

## THE 'LAB ISLAND': GOVERNANCE AND SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE IN SÃO TOMÉ AND PRÍNCIPE AND IN THE COUNTRIES OF THE PORTUGUESE-SPEAKING COMMUNITY

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### THE REGIONAL GOVERNANCE OF FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION IN THE CPLP

The member states of the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries (CPLP), a multi-regional entity formed by Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Portugal, São Tomé and Príncipe, and East Timor,<sup>2</sup> have a common history. As outlined by Sarmento, “for nearly four centuries in tropical environments on both sides of the Atlantic, the flow of people, plants, rituals and rhythms, shackled to the same social system, contributed to the formation of a complex system of habits and values”.<sup>3</sup> In African countries, especially, this hindered the development of family farms and led to many rural communities and millions of peasants being under-equipped and without access to natural and productive resources or public services to guarantee their access to adequate food. The same is true for the patrimonial nature of their national states and the low level of participation of civil society in the development of public policies for food security and nutrition.

However, when analyzing the trends in malnutrition levels in Portuguese-speaking countries, hunger is apparently being reduced. In 1990, there were about 38 million undernourished people in the CPLP, and currently the number is a little over 22 million. Recent data published in the FAO report on State of Food Insecurity in the World (SOFI) shows that Goal One of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG 1) has been achieved in several CPLP countries, such as Brazil, Angola, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Mozambique, and may be reached by some of the other countries before 2020.<sup>4</sup> This data, however, should be interpreted with some caution, given the weaknesses of the national statistical systems in most African countries. Moreover, several civil society actors have criticized the methodology used in the SOFI report.

While we cannot directly associate this development with the approval of the CPLP Food Security and Nutrition Strategy (ESAN-CPLP),<sup>5</sup> which was ratified in 2012 by the heads of State and government,<sup>6</sup> its creation is a step forward for the civil society in these countries. The governance mechanisms of this Strategy are inspired by the reform of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS),<sup>7</sup> and the recommendations for food and nutrition security by the Global Strategic Framework for Food Security and Nutrition (GSF).<sup>8</sup> The Council of Food and Nutrition Security (CONSAN-CPLP)<sup>9</sup> was created with strong participation by civil society through the internal Mechanism for the Facilitation of Civil Society Participation. This ministerial body is mandated to advise and make proposals to the CPLP heads of State and government. Despite repeated delays in its full function, its creation was an important victory. As the former Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Olivier De Schutter, wrote in a letter to the CONSAN-CPLP in 2012 to congratulate

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2 Equatorial Guinea was admitted as a member at the last meeting of CPLP heads of State and government in July 2014, despite strong opposition from civil society.

3 Sarmento, Francisco. “Condiciones Históricas da Construção da Segurança Alimentar no Atlântico: o Caso de Angola e São Tomé e Príncipe.” PhD diss., Universidade Federal Rural do Rio de Janeiro, 2008, p. 162. Rio de Janeiro: *Tese de Doutorado, Instituto de Ciências Sociais e Humanas, Universidade Federal Rural do Rio de Janeiro*, 2008, p.162.

4 FAO. *State of Food Insecurity in the World*. Rome: FAO, 2015. Available at: [www.fao.org/3/a-i4646e.pdf](http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4646e.pdf).

