

Maddie Page
Upper Arlington High School
Columbus, OH
Mozambique, Factor 15

Improving Mozambique by Helping Girls Receive An Education

Mozambique culture is laced with gender-bias, giving men many advantages over women. Women have begun to overcome these restrictions and obtain relatively high political positions. Overcoming these restrictions placed on women through their education is the key solution to bringing Mozambique further out of poverty.

Situated on the southeast coast of Africa, Mozambique covers 309, 496 square miles, twice the area of the U.S. state of California (Advameg). Mozambique consists mainly of coastal plains and mountains, has 60 rivers and 1,300 relatively small lakes. As with much of the dense forest in the rest of the world, Mozambique has lost 70% of its forests (Advameg). The average temperature of Mozambique is 73 degrees Fahrenheit. Mozambique receives on average 30.3 in of rainfall annually. The country is inhabited by a population of 23.5 million, growing at an annual rate of 2.44% (Culture Grams).

Most of the Mozambique population live in rural areas (62%). The rate at which people move from rural to urban areas is 4% annually. The homes of rural Mozambicans are usually made from clay bricks, bamboo, palm fronds, or mud-covered beams, and mostly have no access to electricity and running water. The Mozambicans who live in cities usually live in apartment buildings typically made of cinder block, with roofs made of corrugated metal or cement. Homes are almost always man-headed households (63%), while only 27% are female-headed (Country Watch). Polygamy is a traditional practice, and was very common, until recently. The common household includes several generations living under one roof (AFS-USA). The average family size is made up of 5 people (FAO).

Over 80% of Mozambique's population is engaged in farming, especially farming and herding cattle. The main crops grown include cashew nuts, cassava, citrus, cotton, tea, and timber (Culture Grams). The average size of land for a Mozambican farmer is 3.42 acres (FAO). Mozambique has a relatively small 5.43% of its land that is arable, however only .29% of those lands being used for permanent crops (CIA World Factbook). The costs of supplying and delivering food from rural areas to the urban areas, or to import food for the cities, are rising continuously, and distribution within the cities is uneven. As a consequence, urban food security will decrease (FAO). In addition, natural shocks such as drought and floods regularly affect agricultural production. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Mozambique is 14.27 billion U.S. dollars (Global Finance), and the comparison by sector is 32% agriculture, 24.2% industry, and 43.8% services (CIA World Factbook). The fact that agriculture provides 32% of the country's income is concerning because 80% of the population is involved in agriculture, which means there are way too many people working on farms and such, and this causes poverty for the 80% of people that are involved. Mozambique is reliant upon foreign assistance for more than half of its annual budget. These are many of the reasons that 70% of Mozambique's population is below the poverty line; 37.9 % of the population live on 1 dollar a day, and 78.4% are living on 2 dollars a day (Culture Grams). In stark contrast, the average American family brings in 130 dollars a day (MunKEE).

The Mozambican diet mainly consists of the cassava root in the northern part of the country, and maize in the center and southern parts. In urban areas, where street foods, snacks and sugar rich foods are becoming more available, causing a nutrition transition.

Mozambique has many problems, especially with their judicial system. Affecting this area of the government are things like long-standing case backlogs, long pretrial conditions, and sometimes the lack of a fair trial. Freedoms of press, movement, and association are restricted by the government, when deemed necessary. Sometimes, police and security forces in Mozambique act outside of their reign of authority. Mozambique's prison conditions are incredibly harsh and life-threatening, due to overcrowding and high levels of violence. Child abuse, child labor, and child prostitution are major problems. Discrimination against persons with HIV/AIDS and/or disabilities are also areas of concern (Country Watch). Mozambique also has problems with health care. Only 40% of the population has access to health care. There is an extreme lack of doctors, it's estimated that there are only about 600 doctors in the whole country, that's three doctors per 100,000 people (USAid).

