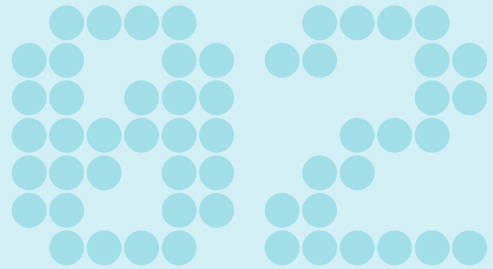




**micaia**

**reflections**



## **Changing household and gender dynamics resulting from baobab business development**

Andrew Kingman



**LEGEND**  
*Land: Enhancing Governance  
for Economic Development*



## About Micaia

Micaia is a 'family' of organizations working together around a common strategy based on four 'pillars of local prosperity': sustainable management of natural resources; diverse and inclusive local economies; active citizenship; and food and energy security.

Micaia's approach is to focus on a small number of substantial landscapes – defined geographical areas – over a long period, working with local people on meeting challenges and taking up opportunities linked to one or more of the 'pillars' noted above. As we learn from that work, we hope to share the lessons with others and this 'Reflections' series is part of that commitment to sharing our experience. Micaia Foundation is an operating foundation, established in 2009, and working almost exclusively in Manica Province. The foundation helps people develop the capabilities they need to make informed choices about their lives and livelihoods and tries to link practical work on the ground with engagement with policy/decision makers.

Eco-Micaia Ltd is an ethical trading company that is helping establish inclusive businesses, working with producers and/or community partners. Eco-Micaia focuses particularly on specific value chains within the field of non-timber forest products that have the potential to go to scale commercially. Eco-Micaia has established and manages three subsidiary companies: NDZOU Camp (a community joint venture eco-lodge); Mozambique Honey Company; and Baobab Products Mozambique.

## About LEGEND

Land: Enhancing Governance for Economic Development (LEGEND) is a programme of the UK Department for International Development (DFID) which aims to improve land rights protection, knowledge and information, and the quality of private sector investment in DFID priority countries. It includes assistance to the development and start-up of DFID land-related programmes and activities bearing on land and land rights at country level, alongside knowledge management activities, a challenge fund to support land governance innovations, and coordination with a network of global land partners supported by complementary DFID grants.

From October 2016 to June 2019, Micaia Foundation implemented a LEGEND-funded project. The project was complemented and partly co-funded by a grant from a private family foundation with a management office in the UK and to a lesser extent by GLZ through its Green Innovation Centre programme. This and two companion papers are reflections on this project. The research underpinning them was supported by the University of Sheffield through a collaboration between Micaia and Sheffield Institute for International Development.

Published in 2019 by Micaia Foundation,  
PO Box 121, Chimoio, Mozambique

Email [info@micaia.org](mailto:info@micaia.org)  
Website [www.micaia.org](http://www.micaia.org)  
Registration number 100094525

This material has been funded by UK aid from the UK government; however the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK government's official policies.

# Contents

---

**4 Introduction**

---

**5 Non-timber forest product value chains, gender and women's empowerment – brief literature review**

---

**7 Baobab Products Mozambique – an inclusive business for women**

7 The BPM model – key elements

9 BPM and Micaia – a partnership for transformation?

---

**12 Challenging the status quo?**

13 Women earning respect

13 Women more involved in decision-making

15 Men changing behaviour

16 The context of polygamy

18 Does age matter?

19 Are the most vulnerable excluded?

---

**19 Conclusions**

---

**20 Notes**

## Introduction

This paper focuses on the baobab value chain in the north of Manica Province, and specifically on the ways in which commercialization of the value chain with Baobab Products Mozambique is beginning to have an impact on the gender dynamics within the households of the women collectors.

Baobab is Africa's 'superfruit', rich in nutrients with demonstrable medicinal properties. Long used as a source of material for food (leaves, fruit, roots), medicine (leaves, bark) and practical goods (cord, crafts), baobab trees are often associated with spirits and cultural traditions, while individual trees (often hollow) have provided hiding places, stores, and even prison cells! The tree is renowned as a source of water in drought periods. The trees also act as a significant resource for a range of wildlife – bees through to bats – whilst the fruits are enjoyed and consumed by elephants, monkeys, baboons and more.

Informal trade in baobab products within Africa has been ongoing for many centuries, and still dominates the overall value chain in most source countries. Development of a more formal, export-oriented trade came about only in the mid-2000s following the approval of the powder as a food product for consumption in the European Union (EU) under the Novel Food Regulations in 2007 and later for the United States through FDA (Food and Drug Administration) approval. The size of the resource base within Africa, and the recognition of the opportunities opened up as a result of formal approval in the EU and the US, has led to a big increase in supply, especially since 2016. The quality of powder supplied varies greatly, as does the price. As large-scale manufacturing companies are increasingly looking at baobab as a potential ingredient, thus moving the product out of the exclusively high-end or niche 'healthfood' sector, there are both opportunities (increasing scale) and challenges (commoditization leading to low returns and undermining efforts in Africa to add value at source). These issues are explored more fully in other Micaia publications. For this paper, the context is that the baobab value chain in Mozambique, pioneered by Micaia, is still in a phase of growth.

Baobab trees are found in many areas of Mozambique, but Micaia's work on baobab focuses on the north of Manica Province in Guru and Tambara Districts. Baobab is one of the few sources of seasonal cash income in this area. However, until Micaia started work, the only trade was with traders from Malawi who avoided the formal system (paying bribes to take the product across the border without papers) and paid very low prices for the baobab pulp. The low current returns, together with the large potential market, convinced Micaia that there was an opportunity to transform the local baobab trade and in so doing to transform the lives of hundreds of women – in Guru and Tambara Districts, collection of baobab fruit is almost exclusively done by women. In neighbouring Tete Province, men are more involved, though mostly in the marketing of fruit. Micaia started work in the two districts in 2012, and in 2014 created Baobab Products Mozambique Ltd (BPM), the first Mozambican company to commercialize baobab. BPM had its first full season of operations in 2015, buying 60 tons of baobab fruit pulp and seed. In 2019, BPM aims to buy 300 tons of pulp and seed. Since 2016, BPM has had organic status for its baobab powder and oil, and the company has become one of the leading producers of high-quality baobab powder in Africa.

