

HORTI-SEMPRE

PRODUCERS COMBINE AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION PRACTICES WITH A BUSINESS VISION AND DREAM OF A MORE DIGNIFIED FUTURE FOR THEIR FAMILIES



For a long time, agriculture in northern Mozambique was dominated by men. However, in the locality of Nacololo (Monapo district) in Nampula province, the story begins to change with the emergence of the “Associação Verde”, an association made up of 2 men and 18 women. Full of determination, and guided by an entrepreneurial spirit, they dared to do differently and to make their dreams come true through a profitable business, that commercially produces seedlings and fresh vegetables under practical and accessible irrigation systems.

The journey is told by Amida Abdala, Secretary of the Association. It all started in 2018 with the visit of a technician from the “Agri-Mulher” project, executed by the consortium of two local NGOs (Olipa and AENA) with Oxfam. After training in vegetable production, these women linked through a shared goal, decided to create the association, all while working on their own fields.

Amida Abdala says that the journey was not easy because they used conventional methods:

«We found a field, we ploughed it and then we threw the first vegetable seeds in the nursery, but after the first sowing the rain took everything».

Despite this failure, the association did not give up, instead they continued to search for more knowledge. That's why in 2019, they got to know the Horti-Sempre project. Through *Agri-Mulher*, the project facilitated their training in good agricultural practices and introduced the *Associação Verde* to the production and marketing of seedlings in trays – something that was very well received.



Amida Abdala: Showing the seedlings production in trays



«We started producing seedlings last year and thanks to training, we have already produced seedlings on-order for the other associations in Monapo District. Because we saw that it is something new in the community and it has viability, we decided to take this project forward and continue to produce seedlings in trays with the greatest intensity», says Amida Abdala joyfully.

The association has a greenhouse with a capacity to produce 20 000 – 22 000 seedlings per month. In addition to the production of seedlings, they were already growing vegetables such as onions, tomatoes, peppers and cabbage using traditional processes. The application of good agricultural practices gained them a 50% increase in profit.

«Last year we had MZN 10,940.00 (USD 182) of net income in the production of pepper and we even sold tomatoes at 60 MZN / kg (1USD/kg), differently from what we had been selling before (25-30 MZN / kg = 04 – 05 USD/kg). In the market everyone appreciates our products and some leave their contacts, even now they are contacting us to supply products from this agricultural campaign».

And according to Amida Abdala they now manage their own incomes. *«Before we had no way to manage money at home because it belonged to our husbands, but we participated with our spouses in courses on gender, facilitated by the Agri-Mulher project, and we learned that all of us should have the same rights, so at home we now manage our money, another part we give to our husbands and others for the children's food and school supplies».*

After each sale, the members of the Association meet to distribute the gains. These meetings also serve as important moments of connection between the women and give them the opportunity to strength the group by planning their next steps.

Their knowledge was strengthened by training designed specifically for their needs. That was when the dream started to become an enterprise. The *Associação Verde* had the challenge of increasing the production of seedlings and vegetables, investing in a greenhouse for the production of seedlings and an irrigation system that would make production more dynamic. During the installation of both structures, the ladies rolled up their sleeves and invested everything to build the water tank and install the irrigation systems.

«We suffered a lot to get water from the source because it is a dangerous place. We left our houses with drums on our heads and we had to go down to a great depth to have access to water and it was often not enough for irrigation because we did two turns and got tired. With this development facilitated by the Horti-Sempre project, we are happy», said Amida Abdala excitedly.

In the hope of seeing the business growing, Aida Abdala president of the association, mentioned that they had to invest all the savings money and raise even more money to build the storage tank and the network of pipes for the distribution of water, as well as the infrastructure of the greenhouse for the production of seedlings.

«As members of the association, we agreed to contribute with stones, water, sand and labour for the construction of the tank, excavation of the soil and materials for the greenhouse, but it was not easy, each of us had to do extra work. When it was not possible to get help from the men, we would take the marquetry and break the stones and even sell our “capulanas” to get the irrigation system and the greenhouse working», said Aida Abdala.

The irrigation project came with a cost of MZN 470,000 (USD 7'833.33) and the Associação Verde made a contribution of 42%. In the case of the greenhouse for the production of seedlings, the total investment amount was MZN 70,000 (USD 1'166.67), where the Association's contribution was 35%.

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Despite the sacrifice, the members are satisfied with the result and their achievements are already an inspiration for many women in their communities. Their desire is to be able to impact other women to follow their example.

«It was worth the effort, now we have something of our own and it is the responsibility of the entire group to take care of this investment so that we can get the most out of it. With this irrigation system, our production will be on a large scale. Today we are envied because we have managed to excel in our community. With the experience, we hope to influence the three women's associations in our community, we will encourage and train our colleagues to use seedlings of improved varieties in trays to achieve greater production and financial independence», said Amida with great joy.

This evolutive process involved the active participation of 18 women and 2 men of the Association in the decision of each stage. In addition to the association, they also work in their own fields together with their husbands and have reconciled homework, looking after the family, the children, full of hope.

«Last year, I had the opportunity to participate in the onion culture field day in Malema, organized by Horti-Sempre, and I saw the warehouse of a 5 ha onion producer and then I made a drawing of the warehouse and I showed to my companions, and this is what motivates us a lot to continue to produce more and more. Our biggest dream is to see our group growing».

The enterprise that started with an empty field, today brings hope and stands as a sign of victory for these women. With their production they are able to buy food for their families, buy school books for their children and invest in building an improved house. A dream that comes true with effort and determination.

The main lessons learned from this experience with the group of women entrepreneurs is the ability to work as a team; that determination and commitment ends in success; the openness and predisposition to adopt and apply good agricultural practices; the development of a business vision for selling seedlings and their own group- and individual production; a vision of shared profit with the association and the family; the involvement of husbands in the decision-making process and above all, the ability to share in the investments made (greenhouse and irrigation system) as a principle of ownership and responsibility of the entire group; now they feel that everything they own is theirs and it was not a simple donation, so their commitment to take care and get the most out of it is immense and guarantees the sustainability of both infrastructures in the future.



The Horti-Sempre project financed by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and implemented by Swisscontact and the GFA Consulting Group. It seeks to improve the quality of life of small local horticultural producers through appropriate facilitation that allows access to relevant products and services and helps to increase the capacity to produce and compete in the market.