5 For more information, please visit: [www.cplp.org/id-2393.aspx](http://www.cplp.org/id-2393.aspx).

- 6 See Guideline 3.10 of the FAO. "States should support, including through regional cooperation, the implementation of national strategies for development, in particular for the reduction of poverty and hunger as well as for the progressive realization of the right to adequate food." *Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security (Right to Food Guidelines)*. Rome: FAO, November 2004. Available at: [www.fao.org/3/a-y7937e.pdf](http://www.fao.org/3/a-y7937e.pdf).
- 7 For more information on the CFS, please visit: [www.fao.org/cfs/cfs-home/en/](http://www.fao.org/cfs/cfs-home/en/). See also: De Schutter, Olivier. "Governing World Food Security: A New Role for the Committee on World Food Security." *Right to Food and Nutrition Watch* (2009): 13–15. Available at: [www.rtfn-watch.org/fileadmin/media/rtfn-watch.org/ENGLISH/pdf/Watch\\_2009/WATCH\\_2009\\_English.pdf#page=13](http://www.rtfn-watch.org/fileadmin/media/rtfn-watch.org/ENGLISH/pdf/Watch_2009/WATCH_2009_English.pdf#page=13).
- 8 The GSF is a set of guidelines for states, intergovernmental actors, the private sector, and for the CFS itself, on how to promote political coherence, based on human rights, towards the full realization of the right to adequate food. This framework is not legally binding. Instead, as a compromise by the member states, it calls on actors to adopt its principles, options and political foundations as relevant to their local specificities. For more information, please visit: [www.fao.org/cfs/cfs-home/global-strategic-framework/en/](http://www.fao.org/cfs/cfs-home/global-strategic-framework/en/).
- 9 For more information on the CONSAN-CPLP, please visit: [www.cplp.org](http://www.cplp.org). For more information on the Mechanism for the Facilitation of Civil Society Participation, please visit: [www.msc-consan.org/](http://www.msc-consan.org/).
- 10 Communication of the former United Nations Special Rapporteur for the Right to Food sent to the IX Conference of Heads of State and Government of the CPLP, July 20, 2012. Available in Portuguese at: [www.actuar-acd.org/uploads/5/6/8/7/5687387/declar\\_cimeira\\_cplp\\_portugues.pdf](http://www.actuar-acd.org/uploads/5/6/8/7/5687387/declar_cimeira_cplp_portugues.pdf).
- 11 For more information, please visit: [www.redsan-cplp.org/](http://www.redsan-cplp.org/).
- 12 For more information, please visit: [www.pccplp.org/](http://www.pccplp.org/).
- 13 The other two pillars are governance and social protection.
- 14 Sarmento, Francisco. Presentation to the First Forum on Family Farming and Food Security in the CPLP, São Tomé and Príncipe, March 16, 2015.
- 15 According to 2008 data, men are the estate owner in 68.8% of cases, but women now have access to land due to agrarian reform. For more information please see: Muniz, José Norberto. *Diagnóstico Socioeconómico do Meio Rural em São Tomé e Príncipe*. Viçosa: Universidade Federal de Viçosa, 2008.
- 16 The best known is the ProSAVANA program in Mozambique. For more information, please visit: [www.prosavana.gov.mz/index.php?num\\_lang=2](http://www.prosavana.gov.mz/index.php?num_lang=2). However, there are other initiatives in the country, particularly in the Lúrio valley region. In other countries, such as Guinea-Bissau and Angola for example, this trend is also a reality, although it is not as well-known at the international level.
- 17 *Supra* note 4.

it on its first meeting, "the right to food must be understood not only as a symbol for the fight against hunger and malnutrition... It is an operational tool. It improves the effectiveness and sustainability of interventions in the area of food security."<sup>10</sup>

With this end in view, civil society has sought to assume a strategic role at the regional level and in appropriate spaces gradually created in different countries through the establishment of national councils for food and nutrition security. This important initiative includes the CPLP Regional Network for Food and Nutrition Security (REDSAN-CPLP), which is composed of 500 organizations and civil society networks,<sup>11</sup> and the CPLP Peasants Platform, which brings together organizations from all the countries and represents about 17 million peasants and family producers.<sup>12</sup>

## FAMILY FARMING AND THE PROMOTION OF BIODIVERSITY

One of the priority issues for the CPLP's civil society is to promote family farming, one of the three pillars of the ESAN-CPLP.<sup>13</sup> Data presented by Sarmento illustrates the scope of the issue:<sup>14</sup> peasants cultivate small areas from 0.2 to 18 hectares, a figure that varies from country to country.<sup>15</sup> The levels of technology used by these farmers also differ, and they are responsible for producing 70–100% of the food in most countries, directly or indirectly feeding more than 45 million people. For this reason, the institutional recognition of family farmers and their improved access to natural resources, credit, and social technologies is crucial. This is particularly important in light of the trend in African CPLP countries to expand the agribusiness model, which makes intensive use of means of production and is based on working large tracts of land.<sup>16</sup>

The last meeting of the CONSAN-CPLP's Working Group on Family Farming was held in Rome in June 2015, on the sidelines of the 39<sup>th</sup> session of the FAO Conference. The participants approved the start of a process to develop joint guidelines for the promotion of family farming in the CPLP. This was an important victory for civil society. It will, of necessity, be a long-term exercise and part of a broader struggle for the sustainable use of biodiversity in production systems.

## SÃO TOMÉ AND PRÍNCIPE: THE "LAB ISLAND"

São Tomé and Príncipe, a relatively small country of about 1,000 km<sup>2</sup>, has a wealth of experience regarding the promotion of family farming and biodiversity within the CPLP, providing a source of institutional knowledge and good practices.

