

Primeiras e Segundas: Making two worlds one

Through CARE-WWF partnership, fishing families find alternatives

Traditionally, along the northern coast Mozambique, men and women go their separate ways each morning. Husbands head out to sea, casting nets and fishing lines into the Indian Ocean. Wives trudge inland and work small family farms called *machambas*.

But in recent years, fish catches have plummeted, the result of overfishing and a reef ailing in waters warmed by climate change. The picture on land isn't much better. More erratic rainfall has made growing cassava, maize and other staples more difficult. In a region where most people live on less than \$1 per day, families find themselves searching for a new way.

That's why, on a recent morning in the remote coastal village of Topa, six men and six women head off to work – together. Carrying a red tub, a 10-foot net and bags of fish-feed, their conversation crackles with anticipation. Up ahead is the saltwater fish farm they've built from scratch over the past year. And in a few minutes, they hope to celebrate a major milestone: first fish harvested.

The neighbors formed a fishing association 2 years ago as part of an innovative project spearheaded by CARE and the World Wildlife Fund. Named for the string of islands that distinguish this stretch of coast, the *Primeiras e Segundas Livelihoods Project* (P&S) connects seemingly separate worlds: land and sea, women and men, economic development and ecological protection. The key to a better future, it turns out, is finding ways to make those worlds work together, as one.

For members of the Muaweryaca Fishing Association, the new path is made of soft white sand. Wearing a mix of bright floral shirts and wrap-around *capulanas*, they walk single file down the trail, winding and bending like a rainbow ribbon as they move through green fields of cassava.

Abiba is quiet, perhaps nervous. The group has been so focused on growing and protecting the fish – they even formed a night-watch rotation to ward off thieves – that they haven't completely thought through how to catch them. To come up dry on the first attempt would be a bad omen.

Then Abiba's pensive expression gives way to smile of confidence. "I know how," she says in the Makua language native to this region. "Watch and you shall see."

A Sea change

The fish farm got off the ground in early 2009, when P&S staff helped the association gain legal registration. Because the government owns most of the land in Mozambique, the registration enabled the group to secure a 50-year lease on a parcel slightly larger than an Olympic pool.



Ausi Petrelius ©CARE

Abiba Ussene and Chugue Chugo hold hands as they move through a fish farm in Topa, Mozambique, a village of 4,000.

P&S has found that registering fishing associations is a simple move that opens doors along the coast. Once registered, one women's group was able to take out a loan and start a cement-block making business. In March, another association launched the first motorised ferry connecting islands to the mainland in the city of Angoche.

Economic options are particularly critical now. CARE, WWF and the government of Mozambique have worked with communities here to create two no-fish zones to help aquatic life rebound around the reef. Fishermen want to let the ocean rest. But along the coast of Mozambique's Nampula province, where half the children under five suffer from malnutrition, families must have other ways to feed themselves.

Increasingly, they are turning to the land. P&S staff are training families how to rotate crops and, rather than burn fields after harvest, leave mats of vegetation that trap nutrients and moisture in the soil. As a result, yields are on the rise. In many cases, husbands are spending less time in at sea and more time helping their wives in the *machambas*.

"We are not catching enough fish to feed the family," explains Abiba's brother, Abdla Ussene. He and his wife have another three mouths to feed at home.

When Abdla does join crews at sea, they often spend time patrolling one of the no-fish zones. P&S staff are cultivating dozens of patrolmen who, should the plan for an office marine reserve come to fruition, could work as paid rangers. But Abdla's greatest hopes, like those of his sister Abiba, are tied to the aquaculture project whose earthen walls are now visible in the distance.

Before reaching their fish farm, the group steps past a stand of palm tree trunks slanted at a severe angle, like straws in milkshakes. Dead or downed trees dot the landscape here. No more explanation is needed. Cyclone Jokwe devastated this storm-battered coastal region in April 2008. The monster storm tore apart the mud-and-thatch homes. It carried away their boats and nets. What farms it didn't ruin were left more vulnerable to disease, most notably the cassava-infecting brown streak virus.