# Non-timber forest product value chains, gender and women's empowerment – brief literature review

Non-timber forest products (NTFP) play an important and often critical role in the lives of rural people in Africa, providing medicine, food and sources of income.<sup>1</sup> Multiple factors including proximity to natural resources and/or markets, local agro-ecological conditions, and regulatory frameworks determine the relative importance to household income of NTFP and make it difficult to generalize. However, a range of case studies from southern Africa suggest that NTFP contribute 10%–35% of household income in addition to providing food and medicine.<sup>2</sup>

Developments in the global economy from the 1990s, most notably the growth in consumer demand for natural, healthy food and cosmetic/personal care products, helped drive commercialization of many NTFP value chains.<sup>3</sup>

Unlike in Asia and Latin America, where men dominate NTFP trade, in many parts of Africa it is women who are primarily responsible for harvesting and small-scale trade, though

men tend to be more involved if a greater level of processing is involved – suggesting higher returns – or if the scale of the trade is large.<sup>4</sup> Given the prominence of women in NTFP collection, it is not surprising that many development interventions linked to NTFP have focused on women. Nevertheless, there is evidence from well-established NTFP value chains such as shea nut that increasing commercialization can lead to women's prominent roles being usurped by men.<sup>5</sup> It is also important to note that if increasing commercialization leads to more work for women but

not much change in terms of empowerment, then NTFP investments are open to the same general criticisms often levied against women's microfinance programmes – that they increase work on top of unpaid domestic work with little net benefit for the women.<sup>6</sup>

The focus of most development interventions in the context of NTFP is on some form of upgrading of an often informal and poorly organized value chain in which collectors/harvesters are easily exploited because of their lack of market information, their isolation and their limited technical skills.<sup>7</sup> This was certainly the case with baobab in Mozambique. Upgrading might focus on coordination (eg building the capacity of harvester groups to collaborate), process (eg training in handling in order to avoid risk of contamination), product (eg improving quality in order to comply with specific market requirements), function (eg introduction of grading products or investing in facilities to allow bulking at source) or new developments such as creation of entirely new finished products.<sup>8</sup> In the case of baobab, as we illustrate below, each of these strategies was and still is being implemented.

Within the upgrading strategies there is usually explicit or implicit reference to women's economic empowerment, the assumption being that women will gain better returns from any one or a combination of the upgrading strategies, and will be better able to negotiate,

**There is evidence . . . that increasing commercialization can lead to women's prominent roles being usurped by men.**

to represent their own interests, and to have a say in decision-making in the household or community. Moreover, studies beyond NTFP show that increasing women's income is more likely to lead to increased household investment in food, health and education<sup>9</sup> – though the extent to which this is the case appears to depend on the role of women in decision-making.<sup>10</sup>

Without entering the wider debate about women and empowerment, we do want to acknowledge that more often than not, development interventions in NTFP value chains focus on assets and opportunities, seemingly assuming that if women earn more and

### **Enabling women to gain more income and opportunity ... does not challenge ... the structural nature of gender inequality.**

have more opportunities in 'the market', their lives and livelihoods will be better. This may be the case, but such outcomes are contingent, not necessary. In effect, enabling women to gain more income and opportunity might well enable them to manage their poverty more acceptably (to them and external evaluators) but it does not challenge the root causes of poverty or the structural nature of gender inequality. Gender relations are dynamic, negotiated and contested. In many situations and in many different ways (direct and indirect) men resist women's empowerment. One

well-documented example of this is when women's crops acquire commercial value and men try and take them over. In other words, limiting interventions to market access is not likely to be transformative.

Cornwall<sup>11</sup> succinctly charts the shift from the 1980s/1990s radical agenda of transformation in power structures and relations to the narrower focus on market-focused opportunities, income and assets. Whereas transformation requires an emphasis on conscientization, mobilization and solidarity, and is necessarily a process and a relational concept, the market orientation and focus on income often strip away these features (though this is not necessarily the case: the transformational agenda can be combined with increasing market access and economic opportunity for women). Transforming gender inequality requires both a shift in consciousness at the level of the individual (challenging restrictive social/cultural norms while changing women's self-image) and engaging at all levels with culturally embedded normative beliefs and practices relating to gender. As Hania Sholkamy writes:

Alleviating poverty and enabling women to make some income can better lives, but the enabling environment that confirms the right to work, to property, to safety, to voice, to sexuality and to freedom is not created by sewing machines or micro-credit alone.<sup>12</sup>

As we demonstrate below, in our work with women in the baobab value chain we are trying to facilitate discussion about various features of the structural – social and cultural – dimensions of gender inequality, and we are committed to this broader ambition of empowerment. However, we are also concerned to explore the differential levels of empowerment and of marginalization and/or oppression within and between households active in the baobab value chain. Most studies of women's economic empowerment, while noting specific case studies, tend to present macro or collective data (women's income increased on average X% in the course of the project etc), and to treat women as

a homogeneous group. Relatively few studies have explored disaggregated impact and thus factors such as polygamy, class and ethnic origin etc are rarely considered.<sup>13</sup> This is a research gap that we aim to help fill in future though in this paper we can only highlight some initial emerging evidence and set out a framework for further research.

