

# Examining Citizen Participation in Poverty Reduction Strategies: Evidence from Beira City, Mozambique

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## Abstract

Despite periods of economic growth and the implementation of various poverty reduction strategies by the Government and Non-Government organisations, urban poverty persists and constitutes a huge challenge in Mozambique. In recent years few research has examined how citizens participate in poverty reduction strategies at the community level, particularly in urban contexts. The objective of this study is to examine how citizens participate in poverty reduction strategies in Beira City, Mozambique, focusing on the urban communities of Goto, Praia Nova and Munhava Central. The study adopts a qualitative research method, using semi-structured interviews with community members as the primary data collection method. In addition, direct observation and document analysis were used to triangulate the data and strengthen the validity of the findings. The findings reveal that citizens of the three communities studied participate through both formal mechanisms and informal strategies such as community-based initiatives, informal economic activities and mutual support networks and emphasise structural and institutional constraints that limit their effective participation. This study contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence on the forms of citizen participation in urban poverty reduction in Mozambique. The findings underline the importance of strengthening participatory instruments to promote more inclusive and sustainable poverty reduction strategies in urban areas.

Keywords: Urban poverty, citizen participation, poverty alleviation strategies, Beira City

## Introduction

Despite progress achieved in recent decades, at the global level, poverty remains a major development challenge and constitutes a complex and multidimensional phenomenon. According to Zulkifli and Abidin (2023:273), "poverty in its comprehensive meaning refers to a state of deprivation that goes beyond mere financial scarcity". It involves a complex of various interrelated dimensions that prevent individuals and communities from meeting their basic needs and enjoying an adequate standard of living. Earlier estimates indicate that more than 2.2 billion people live in multidimensional poverty, reflecting deprivations in income, education, health and living standards (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2014). These figures highlight the persistence of poverty and the limitations of economic growth in ensuring inclusive development. Sub-Saharan Africa appears to have the highest incidence of extreme poverty globally. According to the World Bank (2019), approximately 40.9% of the region's population lived below the international poverty line of US\$1.90 per day. This means that a substantial proportion of the population is unable to meet basic subsistence needs, reflecting deep structural inequalities, limited employment opportunities

and weak institutional capacity. The same report shows that Mozambique is among the countries most affected by poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank, 2019), with a significant proportion of the population continuing to experience poverty, even in urban areas, despite episodes of economic growth reported. Rapid urbanisation, unemployment and limited access to services are some factors that have contributed to the persistence of urban poverty, especially in cities such as Beira.

Recent data presented by the World Bank (2025) reveal a clear worsening of poverty in Mozambique. Across some indicators, the proportion of the population living in urban poverty increased from 48.4% in 2014-2015 to 62.9% in 2022. This was determined by a combination of macroeconomic instability, the hidden-debt crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic (which led to the closure of various informal and formal businesses) and repeated climate-related shocks. In absolute terms, this means that approximately 20.4 million people are now living in poverty, highlighting the growing scale and severity of deprivation in the country. This worsening poverty situation is particularly notable given that Mozambique has experienced periods of strong economic growth, with average Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rates exceeding 7% in some years (Institute for Security Studies [ISS], 2024). This indicates that this growth has not been inclusive and its benefits have not been evenly distributed across the population.

Theoretical literature offers different perspectives and distinct explanations for the causes of poverty and, consequently, shapes the design and implementation of poverty reduction strategies. According to Bradshaw (2006), community anti-poverty programmes are often based on specific theories about the causes of poverty, which justify development interventions. In this context, citizen participation has emerged as a key component of poverty reduction strategies, as it enables communities to actively engage in development processes, strengthen local capacities and contribute to more inclusive and sustainable results. Citizens' participation becomes an important element in the success of poverty alleviation efforts. The UNDP (2000) has highlighted this importance, considering that when anti-poverty programmes are initiated at the community level, the process can build strong consensus and commitment, leading to greater sustainability, adoption of new practices and better use of services. Citizens' participation is interpreted in various ways depending on the context and the individuals involved. For instance, within community development, it refers to the active inclusion of diverse stakeholders in a continuous process aimed at improving community well-being (Bowen, 2007). In the context of anti-poverty initiatives, citizen participation involves the engagement of residents in multiple stages of the programme, including its design, implementation and evaluation (Bowen, 2007).

