are ongoing. In some cases, the community group beneficiary budgets a small amount of money to pay the instructors. In other cases, the instructors are themselves members of the community group and volunteer their time to teach the children without financial compensation. In all cases, the amount paid to instructors by community groups is a very small percentage of the total grant so that most of the funds go towards livestock, equipment, and materials.

#### *Types of community grants*

##### **Food Security and livelihoods**

- Vegetable gardens
- Food distributions
- Income generation (e.g. animal husbandry, support for fishing, goat rearing)

##### **Basic needs**

- Clean water (e.g. boreholes)
- Shelter
- Education (e.g. school materials and uniforms)
- Health (home visits)
- Psychosocial support and counseling
- Child rights (e.g. birth registration, poverty certificates)

##### **Skills and capacity building**

- Community meeting places
- Crèches
- Theatre
- Tailoring
- Carpentry
- Pre-school supervisor training
- Vocational and other types of training

## **B. Process/steps in implementation**

The success of community grant projects is dependent on the quality of the selection and implementation process. Save the Children has devised an open and transparent process in close consultation with local government officials, the District AIDS Nucleus, and community groups.

The process begins with a call for proposals, which is advertised through a number of channels, including community radio. Community radio (e.g. Radio Morrumbala) announcers are provided with information by Save the Children and announce the awards opportunity. This happens at the beginning of each grant cycle (e.g. once or twice a year). Some community groups have suggested that Save the Children staff appear as guests on the radio so that they may provide more detailed information on why the project was created, who the grants are supposed to benefit, and the submission process that is followed. This is a good idea since the radio announcers are limited in terms of their knowledge of the grants. We are currently in discussions over this possibility. Announcements over community radio are important, because they allow people living outside district centers in more remote areas to find out about the grants. The District AIDS Nucleus and Save the Children also directly inform the eligible communities.

Proposal forms are distributed during field visits to the communities. At the onset, communities are supported in producing high quality proposals. Interested groups are invited to a proposal writing workshop during which Save the Children technical staff thoroughly explain the proposal process and give groups guidance on writing strong proposals. Over the past few years, certain groups have had difficulty conceptualizing and drafting proposals as it is often the first time they have ever submitted such an application. The groups that experience difficulties tend to be newly formed with weak organizational capacity (e.g. inexperienced president, treasurer, secretary, etc.) and structures (people unsure of their roles). Such groups also experience difficulties in consolidating a vision on how and what they want to achieve in terms of assisting vulnerable children. Save the Children has subsequently invited these groups to our district offices where our field staff has provided their members with additional assistance or, when necessary, visited groups that are located far away from our office.

The process for selecting grants has been designed to maximize the participation of children. A review committee made up entirely of children evaluates each proposal. The review group is made up of child members of Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) Committees and local Child Parliament chapters. The children range in age from twelve to seventeen and are equal in numbers of girls and boys. These committees have access to all proposals and are responsible specifically for determining which projects will benefit vulnerable children and young people. The children's review group can reject any proposal that they do not see fit for improving their

livelihoods. By affording children such a crucial role, Save the Children clearly establishes the importance of child participation at the onset of the process.

The selection process is competitive, and not all proposals are ultimately funded. All submitting groups maintain their own copy of the proposal to submit to other donors should their submission prove unsuccessful. They are also given feedback as to why their proposal was not approved. This helps ensure that groups whose proposals have been rejected can think more critically about how they can improve, should they wish to re-submit in the next grant cycle. There are typically one or two rounds each year.

All of the grants recipients are announced at a public awards ceremony. This event is crucial to publicizing the program to other local groups. The public ceremony is also essential in holding the groups accountable to the children and communities that they serve.

The focus on the role of children in this program continues after selection. All chosen community groups receive training in child participation and child protection. While some have had exposure to such learning, many (particularly the faith based groups and associations) have not, and this level of engagement with children is very new. OVC Committees, unlike some associations and faith-based groups, are the focus of other Save the Children projects where child participation and child protection training is incorporated. In many cases, both the OVC Committees and the Child Parliaments have been receiving this type of training for many years as a part of on-going programs. This training is often quite new, however, to the associations and faith-based groups, because they have not previously worked with Save the Children.