Many here feared Jokwe would cast this stretch of coast into a downward spiral of ecological destruction and economic decline. Parents desperate to feed children might return to catching juvenile fish with mosquito nets, a destructive practice that robs the sea of the next generation of fish. Others might cut down mangroves to make charcoal sold for meal money.

But in that circular connection between their natural and fiscal resources, Abiba, Abdla and two dozen of their neighbors didn't see a spiral downward. They saw a spring up. They decided to form the fishing association, put their heads together with P&S staff and develop more sustainable sources of income and food.

The association started a savings group and a social fund the helps pay for emergency medical needs and funerals. They built a small cement meeting house. And they bought into the concept, preached by P&S staffers, that the women have to be more equal partners. Omar said it was in the group's self-interest, particularly as they confronted the paperwork required to secure land from the government.

"All the women are illiterate," he says. "But they're the ones at home when we're at sea. We need to teach them so they can read and write." At a minimum, he wants the women to be able to sign their name.

Early on, the women floated the idea of weekly lessons in reading, writing and basic math. Abiba was among the strongest advocates.

"If I receive a paper from somewhere else, I want to know what it is," Abiba laughs, holding a flat palm out in front of her face, as if reading. "The president could write a letter saying he wants to come visit us. I want to read that letter and know: Ah-ha, we have a meeting with the president."

So one day the savings group held a formal vote on whether to add literacy classes to their weekly meetings. It was unanimous. Now, every Friday, a chorus of A,B,C's floats out of the little cement hut with big plans inside.

A Will to Win

With all the positive momentum, Omar hardly misses the boat that Cyclone Jokwe took away. In fact, he sees the storm as the push he and the others needed to try something new. That's why the group chose the name *Muaweryaca*. A Makua word, it means "Try, and you can win."



Ausi Petrelius ©CARE

Omar Amisse, president of the Muaweryaca Fishing Association, leads a basic literacy class for women in the group.

Nothing has come easy. Mounding the mud into walls took months of backbreaking work. And the group couldn't afford to buy a flood-control gate, so they experimented to fashion one of their own. Eventually they succeeded by stringing reeds together, much like a traditional mat. They lift the contraption up on rising tide to let fish in, then drop the filter-like mat back into place on the falling tide, allowing the brackish water – but no fish -- to escape.

But now, it's showtime. Abiba squats down in the water and comes up with two fistfuls of mud. Then, as if she's been corralling fish her whole life, Abiba starts throwing chunks of mud to scare them toward the net. Chugue takes her lead, moving along the more shallow edge and splashing. As they near the net, the two stop. It looks like they may have come up empty.

Suddenly, the net starts bobbing up and bouncing. Abiba rushes forward. Then, to everyone's delight, she jerks the net up to reveal silvery flashes of success. The others erupt into shouts of "Macupa! Macupa!" the Makua name for the captured fish.

It is a small but important victory for people who, with just a little help, have built real hope for the future. In the face of sick seas, debilitating droughts and terrible tempests, members of the Muaweryaca Fishing Association refuse to be defined by what they have lost.

Abiba throws the fish into the red tub. Then she lifts it high in the air like a trophy. Shouts of "Muaweryaca" echo across the fish farm, through the cassava fields and into the Indian Ocean sunrise. Try, and you can win.

Read the entire article at <http://primeirassegundas.net>. CARE and WWF launched the Primeiras & Segundas Livelihoods Project in northern Mozambique in 2008. Now in its third year, the project is working to conserve and improve the fragile ecosystem of the Primeiras and Segundas archipelago, while strengthening the livelihoods of the communities that depend on the area's marine and terrestrial resources. The Primeiras & Segundas Project is made possible by a generous grant from the Sall Family Foundation, with additional support from The Nature Conservancy, DIPECHO and CARE Denmark.