



Designing Women

The clanging noise of a small hammer mill is the sound of independence and opportunity.

In rural Mozambique, people take whole grain to be milled instead of buying commercially produced flour. Typically located within a village center, mills provide a valuable service by grinding grains and roots into meal and producing a superior tasting product that consumers prefer. Small-scale mills, that have a capacity of processing one to five tons per day, dominate this landscape and also provide a significant labor saving alternative to customary hand pounding.

Senhora Fatima Bolacha started such a milling business after identifying an opportunity gap in the area. Today she is one of a small but growing number of women entrepreneurs who have recently entered the business, and success has led her to start designing new enterprises. With prior experience as a vendor of used clothing, a tobacco farmer, and as an accountant for a large cotton company, her business credentials and instincts are considerable. She has already diversified into packaged-flour sales

and now intends to invest in refrigeration with a plan to bring fresh fish to the rural interior. Fatima's entrepreneurial persona has firmly planted her as an independent and strong woman within the village of Ribaue, Nampula province. But it is her drive that sets her apart. When she is away from work for any length of time she gets anxious, and it is the noise of grinding machinery, as much as anything, that gives her comfort. To be sure, her business is booming and like the steady beat of a mill Fatima says she is "in a rhythm." drive that sets her apart. When she is away from work for any length of time she gets anxious, and it is the noise of grinding machinery, as much as anything, that gives her comfort. To be sure, her business is booming and like the steady beat of a mill Fatima says she is "in a rhythm."

Sinezia Pinto, a business advisor for TNS Millennium Maize Mills project, is carefully studying Fatima's innovations. Pinto remembers her strict upbringing in Monapo. Arriving home from a night out with friends, Sinezia and her brothers would routinely be instructed by their father to pound up to 50 kilos of maize until the early hours of the morning. "Pounding maize is

very difficult,” observes Pinto, “so I suppose it is ironic that I am working in the maize mill business. But perhaps it is to improve on [people’s] suffering.” Indeed, a new model of maize mills hold the potential to liberate people’s time while also functioning as multi-purpose business centers. Among a range of socio-economic benefits, expanding the industry will decrease the amount of time women otherwise spend hand pounding maize, open opportunities for better access to nutritious food, and serve as an important vehicle for more gender equity. Additionally, maize meal offers a high profit margin to mill owners and is a gateway for vertical integration into larger-scale trading and storage schemes, allowing millers to hedge against agricultural risks and use the seasonality of maize production to their advantage.

While considering each of these factors, however, it is important to bear in mind that, in the end, mills exist for utility. People grind their maize because they need to eat and because milling is a time saving, cost effective alternative to arduous hand labor.

As such, a community’s relationship with grain and its milling is largely governed by considerations of immediate use rather than any exchange value. And while entrepreneurs and investors might rightly identify excellent market opportunities and niches in the milling business, a dominant agrarian ethos in rural economies often means that mills function as a public service governed by collective need as much as individual pursuit of profit. In short, the maize milling business occupies what historian E.P. Thompson calls a friction between the “awkward realities of commerce and consumption.” Service and good business are not exclusive, of course, and, the genius of Nampula’s designing women lies within a vision to transform the very concept of a mill by blending social, community and health aspects into a feasible business model. Ultimately, the greater control men and women have over their time and the increased choices available in the marketplace represent the kind of real development that happens when people are given the space to create and innovate.



A Talk with Maize Mill Women

Fátima Bolacha

I'm originally from here Ribaue. I studied here, grew up here and I am getting old right here. My father was a big farmer. He was a big producer of rice and maize and he also planted sunflower. In life, I had to conquer everything on my own. I only had support from my father. He was a man that always put an emphasis on his children's studies. My mother died when I was a child. My father always took care of his children. He supported me since the beginning.

After finishing school, I lost my chance at a job. Because of the war it was not safe to travel to Nampula and this is where the job placements took place. So I could not go there. I stayed here and took a job at the cotton factory [CANAM, later called SANAM] where I worked for almost 19 years. During this time when I was working at the factory I started thinking about trying a small business. I was not born a business woman. I learned later. You just need to use your head. I have children; I have to use my head. I started making a business of selling used clothes. Those type of clothes that were called mundiais, in bulk of 400 kilograms I bought and resold. Later, after the peace agreement, I bought a maize mill, a diesel/oil miller. I worked with it for almost two years. From then on I started to have other thoughts on how to improve. That was when I

"My tendency is to do something different from what others are doing"

When I started doing my businesses I did not want to join my business with my husband. Because I was witnessing the way he was going and saw that the marriage was not solid. I'd rather do my own things on the side. When we divorced I continued with my businesses.

