

## Policy Brief

Lessons on institutional support and strategic visibility from a capacity-building initiative with a women-led NGO

By Cecilia Laryea, 75inQ; Felipe Paludetto, 75inQ; Ana Catarina Simões

June 2025

## Executive Summary

NAFEZA (Núcleo das Associações Femininas da Zambézia), a women-led provincial platform with 26 years of history, plays an important role in promoting women's rights and social development in Zambézia, Mozambique. Despite its broad experience and strong local engagement, NAFEZA faces persistent challenges that limit its institutional growth and access to funding. From February to June 2025, 75inQ partnered with NAFEZA to strengthen monitoring and evaluation, internal documentation, visibility, and fundraising strategies. The project identified key areas of progress, including improved internal systems and initial steps towards donor engagement. However, limited infrastructure, weak digital access, language barriers, and lack of formal financial systems continue to constrain the organisation's potential. This note outlines the results of the intervention and presents practical policy recommendations for development partners, national authorities, and technical support providers.

### NAFEZA: Between legitimacy and isolation

NAFEZA was founded in 1997 as a coordinating platform for women-led associations in Zambézia Province, Mozambique. It now counts 36 member organisations across 13 districts and is involved in areas including health, education, political participation, and emergency response. While locally recognised and deeply embedded in the communities it serves, the organisation operates in a context of significant structural isolation.

Zambézia is geographically distant from Maputo, the capital and central hub for donors, embassies, and national decision-making. This distance limits NAFEZA's access to key institutional partners and funding opportunities. Internet access remains poor and inconsistent, and few staff have regular access to personal computers. These infrastructural constraints are compounded by language barriers—Portuguese is the dominant working language in Zambézia, and most of the staff lack English proficiency, which restricts participation in international opportunities that require English-based reporting and communication.

Prior to 2025, NAFEZA had little to no digital presence. While it had previously participated in

externally funded projects, these efforts were not documented or leveraged to build visibility or position the organisation for future funding. There was no systematic archiving of past initiatives, no donor database, and no internal system for capturing and communicating organisational results. Knowledge of international donors and their requirements was limited, and there were no established relationships with funding institutions based in Maputo or abroad.

This combination of weak infrastructure, language barriers, limited institutional memory, and absence from national platforms has contributed to a situation in which NAFEZA, despite its strong local roots and experience, remains largely unknown beyond its immediate geographic and operational sphere. Its legitimacy on the ground is not matched by recognition in the broader development landscape.

These challenges are not unique to NAFEZA. They reflect broader patterns affecting regional organisations operating outside of capital cities in low-resource settings. Addressing them requires sustained and appropriately targeted institutional support— not only for programmatic

delivery, but for the underlying systems that make long-term development engagement possible.

## 75inQ Intervention in Mozambique

The partnership between 75inQ and NAFEZA emerged from a shared understanding of the urgent need to bridge capacity gaps among regional women-led organisations that remain institutionally marginalised. NAFEZA's extensive community reach, multi-sectoral engagement, and leadership structure made it a suitable candidate for a targeted intervention. Despite a track record of grassroots impact, the organisation lacked the institutional tools and visibility needed to transition from project-based survival to long-term strategic positioning.

The intervention aimed to strengthen NAFEZA's operational base and provide the foundational systems necessary to increase credibility, attract diversified funding, and promote sustained engagement with national and international partners.

## Identified key limitations

During the course of the intervention, the team identified structural and operational challenges that continue to constrain NAFEZA's institutional capacity:

### 1. *Infrastructural and digital exclusion*

Zambézia's geographic isolation, compounded by poor internet connectivity and limited access to computers, restricts NAFEZA's ability to document, communicate, and operate efficiently. These limitations affect participation in virtual trainings, proposal submission processes, and regular digital engagement with partners.

### 2. *Language and donor communication gap*

While Portuguese is the working language, most international donors operate in English. NAFEZA's lack of English proficiency among staff constrains its capacity to apply for grants, draft donor reports, or participate in cross-border initiatives.

This disconnect reduces the organisation's visibility and engagement with international stakeholders.

### 3. *Absence of institutional memory and visibility*

Despite 26 years of action, NAFEZA has little documented evidence of its achievements. Projects were neither archived nor strategically communicated. Until 2025, the organisation had no website or consistent presence on social media. This eroded donor confidence and limited its ability to showcase past performance.

### 4. *Informal financial governance*

NAFEZA continues to operate without a dedicated institutional bank account or formal financial procedures. This undermines the transparency and accountability required by institutional funders and restricts access to grants demanding structured financial reporting.

These issues are interconnected. Language barriers limit access to funding opportunities; the absence of documentation weakens credibility; and poor digital infrastructure obstructs implementation of even low-cost solutions. Addressing them requires a combined approach to system-building and long-term investment.

