

Roots of Conflicts in Guinea-Bissau: The voice of the people



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This is a translation from the Portuguese original.

Cover page photo: Voz di Paz

About Voz di Paz

“Voz di Paz – Iniciativa para Consolidação da Paz” (Voice of Peace – An initiative for the consolidation of Peace) is a Bissau-Guinean non-governmental organization (NGO) based in the capital city, Bissau.

The mission of Voz di Paz is to support local actors, as well as national and regional authorities, to respond more effectively to the challenges of consolidating peace and contribute to preventing future conflict. The approach promotes participation, strengthens local capacity and accountability, and builds national ownership. It enables those involved in the process to participate in defining the problem and finding solutions for a more peaceful future. To understand root-causes of conflict, participatory action research is used as a tool and the basis for policy reflection, analysis and action.

About the programme Voz di Paz

Voz di Paz is also the name of the Interpeace and Voz di Paz (the organization) joint programme that was initiated in 2007. The aim of the programme is to make a tangible contribution to the consolidation of peace and stability in Guinea-Bissau as pre-requisites for sustainable development. The programme seeks to remove the obstacles to peace in Guinea-Bissau by encouraging dialogue and by engaging with a wide range of actors, influential persons and ordinary citizens throughout the country.

In 2008-09 the programme carried out country wide consultations on the root-causes of conflicts. The consultations were carried out in 38 administrative areas in all regions of Guinea-Bissau and aimed at identifying the peace-related issues as seen by Bissau-Guineans. The key findings are summarized in this report.

About Interpeace

Interpeace is an international peacebuilding organization, headquartered in Switzerland with offices and programmes in 16 countries. It was created by the United Nations (UN) in 1994 as the “War Torn Societies” project to assist societies divided by violent conflict to build sustainable peace. It became independent in 2000 and today can work either as an NGO or through an innovative operational partnership with the UN called the Joint Programme Unit for United Nations / Interpeace Initiatives (JPU). Interpeace currently supports peacebuilding programmes in: Burundi, Cyprus, Guinea-Bissau, Israel, Liberia, Palestine, Rwanda, the Somali Region, Timor-Leste, Youth Gangs in Central America (Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador), and has a thematic programme on post conflict constitution-building. www.interpeace.org



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Acknowledgements

Since 2007, Voz di Paz has been working to engage Bissau-Guineans across the country and at all levels to define priorities for peace.

Special thanks go to all the Bissau-Guineans who made time to travel and to take part in the consultations in all the regions across the country. Their ideas, views, stories, interest and unique analysis of the current obstacles that stand in the way of peace provide the substance for this report.

The individuals from the programme and the members of the Regional Spaces for Dialogue played a key role in making this initiative happen. Their hard work, reflections and tenacity have been key to the success of Voz di Paz programme, the analysis and the production of this report.

Without the support and guidance from the National Orientation Committee, Interpeace and The Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, this important step would not have been possible.



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GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS

ALTERNAG	Guinean Association for the Study of Alternatives
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ECOMOG	Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group
FLING	Struggle Front for the National Independence of Guinea
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PAIGC	African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde
PRS	Social Renovation Party
RSD	Regional Space for Dialogue
SSR	Security Sector Reform
UN	United Nations
UNIOGBIS	United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Photo: Voz di Paz

Voz di Paz: the need for a new approach

There have been numerous initiatives undertaken by a variety of organizations which seem to promote peace. Typically run by youth, women and religious leaders, these initiatives have played an important role in providing channels for peace-related activities.

However, many have been short-term in nature and focus on immediate solutions. Two key components have been missing in these more ad hoc initiatives:

- 1) The serious examination of the root-causes of conflict; and
- 2) The building and maintenance of links and trust across and between all levels of society.

There is a need for a sustained and structured process
aimed at instilling in the fabric of society
the capacity to recognize and understand issues fully,
and to take actions to achieve possible solutions
in a non-violent manner.