The Capability Approach developed by Sen (1999) stresses the importance of freedom and agency. Sen's theory emphasises the democratic development of capabilities, which aligns with participatory forms of social engagement, through engagement in the decision-making process (Hart et al., 2014 as cited by Zulkifli & Abidin, 2023). The author also highlights the need to hold a real voice in determining the directions of an individual's life.

The challenge of Poverty in Mozambique is based on several factors: structural inequalities, regional imbalances, climate vulnerability and low agricultural productivity. Despite national and international strategies aimed at reducing poverty, the persistence of multidimensional deprivation, combined with slow and uneven progress, suggests the need for more inclusive, community-centred and regionally differentiated development approaches. Empirical evidence highlighted the importance of citizen participation in enhancing the effectiveness of poverty reduction interventions. For example, Hoddinott, Adato, Besley and Haddad (2010), in their

study of public works programmes in South Africa, found that community participation improved the efficiency and targeting of anti-poverty initiatives. The findings of the study suggest that local communities possess valuable contextual knowledge that can enhance programme design and implementation. Increased participation was associated with lower project costs, greater labour intensity and more effective transfer of resources to poor households. Importantly, the study found no evidence that participatory approaches increased costs; instead, participation contributed to improved efficiency and overall effectiveness of poverty reduction efforts.

In addition, Reddy (2008) as cited by Nkosi (2017) stated that public participation is a fundamental part of good governance and it enhances democratic governance that is responsive to the needs of the public. Citizens can hold the state accountable for its decisions and policies implemented on their behalf. The author suggests that local governance cannot succeed without public participation and the failure of many projects can be attributed to the lack of involvement. According to Bowen (2007:67), anti-poverty policies and programmes are recognised as essential components of public participation, including poor people as principal stakeholders. To alleviate poverty, citizens are urged to partake in directive participatory programmes (UNDP, 2000).

This article contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence on how citizens participate in poverty reduction strategies in an urban Mozambican context. While many poverty reduction policies emphasise citizen participation, limited research examines how participation occurs in practice at the community level. This study addresses this gap by providing empirical evidence from Beira City and focuses on both formal and informal forms of participation, such as community-based initiatives and livelihood strategies developed by residents themselves. The study is based on qualitative data collected primarily through semi-structured interviews with community members from the urban communities of Goto, Praia Nova and Munhava Central in Beira City. Observation and document analysis methods were used to triangulate the data and enhance the credibility of the results. The study is limited to urban contexts and does not include rural poverty reduction strategies or national-level policy implementation. Understanding how citizens participate in poverty reduction strategies at the local level is therefore essential for improving policy effectiveness and promoting inclusive urban development. Given this contextualisation, the study seeks to answer the following research question: How do citizens participate in poverty reduction strategies in Beira City, Mozambique?

## **Research Methodology**

The present study adopted a qualitative research approach, guided by an interpretivist orientation, seeking to understand poverty as a lived and socially constructed experience. A case study design was employed, focusing on three urban communities in the city of Beira (Goto, Praia Nova and Munhava Central), which enabled an in-depth and contextually grounded analysis of the local dynamics of poverty. Participants of the study included 25 heads of households distributed as follows: 8 from Goto, 6 from Praia Nova and 11 from Munhava Central. Three (3) community leaders residing in the selected communities were also included. Purposive sampling was used to identify individuals with direct experience of poverty and active engagement in livelihood activities, community initiatives or poverty reduction programmes. Data were collected primarily through face-to-face semi-structured interviews, which allowed participants to describe their experiences, perceptions and forms of participation in poverty reduction efforts.

To enhance the depth and credibility of the findings, interviews were complemented by direct observation of community activities and document analysis of relevant policy reports and programme documents. All interviews were transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis, following the approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which enabled the identification of recurring themes. According to Denzin (2012), the triangulation of multiple data sources, including interviews, observations and documentary evidence, strengthens the validity and credibility of the findings of the study by allowing cross-verification of information and enhancing the robustness of the analysis. Ethical and legal principles were strictly observed by the author throughout the study. Participants of the three communities were informed about the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of their participation and their right to withdraw at any time without consequences. Informed consent was obtained before data collection. To ensure confidentiality and protect participants' identities, pseudonyms were used, all identifying information was removed from the transcripts and data were securely stored and used exclusively for academic purposes.