I learned from my father how to work machambas. It was also one of the things I bet on for a while. I used to be a tobacco producer. I used to be a cotton producer. I did all these things already, but I realized the machamba was not a great return, so I reduced the machamba part and stayed with the mills. I also stopped selling clothes because everybody was starting to compete in the same business. My tendency is to do something different from what others are doing. Instead of everybody running

Sinézia Pinto

My father worked at a cashew factory, the Companhia de Chavo da Monapo. It was a big factory, it did cashew, copra, sisal. It was very big and part of the Entrepосто Group. The factory provided houses for all the workers. We had a school, child care, a soccer field; we had everything, a place to study, and all paid by the company. It was a small villa. It was a close community. And everybody knew who was whose kid. If you behaved well or of you did not behave well everyone would know. My father was very protective. We had a family of 15 people, my cousins,



brothers, extended family and friends. He had a big maize machamba, of around 50 hectares, and had tractors to clear, sow, and all that. We were the ones who did part of the harvest. It was complicated to do the harvest. We always had maize at home. A lot of maize. Always. During vacation we would get in the tractor and go there. We liked to do that. Just the hard part was to pound maize. We had to take it out, how do you say it, de-hull it? Then our two tasks were these. We used to de-hull every night, after dinner. It was a big house. We had a big yard, we would extend a tarpaulin, he would bag it and sell it to people, and basically we were the labor. On the pounding

side, we always had to pound, at least once a month. We pounded 2 to 3 bags, in group. Each one had to pound up to 50 kilos, sometimes.

When we reached adolescence, we wanted to go out with others, and at times drink and my father was asking "how can I control this?" We wanted to go to parties, to graduation parties, and he was resistant. We had to ask for permission one month in advance. But he couldn't always forbid it, say, if the party was at a neighbor's house, or at an uncle's house. Then he would allow us to go, but would say, "you go, but you have to know that tomorrow there's maize." And really, 3 AM, when we were returning from the party, he was waiting, seated there, with 5 or 10 pilões arranged, with 50 kilos. We pounded by pairs, we started at 3 AM and went to 10:00 AM sometimes 12. Without sleeping. You were tired; you would run to the bathroom to rest, and he would come and say "hey, hey, you are delaying, what you are doing? Let's go!" He would not sleep until we finished pounding the maize. The next time we would not want to go out. At that time there weren't even many maize mills. I remember. We had to pound in Monapo, and he would take to Nacala. We pounded to take away the shells, and when he went to Nacala he would mill and bring back for consumption in the house. He would only sell grains; he did not sell pounded maize or any-

"She's a woman, so she cannot do the heavy lifting."

"She's a woman, so she cannot carry bags."

for the same thing, I thought it was better to move away a bit. Take for example when I introduced a flour business. Yes, there were maize mills, but no one was making flour for sale. Then when I did, I think some people started to follow. This is the third year I am doing packaged flour. At first I was only grinding it simply. So this idea was born – since I can pound already, I can make the flour, package it and sell it to people. That is when I started negotiating bags, sewing machines, and all that. I started experimenting.

Now I do not know whether I will be able to design something else. But I think with the principles of what TechnoServe is bringing it is possible to change some new things, make my business bigger, help me change the basic idea. Maybe also because I've been working a long time with the public. For example, if someone comes to grind their maize and does not have the full money, I sometimes discount without reducing the total amount of maize. If some show up and don't have money, I try to help.

thing. It is ironic or maybe destiny, that today I'm here working for the maize mills but perhaps it is to improve on the suffering. We had to pound maize to make rice, to make flour, to eat *maçaroca*. But when it was for punishment, you had to pound, there was no excuse. Yes, pounding maize is very difficult.

I lived in my father's house until I was 17. In Monapo, school only went up to 10th grade. Then I went to Nampula where I completed 11th and 12th grade. I stayed in Nampula, when I finished the course, I think it was 2000. My mother was from Quelimane and we had a certain education. But after we went to live with my father it became very complicated. My father's wife was Muslim, and my father was also Muslim. He was religious. He even used to say "my daughters have to marry pure, virgins, etc." We had to go to the mosque, we had to do all that stuff. When my mother left, my father moved and went to live with that woman. We didn't want to go. So we stayed by ourselves in the house. We stayed a long time alone. We lived there alone with the servants. He became distant from us. Sometimes we would go meet him at his work to ask for money to buy food. He would get mad, irritated with us. We did not accept the separation very well. We were kids; we did not understand why they had separated, and we thought he was at