## **Baobab Products Mozambique – an inclusive business for women**

### **The BPM model – key elements**

Baobab Products Mozambique (BPM) was set up to create a fairer, more lucrative market for the women who collect and sell baobab fruit pulp each year. Given that women represent the majority of actors in the value chain, BPM only buys from women, and only from women who have a contract with the company. This contract is in part a requirement of the organic certification process, for it signifies that the people from whom BPM buys have been trained in the organic system in general and as it relates specifically to baobab. The contractual element is also linked to BPM's business model and ownership structure.

BPM was designed to be an inclusive business both in terms of its ownership structure (Eco-Micaia, the founder, has pledged to give a 20% stake in the company to the association of collectors once it is formally launched) and its operational system (including enabling the women collectors to be involved via elected representatives in management and decision-making processes). Baobab fruit harvesting (if fruit is taken from the trees) and collecting (picking up fallen fruit) is an individual task, though if the baobab trees are far from their homes, the women often walk in small groups for reasons of security. For this reason, BPM buys from individuals. However, at the village level,

**BPM was designed to be an inclusive business both in terms of its ownership structure ... and its operational system.**

collectors are grouped in informal 'clubs' that act as a vehicle for training, planning and communication. Each club has both a lead collector – a woman, selected by her peers, who has received more advanced training so as to be able to assist in the harvest preparation and fruit buying, and two association representatives (in some cases the lead collector is also a representative). The representatives will be increasingly important as the association of collectors becomes operational. The association, due to be

launched in late 2019, will establish district and administrative-post level bodies through which the executive of ten women can be elected and issues discussed among a larger representative body of the collectors.

Traditionally, women would crack the fruit pods close to where they found them unless the trees were close to the family compound, in which case they might have been collected and stored for home use in the weeks or months ahead (the dry season, when food is scarce). The dry pulp-coated seeds would be taken back to the women's houses and then sold to traders or taken to the main road and sold to people who then offer the fruit to people traveling through the area. BPM introduced a new system, initially focusing on

having the fruit stored off-ground for several weeks in order to ensure it was dry before cracking (the powder produced from the pulp must be below 12% moisture if it is to be exported). The next step was trying to coordinate fruit cracking in order to have company representatives present to ensure compliance with hygiene standards (to avoid microbiological contamination). This attempt failed; logistics and costs made it impossible for the company to observe all cracking, and in any case the women were keen to sell and receive their money early in the 'hungry season'.

A combination of concerns about early harvesting and about risks arising from having fruit cracked at home prompted BPM to buy whole fruit and move it to a purpose-built facility on the edge of the district town of Guru. BPM had to invest significant time in explaining the price to the women, who had already moved from selling large bowls of pulp/seed to selling to BPM per kilo (that change required BPM to demonstrate the weight of a typical bowl of pulp and therefore calculate the per kilo price that the women typically received, before offering the company's much higher per kilo price). The new price was of course lower because roughly half the weight of the fruit pod is shell, which currently has no

**The women were happy ... once they understood that they would ... receive a little more money for less work.**

economic value. The women were happy with the shift once they understood that they would actually receive a little more money for less work.

The new system did enable BPM to achieve the quality standards it set, and the company was also able to offer seasonal casual labour to 70 young women in Guru who cracked the fruit and extracted the pulp and seed. However, with a growing market, BPM has again had to make changes and in 2019 the company has established three permanent cracking stations in strategic locations in the collection zone. The stations have been set up to allow for hygienic handling and processing, and in each case 30 to 40 women have been trained to crack the fruit. If the system works well, BPM is intent on establishing more of these stations, thus creating additional revenue streams for at least some of the women.

There is no doubt that BPM has changed the nature of the baobab value chain in Guru and Tambara Districts. A recent survey, conducted by Micaia Foundation staff members, gathered data from 63 women across several villages. Seventy per cent of the women surveyed said that their own attitude towards baobab and the general perception about baobab in the home and community had changed since BPM got involved. The annual baobab harvest and sale has become a much more serious business.

There is also no doubt that BPM is having a positive impact in terms of income for the women. Micaia's early investigation of the local baobab trade had identified the way in which traders exploited the women because of their lack of knowledge of the baobab market outside of their village).<sup>14</sup> Prices paid were often extremely low, and in some cases traders paid in cheap goods. In 2016, cases were identified of a trader 'paying' for a big bowl of fruit pulp (approximately 12kg) with a pack of spaghetti costing at that time no more than MZN 18.5 (USD0.30). In other words, the women were receiving the equivalent of MZN1.5 (USD0.025) per kilo. BPM in 2016 was paying the equivalent of MZN9.3 (USD0.15). More typically, women would sell their bowls of fruit pulp for cash and the price per kilo would vary from MZN3 (USD0.05) to MZN5 (USD0.08). In 2019, BPM



is paying the equivalent of MZN12 (USD0.2) per kilo of pulp when the company buys the whole fruit. It is then paying a further MZN4.3 (USD0.07) per kilo for the pulp when the fruit is cracked in one of the stations. In the three stations established in villages, this means that 120 women, many of whom also sell fruit, have an additional income from baobab. In the 2019 season, the only local trader active in Guru District was paying MZN3 (USD0.05) per kilo for pulp/seed (buying in bowls, not by weight). So BPM is paying the women who supply the whole fruit up to four times the price they would receive if they sold pulp/seed to the trader.

\*This was in part because BPM did not accept the price or terms offered by the company for stock in 2019, though BPM had previously sold powder to that buyer.