## Results and discussion

This section presents and discusses the findings of the study, which are organised into key thematic areas that emerged from participants' narratives and reflect their lived experiences of poverty and their strategies for improving their livelihoods. The data includes community participation and engagement, participation in government and NGO programmes, challenges and opportunities for citizen involvement and resilience to environmental vulnerability, which are discussed in the following section. Each participant was identified with pseudonyms: GT for Goto, PN for Praia Nova and MC for Munhava Central, followed by a number indicating the sequence of each participant. Community leaders were also not addressed by their real names; pseudonyms were assigned to them.

### Theme 1: Community participation and engagement in poverty alleviation initiatives

Regarding the first theme, in the three communities studied, namely Goto, Praia Nova and Munhava Central, diverse forms of participation and involvement in poverty alleviation initiatives were presented. In Goto, participants expressed a strong sense of interdependence and mutual support, emphasising the role of community networks in coping with poverty. For instance, Participant GT-1 stated in Portuguese that:

“Quando não temos comida em casa, dependemos muito dos nossos vizinhos, ajudamo-nos uns aos outros, partilhando o pouco que temos, porque sabemos que amanhã pode ser a nossa vez de precisar de ajuda. É essa solidariedade que nos mantém vivos, já que a ajuda externa raramente chega até nós”.

Directly translated from Portuguese to English, this means: “When we do not have food at home, we rely a lot on our neighbours, we help each other by sharing the little we have, because we know that tomorrow it might be our turn to need help. This solidarity is what keeps us alive, since external aid rarely reaches us”.

Likewise, Participant GT-7 underlined the central role of community solidarity in sustaining livelihoods under conditions of poverty, stating in Portuguese: O que mais nos sustenta não é o governo, mas sim a solidariedade entre nós. Se esperássemos apenas pela ajuda oficial, estaríamos numa situação ainda pior. É a comunidade que nos salva.”

Directly translated from Portuguese to English, this means: “What sustains us the most is not the government, but the solidarity among us. If we waited only for official help, we would be in an even worse situation. It is the community that saves us”.

These statements reveal a form of community solidarity in which daily survival is ensured not by government or institutional programmes, but through cooperation among neighbours and mutual aid. These perceptions show that in Goto poverty, although marked by a lack of material, it is also a context of creativity and social interrelationship. This is consistent with Bradshaw (2006), who says that this type of behaviour fits within the “cultural theory of poverty,” in which poverty is caused by cultural belief systems that support subcultures of poverty, where this culture is socially generated and perpetuated, reflecting the interaction between individuals and community. In the Goto community, it was possible to perceive that poor populations internally build their own support mechanisms in response to inadequate institutional capacity. According to UNDP (2022), informal support networks are crucial for urban survival, especially in contexts where the government is unable to provide basic services.

In Praia Nova (where the predominant informal economic activity is primarily characterised by fishing and the sale of seafood), participants referred mainly to survival strategies linked to environmental crises. This may be because Beira City, particularly in the coastal area, is highly vulnerable to climate-related events such as cyclones and flooding. Participants particularly emphasised the destructive impact of these events, noting that they damage their homes and limit the growth and sustainability of their businesses. As well as the Goto community, in Praia Nova, there is also a strong spirit of mutual aid and solidarity, which is illustrated by the following statement from Participant PN-1, who commented in Portuguese:

“Quando ocorrem inundações, organizamo-nos rapidamente para limpar as ruas e os canais de drenagem. Se não fizermos isso, a água fica estagnada, o lixo acumula-se e as doenças começam a espalhar-se”.

Directly translated from Portuguese to English, this means:

“When floods occur, we quickly organise ourselves to clean the streets and drainage channels. If we do not do this, the water stagnates, garbage accumulates and diseases begin to spread”

This statement is reinforced by the testimony of Participant PN-2, who said in Portuguese the following:

“Sempre que as casas são destruídas, juntamo-nos em grupos para reconstruí-las. Usamos madeira, chapas de zinco e areia recolhida na praia. Mesmo com recursos muito limitados, acreditamos que juntos podemos erguer novamente as nossas casas.”

Directly translated from Portuguese to English, this means: “Whenever houses are destroyed, we come together in groups to rebuild. We use wood, iron sheets and sand collected from the beach. Even with very limited resources, we believe that together we can rebuild our houses again”.

