Beyond diversity: understanding and driving women's inclusion at work

The case of Eletricidade de Moçambique (EDM)

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About MUVA

We are a social incubator working since 2015 for the economic empowerment of young people, and in particular women. Recognizing the social and economic barriers that limit access to decent work, we develop a range of innovative interventions to support young men and women in preparing for the labour market with the vision and confidence needed for employment, self-employment and strengthening their business. We create, develop and implement effective approaches for the promotion and inclusion of young people, with a focus on socioeconomically vulnerable populations.

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Introduction

In Mozambique, only six percent of women are employed in the formal sector, compared to 25 percent of men (World Bank). Moreover, in most sectors, women are underrepresented not only in the workforce, but are rarely found in technical positions or leadership roles.

Electricidade de Moçambique (EDM), the state-owned electricity company of Mozambique, is no exception. Out of EDM's 3,700 employees, 18 percent are female, with women largely occupying administrative and non-technical roles in business development, human resources and finance. Roughly 25 percent of middle management positions (*Directores Centrais*) are occupied by women but only one out of seven Board members is female.[1]

As other companies operating in largely male-dominated sectors, EDM faces a range of challenges that limit the representation and professional advancement of women. Wide-spread gender stereotypes and unquestioned assumptions of what women can, cannot and should not do ("Women shouldn't climb utility poles.") push women into non-technical roles or hinder their career development. In particular pregnant women and mothers face discrimination due to norms and expectations, largely from their male colleagues, that care responsibilities negatively affect women's professional performance. When they return from maternity leave, women are often involuntarily transferred from technical to administrative positions[2]. Throughout the organization, strong hierarchies and invisible power dynamics determine company culture and the relationship between staff. This will be interrogated more closely through the inclusion data presented further below.

MUVA is social incubator working on the economic empowerment of young people and in particular women in Mozambique and Southern Africa. Since 2015, MUVA has supported interventions to support young men and women in preparing for the labour market with the vision and confidence needed for employment, self-employment and strengthening their business. Learn more here.

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1. Human resources data collected by MUVA (2022) and EDM Gender Strategy. For EDM's Board of Directors, also see https://www.edm.co.mz/en/website/page/board-directors.

2. EDM Gender Audit and MUVA diagnosis.

The intervention

Acknowledging the opportunities increased female economic participation brings, EDM's Board of Directors pledged that women would make up 40 percent of the workforce by 2030. A Gender Audit of the utility followed in 2018/2019. To support the implementation of the company's Gender Strategy, and address the challenges identified in the Gender Audit, EDM approached MUVA, a Mozambican NGO supporting female economic empowerment, for practical guidance and support to achieve the goals set out by the company. The collaboration between MUVA and EDM was made possible through funding from GIZ[3].

Committed to "Gender Action Learning" MUVA's approach involves understanding how power imbalances affect corporate decision-making and a conscious reflection on formal and informal organizational rules to understand how a company's culture can be strengthened to create an inclusive working environment for everyone. Informed by a diversity and inclusion diagnosis, using qualitative interviews with leadership and staff, training packages were tailored to different target groups performing different organizational roles including:

1. An induction week with a focus on soft skills development for all new joiners. The session focused on self-reflection, sharing emotions, collaboration, and self-confidence and was folded into the induction week carried out routinely by EDM.
2. A training course targeting middle management, the people managers at the heart of the organization, to support them to become inclusive leaders.
3. A series of workshops with key decision-makers on inclusive policies, corporate change and the prioritization of projects and spending to achieve greater diversity and inclusion.
4. A process of collaborative support to the Women Forum of EDM (the Forum Mulher), the human resources department and the existing team of trainers of trainers to ensure sustainable change.

Over 2022, a total of 261 EDM staff, 93 women and 168 men, were part of the induction or one of the trainings and workshops—the journey which EDM and MUVA commonly referred to as "*transformação corporativa*" (corporate transformation). Feedback on the range of training initiatives was throughout positive. Participants were in particular appreciative of the training content's relevance to their work and the participatory nature of the training which kept everyone actively involved throughout. In the words of one female participant of the HR team, "Nobody sleeps in a MUVA training!" Moreover, over 95 percent of trainees reported that their understanding of diversity and inclusion issues improved due to the training.

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3. The German Development Cooperations (GIZ) implements Employment and Skills for Development in Africa (E4D) with the main goal of improving the employment and economic situation of job seekers, employees and enterprises in cooperation with the public and private sector.

Inclusion and measuring the invisible

MUVA strongly believes that data can put a spotlight on things that would otherwise remain invisible. When you measure things, they tend to matter. Measuring diversity is relatively easy; in many cases it is "a simple matter of headcount" (Sherbin and Rashid 2017): How many women are found in leadership positions? What does the gender pay gap look like? How many women compared to men have left the organization last year?