In the latter part of the 2019 season, one of the largest actors in the world baobab market commissioned a Zimbabwean company to enter the Mozambican baobab market.\* BPM received reports from its lead collectors and buying team that the Zimbabweans – well equipped with a fleet of trucks – were paying MZN120 (USD2) for a large sack of fruit. Although the weight of fruit varies, a full sack is typically 35kg–40kg so the buyers were paying MZN3 (USD0.05) per kilo – half of BPM’s price. The fact that the new buyer was able to secure stock at the lower price suggests that they were able to buy from men rather than from women who had contracts with BPM. It may also reflect the reality on the ground that for people with little or no cash income, money in the hand today is better than waiting for a bit more money tomorrow. Subsequently, BPM has heard that in some cases the Regulo (chief) of the community sent the buyers away, stating that the community had an arrangement with BPM. In other cases, women used the BPM price as a starting point for their negotiation with this new buyer and insisted on use of a scale. These are indications of the values being built in the relationship between BPM and its suppliers and their communities. Nevertheless, the sudden involvement of a new, well-financed large-scale operation does pose a threat to BPM and one that the company will need to respond to before the 2020 season.

## BPM and Micaia – a partnership for transformation?

BPM does not work alone in developing the baobab value chain. The close partnership between Micaia Foundation and BPM has been a critical factor in the company’s success. In recent years, Micaia has been able to secure project funding for work in the baobab zone in Guru and Tambara Districts. Two substantial projects have been implemented, with one continuing into 2020. The first, funded by DFID’s LEGEND (Land and Natural Resource Governance) programme, focused on enabling 20 villages in which BPM buys

baobab to complete a process of land use mapping and delimitation, and produce natural resource management plans.

This work, understandably, involved a cross-section of communities, men and women. The results were significant: at the level of Regulado (community, headed by a Regulo or chief, and often encompassing several villages), Micaia facilitated official land delimitation of 14 communities (23 villages), and in each case production of a natural resource management plan. Other

important outputs included detailed forest inventories and identification and zoning (on maps) of the largest areas of baobab forest that would be treated as ‘commons’, ie

**The close partnership between Micaia Foundation and BPM has been a critical factor in the company’s success.**

available to all. This is important because it helps protect the women's access to the increasingly valuable resource. The assumption is that with the community leadership more engaged in governance of the baobab resource, there will be a stronger basis for resisting 'raids' by traders interested only in the lowest priced supply. Similarly, with the zones marked, it is now open for Micaia (due to extend its work in the baobab communities in a new 4-year programme from early 2020) to work with the communities on implementation of management plans, monitoring access to the baobab, and also to address long-term sustainability through planting schemes.

The second project, funded by a private foundation, focuses on the capabilities and organization of the women collectors. Micaia is greatly influenced by the capabilities approach as developed initially by philosophers and sociologists such as Amartya Sen and Julia Nussbaun.<sup>15</sup> Micaia has adapted the approach and in the last two years has developed a set of facilitation tools brought together under two main themes: 'My Good Life' and 'My Community'. The theme 'My Good Life' covers issues such as hygiene, health, diet and nutrition (my health), child protection, family planning, sex abuse and

### The second project ... focuses on the capabilities and organization of the women collectors.

domestic violence (my welfare) and also practical matters such as home economics and planning, savings and credit, and circulation of money within the community (my future). The second theme of 'My community' starts by looking at what defines a community and how communities grow. It addresses (neutrally) the issue of polygamy verses monogamy and the different ways in which each system affects the development of a community. Gender is central

in this theme, with topics including gendered distribution of tasks in the community, and the different experiences of the girl child and boy child.

Although the capabilities work runs in parallel with BPM's commercial engagement with the women collectors, in reality the two are closely intertwined. All the work in the project (a pilot to explore how the 'capabilities approach' could be implemented as an integral element of all practical development work in communities) is taking place with baobab collectors who are part of the BPM contracted supply chain. Moreover, the work on capabilities has focused on utilizing BPM's existing structure of lead collectors, involving them in residential training to introduce the capabilities approach, test out the materials, and discuss how to roll it out in the communities.

In all residential training the women are free to discuss issues during and after sessions. These unstructured discussions are particularly fruitful for them as they provide the moment for sharing their experiences and relating these experiences to the topics introduced in the training sessions. For example, in one training session, after talking about domestic violence in the evening during dinner, the women discussed the issue of the lead collector whom they had previously condemned for leaving her (abusive) husband. Recognizing the violence the young woman had suffered, many of the women (not all) felt they had been wrong to condemn her for leaving her husband.

L is a young mother of three children who left her father's home when she was in the 8th grade to visit her boyfriend's home and never returned home. This was eight years ago. She stayed in village N in the district of Guro where she had three children but always suffered from ill-treatment from her husband. As a young woman who had some education, she got involved in the baobab business and became a lead collector. As a lead collector she received training so that she could train other collectors and assist BPM during the buying season. So she began to get some extra income and bought herself some animals as a way of saving for the future. Her husband, also educated but something of a drunkard, began to think that he could get more money from L or sell the animals and marry a second wife. After a long struggle L was able to stop him from marrying the second wife, but the violence in their home never stopped. L thought that as a woman and a wife she must continue to stay with her husband and try her best to protect herself from his beatings and ill-treatment.

When L was chosen as one of the community facilitators for the capabilities approach, she began to understand more about her welfare and that of her children. She now knew that she was responsible for every choice that she made and she could still make other choices as long as she knew what the consequences could be. One day L decided that she had to leave her husband so that her children could have a better life. She left the village and went back to Chimoio to her parents' home with her three children.

L's husband wants her back but he doesn't want to meet the conditions given by L's parents. He took their daughter eight years ago and never came back, and has not paid any dowry, so he can only take his wife back when he has fulfilled the traditional requirements of the marriage ceremony – and when he promises to stop the beatings (though for the parents, this is less of a condition than it is for L). It has now been eight months since L moved away and she has become a new person with new ideas for her own development. She lost the right to continue her work as a lead collector and capabilities facilitator, and she misses her friends and fellow baobab collectors, but she doesn't regret her decision. She will continue to help other women who are in the same situation as she was and, most important of all, she is certain that she made the best decision.

