

The partnership between Eni and AVSI in Mozambique, an interview with Laura Morisio, Country Director of the Volunteer Associations for International Service (full version)

Date: 3 October 2025

How do we begin to build a trusting and collaborative relationship with local institutions and communities?

To build a relationship of trust and collaboration with institutions and local communities, it is essential to start with active and conscious involvement from the very early stages of project conception. Transparency and clear communication of goals, activities, and processes are essential to forge a strong and enduring relationship. Listening to the community's needs through public consultations is crucial. We must hold meetings that foster the sharing of experiences and expectations, as well as recognise current solutions and pinpoint any barriers or things that are conducive to the project's goals. Local communities should be involved consistently and with respect for their traditions and local practices, fostering a sense of belonging and responsibility, which also ensures ownership of the project's outcomes after completion. Constant dialogue makes it possible to direct project activities towards actual needs, responding in a targeted manner and maintaining the flexibility to adapt objectives over time, according to changes in the situation. Additionally, the active involvement of institutions ensures that the project is integrated into local and national policies. Forging partnerships with local groups, community leaders, and the government strengthens the support network and ensures that activities are sustainable and accepted. The creation of networks, which include companies, NGOs and other institutions, allows for the sharing of resources, the avoidance of duplications, and the improvement of overall effectiveness. It is also essential to establish mechanisms for continuous feedback, to demonstrate that the community's opinions are valued and that it has the power to influence the decision-making process, generating positive changes in the long term.

How can an NGO and a large company leverage their respective skillsets and experiences?

An NGO and a company like Eni can pool their skills and experiences in ways that go beyond mere financial partnership, creating a deep and lasting social and community impact: a private company, with its resources, technology, and market access, can support practical work on-site; an NGO, drawing on its knowledge of social and environmental issues, can make sure efforts meet the actual needs of local communities. In the "COESÃO" project, we successfully merged these abilities by forming a strategic partnership that tackled local challenges through an approach adapted to community realities, and bolstered capacity with training and skill enhancement. Another successful example of collaboration is the stove improvement project, where the partnership between the NGO and the company enabled sustainable community development initiatives. In this instance, the company provided technical and financial support, while the NGO ensured the activities met the communities' needs, fostering awareness and encouraging more environmentally friendly behaviours. This cooperation has enabled the development of innovative solutions that meet both the immediate needs of communities and long-term sustainability requirements.

The collaborative approach between NGOs and large corporations therefore goes beyond the mere financial-economic aspect, as it includes a joint commitment to tackle local challenges in an integrated way, each respecting its own mission and "core business". Stemming from a cultural shift in the conception of enterprise, the private sector plays a role in development cooperation through active contributions to sustainable project design and execution. In doing so, they work alongside NGOs, whose local knowledge and presence mean they can identify and carry out activities that best meet community needs and do so most efficiently. Of course, it is the NGO's job to ensure that the interests of the community are safeguarded. The NGO recognises its responsibility in preventing any project developments that may have negative impacts on the population and the environment in which it lives. This combination of skills and resources enables the creation of more targeted, effective, and sustainable projects, capable of better meeting the needs of people and achieving common goals in a collaborative and innovative way.

What are the positive effects of the project you did with Eni?

The projects AVSI and Eni have delivered in Mozambique have significantly improved the lives of those involved, enhancing social and economic conditions and bolstered community cohesion. In the COESÃO project, we achieved many tangible goals, including teaching 75 women literacy and maths, so now they can read, write and do basic maths. This has given them the ability to improve their daily lives and to undertake sustainable income-generating activities. Female entrepreneurship and empowerment were fostered, boosting women's recognition of their worth and potential. Additionally, vocational training enabled around 60 young individuals to gain skills and begin apprenticeships, opening the doors to the labour market for them. Community activities like football leagues have also bolstered social cohesion by fostering interaction among various local groups. The positive impact of the "Improved Cookstoves Distribution" project in Pemba has been equally significant. The project has produced and distributed over 20,000 enhanced stoves, benefiting about 100,000 people. Besides cutting harmful emissions from conventional stoves, households made savings, boosted their buying power and enhanced their quality of life. The direct employment of around 30 local stove makers, including women, has enhanced their abilities and opened up new economic opportunities for them. Training in business and sales has contributed to the creation of new economic activities, and awareness of the environment and sustainability has reduced deforestation, generating positive impacts on the environment. Thanks to better stoves, women have cut down on fuel use and cooking time, freeing them to pursue economic activities like selling farm produce in local markets. This has increased their purchasing power, while also improving the nutrition and wellbeing of their families. The project has also boosted community spirit, as families united to enjoy the new technology's benefits, building a support network and encouraging adoption of better stoves through word of mouth and peer comparison.

In summary, these projects have brought about tangible benefits ranging from the improvement of the economic and social conditions of communities to the promotion of environmental sustainability, demonstrating how the alliance between NGOs and large corporations can generate a lasting positive impact.

Why is energy so important for building up a country's local communities?

Energy is a crucial factor for the development of local communities, as it improves living conditions and opens up new opportunities in various sectors. First and foremost, access to energy is essential to ensure education: it allows children to study at night, helping to cut illiteracy and foster social inclusion, including for adults who cannot study during the day. Energy also enhances community safety by enabling night-time movement and ensuring that vital services, like hospitals, can function around the clock. Energy underpins local economic development. It enables the creation of small businesses, such as those that require refrigerators or other equipment, and makes it easier to grow food in home gardens, improving the quality of nutrition. Furthermore, improved cookers cut the risk of smoke inhalation and help protect the environment by reducing deforestation. In countries like Mozambique, where just 33.2% of the population can access electricity, fair distribution of this resource remains a challenge. Rural communities, in particular, suffer from inequalities that compromise their economic development, health, and education. For this reason, it is essential to ensure access to energy in the most remote areas, allowing all families to benefit from the opportunities that arise from new technologies. Projects like the adoption of electric cookers, replacing traditional charcoal stoves, mark a significant move towards improved energy efficiency, enhanced air quality, and fewer respiratory illnesses. In summary, energy is the key to improve people's quality of life, promote economic growth and support social progress, helping to reduce inequality and creating development opportunities for all.