As useful as these largely quantitative performance metrics are, they can distract from inclusion, which is much harder to define and measure meaningfully. (Gaudiano 2019) At the same time, inclusion is the true organizational performance driver (Bourke 2017, quoted in Bourke and Dillon 2018) and diversity without inclusion risks backlash. In a nutshell, adding a few women to the organizational mix is unlikely to move the dial on inclusion without cultural change that ensures these women feel respected, valued and comfortable to share their insights.

But how do you measure the largely invisible processes that drive inclusion? Based on a detailed literature review, MUVA drew up its own framework combining concepts of psychological safety, defined as "a shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking" (Edmondson 1999), inclusive leadership (Bourke 2016 for Deloitte) and the prevalence of microaggressions (e.g. McKinsey & Company and LeanIn 2020). See Figure for a graphical representation how these three aspects relate to individual managers, teams and company culture.

Diversity & Inclusion
While at times used interchangeably diversity and inclusion are conceptually different, and, importantly inclusion is neither a by-product nor a natural consequence of diversity.
Diversity means understanding that each individual is unique, and recognizing our individual differences. Gallup defines diversity as the "full spectrum of human differences." (Washington and Patrick 2018)
*Inclusion is about valuing difference and removing barriers to participation. For MUVA inclusion means creating an environment where everyone feels valued and respected, regardless of their background or identity.*

Using data to understand inclusion

Two waves of data collection provided valuable insight on employees' views on their managers (and their performance on selected leadership traits), company and team culture. By testing staff views on specific statements linked to these three areas, the data enabled a more detailed interpretation of the organizational culture at EDM. Moreover, combining this with the qualitative insights from the diagnosis ensured, that inclusion did not remain a vague concept or a merely empty phrase. While methodological detail is provided in an Annex, the following provides key findings from the data.

Inclusive leadership: While over two thirds of respondents agreed that their managers treat team members with respect, only 45% agree that managers admit when they make mistakes. Similarly, only 44% of respondents believe their managers make fair and merit-based decisions about promotion, pay and task allocation. This is in line with the data collected during the Gender Audit. Not surprisingly, those who manage people agree with the above statement to a much larger extent (55%) than those who do not manage people (37%). Equally women have less favourable views on managers making merit-based decisions than men. *The graphic* provides an overview over all statements tested with respondents related to six inclusive leadership traits. The closer the blue dots are to the outer line of the hexagon (which would convey 100% of agreement with the statement) the more positive employee ratings are.

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS THAT AGREE (STRONGLY) WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS:
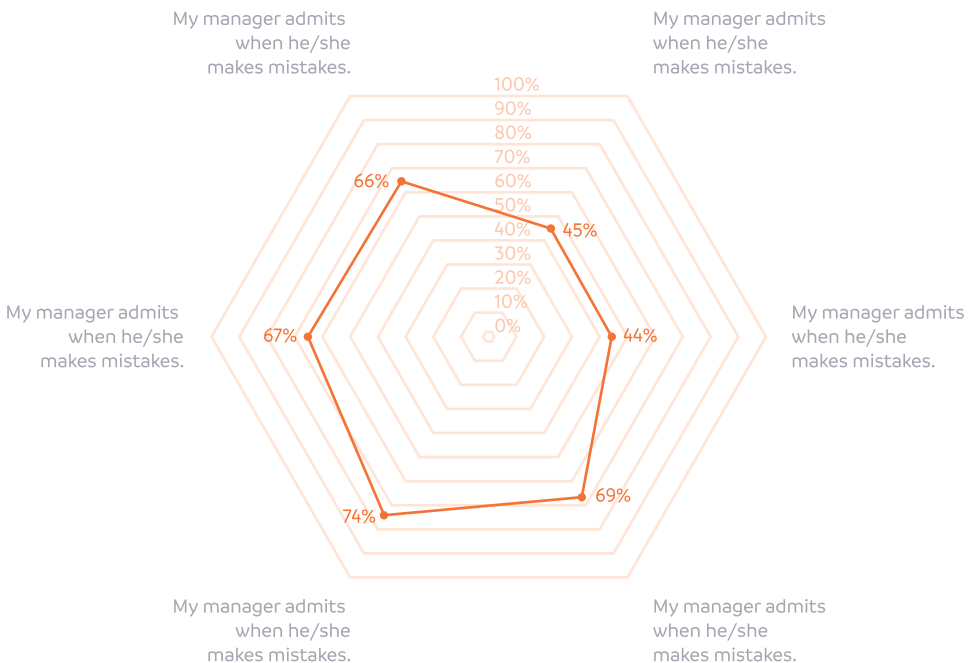
Team culture: While most feel comfortable asking other team members for help (almost 70% of respondents disagree that it is difficult to ask for help), just over one third of employees feel that team members are able to bring up problems and tough issues—with ratings by female employees much lower than their male counterparts. And an even starker difference between managers and those who do not manage staff. Asked if it is safe to take a risk in the team, only 17% agree or agree strongly. Lastly, unsurprisingly, almost 70% of managers feel their skills are valued and utilised whereas only half of those who do not manage staff agree with this.

