



Socio-cultural elements integrated into planning processes and local development strategies



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BACKGROUND

Despite the fact that local communities have privileged insight into how to best use local resources and that health issues such as hygiene and public health must take into consideration the traditions that have regulated family lives for centuries, traditional knowledge is often overlooked in development plans and interventions.

This issue is prevalent in Mozambique. The civil war cut off many traditional practices and resulted in the implementation of some development programmes that promoted modern technologies to the detriment of traditional knowledge. For instance, some imported crops proved unable to withstand Mozambiquan conditions, and an unsustainable use of forestry resources led to conflicts between communities, authorities and commercial explorers. Additionally, women in Mozambique had high levels of teen pregnancy, HIV, and maternal mortality, due in part to the prevalence of certain cultural norms such as not using condoms and polygamy.

By supporting the recognition and integration of traditional knowledge systems and socio-cultural data into development plans, the JP aimed to enhance the quality and relevance of interventions. The main objectives were to give a voice to community members in participative planning exercises, and to incorporate their knowledge into development strategies.

PROCESS

The JP implemented community workshops and gender-balance task force groups, which drafted a series of communal work plans to be implemented alongside inputs by government and UN partners. School-based curricula and functional literacy training materials, particularly on Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) practices, were developed, and monitoring activities were conducted in full collaboration with community members.



Community members from Mossuril District testing Sexual & Reproductive Health (functional literacy based) training manuals to be used in community workshops. © Lorraine Johnson, MDG-F JP Mozambique

In the area of SRH, traditional leaders and local leaders were taught about the health risks associated with certain cultural practices which contribute to the spread of diseases. Conversely, the formal sector was taught that some illnesses, such as female infertility, can be treated more effectively using traditional rather than conventional methods.

Outcomes

As a result of the JP, many religious leaders now advocate for condom use, and many traditional healers now know to not use the same knife or needle on different people and to promote HIV testing. In Mossuril, nurses are now helping to teach SRH at school.

In forestry and agricultural management, progress has been made towards income generation and poverty reduction. Culturally important species are now grown alongside income-generating species, thus safeguarding intangible heritage and the natural environment and providing both cultural and commercial benefits to the area.

Several outcomes of the JP have already been introduced into local development planning, including cooperative mechanisms to address the HIV&AIDS pandemic and maternal mortality issues, and reforestation of Mecrusse, a timber used in local construction building techniques, and other culturally-significant species.

Awareness was raised on the benefits of inter-ministerial and inter-agency teamwork and collaboration between formal and traditional sectors for addressing relevant issues.