As a prerequisite for durable post-conflict development and the prevention of future violent conflicts, a new approach was necessary to support the consolidation of peace and stability in Guinea-Bissau.

In 2007, the Voz di Paz programme was created to meet these challenges. The programme draws its relevance from the urgent need to establish a broad dialogue among the Bissau-Guineans, whose major conflicts in recent years have been exacerbated, if not caused by the lack of dialogue.

From this perspective, Voz di Paz has been carrying out a programme with the following objectives:

- Create a framework for national dialogue;
- Develop an inclusive process to identify:
 - the deep-rooted causes of recurrent conflicts in the country; and
 - the threats to peace in the short and medium term;
- Contribute to creating an environment conducive to conflict prevention and management;
- Contribute to the development of good governance that is sensitive to peace consolidation issues;
- Contribute to reducing the tensions among communities, regions and between political and social actors;
- Strengthen the capacities for dialogue at the national and local level to reduce the risks of conflicts;
- Stimulate the use of Participatory Action Research in the search for lasting solutions;
- Contribute to improving relations between the Defence and Security Forces and the general population through a process of dialogue and reflection; and
- Develop lessons and practical tools for peacebuilding in Guinea-Bissau and the sub-region.

This new approach was deemed necessary following in-depth observation of the country's fragility and chronic instability. There is ample evidence from recent events showing that the root-causes of conflict remain non-explicit or unexplored, and continue to undermine the foundations of peaceful co-existence in Guinea-Bissau.

The Voz di Paz approach is holistic in that it combines short, medium and long-term perspectives in a multidisciplinary exploration of the historical, social, political, economic and cultural roots of the conflicts.

Using Participatory Action Research (PAR), the process provides for an active and inclusive participation of the actors involved in or victims of the conflicts, the very people who are also the potential builders of a lasting peace. This methodology was originally developed in order to render research more applicable to the needs of those being studied, and encourage them to actively participate in the research design, methodology and projected outcome.

Key principles of the programme

The programme seeks to create and broaden a dialogue on the issues and obstacles that are deemed key to achieving sustainable peace. Its approach focuses as much on "how" the programme is implemented as on "what" is implemented: the techniques and the tools.

Underpinning the programme are five key areas of focus:

- **Inclusiveness.** A guarantee to not exclude any significant actors in order to promote and ensure participation of socio-political stakeholders. Participants come from the general population, from all corners and regions of the country, paying special attention to their role and/or stake in the peacebuilding process.
- **Participatory Action Research.** The dialogues, debates and proposals for possible solutions to the obstacles to peace are based on facts, objective and verifiable research and knowledge.
- **Nationally owned.** All levels of people and groups participate in identifying and defining problems and solutions that they will ultimately implement, taking full ownership and responsibility for the process.
- **Politically impartial.** Avoiding partisan politics, the programme ensures that it plays an impartial role in the identification of national issues and the facilitation of the dialogue with all stakeholders.
- **Respect for diversity.** Ensuring the participation of the widest possible range of actors, even opposing groups, promotes tolerance and peaceful dialogue.

Phase 1: Defining the framework for a national dialogue on the root-causes of conflict and main obstacles to lasting peace (2007-2009)

The consultation process

Between 2007-2009, Voz di Paz engaged Bissau-Guineans from across the country in a peace mapping exercise to identify the major peacebuilding challenges in the country. Over 3000 people participated in these consultations, representing civil society at a local level, the State at a community level and members of the Regional Spaces for Dialogue put in place by Voz di Paz. Journalists from community radio stations also took part. The programme in addition, carried out consultations with over 1000 members of the security forces (military and police) and some 200 members of the Bissau-Guinean diaspora in Lisbon.

All consultation meetings initially started with a brief presentation of the Voz di Paz programme. The team and participants then collectively identified expectations, which helped build a positive environment for debating and exchanging ideas and reflecting on the challenges facing the nation. The participants went through various stages of reflection individually and in different groups.