Despite the state that Mozambique is in now, the country has made much progress in economic development and political stability since gaining independence in 1975. Improvements include women receiving the right to vote and stand for election. In 1977, the first woman was elected to Parliament. (Country Watch). For the first time a woman, Luisa Dias Diogo, was appointed as Deputy Ministry of Finance in 1986 and held the position till 1989, while also heading the National Budgetary Direction from 1982 to 1989. Then Ms. Diogo was appointed to Minister of Finance in 1994, and finally reached Prime Minister in 2004. Ms. Diogo has held more than ten years in a leadership post (Afrol News). Unfortunately, not all men are prepared to deal with women being empowered yet. It is normal for men to say in reference to women with political power that, "The husband of that woman is not a man because the person who is wearing trousers in that household is his wife" or "this woman must not be married." Often it is said the women in parliament are only the flowers of parliament, only there for decoration. Because of this, women do not feel their equal rights are a true emancipation since the behaviour and attitudes of men have not yet changed (Ines M. Raimundo). It's no wonder that women do not see the benefits of their rights, considering the gender-biased that favors men with more upward mobility and higher paying jobs. This attitude also extends into family roles.

The jobs of a typical Mozambican family are gender-oriented; the males are responsible for looking after livestock, tending crops, doing household repairs, and supporting the family financially. The women care for the children and do household chores such as cooking, cleaning, and gathering water; most Mozambicans have to collect water daily. For women who live in rural areas, they are very involved in Mozambican agriculture, however women in towns and cities are generally confined at home (AFS-USA). From a very young age, children are taught the difference between men and women's work. However in urban area, tasks are becoming less closely associated with gender (World Factbook).

Domestic violence is so common in Mozambique that many people consider it normal for husbands to beat their wives. Perhaps because of the idea that women are of a lower status than men, there is an extreme imbalance between men and women's education (World Factbook). However, the completion of first grade for both genders is terribly low. Out of the 91% of children that attend primary school, only 15% go on to attend secondary school (Culture Grams).

Mozambique has a very low school attendance rate, particularly for girls. Many mothers do not send their children to school because of the need for older children to care for their younger siblings, with girls being twice as likely as boys to stay home for this reason. The distances from home to school are too far for a child to walk, particularly a young girl to walk, considering the danger she could face on the road (International Journal of Social Welfare). Mother's may also not send their girls to school based on the numerous reported accounts of teachers abusing children, including sexual abuse by students and teachers (Unicef).

Solving the issues Mozambique has with gender equality in education may immensely profit the well being of the entire country. Cornell University states that “increasing the number of adult females in the household that have completed primary school by one leads to a 23.2% decrease in the proportion of the population living below the poverty line” (Cornell University, Volume 1 pg 197). Studies on Mozambique have shown that mother’s education is crucial to poverty reduction (Cornell University, Vol. pg 197), when the female adult literacy rate is only 32.7% (Country Watch). No country has ever achieved a continuous and rapid growth without reaching an adult literacy rate of at least 40% (Center for Global Development).

Providing more women a better education can raise agriculture profits in a country, especially considering that up to 75% of agricultural producers in Africa are women (Norton/Worldwatch). The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) estimates that if women had the same access to productive resources as men, like education, they could increase yields on their farms by 20-30%. This increase could raise total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5-4% and lessen the number of hungry people in the world by 12-17%, up to 150 million people (See the Future, Feed the Future, Change the Future).

Women’s status has a profound effect on children’s nutrition. In Nepal, the children of women who own land are twice as likely to be sufficiently nourished than children in households where women work on family land they do not own or children growing up in landless households. In general women with an elevated economic status have a raised nutritional status, are better cared for themselves, and purvey higher-quality care to their children (Cornell University, Vol. 1 pg 198). Young people who have completed primary education are less than half as likely to contract HIV as those with little or no schooling. Also, mothers with an education are 50% more likely to immunize their children than uneducated mothers (Center for Global Development). Equalizing men and women’s status is estimated to reduce malnutrition prevalence by 3% in that region, or a reduction of almost 1.7 million children under the age of 3 (Cornell University, Vol. 1 pg 200). Stakeholders affected are men, women, and most importantly, children within families (Cornell University, Vol. 1 pg 195). Girls’ education yields some of the highest returns of all development investments, benefiting individuals, families, and societies at large (The Chicago Council on Global Affairs) For caregivers who have not had access to an education, it is difficult to see the benefits of their girls obtaining an education when daily survival is the more immediate priority (International Journal of Social Welfare).

