

# TANZANIA – STORIES FROM THE FIELD

5 GENDER  
EQUALITY

Debora Masunga, Mbutu villager, utilizes training provided by the project to tailor clothes and harvest cotton to earn a living

## Collaboration ensures gender is at the heart of development in Igunga, Tabora Region

Mbutu village, about ten kilometres from Igunga Town in Tabora Region has a population of over 5000 people, who rely mainly on agriculture and livestock for their livelihoods so are therefore vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. However, since the beginning of the Igunga Eco-Village project four and a half years ago, funded by the European Union, climate change adaptation activities have placed women at the heart of decision-making. The project ended in September 2019 but these activities are set to continue.

**"We have made good progress in relation to gender equality,"** said Samson Mwandu, Mbutu Village Chairperson, who stated that women dominate in numbers the income-generating activities carried out in the community. **"These activities include Village Savings and Loans Groups (VSLAs) where villagers can borrow loans to kick-start other businesses, which range from tailoring, horticulture to poultry-keeping and breeding cows and goats,"** he added.

Igunga Eco-Village is a climate-change adaptation project situated in a region dogged by extreme water shortages and drought. Average rainfall per year stands between 5 to 7.5 millimeters. As a solution, the project has encouraged villagers to harvest rain water at home and trained local artisans to dig shal-

low wells near to villages. Rain water tanks are also visible at schools and dispensaries. Another vital intervention has been the community tree-planting initiative, training communities to find a solution to the hard rock which sits underground in the area by applying manure and digging holes to successfully plant trees, acacia and fruit trees among them, known to grow well under these tough conditions.

## Invention is the mother of necessity

Married with seven children to support, Debora Masunga, Igunga Eco-Village Mbutu village chairperson is a busy woman. Debora received training from the project to form part of a savings and credit loans group (VSLAs) and used the money borrowed to buy cloth to tailor and sell her clothes. Debora joined the VSLAs when the project initially set up the initiative three years ago. It's hard to ignore Debora's zest for life, leadership skills and entrepreneurial spirit. **"The project trained us to set up the savings groups, and since**



**then, I haven't looked back,"** said Mrs. Masunga, who initially borrowed 200,000 Tanzanian Shillings (80 USD) and returned the loan after a record-breaking one month. As with most VSLAs the interest is 5 per cent, low in comparison to the banks which charge around 12 per cent. **"I make on average 250,000.00 Tanzanian Shillings per month (120 USD) from tailoring, and also harvesting cotton using bio-fertility techniques I learned from the project and buying and selling crops, which means I can afford to provide for my family,"** she added. Debora is

**68%** of groups supported by the projects with women in board positions other than treasurer

Women have built courage and are fearless to speak out at public meetings

Women and men have created community hand dug wells to adapt to climate change

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clearly a decision-maker as she often goes outside the village to sell her crops. Inconceivable in the past. She also bought two goats with the loan, which she intends to breed. Debora encourages more women to get involved in the project. **"Once they see that I am earning an income, they are then motivated to also join in,"** said Debora. The project trains women and men on business and marketing training provided by the project which teaches villagers how to keep books, search for markets and turn a small profit.

Like many other households, Debora involves her husband through the whole process of getting the loan and how to use the money. As husband and wife they borrowed money together to build a small house, which they currently rent out. Debora and her husband are also part of the village project to dig a shallow well to adapt to drier weather conditions.

## Involving women boosts confidence

For Esther Pole, a project chairperson in Bukama village, located 25 kilometers from Igunga town, taking a leadership role in the village has been an empowering experience and given her confidence to actively engage in income-generating activities introduced to her by the project. Esther earns a significant income by growing and selling onions, maize and mung beans, and employing horticulture techniques in the form of having her own kitchen garden providing pumpkins and local spinach for her family, with techniques learned through training provided by the project. **"The project has taught me that I have as equal a right as a man to earn my own money and make decisions about how I wish to spend it. In the past, men would be the ones to decide to sell crops and had control of household money but this has changed and men no longer coerce women into handing over money to them,"** Esther said.



Esther Pole,  
Igunga Eco-Village  
Chairperson in  
Bukama village,  
works alongside her  
husband to create a  
sustainable future

Last year the market dictated that Esther and her husband had to sell their onions at a low price. Despite this, they persevered diversifying with other crops and managed to buy two cows and pay for some school costs to send their children to secondary school. Secondary school education until recently has been out of grasp for many rural villagers. The low market price taught Esther a valuable lesson and the family managed to harvest maize and store it on their homestead to insure them against future food insecurity. Esther concluded by saying that, **"Cooperation with my husband is on an upward trend and we are better together."**

Vincent Mallya, Igunga Eco-Village Project Representative said, **"We started off by raising awareness in village meetings about HIV/AIDS and gender issues and when men saw other men's wives attending the meetings, they realized they could no longer deprive their wives of joining in with meetings and participating in the project activities."** In Bukama village alone we have set up seven women-only poultry-keeping groups, with the aim of encouraging women to forge ahead with micro-entrepreneurial activities. The project has focused on encour-

aging the creation of leadership roles amongst women. **"If a woman is not a chairperson then they are a Vice-Chairperson or a Secretary or Treasurer at least."** Vincent added.

Igunga District Council has collaborated with the Igunga Eco-Village Project since its inception in 2015. The district has helped facilitate the women's groups and ensure active participation in all activities. **"We have seen the positive impact of the project and have allocated resources for gender issues from the District Development Fund,"** said Gaudence Masanja, Community Development Officer, Igunga District Council. All districts in Tanzania have to allocate 10% of their budget to District Funds that benefits (4%) women, (4%) youth, and (2%) of people living with disabilities. Within the next month the district plans to give interest-free loans to ten women's groups with between 10 – 15 women in each group. Women who have small businesses and a bank account are eligible to apply. In addition, the district are keen tree planters with thousands of fruit trees being planted on the district office premises and in villages district-wide.



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