After extensive discussions convergent ideas and themes were consolidated and ranked by a single scoring system. Once the list of obstacles to peace had been identified and a hierarchy established, group discussions focused on solutions and the specific contribution each social professional group could make towards the consolidation of peace.

At the end of the meetings the work done by different groups was presented in a plenary session which brought together their findings on the different views on peace-related issues in the country.

The findings

This process of public consultation took place in 38 administrative areas and in all ten regions of the country. The results (obstacles to peace) were grouped initially into 17 different themes.

These were then structured into four broad categories by the Voz di Paz team to facilitate presentation and discussion. These are: national level issues, regional issues, crosscutting issues, and finally emerging issues.

A BRIEF PRESENTATION OF THE 17 THEMES, BY CATEGORY	
NATIONAL ISSUES	
1. Ineffective State institutions and bad governance	The weakening of the State appears to the Guinean population to be the source of many problems. This sentiment cuts across all social classes and geographical regions. The manifestations of the problem vary according to region, and the perception of the problems themselves also changes according to social class. For the majority of people consulted, the State structures are absent especially at the local level where administrative services are virtually nonexistent. This situation has created a power vacuum enabling disorder to prevail in all administrative sectors.
2. Poverty	Poverty is one of the issues raised most often as a factor causing conflict and affecting social harmony. The perceptions of poverty and the hierarchy

	<p>of its causes vary from one region to another. But generally, the people consulted underlined that poverty is a major cause of tension and conflict in Guinea-Bissau. The notion of poverty is perceived as it relates to food security or insecurity. In all of the consultations almost all participants agreed that hunger was the major cause of concern and discontent.</p>
3. Poor administration of justice	<p>Justice is considered by participants as the foundation for peace between citizens. However, the poor functioning and administration of the judicial system, combined with issues of corruption and widespread impunity, has become a stumbling block to sustainable peace.</p>
4. Political and institutional instability	<p>Many participants felt that there is a poor understanding of the pluralistic system that was chosen in the 90's, which is at the root of the country's instability. The proliferation of political parties that have no clear or real platform also adds to the challenge. Pervasive corruption and the mismanagement of public assets were also seen as disruptive and creating resentment that has led to episodes of conflicts.</p>
5. Poorly managed legacy of the independence struggle	<p>Many of the divides today date back to the actions and roles of different individuals and groups who "fought" and the "others" who did not fight during the struggle for independence from Portugal. The hatred towards those who violently retaliated shortly after independence against individuals who were considered to be on "wrong side of history", is still felt today.</p>

REGIONAL ISSUES

6. Insecurity of people and property	<p>Insecurity is rampant throughout the country. At the local level, many participants felt that the proliferation of arms in the country has transformed, for example, livestock theft into a national and organized phenomenon. Theft was also linked to ethnicity and seen as deteriorating the relationships between different ethnic groups. Drug-trafficking and smuggling of weaponry in the border areas were also widely mentioned as increasingly posing risk to the country's insecurity.</p>
7. Mismanagement of land and resources	<p>Access to land, its use, its management, its ownership and its transfer has become a source of conflict. The traditionally collective tribal and/or family asset is now often transformed for commercial or personal use and that is causing endless feuds and clashes, not only between families and communities but also with traditional authorities and the modern legal system. Deforestation and disputes over natural resources from the river and ocean were also cited as creating a challenging situation.</p>
8. Harmful socio-cultural practices	<p>This topic came up repeatedly in all the regions and in various forms: female genital mutilation, witchcraft, child marriage and forced marriage, kidnapping of women, Koranic schools fuelling child trafficking, exuberant funerals, etc. Cultural clashes between the religious vs. secular, old vs. new, were at the root of many of the local conflicts cited by participants.</p>

CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES	
9. Corruption	This issue is widespread and pervades all aspects of life, but especially at the level of the political elite. Participants pointed to this phenomenon as one of the chief factors of resentment, instability and perpetual crisis in Guinea-Bissau. Participants also felt that corruption affects the poor by diverting resources and holding back development.
10. Weak culture of dialogue	The frequency of reactive political violence suggests that conflicts are also rooted in the absence of dialogue between Bissau-Guineans. The pervasive culture of <i>matchundade</i> (macho culture) was cited as the reason why citizens prefer to engage in physical and brutal violence rather than dialogue to resolve conflicts, whether over a small or large scale issue.
11. Loss of values	The loss of values and morals was highlighted as a common source of conflict between communities and families. Elders especially felt that generational change and the migration of rural youth to large cities has an implication on local labor availability and the future of agriculture. Other participants expressed concern over the spread of pornography and rise in drug and alcohol consumption.
12. Injustices and social exclusion	There was an agreement among participants that social injustice has increased since independence and highlighted divisions within society, resulting in frustration, anger and jealousy and therefore fuelling conflict. Social exclusion and marginalization was particularly felt in remote areas, fuelling resentment and a sense of injustice. This was especially the case in the Sector of Boé and Bijagós Islands.
EMERGING ISSUES	
13. Religious intolerance	Religious intolerance is a recent development in Guinea-Bissau. Participants said that it takes different forms, such as ignorance or lack of information and understanding about other religions and their practices. However, the majority indicated that growing religious tensions were above all related to its appearance in political affairs.
14. Human desertification	Precarious local conditions, limited opportunities and the desertification of the land have triggered a massive rural exodus to large cities, especially of young men. One impact of this exodus on rural communities is a growing shortage of labour in the agricultural sector. Participants indicated that this phenomenon has important implications for the future of agriculture in the various regions of the country and is threatening their traditional livelihoods.
15. Tribalism	In the name of independence, cultural and tribal differences were “denied” for many years. However, today tribalism is rooted in the country’s politics and is creating new tensions as access to resources and power is limited to the tribe that holds the majority. Tribal identity and

	religion are also becoming a phenomenon not easily separated as frustrations and misunderstandings are provoking radicalism and posing a threat to national cohesion.
16. Drug-trafficking	Drug-trafficking is considered by many as the single biggest threat to the stability of Guinea-Bissau. The slow progress in developing the rule of law combined with little human and financial resources for law enforcement has made tackling the issue extremely challenging. The limited resources make it difficult for law enforcement to compete with drug organizations making hundreds of millions of dollars per year. Consequently, the law enforcement personnel are easily bribed.
17. Co-existence between indigenous and immigrant populations	This issue, distinct from Tribalism, relates to disputes between the indigenous population and migrants that have come from neighbouring countries. With shrinking resources and few services, competition over resources has created growing tensions and led to hostility between the native population and newcomers.

Roots of Conflicts in Guinea-Bissau: The voice of the people

This report, originally in Portuguese, is a translation and synthesis of the ideas, views, and perspectives of the participants who took part in the consultations on the obstacles to peace and the geography and causes of conflict in Guinea-Bissau. The report also contains testimonies and statements made by participants as a way of illustrating important issues and concerns. The report is structured around four categories and the formulation of issues that came out of the consultations.

A supporting video documentary captures the essence of the discussions, emotions and conveys the importance of the issues that are at the heart of the interests of Bissau-Guineans.

It is hoped that the dialogue that was created by the programme will continue and will serve decision makers in their efforts to undertake and implement the needed reforms that ultimately will support the peace and reconciliation process.

Phase 2: The validation process and formulating solutions for Peace (2009-2011)

Originally the programme had intended to organize a national meeting in March 2009, to validate the findings of the consultation phase. However, given the complications and the fragile political environment at that time, a regional level validation process was organized instead.