Milling, Meeting and Marketing

The engagement of local entrepreneurs in mechanized grain milling and related activities designed to meet women's needs is turning the village of Ribaue into a local hub of nutrition learning and experimentation. Launched in 2011, the "Fun Food Center" is helping to foster an environment conducive to sharing knowledge and socializing – a good starting point for social and economic empowerment. At the pilot site, Ana Couvinhas of TechnoServe has been instrumental in creatively building a modular multi-purpose point of sale for 'milling, meeting and marketing' – an integrated space that offers the service of grinding grain together with a array of new choices for the customer; choices that make customers progressively better-informed agents of family nutrition and well-being. Couvinhas' holistic and wide-ranging field experiments revealed a surprisingly strong appetite for a simple innovation – dried vegetable flavorings (totally natural, no additives) mixed with traditional Xima to produce a healthier "colored Xima." And, since food preparation is a major task for women in most rural communities, the introduction of new flavors, new colors, and presentation could be combined to create an informal shared learning curriculum. As a result, in attracting „early adopters“ to buy from Fun Foods Centers as well as mill their maize, social learning about nutrition and new techniques is now taking place. Patricia Ferrara, a Nampula-based industrial engineer and specialist in cognitive ergonomics sees the mill as a promising center of education, future collaboration and work force training: "food preparation is important because many of these women have had maybe one or two years of schooling and not much of an opportunity outside of working on a machamba or milling. But putting together ingredients, measuring, following instructions and a recipe and having an outcome is an interesting and important mental exercise. These processes really hold the potential to reach beyond the mill."



I want my children to become doctors, not stay with the mill. They won't stop studying because they have to manage the mother's mill, no. But they are not far from me. If there is a problem they help out. I have a son who understands a bit of mechanics. They help, but always the effort I do is to make them progress with their studies. It is almost a school what I have here at the mill. Usually children come here that do not even know how to count money. When I say "pay 6 meticaís," they give me 10, or when I say "pay 15 meticaís" they give me 25. It is a school. A class. It is necessary that I teach them these things. Yes, a lot of people send their child because they trust the child will go with 5 kilos and come back with 5 kilos and with the right change. And because people trust, they send children.

Women limit themselves as women. "She's a woman, so she cannot touch the iron." "She's woman, so she cannot carry bags." But I'm not ashamed of carrying bag. I wake up in the morning; I'm there, carrying bags. Yesterday, I grinded; personally grinded five bags. Alone. I was sweating. That is what I do. I do not limit myself according to common roles like other women do. I'd rather be working. Some do not manage to go beyond this accepted role because they limit themselves as women. For me there is no use to be clean while I do not have soap, while I do not have anything to eat. I'd rather work a lot. If there is a woman that is very close to me and is going through difficulties, because it is not any type of woman that I will go meddle, but when it is a woman that is close to me, I usually give advice. I have some friends that I always advise. Always crying, sitting in the same place. They have to stand up. Have to do something, at last get the hoe, weed. If you cannot weed, you have to find ways to survive, instead of staying seated and just crying. Tears will never bring anything. I usually advise, stand up there, put yourself standing, it is very important.

No man needs me, you know? They are afraid. They will come here. Each one says "I am going there to do what? To be a worker? Or, to be really a husband?" But well, I am not going to stop doing what I have to do because I want men, right? I'd rather put my work first. At least I can support my children.

"I need to work one day, I need to be independent. I need to study, work, and have my own independence. I am not going to depend on any man."

fault. Of course, he was guilty because he married another woman. We were angry. Today as an adult I understand better. There were always cultural issues, too. I am Macua. My

mother married when she was 16, and she had to live only to help my father. When they separated my mother was left with no money, no house, nothing.

Because he married another woman and I think my mother did not accept being the second wife and said "hey, I'm not going to accept, I'm leaving." She went back to her mother's house after being married for 20 years. I used to say to my mother "don't leave us with the stepmother, "please take us with you. My mother used to say, "I can't take you, if I take you I don't get to work, I don't have money –how am I going to support you, how am I going to pay for school, you have to stay with your father." My mother didn't take us. We stayed with the stepmother not because we wanted, but because my mother could not support us.

You see? Since I was a child I started believing "I need to work one day, I need to be independent. I need to study, work, and have my own independence. I am not going to depend on any man." When I was younger I wanted to become an agronomist or a vet. But I wanted to live far away, have a farm, live there, and do agriculture. In 2003, I moved to Maputo and many things happened in life and the dream ended. I tried many times to get in UEM but I did not manage. First, it was chemistry. But I am not good with chemistry. I ended up taking the course in UP in Administration and Education management and ended up in Human Resources.