Clearly, not all women are able to take such decisions, but most of the women who know about L's story look up to her as a strong woman and an example to all of them. This story has also made many see why it is important to be clear about the pros and cons of each possible course of action when taking a decision. Many women in the communities suffer from domestic violence. While not all are able to leave their husbands (maybe because they have nowhere to go), some have started taking action within their families, for example by discussing the issues as a family and trying to make their husbands see that violence is not the best option. In another example of women challenging behavioural patterns that have become accepted as cultural norms (usually to the advantage of men), some women have started protecting their daughters from early marriages by sending them to stay with family members in town so that they can continue going to school.

While developing the capabilities approach and testing it has been the primary focus of Micaia's work, a second stream directly relevant to BPM has been supporting the development of the Baobab Collectors' Association. BPM also secured support for this work from German development agency GIZ through its Green Innovation Centre. After consultation with all 23 village-level collector clubs, Micaia organized training for two representatives from each club. This training, residential and lasting five days, enabled the women to acquire more understanding of the statutes and registration processes. The meeting concluded with the first General Assembly of the Association, selecting the name (to be registered officially) and electing both the formal founding group of 10 members and the board of directors. Following the residential training, the team went into the communities to support the cascading of the training by club representatives, who had also participated in the residential training, in their communities. Seeing the women holding up schematics of the structure of the proposed association in front of other women of all ages, explaining how the association would work, and discussing statutes and legal registration processes, was another indication of the way in which the baobab value chain and the measures taken to upgrade it are having an impact on the role, responsibilities and status of women in the community. While this work is done by Micaia, it would not be possible if BPM's model had not been designed to be inclusive.

## Challenging the status quo?

After three years of commercial operation, we can start to assess the extent to which the commercial value chain is having an impact at household level. We know that income for the women who sell baobab to BPM has increased considerably compared to what they used to receive from informal traders. Moreover, as BPM's demand for fruit has

**We know that income for the women who sell baobab to BPM has increased considerably.**

grown – from 60 tons in 2015 to 600 tons in 2019 – the number of women accessing this new and more lucrative market has also increased, now reaching around 1,000 women. The amount of money received per household varies immensely for it depends on the weight of fruit collected. This is influenced by the quality of the harvest in a particular village, the proximity of trees to the settlement area, and the number of collectors. Even at the lower

end of the range, women rarely receive less than MZN1,200 (USD20) for 200kg of fruit, and many receive much more. If BPM achieves its 2019 target of 600 tons of fruit, the total amount paid will be MZN3.6 million (USD58,325) just for the fruit, and an additional MZN1.2 million (USD19,422) for the cracking), which means an average of MZN3,600 (USD58) per collector. This extra household income is hugely important: it may mean that children stay in school longer or that the family can add animals or poultry to its stock or buy a solar panel. This asset accumulation and ability to invest in livelihoods is an important element of impact. However, here we are most interested in looking at the way in which the trade is affecting household dynamics, and in particular on gender relations.

This section draws on results from a survey of 63 women selected randomly from three villages. It also includes reflections from field experiences over the last three years.

## Women earning respect

In the north of Manica Province baobab has always been collected by women and also used by women as a food supplement, especially for infants and the elderly. Even as the informal trade expanded, the very low returns from selling pulp drew little attention; baobab season simply meant an opportunity to earn a little money for some food or pocket money for beer. There was no issue of respecting or not respecting those involved in collecting the fruit – it was just an annual activity that many women engaged in. Things

### Within the household there is evidence of women gaining respect from their husbands.

have changed. In BPM's survey, 50 out of 62 respondents stated that the local perception of baobab collection had changed a great deal, and that they as collectors felt much more respected. Many people focused on the fact that the new model of collection established by BPM, and also the scale of the operation, in some ways makes it harder (whole fruit have to be transported from the forest and stored properly). As such, there is more respect for the collection as serious work, not just a casual activity.

Within the household there is evidence of women gaining respect from their husbands. Asked about any changes in behaviour within the household (see below), many of the women talked about being more respected. A typical comment was 'Now he gives me a lot of consideration and he respects me'.

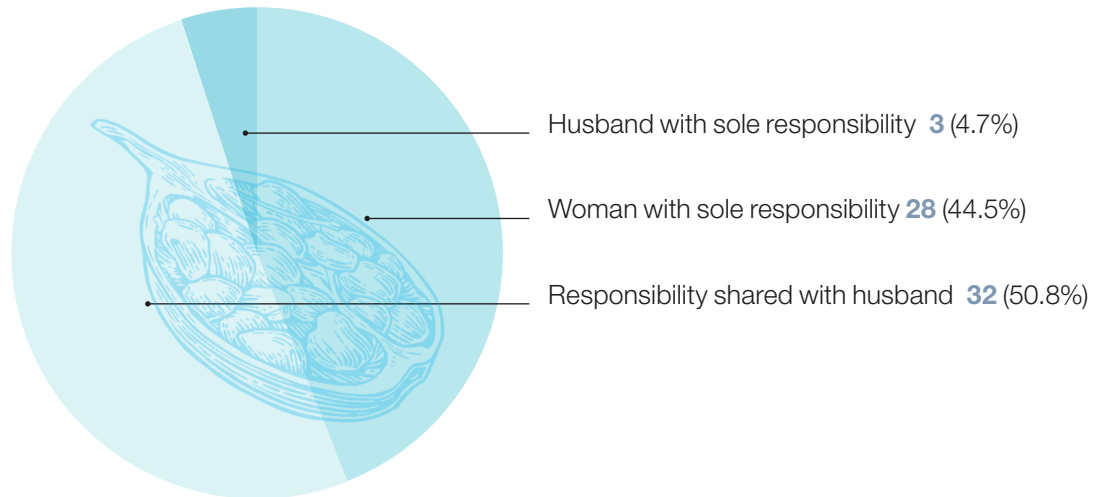
## Women more involved in decision-making

One indicator of women being more empowered in the domestic setting is the extent of their involvement in decision-making about the use of important resources available to the family, including money. The BPM survey asked who is responsible for making decisions about the use of money earned from baobab sales.