## Laying Institutional Groundwork for Visibility and Growth

To address the core limitations identified, the team applied a targeted and adaptive support strategy focused on low-cost, realistic solutions tailored to NAFEZA's operating context. Progress was observed across four key domains:

- **Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)**

An adaptable M&E framework was introduced, along with hands-on training for 11 staff members. Templates for activity tracking, output monitoring, and qualitative reporting were created using simple tools such as Excel and



Word. These enabled the team to begin systematically documenting programme activities and outcomes.

- **Documentation and institutional memory**

A basic internal documentation system was established to group past and ongoing projects by theme and timeline. Staff were trained to file reports and financial records using a structured folder system on a shared drive. This was designed to enhance institutional memory and enable easier access to information for future fundraising and accountability.

- **Visibility and communications**

NAFEZA's digital presence was launched for the first time. Accounts were created on Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn, and content templates were designed to support regular posting. A website layout was completed and is pending registration. Visibility materials such as staff bios and programmatic infographics were also developed to support donor engagement.

- **Fundraising Capacity**

Staff participated in two sessions focused on fundraising tools and proposal writing. A donor mapping exercise was conducted, and four proposals were submitted with guidance from 75inQ. Two of these applications were shortlisted. A simple tracking tool was introduced to help the team record application deadlines, outcomes, and follow-up actions.

Despite these gains, structural constraints continue to affect implementation. Internet instability and limited hardware restrict remote collaboration. The absence of an English-speaking focal point hinders engagement with international partners. Financial systems remain informal, and a comprehensive fundraising strategy is still in development.

The outcomes show that targeted support, even over a short period, can lay essential foundations for improved governance, visibility, and resource mobilisation. However, further progress depends on long-term accompaniment and investment.

### **Ongoing Barriers to Institutionalisation**

While the support provided by 75inQ helped initiate critical shifts, the implementation of new systems is still at an early stage. Institutionalisation takes time, and the four-month window of engagement was not sufficient for full adoption. Staff participation remains uneven, and some tools introduced during the intervention have yet to be integrated into routine operations.

Moreover, several key outcomes, such as donor retention, long-term data reporting, and website activation, require extended timelines to demonstrate effectiveness. Digital limitations and linguistic constraints remain structural issues that cannot be resolved without further investment. As a result, the sustainability of these initial gains will depend on continued mentoring, periodic check-ins, and an environment that allows internal capacities to mature over time.

### **Policy Recommendations: Supporting Institutional Resilience in Low-Resource Contexts**

Organisations like NAFEZA can play a key role in community development, but their long-term impact depends on more than just short-term project results. Many of the tools introduced during this intervention, such as templates, digital platforms, and tracking systems, are still new and need time to become part of everyday practice. **Longer support timelines** are essential to give organisations time to test, adjust, and fully integrate these systems.

Basic operational tools like **stable internet, working computers, and cloud storage** should be

treated as necessary infrastructure, not as optional extras. Without them, even simple tasks such as filling forms, uploading reports, or joining meetings can become barriers to participation.

Language also matters. Since most funding opportunities are shared in English, **language support**, such as translation, basic English coaching, or pre-translated templates, can help local teams connect with donors and write stronger proposals.

In addition, donors and partners should support the creation of **simple internal systems**. This includes easy ways to track documents, manage small budgets, and store project records. These systems help organisations build trust with funders and work more independently over time.

Finally, organisations like NAFEZA need better **access to donor networks and visibility platforms**. Helping them connect to national forums, embassy networks, or development platforms, even occasionally, can make a long-term difference. Local organisations bring knowledge, trust, and experience. What they often lack is visibility. Supporting that visibility is a key step toward sustainable, inclusive partnerships.

## Conclusion

The 75inQ intervention with NAFEZA shows what is possible when local expertise is supported with practical, context-sensitive tools. In just a few months, the organisation made clear progress in documenting its work, engaging online, and applying for external funding. These achievements matter, especially in a setting where resources are limited and access to national and international platforms is uneven.

Still, these are early steps. Real institutional development needs time. It needs follow-up. And it needs trust in local actors to continue building

on what has started. The systems introduced are only beginning to take hold. Most are not yet embedded in daily routines, and key barriers—such as internet access, language gaps, and formal financial structures, remain unresolved. What this project has shown is that change is possible, even in short timeframes, when organisations are met with tools they can use, and support they can trust. For NAFEZA, the next phase will require ongoing engagement, particularly in areas where the groundwork has been laid but not yet stabilised.

For funders and partners working in similar regions, the lesson is straightforward: short-term projects can open doors, but long-term collaboration is what helps organisations walk through them. If well-supported, local actors like NAFEZA can move from isolation to full participation in the development space, not only as implementers, but as strategic partners.