Today, by a twist of irony or destiny I am here, working with women. I often say, "wow, these women need to become independent." Now, I am not badmouthing men. But our culture is like this; men always come first, they determine everything while women suffer and have to be submissive. If women had economic power, they could negotiate. Many women have husbands with more wives not because they accept it, but because they do not have an option.

People only pound maize because they do not have money. Things are changing. Traditionally, men would watch women sieving, washing clothes, ironing, pounding maize, preparing food, and all that. The men before used to feel they were all

Fátima Bolacha

I have to stay at my work. It doesn't help me to go commemorate there and come back home and the child does not have bread. Those who studied want women who studied too. My father always let me study, always.

The mill is a lot of work, and you have to bang your head a lot to keep that thing running. Because if today a screw breaks, I say I will replace tomorrow. Then another one will break, day after tomorrow. If the third one breaks, I'm already stopped, I cannot work anymore. So it is two, three days that I won't work because I have to run and buy pieces and meanwhile the machine is stopped. So in order to manage the business, if you see a screw or a nut that is broken you need to look immediately how to resolve this before something else breaks. You cannot wait and say "let's work on this later. Tomorrow I will do it." No. It has to be immediate. To have that you need to have a mental toughness and discipline. In our time, until third grade you already knew how to write well. And it is not that "so-so" writing. I mean, really writing. You already knew how to write letters and all that. But today we can see a student from the sixth, seventh or eighth grade that doesn't know how to do anything. At least I am proud of my level that I did during my time. Today, students can pick the days to go to school. Today you will not catch any student with a notebook saying he is studying, doing his homework. Never.

Well, really I would like to have a stand (barraca) here, to put it to work. Because there is a thing that is missing. I was thinking if I one day had the possibility of making a barraca here; buy some big freezers, those commercial ones. I would start going to the shore to buy fish there and bring back the first rate fish, not this carapau that goes around. Bring the first rate fish here and



Sinézia Pinto

powerful it was accepted. The culture was like this; that the woman has to work for men. But today people are changing their mindset. The men themselves recognize that it is a sacrifice to pound maize. For example, we recently went to a village where the men go to the maize mill, not the women. They do this because it is very far to the mill and the bags are heavy.



You have to carry the maize a long distance, sometimes up to 40 kilometers with 40 or 50 kilos on your head. Yes, 20 to 30 kilometers on average with 45 kilos on the head! It is too tough on women, so the men are the ones who do it. The men now have an idea about how much work it can be. They understand that if the women walk those kinds of distances they cannot also cook nor do much else. So the men end up going. I talked to a man, and he said "we want a mill because we discovered it is really a lot of sacrifice to see our woman pounding maize, during the whole day working, just pounding maize, it requires a lot of effort." Now they are already assuming that pounding maize is a sacrifice. They pound because they have no alternative.

Men know how to pound. In a family, up until a certain age, the work activities are organized. For example, the boys fetch wood, the women do other tasks. But during maize pounding time everybody pounds. My brothers also pounded with us. We went out together, went to parties, there was no woman or man. We all pounded. So the men know how to pound maize. They end up learning. But after a certain age they stop. They start feeling like men, and leave it all to the women.

"For "we want a mill because we discovered it is really a lot of sacrifice to see our woman pounding maize, during the whole day working, just pounding maize, it requires a lot of effort."

I think, in principle, the community lives like a family. Even if they are not so close people are generally united. In the case of maize, especially, we know that maize is the basic food, in Mo-

zambique and in the north of the country. The owners of the maize mills have a very important role in society. It is not just for the business they also have a social role. For example, there

Fátima Bolacha

resell it to people. The capacity that people currently bring, the quantities, are not enough. In one day it is gone. I would like to provide something that can stay longer, something that was reliable and continuous. In Ribaue there is only maybe goat meat or chicken meat, but if you wait until nine o'clock without going to the market, well, it will be gone. Not having these things is a problem and if I person could supply fish I know people would adhere.

For me excitement is to see my work going at a normal rhythm. Then I get very excited. But when there is not work, if there is a machine break down, I get sick just thinking how I will be today. I do not feel satisfied while there is no work. I am used to this noise. To me it is very normal. It really makes me excited. I feel happy with the noise. The day there is no noise I know on that day I will not have an easy time. There have been breakdowns. There are times that there is no energy. Such days for me are a bit sad. Someone can even show up and ask "Are you sick?" "I am not sick, but just from thinking about my work." That's why for me I don't feel good just waking up, just sitting and not doing anything. When I am away from home I also don't feel happy. When I go to the city I will stay a maximum of one week. I have to run and see my work. I don't feel happy to stay away for long from my work. I am in this rhythm.