This idea was something new and the process turned out to be a success. In fact, the regional process encouraged greater participation of the people in the identification and validation of the causes of conflict. The 13 validation meetings involved over 6000 Bissau-Guineans from across the country. It gave the team an opportunity to compare the way ideas about the conflict differ between the various regions and groups.

The purpose of the validation process was to discuss and choose four main priorities most relevant for the consolidation of peace. These turned out to be:

1. Ineffective State institutions and bad governance;
2. Poverty;
3. Poor administration of Justice; and
4. Tribalism.

The next volume of this report will analyze the findings of this validation process.

The Voz di Paz programme will now concentrate on the four priority issues identified during the validation process in order to formulate broadly based solutions contributing to the consolidation of peace. This approach will continue to yield both a broadly debated body of research and knowledge on issues critical to the consolidation of peace as well as develop practice and experience with consensus-building at national and local levels, thus building actor ownership of the process.

In the next phase, the programme will establish Working Groups, for each of the 4 priority issues. These will be charged with the identification and articulation of solutions relevant to the selected priorities. The conclusions of the Working Groups will be presented, discussed and validated in 2011.

INTRODUCTION



Photo: Voz di Paz

1. Background: The legacy of historical cycles of violence

Over the last four decades the history of Guinea-Bissau has been marked by periodic violence. As a result of this succession of violent events the country has particular characteristics: politically, socially and culturally. Severe economic challenges and extreme poverty are also consequences of this history of violence.

The birth of Guinea-Bissau as an independent nation was the result of 11 years of war against foreign domination. This war of national liberation, which lasted from 1963 to 1974, had profound after-effects on the economy, infrastructure, loss of lives and social and political relations.

The subsequent process of national reconstruction has been difficult, made more so by the international context which brought with it ideological struggles between capitalism and communism.

The purges that followed the liberation of the country added to
the wounds of the war itself.
In turn the excesses of the “winners”
fanned the resentments of those who lost,
especially the local “assistants” of the former colonial system.

The African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) took control of the country in 1974 after the withdrawal of the Portuguese administration and its military.

The PAIGC were severe in repressing civilian and military groups denoted as “assistants” of the colonial domination. These actions remain controversial to this day: the motives, methods, extent, relevance, usefulness and purpose are all questioned today. But it was 20 years before people were able to openly express their deep resentment as ‘freedom of expression’ became the norm in the 1990s. Before that time, opinions had been stifled as the PAIGC had exclusively dominated the political arena.

The struggle for power that marked the early years of independence led to a long and continuing course of violence. Several cycles of repression followed in the wake of accusations of attempted coups.

The most significant repression took place between 1985 and 1986 when much of the military hierarchy was killed. The president at the time, President Joao Bernardo Vieira, felt that the Balantas were trying to dominate the government so there was a period of intense repression against this ethnic group. Known as the “17th October Case”, it was massive, sudden and brutal in character with cruel fates reserved for certain victims. It had an ethnic angle as most of the victims were from the Balanta ethnic group which had been strongly represented across all ranks in the armed forces. Many of them had played key roles or participated in the national liberation struggle.

This repression caused deep resentment which would remain embedded in large segments of the population during the following decades.

In 1998 another large scale crisis of violence broke out. The “7th June War” lasted for 11 months, putting former fellow soldiers in a face to face fratricidal conflict that lasted until 7 May 1999. This political-military crisis, unequalled in the history of independent Guinea-Bissau, left many Bissau-Guineans extremely bitter.

The war started as a rebellion. It was led by Brigadier Ansumane Mané supported by a small group of followers. It was apparently caused by an unclear case of weapons trafficking for the Casamance independence movement. The crisis spread and the country was on the brink of a civil war with foreign troops from Senegal and Guinea-Conakry intervening as they supported President Joao Bernardo Vieira. Troops from the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) and from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) were also involved.

There were thousands of deaths, much of the infrastructure of the capital was destroyed and efforts to restore economic growth after years of poor performance were disrupted. Poverty became even more widespread and the fragile social equilibrium that had been painstakingly built was broken.