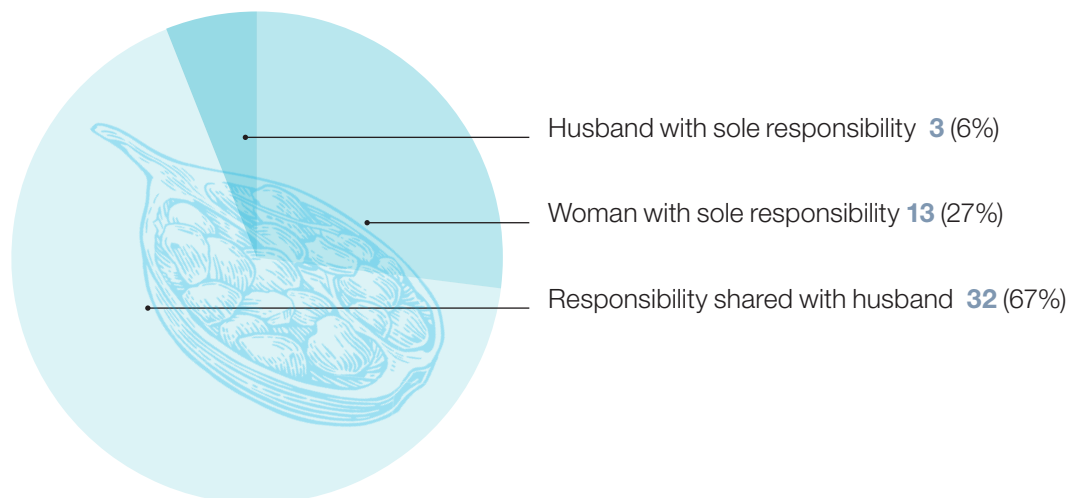
As the table below demonstrates, most (95%) women are involved to some extent in taking decisions about use of the money they receive.

The survey group included 15 non-married women. Recasting the figures to exclude non-married women has limited impact on the percentage of women involved in decision-making with regard to income from baobab, but it does of course significantly reduce the proportion of women who state that they have sole responsibility for decision-making.

**Figure 1**  
Women's role in decision-making since BPM entered the market



**Figure 2**  
Married women's role in decision-making since BPM entered the market



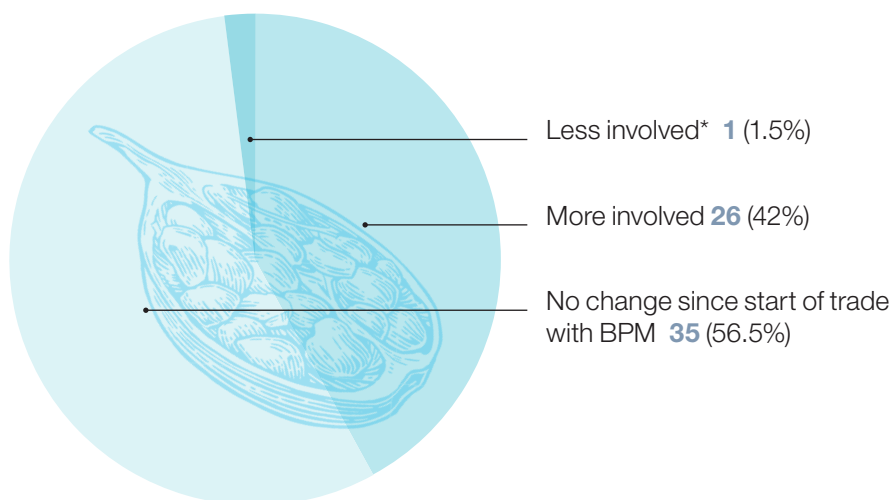
The fact that in almost all cases the women state that they are involved in deciding how to use money from selling baobab does reflect to a great extent the local socio-economic context. With so few sources of income, money from baobab has always helped cover supplementary food needed, especially in the 'hungry' season (April–June). Men go hungry too, so while there are always instances of the men taking money and using it to buy drinks, the majority have been happy to see their wives buy cooking oil, salt and other foodstuffs. As the level of income increased, so too did the range of possible uses for the money, such as buying assets for the home such as roofing sheets or animals, or paying school fees to maintain children in school. Only the most short-sighted of men will not consider such investments in their interest too. Nevertheless, anecdotally we know that many women manage their money carefully, giving some to their husband and keeping some back. We must also acknowledge that 'joint decision-making' can cover a very wide spectrum from serious and open discussion about options to women having very little say other than agreeing with the husband's ideas. Qualifying this issue will require deeper research.

One indicator that might give some level of confidence that women's degree of involvement in making decisions is significant is the extent to which the women feel that they are becoming more involved. A supplementary survey question about decision

making found that there have been important changes since the women started selling to BPM (and their incomes increased).

**Figure 3**  
Changes in decision-making roles since BPM entered the market

\*Although only one woman stated that she felt less involved in decision-making since she started selling to BPM, we assume that the reduced involvement in decision-making relates to the growing value of the trade, ie with more money available, the husband has taken more notice. This is an issue that will need to be monitored if the trade continues to expand.



