Livaningo Strengthens Civil Rights in Mozambique's Forest Communities

Most of SustainableEnergy's international work takes place through partnerships with civil society organizations that have local knowledge of the areas in which they work and the issues the population faces. This is also the case in Mozambique, where SustainableEnergy collaborates with Livaningo, among others. Olinda Cuna, program coordinator at Livaningo, discusses one of the project programs that Livaningo has been a part of for the last five years. The project aims to strengthen small local communities in forest areas in central Mozambique.

By Charlotte Elisabeth Christiansen

As program coordinator at the environmental and civil society organization Livaningo, Olinda works on the project program "Natural Resource Management Committees in Sofala – Governance, Rights, and Climate Change."

In the program, which SustainbleEnergy helped initiate in 2017, Olinda and the rest of Livaningo work with five other civil society organizations in a consortium to support and strengthen 25

village-based natural resource groups in Sofala province. The goal is to raise awareness about the rights of these groups and the communities they belong to. The communities are all located in forest areas, and many are impoverished, making them highly dependent on the forest and other natural resources, as well as the income the forest can provide.

“We have a law that states that all communities in forest areas are entitled to receive 20 percent of the state's revenue from contracts made with external companies granted permission to cut trees and exploit the forest's resources in the area. But what we see is that these communities are not receiving the 20 percent. And often, they don’t even know they are entitled to it or how to organize themselves to claim it. So, we provide information and training to help them claim their rights,” explains Olinda, continuing:

“Additionally, we do advocacy work. We hold meetings with the government and present them with the evidence we’ve gathered in the field that shows the law, which is otherwise good, is not being implemented. Together, we try to solve the problem. At the same time, we work on getting our message out through the media. Here, we share positive stories with examples from provinces where the government is actively implementing the legislation. In this way, we can inspire authorities in other areas to do the same.”

This positive and collaborative approach has proven to be a strength, and, in Mozambique, it is unique to Livaningo and the consortium they work with. It has led to invitations from the authorities to participate in otherwise closed meetings where the legislation concerning village communities in forest areas is discussed. Moreover, their approach has led to positive results for the natural resource groups:

“In the five years that the program has been running, the authorities have become more open to discussing civil society issues, and they have started to recognize the existing legislation regarding forest communities. There is more transparency, and, in many places where the natural resource groups have an active bank account, the 20 percent of the state's revenue is actually allocated to the natural resource groups,” concludes Olinda.