## C. Method of measuring results

Measurement of results is carried out in several ways. The program is supported by several officers who regularly monitor the progress of the actual grants distributed and their impacts on children and oversee financial management and accounting. Projects are typically six months in length. After three months, Save the Children field staff has meetings with community groups to see if they are complying with the terms of the grant using a monitoring matrix and checklist. Regular visits to project locations take place, and individual and focus group discussions are carried out to ensure that the principal beneficiaries of these grants are served. Whenever possible, these visits include district officials, civil society program officers, and community leaders who therefore become familiar with the monitoring and evaluation process. Several more formal evaluations have taken place including a detailed internal study which resulted in a publication entitled 'Better Choices for Children – Community Grants in Mozambique' (available on request).

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The community group's membership is responsible for appointing a President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer. There have been a few instances when OVC Committees elect a child President (usually about seventeen-years old). This is a positive example of adults appreciating the merits of listening to children and recognizing them in positions of leadership. All members must attend a workshop facilitated by Save the Children where a basic financial training component is included.

Since the release of this publication, Save the Children has created additional innovations in the community grants program. For example, we have noted that certain groups were driven by one or two members so that the majority of people involved did not have a real understanding of the role and potential of small civil society organizations in making a tangible difference in the lives of vulnerable children. Members of these groups appeared to have a reasonable understanding of why a specific project was being carried out, but they did not always see a bigger picture in terms of the importance of empowerment to make positive change through formalized groups. In the past, communities looked to district governments and large NGOs for various forms of assistance and guidance and perhaps did not think that small groups had much to contribute. In response, Save the Children created a half-day workshop which focuses on association/civil society-building. The workshop focuses on helping participants to understand the importance of having a shared vision of projects and the role that civil society organizations can play in improving the lives of vulnerable children.

In order to ensure a strong community ownership component, Save the Children prompts the involvement of community structures in this process. In several of the communities that have benefited, we have supported child welfare OVC committees where we operate in Mozambique. The committees are community structures made up of both adult and children volunteers. They address issues concerning the most vulnerable children and are committed to providing them with various forms of support. They help link children and their families to crucial government services in education, health care and registration for identification (e.g. birth certificates). OVC Committees also conduct assessments to identify orphans and children who are most vulnerable in their communities.

Within each committee, there are both smaller sub-committees comprising of boys and girls and men and women. Members elect a President, Vice President, Treasurer and Secretary. Save the Children has provided various forms of support to these committees in Morrumbala and Mopeia for many years.

The committees are regularly involved in monitoring and assessing the different types of ongoing community grant projects and organizing public award ceremonies. To further enhance this

sense of ownership and community accountability, each award ceremony includes a presentation made by the recipients of the community grants in front of the entire community gathered, which includes a detailed description of the project as well as the amount provided and the timelines for expenditure. Such accountability has reduced the incidence of fraud and misappropriation of funds and has also stimulated the kind of proactive behavior that will assist the long-term sustainability of these kinds of interventions. Save the Children sometimes awards repeat grants to community groups which fulfill the terms and conditions of their projects (e.g. allocate money according to what it has promised, evidence that ‘x’ number of children have received the specific support indicated, etc.). In other words, ‘good performers’ receive additional funds to expand their existing projects and increase the level of assistance and number of children reached. This is perhaps an example of ‘long-term support’ from Save the Children, rather than ‘long-term sustainability’ as described above. In Morrumbala and Mopeia districts, community groups do not presently have access to government funding.

Districts funds are currently only accessed by legally registered entities, which is a major constraint since the majority of our grantees are not eligible. We recognize that an increased emphasis on more capacity-building to eventually facilitate registration needs to be undertaken. There seem to be more NGOs offering micro-credit to community groups now in response to the pressure to do more to build capacity of civil society organizations and to fill this gap.

In addition, district government funds are only available for groups doing income generation projects and are not for initiatives to assist orphans and vulnerable children.

## III. OUTCOMES

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### A. Positive results

Representatives from community groups claim that the grants have helped to change the way they think about their role in caring for and supporting vulnerable children. They tell Save the Children that it is not only their thinking that has changed, but the attitudes of those who traditionally have made decisions for the communities. District government officials are taking notice of the positive contributions that have been made by local groups. Nita, a 17-year-old member of the Child Parliament in Mopeia explained that:

*The government sees that associations that had not received funding before now have their own projects, take care of money and give reports to Save the Children. Before, the government did not pay much attention to associations because they did not think these groups had any ability. They were surprised to see how successful they could be, especially because some people here have difficulty reading and writing. I think the projects have helped the government to trust the communities.*

Joao is a 17-year-old boy and member of a theatre group which received a community grant in Morrumbala District. He explained how his type of project is changing the way adults treat orphans:

*It is not just school materials and food that helps children. This theatre is making a difference too. I think it is sometimes a better way for children to communicate with adults than just speaking with them. This is especially true with people in the government, traditional leaders, teachers and the police. For example, we created a play about a police officer who accused an orphan of stealing and put him in jail. It is a true story. The orphan was innocent, but because he had no one to defend him, it was easy for the police to accuse and mistreat him. Adults always think that orphans are stealing here. We performed in front of government people including the chief of police. In the play we also showed the difficult way that orphans live. After the play, they told us that they now understand that they cannot just think that orphans are thieves and have no rights. The Chief of Police said that they would treat orphans better in the future. So the theatre is a way of changing attitudes of adults towards orphans.*

**Note:** OVC Committees and Child Parliament chapters receive on-going sensitization and training on identifying and denouncing cases of physical and sexual abuse at the hands of authorities, such as police and teachers, and also by parents and guardians. The Child Parliaments comprised exclusively of children in Morrumbala and Mopeia have been somewhat effective in denouncing cases of child abuse. After finding out that a child living in the area had been physically abused by a parent, the young parliamentarians have asked for meetings with the police to request that the child be protected and the case be investigated. In other instances,

children, in particular orphans, have allegedly been accused of stealing and subsequently put in jail. The Child Parliament explains to the police that children by law cannot be detained and should be released immediately, and that the police should not make assumptions of guilt and look into cases more thoroughly. The OVC Committees have not been as proactive as the Child Parliaments in protecting children from abuse by the police and other authorities.

## B. Resources required/Cost to Institution

Save the Children awards grants of approximately US\$1,000 to 1,400 in local currency (Metical) for projects which generally last six months. Each grant is generally accompanied by a program of community training and undergoes a detailed assessment by a range of committees. During the project duration, a public awards ceremony, regular field visits, monitoring and assessment of results, and exchange visits between successful groups take place that are an additional US\$500 expense.

**Note:** The exchange visits are a recent and popular innovation in the community grants project, which have proved meaningful for the beneficiaries. Save the Children has expanded the project to areas outside of district town centers to reach more remote, isolated areas. This ensures that communities, which previously did not have access to this kind of initiative, are included. In particular, the groups in the rural communities have noted that they have learned from the better established and organized groups in town centers that have received multiple grants with positive results. The groups are able to exchange lessons learned, best practices, challenges and successes encountered.

## C. Challenges and Pitfalls/Lessons Learnt

### *Ensuring Quality of Projects*

To date the technical review process has not been very stringent. This is evident in the types of projects funded and the mixed quality of delivery. To ensure that high quality interventions are delivered, a technical team must spend more time assessing capacity on the ground before the grants can be awarded. In many cases this may require a site visit. Additionally, with such a diverse variety of projects, there should be a process for bringing in different expertise to support this review as dictated by proposal needs. Due to logistical challenges and costs involved, proposals are sent to government and civil society experts in Quelimane City for technical review. To date, it has not been practical or cost-effective to bring these experts to the districts (e.g. petrol, accommodation, per diem would have to be covered). While Save the Children has made efforts to identify technical experts in Morrumbala and Mopeia, we have not been able to find them in sufficient numbers. There is a brain-drain occurring between districts and the

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provincial capital and other urban areas in Mozambique. Those with technical expertise from the districts often migrate to Quelimane or Beira where more jobs befitting their training and level of education are found.

In order to improve the quality of the community grant projects and ensure their viability and impact, there is a need to ensure that technical support is provided to communities throughout project implementation and not just in the selection of grants process.

This is also an important learning process for all involved. Often the failures of certain projects provide as much learning as the successes. By sharing these experiences with community groups, the quality of projects is improving. However, innovation is a value of this scheme, so while it is important to learn from other projects, Save the Children does not wish to be too prescriptive to the communities where local ownership is crucial for success. Save the Children closely monitors the allocation of project funds by the community groups. If we discover cases of mismanagement or misappropriation of funds, the group is at risk of losing the remaining project funds, equipment (e.g. sewing machines) or livestock (e.g. goats). In the most serious instances, Save the Children will involve the police in the matter to conduct an investigation. Save the Children recognizes that many groups are carrying out projects for the first time. There are no explicit penalties for bad practices other than those mentioned above. Another innovation introduced recently was the awarding of certificates of excellence at an end of grant cycle ceremony attended by all the project implementing groups. A small number of groups, which achieved their objectives and made tangible differences in the lives of vulnerable children, are presented with the special certificates and then discuss their achievements in front of the audience. Save the Children believes that this is a positive way for groups to strive for good results in their projects.