These two statements clearly express the resilience and community solidarity that emerge in response to recurring environmental shocks such as floods and cyclones. The participants describe local and spontaneous responses, based on collective organisation, community work

and resource sharing, showing that social action often replaces the absence of government interventions. This reflects a form of autonomy, in which the community does not wait for government intervention or NGO support but acts immediately to mitigate environmental impacts and to protect life and the living space. Furthermore, in Praia Nova, residents show that they are not merely passive recipients of assistance, but active agents in their own adaptation and recovery processes. This finding reinforces Sen's (1999) Capability Approach, which emphasises that meaningful development occurs when individuals have the agency and freedom to influence their own living conditions.

In Munhava Central, participants pointed to a more structured and politically aware form of community participation, in which livelihood strategies are accompanied by critical perspectives on social inequality and governance limitations. The following extracts, presented in Portuguese, reflect these experiences:

“A maioria de nós cria o próprio emprego no mercado informal. Vendemos frutas, roupas em segunda mão ou carvão, vamos para machamba cultivar, porque não há empregos formais para todos”. Participant MC-1

“Participamos em reuniões comunitárias para apresentar os nossos problemas, como a falta de água, eletricidade ou emprego. Queremos que a nossa voz e as nossas preocupações sejam ouvidas e atendidas, mas sentimos que as autoridades não nos dão a devida atenção”. Participant MC-3

Directly translated from Portuguese to English, these statements mean:

“Most of us create our own jobs in the informal market. We sell fruits, second-hand clothes or charcoal and we also go to the ‘machamba (fields) to cultivate, because there are not enough formal jobs for everyone”. Participant MC-1

“We participate in community meetings to present our problems, such as the lack of water, electricity or employment. We want our voices and concerns to be heard and addressed, but we feel that the authorities do not give us the necessary attention”. Participant MC-3

These statements describe residents of Munhava Central as a resilient and politically aware community that actively navigates poverty through informal economic activities and collective engagement. In the absence of formal employment, residents rely on informal livelihoods as their primary survival strategy, reflecting broader urban patterns in Mozambique (World Bank, 2022). Participants in this community expressed a clear desire to be meaningfully included in decision-making processes, while also conveying frustration with participatory mechanisms that rarely lead to concrete action. Direct observation confirmed that community meetings often serve as spaces where residents are invited to share their views, but where there are little follow-up and few visible outcomes.

## **Theme 2: Participation in government and NGO programmes**

In the three communities of Goto, Praia Nova and Munhava Central, participation in government and NGO programmes is considered limited, as participants reported the existence of these programmes; however, they do not reach the poorest people who really need support and are sometimes ineffective. Consequently, communities have developed informal mechanisms of solidarity and mutual support, as described in the previous sections. These

findings reveal that there is an “implementation gap”. between the design of poverty reduction strategies and their actual impact at the local level (World Bank, 2022; UNDP, 2022).

In Goto, participants emphasised that solidarity replaces official assistance, reflecting the limited presence and effectiveness of formal support mechanisms. The community’s perception is that Government and NGO interventions are sporadic and unreliable, which reach the community only occasionally and without the consistency required to support their long-term livelihood needs. The following statements illustrate the concerns expressed by participants in this community:

“A ajuda externa dificilmente chega ate nós”. - Participant GT-1

“O que nos sustenta muito não é o governo, mas a solidariedade entre nós”. Participant GT-7

Directly translated from Portuguese to English, the extract means:

“External aid rarely reaches us”. Participant GT-1

“What sustains us the most is not the government, but solidarity among us”. Participant GT-7.

These excerpts reveal a clear need for stronger government presence and follow-up in the implementation of public policies at the local level. The statements are aligned with Bradshaw’s (2006) debate of the structural theory of poverty, where communities facing chronic deprivation develop self-organised survival systems due to weak institutional presence. From observation, these initiatives show collaboration, reciprocity and trust, although they also coexist with feelings of frustration toward formal institutions. From documentary analysis, the Local Economic Development Agency (ADEL)-Sofala (2023) states that peripheral areas like Goto remain excluded from consistent programmatic interventions, largely due to logistical and bureaucratic constraints.

In Praia Nova, the interaction between NGOs and local communities is particularly more evident, emphasising actions during post-cyclone recovery efforts. As Participant PN-4 referred to in Portuguese:

“Colaboramos com as ONGs quando elas vêm após os tempestades e ciclones. Normalmente, elas fornecem lonas, kits de higiene ou alimentos. Também participamos das reuniões que organizam, embora muitas vezes a ajuda não seja suficiente para todos”.