There are many flaws within the school systems in under developed countries, like lack of quality teachers, or general lack of teachers altogether, and the lack of a smart curriculum. But before students even have the opportunity to face these issues, they must get to school. Research in Nepal shows that access to roads affects girls far more than it does boys. When school was a four hour walk from home, boys enrollment rates were 56%, but only 31% for girls. When the walk was thirty minutes from the road, enrollment went up only 11% for boys, compared to the 20% rise for girls (The Chicago Council on Global Affairs). One of the ways to help girls overcome this distance challenge in Mozambique is to provide bikes for them.

Alaffia instituted a project called Bicycles for Education in 2005. Over 3,500 bikes have been donated and shipped off to 40 different villages since then, and now 3,500 students have transportation to and from school. The students who received bicycles have a 98% retention rate in school, and 95% passing rates on the annual exams. Alaffia has a very systematic selection procedure established in order to benefit the most people. A village has to be at least 7km away from the nearest secondary school to allow students to apply for a bicycle. Then the students are selected based on gender and family income, with girls given preference due to their lower attendance rate and higher dropout rate (Alaffia). Not only has this project kept more girls in school, but has also reduced pregnancy rates. In the town of Sokode, for

instance, the girls often have to trade sex for a ride to school. However, no pregnancies have been present among the 3,000 bike recipients in Sokode (State of the World).

Another obstacle for getting to school in some regions of Mozambique are floods. Mozambique suffered record floods in 2000 when more than 700 people were killed (AP). Chokwe, Mozambique was recently hit with a flood that killed 80 people and left 150,000 displaced (Plan). The Chikahalani camp alone is holding an estimated 65,000 people, but only has 28 latrines. UN estimates that at least 15 million U.S. dollars will be needed for relief aid (AP). With all that has been going on, children have been unable to go to school, and the teachers have also been majorly affected emotionally and psychologically.

Plan is starting a move that is part of Plan's support in the Mozambican government's emergency response to floods. Plan will first be providing emotional and psychological support to teachers, along with providing chalkboards and other school materials. Plan is also distributing 10,000 learners' kits to help the children affected by these floods in Mozambique to return to school. Each learners' kit contains 10 exercise books, an eraser, a geometric set, pens, pencils, a ruler and a school bag. These kits will help reinstate schooling and support pupils for at least one term as the country reconstructs institutions and systems decimated by the floods. These kits go a long way, as each child receiving a kit will have a book on each school subject (Plan).

Not only has vicious floods affected the schooling of girls, but sexual abuse has been a major issue in schools, particularly for girls. Because of the numerous accounts of sexual abuse from teachers toward female students, an increase in the number of female teachers would likely increase girls' attendance. The Female Teacher-Training Scholarship Scheme (FTTSS) is a program that targets marginalized areas in four states in Nigeria. Female students who are qualified to study for the Nigeria Certificate of Education (NCE), but lack funding or information to apply, are funded to take the three-year teacher-training course at the state college of education, and receive the NCE upon completion of the course. In exchange for the funding, the successful Teacher-Training Scheme students agree to return home to their rural communities to teach in primary schools. The scheme began in 2008/2009 with a total of 674 female students. As of 2011, a total of 2,346 female candidates are pursuing their education (Unicef).

Striving harder to give Mozambique girls an education can improve the status of the issues Mozambique faces, such as agriculture. Since three fourths of Africa's agricultural producers are women, giving them a basic education will help them make informed decisions in the fields, resulting in higher profits for the country (Norton/Worldwatch). A step to reaching this growth can be made by providing girls with ways to get to school. Also, helping Mozambique's emergency response efficiency will help education get back on track when floods hit Mozambique and affect its schools, students, and teachers. Another step to reaching better economic growth is to provide a way for successful students, specifically female students, to be trained as teachers so they can then return home after receiving their specialized education, and provide younger female students with a safe learning experience, creating a cycle of education that results in intelligent women who can provide female role models to inspire young girls too. This investment in education will help to shift public opinion toward greater acceptance of women in politically powerful roles.

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