Company culture: Micro-aggressions, from having one's judgment questioned, being addressed in a less than professional manner to hearing demeaning remarks, are wide-spread (*see Table*). Interestingly, staff throughout the organization seem to experience micro-aggressions with little difference by gender or if they are managers or not. This tallies with the experience from the training sessions at all levels where communication and the way people interact with each other emerged as a key concern.

	Never	Sometimes	Often
Have you had your judgement questioned in your area of expertise?	**33%**	**57%**	**10%**
Do you need to provide more evidence of your competence than others do?	**24%**	**55%**	**21%**
Have you been addressed in a less than professional way?	**41%**	**49%**	**10%**
Have you been mistaken for someone at a much lower level?	**64%**	**27%**	**8%**
Are your work contributions ignored?	**46%**	**48%**	**5%**
Have you heard demeaning remarks about you or "people like you?	**37%**	**48%**	**16%**

Results and impact

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE: CONCRETE ACTIONS TO DRIVE THE GENDER STRATEGY

While EDM's 40 percent women by 2030 objective, the Gender Audit and Gender Strategy clearly showed the utility's willingness to drive gender equality, it was largely a theoretical commitment without concrete steps to pave the way for EDM to foster inclusion and reach its ambitious targets.

Therefore, one of the key objectives of the MUVA training process was to initiate the implementation of the Gender Strategy, with a focus on two of its five pillars: training & development and corporate culture & leadership. Throughout the training sessions, employees have identified priorities to drive organizational culture change at EDM which in turn have been used to operationalise the existing action plans in range of areas, including a transparent selection and recruitment process, ongoing training on diversity and inclusion, worker's health and well-being, eradication of any forms of harassment and career development with a focus on technical training for women. According to EDM's Head of Human Resources, collaboration with MUVA improved the action plans through inputs and prioritization by employees and— by successfully translating written commitments into operational practice—"made the strategy run".

Specific initiatives, informed by the action plans have already started: EDM has made adjustments to the recruitment process (e.g. greater diversity on the interview panels and awareness raising among hiring managers), has integrated the diversity and inclusion training in an expanded induction process for all new joiners delivered by EDM trainers and has initiated a scholarships for young women in technical fields. The individual action plans have in the meantime evolved into a costed operational plan, owned and driven by EDM's *Forum Mulher*, which includes women from all parts of the organization including human resources which remains a powerful driver of change at EDM.

"ALPHABETISATION": UNDERSTANDING POWER AND HAVING THE LANGUAGE TO TALK ABOUT DISCRIMINATION

Most staff were aware of the gender imbalance at EDM and many understood that gender equality is important for the utility. However, few had a clear idea of the practical steps or their own role in the journey towards greater equality. At the same time, informal hierarchies of a highly bureaucratic organization intersected with unequal power relations between men and women, affecting how staff interacted with each other and experienced their workplace, with women feeling the negative implications of EDM's organizational culture to a greater extent than men.

MUVA's training approach specifically targeted the invisible barriers to inclusion and utilized group work and participatory exercises to foster self-awareness and an analysis of power imbalances (*for an example how role play was used to understand the concept of power, see box*). Through this process employees were able to contextualise their personal experience within the cultural and gender norms that shape their private lives as well as the workplace. One female participant stressed that the training provided a "safe space to be yourself", where "people give their real opinions" and "are not afraid to say what they think". One exercise focused on what it means to be a man or a woman in Mozambique. By sharing the phrases men and women heard from an early age, participants—in the words of one facilitator—"connected with the weight of gender roles assigned to each individual" and started a discussion how these translate into barriers women experience at work. One male participant explained: "the training allows us to recognize power […], motivating us to break free from these roles, whether as oppressors, victims, or perpetuators of power imbal-

Understanding power through role play
The Power Triangle proved an important group exercise throughout the training sessions. Involving role plays based on common experiences of oppression and discrimination, each participant took on a role as either the perpetrator, the victim, or a silent observer. Throughout the exercise, the participants changed roles: the perpetrator became the victim and the other way around. This didn't just promote sensitivity towards the experience of others, but enabled a detailed discussion how power and unequal power relations determine everyday life at home and at work. And importantly, what concrete actions can be taken to make inclusion a reality at EDM.

ances." Being able to identify everyday discrimination and take personal responsibility for change was essential. As one male training participant summed up: "As men, we must deconstruct these barriers within the institution."