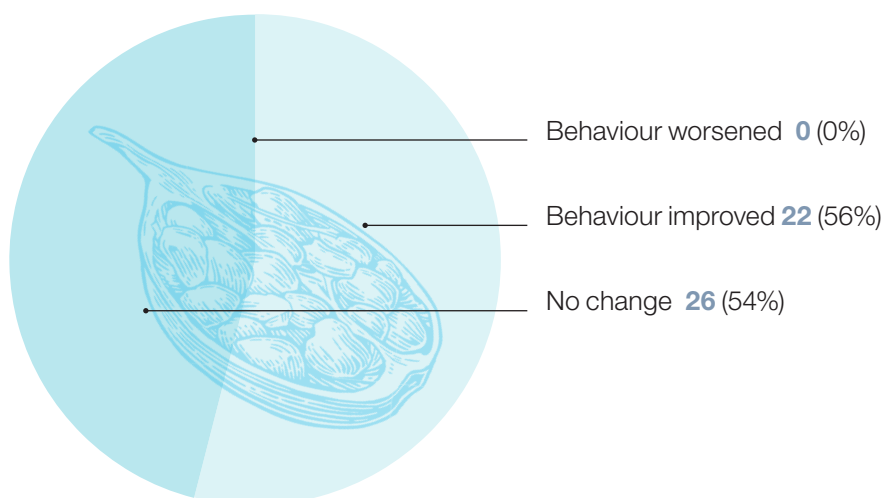
Of the 35 women who reported no change, only 9 gave all or part of the money to their husband. In other words, they were already individually making decisions about use of the money or they were jointly taking decisions but the woman was looking after the money. The 26 women who reported change included women who give all or some of the money to their husband.

## Men changing behaviour

\*\*We note that there is some evidence of increasing domestic violence in the context of women's economic empowerment initiatives.

The survey sought to explore the possibility that the women's growing involvement in a commercial trade might lead to changed behaviour among men – for better or worse.\*\* The table below presents results from the 48 married women.

**Figure 4**  
Changes in men's behaviour since BPM entered the market



Asked in what ways the husband had changed, most of the women talked about being more respected, and having more opportunity to talk and be listened to. Specific comments included:

Now we understand each other better, we interact and help each other.

There is more consultation whenever decisions are made, and I have more freedom to make decisions related to the upkeep of the family.

He is more considerate and respects and backs me up – that makes me feel stronger.\*

\*All comments were translated from the local language into Portuguese by the interviewer and then into English by the author.

A majority of women (17 out of 28 comments) talked about being encouraged by their husband to be involved in the baobab trade:

His support gives me the right incentive to get more and more involved in the business.

Given that most of the husbands still play a key (if not the lead) role in deciding how to use the money, this is not much of a change! However, some of the comments made reinforce the sense of men and women making decisions together to the benefit of the household:

Today the husbands support women's involvement in baobab collection because it has more advantages than horticulture. Through this, women are able to help pay important household expenses.

A few women talked about how their husband's behaviour was changing outside the household. One woman (in an earlier interview, not part of the survey) informed the Micaia field officer that her husband had been a drunkard but the growing family income and the woman's role as a contracted collector to BPM had led to him giving up the drink and taking his role in the family seriously. In a visit by KPMG representatives (in connection with the LEGEND project) to communities in Guru District, one woman collector stood up and said:

Look at my husband! Doesn't he look beautiful? I bought him these clothes with my baobab money!

## The context of polygamy

The rural areas of Guru and Tambara Districts have mostly polygamous communities where it is common to find households in which men have three or four wives. We know of several families in which there are as many as seven wives (in one case, the husband has built a special accommodation block with seven identical quarters, each with a sleeping area and a small cooking area). In this context, we wanted to test the hypothesis that 'junior' wives might be required to do the collecting while the first or senior wife received more benefit. If this were the case, the trade could be making a difficult situation worse for at least some women.



The data gathered to date does not really suggest any additional burden is being placed on women involved in polygamous families. As the table below shows, women from various positions in polygamous families are involved in the collection and sale of baobab. This suggests that there is little evidence of 'junior' wives being sent out to the forest to collect the fruit. However, given the high proportion of women who stated that they get to keep some if not all of the money and/or are (at least) involved in deciding what is done with the money, perhaps the more prominent wives are excluding others from accessing the increasingly lucrative trade. This is something that will require further study.

**Table 1**  
The significance of polygamy (1)

Marital status	Number	Percentage	Role in decision-making					
			Sole responsibility		Shared responsibility		No involvement – only husband	
Not married	15	24 %	15	100 %				
Only wife	15	24 %	8	53 %	7	47 %		
First wife	13	21 %	4	31 %	7	54 %	2	15 %
Second wife	15	24 %	1	7 %	14	93 %		
Third wife	2	3.5 %	1	50 %	1	50 %		
4th, 5th, 6th wife	2	3.5 %			1	50 %	1	50 %

A second indication that polygamy makes little impact in terms of how the women experience their involvement in and benefit from the trade is that there is relatively little difference in terms of decision-making and change based on position in the family. As the table demonstrates, whatever their position in the marital household, women are almost all solely or jointly responsible for deciding on how to use money from baobab sales. This may in part reflect the fact that wives are largely responsible for their own upkeep and that of their children. However, it is important to note that the highest proportion of wives stating that they have sole responsibility for decision-making are only wives.

Cross-referencing marital status with changes in role in decision-making reinforces the suggestion that only wives and first wives are experiencing more change in terms of their being more involved in decision-making in the household.

**Table 2**  
The significance of polygamy (2)

Marital status	Number	Percentage	Role in decision-making					
			Changed – more involved		No change		Changed – less involved	
Not married	15	24 %			15	100 %		
Only wife	15	24 %	7	47 %	8	53 %		
First wife	13	21 %	6	46 %	6	46 %	1	8 %
Second wife	15	24 %	4	27 %	11	73 %		
Third wife	2	3.5 %	1	50 %	1	50 %		
4th, 5th, 6th wife	2	3.5 %	1	50 %	1	50 %		

The 8 (of 15) only wives who stated that they take decisions more or less on their own includes 5 who stated that this is a change. Of the other 7 only wives, all are involved in making decisions and this is a change for only 2 of the women. These responses do suggest that on balance women who are the only wife in the household do have more say over the money they earn than women who are involved in polygamous families. This is also borne out by the comments made by some of the only wives (no similar comments were recorded from other women):

I decide how I want to use the money, and then inform my husband.