The country's economic and social weaknesses, which include limited access to infrastructure and basic services, are compounded by disturbing statistics on nutrition: 10% of the population suffers from insufficient food intake, while another 12% are within the lower threshold. Nevertheless, 2015 FAO data indicates that the number of undernourished people in the country has decreased by 51.4% since the beginning of the 1990s, and that the proportion of undernourished people of the total population has decreased by 71.2%.<sup>17</sup> These performance figures should not be a surprise, seeing that the development of family farming arose in the midst of a land reform program carried out in the 1990s, under which land was publicly owned and the economy was based on the exploitation of natural resources and biodiversity.

Family farmers, organized in cooperatives, knew how to reconvert the production of cocoa and coffee, integrated in agroforestry systems, redirecting it to the international organic food market, which has significantly raised their income.<sup>18</sup> It should be noted that despite the uncertain institutional characteristics of the country, the last ministers of agriculture and rural development were family farmers and always maintained a relationship of dialogue with civil society.

On the positive side of the ledger, São Tomé and Príncipe has unique capabilities related to the use of its rich biodiversity.<sup>19</sup> This is a source of healthy food and important raw materials for various industries and natural medicine.<sup>20</sup> It is also a sustainable tourist destination, but at the same time there are private investment projects in the country that threaten or may become a threat to this trend. One example is the company Agripalma's investment in palm oil production, with a projected plantation of around 4,500 hectares.<sup>21</sup> A less obvious threat lies in the ecotourism projects developed for high-income segments, mainly on the Island of Príncipe. Concessions already cover approximately one-third of the island, which was designated as a biosphere reserve by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2013.

Civil society, specifically through the Civil Society Network for Food and Nutrition Security of São Tomé and Príncipe (RESCSAN-STP), will focus on certain goals in its role on the National Council for Food and Nutrition Security, which is in the process of being formed in the country. This focus will be on the fight against the 'privatization of biodiversity' and is in favor of the development of legal instruments that allow the sharing of benefits with traditional communities. This is in line with the Nagoya Protocol for access to genetic resources and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from their use.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, the new governance of food security and nutrition in São Tomé and Príncipe and in the CPLP brings issues related to access to natural resources and support for family farmers to the fore in the development of sustainable production models to fight malnutrition. This is encouraging news for the sub-region, and Africa in general.

18 According to the heads of the cooperatives, family farmers are earning between €200 and €500 per month when farming areas between two and five hectares. Data presented at the first Forum of Family Farming and Food Security in the CPLP, São Tomé and Príncipe, March 16, 2015.

19 The country possesses a unique biological richness and includes various types of ecosystems and endemic species, particularly birds, amphibians and plants. The rainforest of São Tomé and Príncipe is ranked number two among 75 African forests in terms of bird conservation. The flora in the country is also remarkable, with more than a hundred endemic species.

20 For a thorough presentation of plants with medicinal value in the country, see: Madureira, Maria do Céu. "Etnofarmacologia, a Medicina Tradicional Redescoberta." *Esporo – Revista de Informação Sobre Desenvolvimento Agrícola e Rural nos Países ACP* 86 (2008). Available at: [spore.cta.int/pt/component/content/article/10-spore/dossier/10/5271-alias-4-605](http://spore.cta.int/pt/component/content/article/10-spore/dossier/10/5271-alias-4-605).

21 For more information on the impact of Agripalma (part of the SOCFIN Group) in São Tomé and Príncipe, please see: World Rainforest Movement (WRM). "São Tomé and Príncipe: Popular Resistance Succeeds in Curbing the Expansion of Industrial Oil Palm Plantations." *Monthly Bulletin* 193 (2013): 17–18. Available at: [wrm.org.uv/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Bulletin193.pdf#page=17](http://wrm.org.uv/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Bulletin193.pdf#page=17). SOCFIN Group was contacted with a request for a reaction on the information included in this article on July 15, 2015. In their reply of July 22, 2015, they claim that Agripalma was created by the Government of São Tomé and Príncipe to ensure economic development, to achieve self-sufficiency in vegetable oil and to serve as a buffer against "uncontrolled invasion to the national park", and that its activities can contribute to food security. It was also mentioned that Agripalma is operating on 2,000 ha and that "rehabilitation and planting was on non-occupied land", for which "there was no contestation by farmers".

22 Convention on Biological Diversity. *Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization*. Montreal: Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 2011. Available at: [www.cbd.int/abs/text/default.shtml](http://www.cbd.int/abs/text/default.shtml).