CREATING CRACKS AND FIRST SIGNS OF INCLUSION

Organizational change and inclusion take time. In the words of one MUVA facilitator: "We cannot expect big changes straight away, but we want to see cracks." What are these cracks? It is a female employee taking the stage and talking to a large group of colleagues in Nampula despite being extremely nervous. Women starting to question if certain roles are indeed only for men. It is a male EDM manager explaining: "I pay much more attention to the progress of women within the company. I am mindful of this, particularly the disparities across sectors and activities." It is a Director inviting a female colleague to work alongside him, to shadow him. Or more technicians accepting women to work in the field alongside them.

According to the Head of Development and Gender Policy, the biggest actual change is to be seen in the way people actively listen to each other and communicate. (Communication had quickly emerged as a focus area during the training, confirmed by the widespread experience of microaggressions.) She explained, that while interrupting each other used to be common, now, people tend to listen more actively which paves the way for non-violent communication and a more respectful interaction with colleagues. "If someone interrupts a colleague, we ask 'Have you not been in the MUVA training?'." Another manager agrees and speaks about an emerging "culture of listening".

Conclusion: Sustainable change and the way ahead

With pledging 40 percent of female representation by 2030 and linking this to its overall objectives of being a "smart" utility and providing universal access to electricity across Mozambique, EDM has shown a strong commitment to gender equality. While MUVA was first approached as training provider, the limited scope of work quickly turned into a more comprehensive partnership, driven by EDM's Human Resources department, to transform a general strategy into concrete actions.

Diversity and inclusion training initiatives are the go-to intervention for companies that want to foster more inclusive workplace. But training is not always the magic wand to "fix" inclusion[4]. So far, the MUVA training shows evidence of success, largely in raising awareness of inequalities and an improved understanding of how concepts like power and unconscious bias have practical implications for staff in their work and private lives. And how addressing those has benefits for individuals, teams and the company. The participatory nature of the training provided the space for staff to reflect that supporting women is neither unfair nor favouritism but corrects prevailing disadvantage—an important aspect to prevent backlash against inclusion. Moreover, first signs of the much harder to achieve behavioural change can be seen (what we've called the "cracks"): employees listen more actively, some women speak up, have been promoted and men have taken responsibility to drive change.

Crucially, the training was not only part of a larger change process at EDM but has been integrated into the EDM induction for new employees to ensure continued change without external support. The EDM cadre of in-house trainers has been trained to deliver the diversity & inclusion training and has worked alongside the MUVA facilitators. Going forward, diversity & inclusion training is now routinely delivered by EDM trainers in an additional one week course during the induction for all new joiners.

Despite these positive signs of change, it is important to appreciate that cultural change in large organizations does not come easily and fostering inclusion takes time. At this stage, the groundwork is done for EDM to continue on its journey. As per EDM's Head of Development and Gender Policy: "MUVA teaches us to proceed by ourselves."

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4. Evidence shows diversity training can help raise awareness but is unlikely to change behaviour. Bezrukova et al. 2016, quoted in Government Equalities Office n.d.). Success is more likely when training takes place over multiple sessions and is embedded CIPD 2019; Dobbin and Kalev 2016).

Annex: a methodological note

This case study is based on existing information kindly provided by EDM, the insights from the MUVA diagnosis and the large amount of qualitative and quantitative data collected throughout the process, including an enterprise questionnaire, a training evaluation (both through feedback sessions and questionnaires), human resource data on diversity metrics and inclusion data. In addition, the authors undertook key informant interviews with the EDM's Head of HR, and various members of the MUVA team.

The inclusion data was collected through two waves to establish a benchmark. The first one shortly after the training—where participants were expected to have an increased awareness of inclusion. The second round of data collection was undertaken approximately six months after the training. A total of 457 respondents responded to the questionnaires either in hardcopy (information booths were established to increase the response rate) or electronically. 36 percent of respondents were female, 54 percent male and 10 percent either skipped the question or ticked "rather not say" when asked about their gender.

The questionnaires collated employee views on statements related to signature traits of inclusive leaders (commitment, courage, cognizance of bias, curiosity, cultural intelligence and collaboration), as identified by Deloitte. Respondents were asked to use a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (agree), 3 (neither agree, not disagree), 4 (agree) and 5 (strongly agree). The same five-point Likert scale was used for feedback on statements related to psychological safety. Microaggressions were tested by asking respondents how often they experience those: Often, sometimes or never. Further data collection is planned for 2024 which will be able to provide further insights if the curser on inclusion has moved.

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