This war severely weakened State institutions and instilled a chronic political instability that has continued to feed the whole process of disintegrating State institutions, the nation's economy and society. It also split the defence and security forces into opposing factions which have since fought in subsequent violent episodes.

The war had restored the military as a prominent political agent. As a result, over the following 10 years the nation experienced successions of military-political crises including coups d'état, attempted coups d'état, uprisings and assassinations.

This long series of violent events has left the country in a state of perpetual destabilization. The chaotic route followed in the decade since the war has clearly illustrated the difficulty of finding a road to peace.

2. The Voz di Paz programme: The need for a new approach

GUINEA-BISSAU FACES SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES

Today the country faces significant challenges that are a direct result of the historical and continuing cycles of violence.

- High poverty rates due to poor economic performance;
- A State organized around strategies of material survival and personal gain;
- Poor governance that contributes to violence, poverty and weakening of the social fabric;
- Endless conflicts between groups to control the limited State resources;
- Weak institutions affected by political dysfunction;
- Recurrent intervention by the military into politics;
- A general insecurity that could have disastrous consequences for the sub-region;
- A political arena infected by ethnic affinities that undermine the balanced mosaic of people and cultures; and
- An absence of constructive dialogue.

There have been numerous initiatives undertaken by a variety of organizations which seem to promote peace. Typically run by youth, women and religious leaders, these initiatives have played an important role in providing channels for peace-related activities.

However, many have been short-term in nature and focus on immediate solutions. Two key components have been missing in these more ad hoc initiatives:

- 1) The serious examination of the root-causes of conflict; and
- 2) The building and maintenance of links and trust across and between all levels of society.

There is a need for a sustained and structured process
aimed at instilling in the fabric of society
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In 2007, the Voz di Paz programme was created to meet these challenges. The programme draws its relevance from the urgent need to establish a broad dialogue among the Bissau-Guineans, whose major conflicts in recent years have been exacerbated, if not caused by the lack of dialogue. From this perspective, Voz di Paz has been carrying out a programme with the following objectives:

- Create a framework for national dialogue;
- Develop an inclusive process to identify the deep-rooted causes of recurrent conflicts in the country and threats to peace in the short and medium term;
- Contribute to creating an environment conducive to conflict prevention and management;
- Contribute to the development of good governance that is sensitive to peace consolidation issues;
- Contribute to reducing the tensions among communities, regions and between political and social actors;
- Strengthen the capacities for dialogue at the national and local level to reduce the risks of conflicts;
- Stimulate the use of Participatory Action Research in the search for lasting solutions;
- Contribute to improving relations between the Defence and Security Forces and the general population through a process of dialogue and reflection; and
- Develop lessons and practical tools for peacebuilding in Guinea-Bissau and the sub-region.

This new approach was deemed necessary following in-depth observation of the country's fragility and chronic instability. There is ample evidence from recent events showing that the root-causes of conflict remain non-explicit or unexplored, and continue to undermine the foundations of peaceful co-existence in Guinea-Bissau¹.

The Voz di Paz approach is holistic in that it combines short, medium and long-term perspectives in a multidisciplinary exploration of the historical, social, political, economic and cultural roots of the conflicts.

Using Participatory Action Research (PAR), the process provides for an active and inclusive participation of the actors involved in or victims of the conflicts, the very people who are also the potential builders of a lasting peace. This methodology was originally developed in order to render research more applicable to the needs of those being studied, and encourage them to actively participate in the research design, methodology and projected outcome.

3. Key principles of the programme

The programme seeks to create and broaden a dialogue on the issues and obstacles that are deemed key to achieving sustainable peace. Its approach focuses as much on "how" the programme is implemented as on "what" is implemented: the techniques and the tools.