Directly translated from Portuguese to English, it means:

“We collaborate with NGOs when they come after storm cyclones. Usually, they provide tarpaulins, hygiene kits or food. We participate in meetings they organise, although often the aid is not enough for everyone”.

These statements reflect a situation of occasional participation with NGOs, which is short-term, rather than sustained and structurally embedded. Community participation in Praia Nova generally occurs in response to immediate needs or specific programme opportunities, rather than as part of sustained and institutionalised engagement in poverty reduction processes. Field observation supports these perceptions: community meetings are irregular and communication between authorities and residents is weak, as reported by the community leader of this

community. Despite these constraints, the collective energy displayed through solidarity groups and post-disaster organisations represents untapped social capital that could support more inclusive poverty alleviation frameworks. Government documents such as Plano de Acção para Redução da Pobreza (PARPA, 2011-2014) and Estratégia Nacional de Desenvolvimento Estratégico (ENDE, 2015-2035) already acknowledge the importance of local empowerment, but their translation into practice is still limited, especially in peripheral and flood-prone neighbourhoods like Praia Nova.

### **Theme 3: Challenges and opportunities for citizen involvement**

This section refers to challenges and opportunities identified by participants regarding their involvement in poverty reduction efforts. The participants of Praia Nova, Munhava Central and Goto highlighted both challenges and opportunities as described as follows:

Main challenges for citizen participation in poverty alleviation

Inequality in access to assistance

Across all communities studied, participants reported favouritism in the distribution of governmental and humanitarian aid. For example, a respondent from Munhava Central stated in Portuguese:

“An assistência básica de comida, saúde, educação....não chega para aqueles que realmente necessitam”- Participant MC-11

“Basic Assistance of food, health, education... does not reach those who truly need it” - Participant MC-11

In addition, Mr M. Tongai (Pseudonym), community leader of Praia Nova, stated in Portuguese:

“O Governo tem feito algum esforço, como a construção de escolas e postos de saúde, mas esses serviços ainda não chegam a todos na nossa comunidade. Se o governo investisse mais em fontes de água potável, hospitais, e habitação, a vida da nossa comunidade seria diferente. Não queremos apenas ajuda de emergência, queremos oportunidades para viver com dignidade...”.

Translated directly into English, the above statement means:

“The Government has made some efforts, such as building schools and health posts, but these services are still not sufficient for everyone in our community. If the government invested more in access to potable water, hospitals and housing, life in our community would be different. We do not want only emergency aid; we want opportunities to live with dignity...”.

This statement demonstrates that the population of Praia Nova recognises visible improvements by the Government; however, they also highlight the inequality in access to assistance. This finding is consistent with the World Bank (2022) and the Government of Mozambique (GoM, 2014), which point to the insufficient expansion of the educational and healthcare networks, especially in urban peripheries. The community leader also expressed that poverty creates exclusion, insecurity and restricts life opportunities, determining their daily

fighters for survival and these practices undermine trust in institutions and weaken perceptions of fairness and social justice.

### **Lack of institutional recognition**

Regarding this point, participants of Munhava Central expressed that their voices are often not adequately considered by local authorities, limiting meaningful involvement in decision-making processes. Some reported that they get frustrated by weak government responsiveness, as one participant of Munhava Central stated in Portuguese: “nós falamos nas reuniões ... mas as autoridades não nos ouvem e não atendem as nossas necessidades, não sentimos nenhuma resposta...”. Directly translated to English, it means: “we speak in meetings... but authorities do not listen to us, they do not meet our needs, we do not feel any response...”. This statement reflects an institutional gap with the absence of effective feedback mechanisms, which discourages public participation and reinforces feelings of weakness.

### **Limited resources and persistence of informality**

Lack of resources and the predominance of informal economic activities are visible in the studied communities. In Munhava Central and Goto, participants reflected limited access to formal employment and persistent household vulnerability. This suggests that the lack of material and financial resources and precarious conditions where they live limit participation in poverty reduction efforts. This is confirmed by Bradshaw (2006), who states that structural poverty, combined with limited education and financial resources, further restricts citizens' capacity to participate meaningfully. Figure 1 provides visual evidence of the predominance of informal economic activities in Goto as a key survival strategy in this community.