I make the final decision after securing my husband's agreement.

I make my decisions after consulting my husband.

I give all the money to my husband and then we use it for household expenses.

I decide. I tell my husband how much I made but then I am free to use it as I see fit.

It is also interesting to note that 9 of the 16 (56.25%) only wives reported that their husbands' behaviour is changing, including showing their wife more respect. This compares with 5 out of 13 (38.5%) first wives giving this type of response, and 5 out of 15 (33%) second wives. The comments of the 5 second wives do not include any mention of their husband being more respectful, only of 'incentivizing' the woman to do the collecting. One woman stated that her husband has stopped insulting and demeaning her when she goes to collect baobab (a few men accuse their wives of using the cover of baobab collecting to 'misbehave'). The difference in comments and responses of only wives from those further down the family pecking order do suggest that men in non-polygamous relationships are more open to some level of empowerment of their wife than men in polygamous relationships.

An indication (though not statistically significant) that polygamy does not automatically mean that women who are 3rd, 4th or even 6th wife are less able to benefit from the baobab trade is shown by the responses of the one 6th wife in the survey. This woman, 45 years old, keeps the money but decides jointly with her husband how to use it, and states that she is now more involved in making decisions.

## Does age matter?

### Age of collectors appears to make little or no difference to the way in which the women are experiencing change ...

Age of collectors appears to make little or no difference to the way in which the women are experiencing change through their involvement in the baobab trade. The average age of only wives was 38 years 10.5 months (though this was skewed by an 87 year old and a 73 year old in the sample). The average age of first wives in a family with more than 1 wife was 40 years 5 months, while the average age of second wives was 39 years 5 months. Across the sample there were no significant differences in responses by age. For example, while we might have expected younger women (possibly with more education) as only wives to be more

involved in deciding how to use the money they earn than older women, especially those in polygamous families, this was only marginally the case.

## Are the most vulnerable excluded?

In the poorest rural communities, especially those in which agriculture is difficult, some of the most vulnerable people are old women living on their own (usually) as widows. In the case of the baobab trade, at least in this initial survey, there was a disproportionately high number of widows and other single women (15 of 62). Given that BPM did not specifically reach out to widows, the presence in the collector clubs of widows does suggest that the baobab trade is reaching the most vulnerable women.

## Conclusions

There seems little doubt that the commercialization of baobab by BPM is having a positive impact on most households involved in the collection and sale of baobab fruit. This is seen not only in terms of the practical material benefits accruing to the household. For the women involved, it is also giving them a little more of a say, earning them more respect, and providing some independent income. This does not mean that there is serious structural or systemic change taking place; women are still experiencing culturally reinforced inequality. Yet the seeds of change are being planted. Through the baobab trade and their involvement in BPM, the women of Guru and Tambara Districts have an opportunity to steadily challenge some deeply engrained and disempowering cultural traditions.

## Notes

- 1 C M Shackleton and S E Shackleton (2004) 'The importance of non-timber forest products in rural livelihood security and as safety nets: a review of evidence from South Africa', *South African Journal of Science* 100: 658–64. C M Shackleton, S E Shackleton, E Buiten and N Bird (2007) 'The importance of dry woodlands and forests in rural livelihoods and poverty alleviation in South Africa', *Forest Policy and Economics* 9: 558–77. T Sunderland and O Ndoye (2004) *Forest products, livelihoods and conservation: Case studies of non-timber forest product systems*, Vol 2. Bogor, Indonesia: CIFOR.
- 2 W Cavendish (1997) *The economics of natural resource utilisation by communal area farmers of Zimbabwe*, University of Oxford, Oxford. P Kamanga, P Vedeld and E Sjaastad (2009) 'Forest incomes and rural livelihoods in Chiradzulu District, Malawi', *Ecological Economics* 68: 613–24. Shackleton and Shackleton (2004).
- 3 M Carr (2008) *Gender and non-timber forest products: Promoting food security and economic empowerment*. International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Italy.
- 4 T Sunderland and O Ndoye (2004) *Forest products, livelihoods and conservation: Case studies of non-timber forest product systems*, Vol 2, Bogor, Indonesia: CIFOR. V Ingram et al (2016) 'Gender and Forest, Tree and Agroforestry Value Chains: Evidence from Literature', Ch 13 in C J Pierce Colfer et al (eds) *Gender and forests. Climate change, tenure, value chains and emerging issues*, Routledge.
- 5 Eg A Wardell & N Fold (2013) 'Globalisations in a nutshell: Historical perspectives on the changing governance of the shea commodity chain in northern Ghana', *International Journal of the Commons*, Vol 7, no 2, August, pp. 367–405.
- 6 S Garikipati et al (2017) 'Microfinance and Gender: Issues, Challenges and The Road Ahead', *Journal of Development Studies*, Vol 53(5), pp 641–8. S Niner (2018) 'Why microfinance as aid isn't enough to empower women', *The Conversations*.
- 7 Ingram et al (2016).
- 8 Ingram et al (2016).
- 9 F Guarascio et al (2013) *Forest, food security and gender: Linkages, disparities and priorities for action*, FAO.
- 10 International Fund for Agricultural Development (2014) *Gender and Rural Development Brief*.
- 11 A Cornwall (2016) 'Women's Empowerment: What works?' *Journal of International Development* 28, 342–59.
- 12 H Sholkamy, quoted in Cornwall (2016).
- 13 Ingram et al (2016).
- 14 Micaia (2016)
- 15 A Sen (1970) *Development as Freedom*; M C Nussbaum (2013) *Creating Capabilities: the human development approach approach*, Harvard University Press.