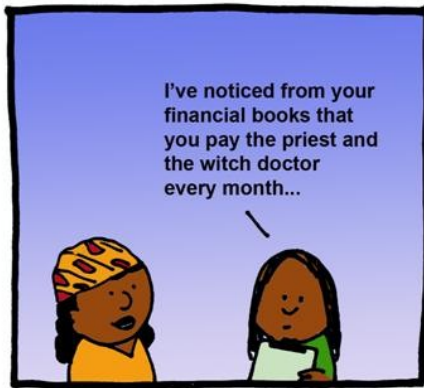
Sinézia Pinto

are times when people walk long distances, they come to the mill with, say, 20kg of maize but only have money to pay for milling 10kg. Mill owners have to make a decision and I think it is one of the things they do to keep clients. They will say "we will mill, but next time you come you will pay the other part." Or they negotiate. This for the community is important.

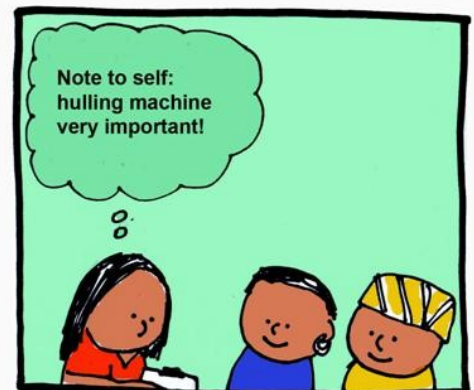
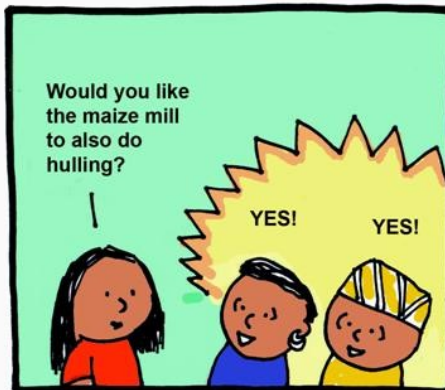
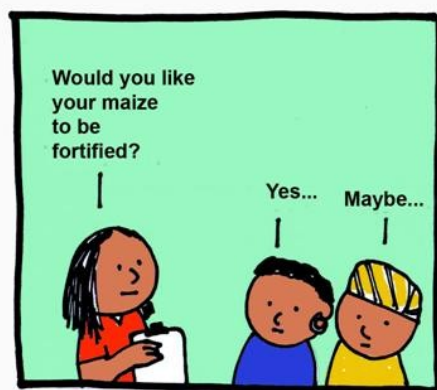
They are there to do business; they are also there to help people. Everybody knows the pain of pounding maize. The owners of the mills have this social role to help others, which is why people respect the owners. Not just for the business, but for the support they give to the community. If a particular owner does not help someone, people will stop going to that mill. They prefer to walk, even if the mill is close by. If people feel they are treated badly, they will go elsewhere.

Once someone owns a mill, the respect of the people increases. Increases a lot. I think because people start to see a common interest, a dependency between the two. The owner needs to gain clients and the clients also need the owner. They have to respect because they know they need each other. And it goes beyond just the milling. We know that people when they go to the maize mill sometimes stay a long time there, especially when it is high season. People like to socialize in one place and feel good. If the mill owner does not give importance to his clients and says "ok, come mill the maize and then go away," then there is no opening, no trust. People will go where they feel welcomed. It is not even the comfort of the space. It is a question of ambience, between the owners, the workers, and the clients.

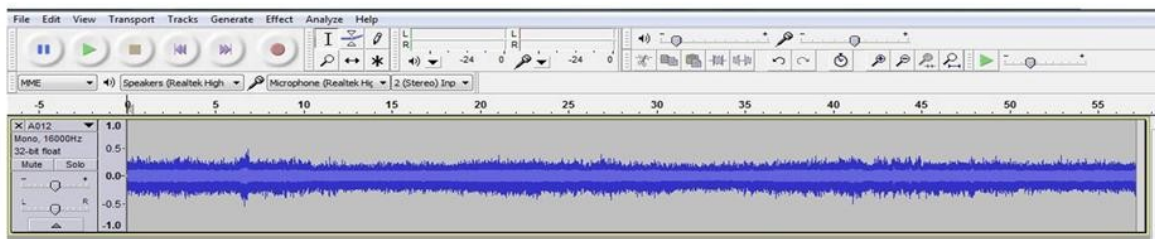
Prismo | Prism



COPYRIGHT BY CHAO 2012



COPYRIGHT BY CHAO 2012



Prismo | Prism