### **Figure 1: Goto- Informal Market**

Source: Author, 2025.

This informal market constitutes an important source of income for households with limited access to resources and formal employment in Goto. This reality demonstrates the adaptive capacity of this community, which is not significantly different from that of the other Praia Nova and Munhava Central. Although in Praia Nova, the main livelihood activity is the sale of seafood for survival.

### **Economic and logistical barriers**

Economic and logistics barriers emerged as one of the most concerns for poverty alleviation efforts among the communities studied. Participants of Munhava Central and Goto identified economic barriers such as high costs of acquiring goods, imposition of elevated taxes and limited credit access to finance their activities. In logistical terms, time was also identified as a major constraint, as daily survival demands reduce their ability to engage in other activities. Some participants noted that they cannot afford to stop working to attend government meetings. This reflects the opportunity costs associated with participation, particularly for informal workers and reinforces exclusion from decision-making processes, as referred to in PARPA III (2011–2014).

“Não podemos parar de vender ou cultivar para participar nas reuniões longas”. Participant MC-9, in Portuguese.

Directly translated to English it means:

“We cannot stop selling or cultivating to attend long meetings”- Participant MC-9

While there are institutional and economic barriers, participants of Munhava Central show that solidarity, informal collaboration and civic consciousness can serve as powerful practicalities for inclusive and sustainable poverty reduction.

### **Corruption and exclusion**

Participants of Munhava Central and Goto identified experiences of corruption and exclusion from government aid as a challenge to their involvement in poverty reduction initiatives. They expressed frustration with the lack of transparency and responsiveness, noting that assistance is sometimes diverted before reaching intended beneficiaries. Despite these challenges, participants continue to attend community meetings and register for NGO programmes, reflecting ongoing efforts to access available support.

“A ajuda é frequentemente desviada ou fica retida pelo caminho”. Participant MC- 4

Directly translated from Portuguese to English, this means:

“Aid is diverted or gets stuck along the way”. Participant MC-4

“Falamos abertamente contra a corrupção, porque vimos que a ajuda muitas vezes não chega aos mais pobres. Denunciamos essas situações, embora saibamos que é difícil mudar” - Participant GT-8

Directly translated from Portuguese to English, these statements mean:

“We speak openly against corruption, because we see that aid often does not reach the poorest. We denounce these situations, even though we know it is difficult to bring change overnight”- Participant GT-8

This statement is consistent with the International Monetary Fund (IMF, 2016) critiques of governance in Mozambique, where elite capture undermines pro-poor spending. Participants see NGOs as more reliable, especially in youth training projects, but access remained limited. Direct observation in Goto confirms these testimonies, indicating that participation is often limited in terms of capacity to influence decision, yet residents continue to demonstrate political awareness and engagement.

Main opportunities for citizen participation in poverty alleviation

### **Strong local solidarity networks**

In Goto, practices such as xitique (community savings groups where each person contributes and later uses the fund for school, health and other expenses) demonstrate how residents have developed informal systems of mutual support to cope with financial challenges. As pointed out by community leader of Goto, Mr. Lourenço (pseudonym): “Devido a dificuldades de

acesso formal ao crédito, fazemos práticas de xitique entre vizinhos e pessoas que possuem banca no mercado de Goto”.

Directly translated from Portuguese to English, this means: “Due to limited access to formal credit, we rely on 'xitique' practices among neighbours and market vendors in Goto”.

These solidarity networks function as local protection mechanisms and UNDP (2022) considers this practice to have the potential to be integrated into formal microcredit and financial inclusion programmes, contributing to economic development and the sustainability of communities.

### **Local empowerment and capacity building**

Participants of Munhava Central (MC-5) reported the potential for strengthening local skills and promoting economic empowerment by teaching youth practical trades such as carpentry and sewing. These efforts could be expanded through formal training programmes and microfinance support. However, MC-5 highlighted empowerment constraints by structural factors, including limited access to financial resources, inadequate institutional support and weak integration of community perspectives into formal development planning.