### *Sustainability*

There are some concerns over the sustainability of many of the grants. This is a challenge for grants that are so small in size and are generally offered to first time recipients. Additionally, with so many acute needs facing children, the proposed interventions in the past have tended to address immediate needs (rather than long-term support) such as clothing and food distributions. In Save the Children's evaluations, these types of projects are not considered to be sustainable. However secondary grants to a higher value (approximately US\$2,500) have been awarded to groups who have shown to be successful.

Save the Children believes that the increased capacity from community groups handling successively larger grants can eventually enable them to become registered entities. They will therefore be eligible for larger loans that will allow them to expand Income Generating Activities (IGA). With time, they will become less dependent on external funding. We have started to support our community groups to start up such IGAs through our OVC programs.

Grants with higher sums of money for groups need to be accompanied by more capacity-building and association-building. However, this kind of support takes time – certainly longer than the given six month project implementation timeline.

### *Community Divisions*

At times, there has been tension between various communities within the targeted areas. Much of the dissent stems from a lack of understanding over the selection of targeted communities. A review of the grants awarded showed that the majority were delivered around district town centers. Subsequently, there has been an increased focus on recognizing the needs of vulnerable children in more remote areas.

There were also challenges with regards to the the selection of beneficiaries in the communities where projects were implemented. There were incidents of confusion among non-beneficiaries as to why certain children or households were selected. This type of confusion echoed the importance of being as open and transparent as possible with the communities about the decision-making process. In the future, conflict resolution training will also be integrated within the training that all grant recipients receive to mitigate community divisions. Save the Children has not yet identified organizations which could provide this type of training due to other priorities. We are open to suggestions if SEEP members have any ideas.

### *Missing children*

It has been a challenge to ensure that the most vulnerable children are reached by the community grants. Because of traditional values, girls, disabled children and homeless children are often not considered by community groups for specialized assistance. Even when girls have been identified as a target group, the projects fail to reach them in meaningful numbers since parents and caregivers often make them do daily chores in lieu of participating in projects.

There has been some effort by Save the Children to encourage communities to look specifically at the inclusion of girls, both in the governance of projects and as beneficiaries. While some projects have chosen to focus exclusively on girls as beneficiaries in an effort to right the gender balance, this is not enough. In future training for community grant recipients, Save the Children will explicitly address the issue of gender equity.

The inclusion of disabled children and the homeless is proving more of a challenge. Lacking expertise in this area, Save the Children is seeking a local organization to work with the community groups to develop appropriate projects for these groups.

### *Training and capacity-building*

A significant benefit of the community grants program has been the development of increased capacity of the community groups themselves. Attitudes toward children have improved as a result of the training, and the challenges facing vulnerable children have received increased attention. Additionally, the new found financial and project management skills are evident in other projects that the groups have undertaken. Some are working closely with the government to deliver projects, and others have successfully received funding from other sources.

## D. Recommendations for Next Steps

Five years into the implementation, Save the Children recommends and is attempting to implement the following:

- Training must emphasize the continued involvement of children (especially girls) throughout the project lifecycle including concept development, project design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.
- Openness and transparency across communities are essential. Ensure adequate time is allowed for communication with communities, both in terms of project eligibility and selection.
- Thorough technical review is essential. With such a diverse range of projects, expertise must be sought from project partners and in particular local government to determine the feasibility of proposed interventions.
- Maximize the public communication. The award ceremony is an important public awareness and advocacy opportunity for spreading messages on the rights and protection of vulnerable children and HIV & AIDS. In our grant-making experience over the past six years in Morrumbala and Mopeia, the award ceremony has not exacerbated tensions between recipients and groups that are not selected. Not surprisingly, when certain groups have not been awarded project funds, on a small number of occasions members will approach Save the Children for further information on why they were not accepted. We take the time to sit down with these groups and explain our decision and encourage them to submit proposals in the next call for proposals. These meetings have always been objective and positive, and groups have had a genuine interest in learning.
- Special attention must be afforded to underrepresented groups. Save the Children identified challenges in reaching girls and children with disabilities. Proactive efforts must be undertaken to ensure these groups are included in future interventions.
- Community grants scheme is one mechanism for supporting vulnerable children. More research is needed to look at the feasibility and effectiveness of other direct transfers, including household transfers.
- Donors and non-governmental organizations should play a stronger role in supporting cash transfer programs to benefit orphans and vulnerable children. Effective implementation of such programs requires adequate and sustained financing, increased administrative and management capacity, and commitment.

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