Some respondents expressed limitations regarding the lack of tangible support to strengthen their economic initiatives. As one participant from Munhava Central explained in Portuguese: “Nós temos ideias e vontade de trabalhar, mas não temos recursos ou ajuda para fazer crescer os nossos negócios” – Participant MC-2

Directly translated to English, this means: “we have ideas and the will to work, but we do not have resources or support to grow our businesses”- Participant MC-2

Similarly, a participant in Goto noted that in Portuguese: “Nós tentamos organizar-nos e participar nos encontros, mas não há acompanhamento nem apoio para nos ajudar a melhorar a nossa situação” – Participant GT-3.

Directly translated to English, this means: “we try to organise ourselves and participate in meetings, but there is no follow-up or assistance to help us improve our situation”- Participant GT-3.

These statements reflect the gap between community initiative and institutional support, which limits the effectiveness and sustainability of local empowerment efforts. While some initiatives led by local organisations and NGOs have contributed to skills development and income-generating activities, their impact is often limited in scale and continuity. A participant of Praia Nova observed that: “As ONGs às vezes oferecem formação, e isso ajuda, mas depois de algum tempo o apoio termina e voltamos às mesmas dificuldades” - Participant PN-1.

Directly translated to English, this means: “NGOs sometimes provide training and it helps, but after some time the support ends and we return to the same difficulties” – Participant PN-1.

This highlights the discontinuity of external interventions and the absence of sustained institutional engagement necessary to produce lasting socio-economic change. Direct observation confirmed that communities possess significant internal capacities, but these

require sustained institutional support, inclusive governance and access to resources to translate local initiative into long-term socio-economic improvement.

#### Theme 4: Resilience to environmental vulnerability

The communities of Goto, Praia Nova and Munhava Central demonstrated capacity for adaptation and resilience in the face of environmental vulnerability, characterised essentially by floods, cyclones and the degradation of urban infrastructure. Participants described spontaneous actions after floods, such as cleaning drainage channels, rebuilding houses with recycled materials and organising collective donations of food and clothing. The following excerpts from participant interviews highlight this:

“Quando há inundações, limpamos canais de drenagens para ajudar a escorrer a água” - Participant PN-5

“Na época de chuvas fortes as nossas casas não resistem e reconstruímos com material reciclado”- Participant GT-6

“Para aliviar o sofrimento dos nossos irmãos organizamos donativos como comidas e roupas” Participant MC-2

Directly translated from Portuguese to English, these statements mean:

“When floods occur, we clean drainage channels to help the water flow away”- Respondent Participant PN-5

“During heavy rains, our houses do not resist and we rebuild them with recycled materials. - Participant GT-6

“To ease the suffering of our brothers and sisters, we organise donations such as food and clothing” - Participant MC-2

These initiatives, though informal, reflect an active social action which are essential for confronting recurrent climatic shocks. The literature reinforces that urban resilience in contexts of poverty depends both on local adaptive capacity and on institutional intervention. UNDP (2022) highlights that in Mozambique’s coastal cities, vulnerability is aggravated by poor urban planning, inadequate sanitation and limited access to safe housing. Direct field observation confirmed these perceptions; there is clear evidence of mutual aid systems, especially through “xitique” (community savings groups) and small groups that share tools or construction materials. In some cases, young people were observed organising, cleaning and reconstruction campaigns, demonstrating a sense of local leadership and cooperation. Despite being reactive, these responses represent valuable forms of resistance and social learning that should inform public policy.

In general, the findings of this study underline the need for further research on the long-term role of citizen participation in poverty reduction strategies and livelihood improvement. Considering the integration of community knowledge into policy implementation, regional comparative research that could provide deeper perceptions into how community-driven initiatives contribute to sustainable poverty reduction in urban contexts is essential.

## Conclusion and recommendations

This study examined how citizens of Beira City, Mozambique, participate in strategies aimed at reducing poverty, specifically in the communities of Goto, Praia Nova and Munhava Central. The findings reveal that participation is largely informal, community-driven and survival-oriented, rather than integrated into formal governance structures or state-led initiatives. Despite institutional limitations, these communities demonstrate resilience and collective capacity to respond to poverty and environmental vulnerability. Recognising and consolidating locally embedded forms of participation is essential for bridging the gap between policy design and lived realities. By placing citizens at the centre of development processes, poverty reduction strategies can become more responsive, effective and sustainable in addressing the complex challenges faced by vulnerable urban communities. However, participation alone is insufficient; it must be accompanied by continuous local government monitoring and evaluation to ensure effective implementation and alignment with the lived realities of urban poverty.

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