PREVIOUS AND ON-GOING PEACEBUILDING EFFORTS IN GUINEA-BISSAU

Gorée 1 and Gorée 2. Two meetings of the political class and civil society organized by the Gorée Institute to reflect on possible solutions to the crisis after the government overthrow in 2003.

Estados gerais. An attempt to promote a national debate around issues that generate conflict launched by a group of citizens who seek solutions based on a political and social commitment.

Cidadãos de boa vontade. An initiative that brings together independent citizens who enjoy a certain social status and allows them to act as mediators in various types of conflicts and make statements in favour of peace.

Ombresa pa Paz. Launched by the Al Ansar Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) in partnership with the Guinean Association for the Study of Alternatives (ALTERNAG) to develop awareness activities for peace and security in the northern area of the country (in terms of the on-going conflict in Casamance in southern Senegal).

Civil Society Movement for Peace, Development and Democracy. An intervention type structure for different components of civil society that functions as a pressure group and mediator in potential conflict generating situations.

Reconciliation Commission of the Armed Forces. An initiative that aims to consolidate the reunification of the military forces after the division caused by the civil war of 1998-99.

Justice and Peace Commission. A Catholic Church organization dedicated to promoting the values of justice and peace.

Pathways to Reconciliation, Peace and Development, National Conference. Launched by the National Popular Assembly and the President of the Republic to bring Bissau-Guineans together as a way of opening new avenues for the consolidation of peace.

¹ June 7, 1998 marked the beginning of a civil war that lasted until May 7, 1999. The 11 month war was triggered by a failed coup d'état that brought clashes between government forces and rebels. The civil war, which deeply divided society, has left a legacy that today hinders the consolidation of peace in Guinea-Bissau.

Underpinning the programme are five key areas of focus:

- **Inclusiveness.** A guarantee to not exclude any significant actors in order to promote and ensure participation of socio-political stakeholders. Participants come from the general population, from all corners and regions of the country, paying special attention to their role and/or stake in the peacebuilding process.
- **Participatory Action Research.** The dialogues, debates and proposals for possible solutions to the obstacles to peace are based on facts, objective and verifiable research and knowledge.
- **Nationally owned.** All levels of people and groups participate in identifying and defining problems and solutions that they will ultimately implement, taking full ownership and responsibility for the process.
- **Politically impartial.** Avoiding partisan politics, the programme ensures that it plays an impartial role in the identification of national issues and the facilitation of the dialogue with all stakeholders.
- **Respect for diversity.** Ensuring the participation of the widest possible range of actors, even opposing groups, promotes tolerance and peaceful dialogue.

CRITERIA FOR A PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

- Mobilization of qualified human resources to serve as sources of quality information to help make appropriate recommendations.
- Consultations include all sectors and levels of society that engage participants in a dialogue to develop a national vision of peace.
- A continued interaction between the different levels and sectors to boost mutual understanding and build trust.
- Establishing broad consensus on the problems and solutions so that compromise is grounded in a wider dialogue and trust-building process.
- Proposed solutions are chosen by the participants to ensure ownership and the continued engagement in developing a culture of peace.

4. The programme strategy and methodology

The programme's strategy is adapted to the context of Guinea-Bissau, involving those internal forces likely to maximize outcomes, attract voluntary support and reflect the objectives of rooting peace in the minds of the general population. To do this, the programme's strategy favours the widest possible participation of all sectors of society in a process of inclusive dialogue. In view of the principle of inclusiveness, the implementation of Voz di Paz remains open to cooperate with all initiatives that are developed on behalf of peace. Initiatives already underway or planned, national and international are taken into account.

Drawing on Interpeace's experience, the programme uses the following methodological tools in its implementation:

- Community and regional meetings;
- Expert workshops and focus group discussions;
- Validation seminars and meetings; and
- Participatory surveys.

One of the key elements of Voz di Paz has been the creation of neutral spaces for debate and dialogue. These spaces help to ensure that voices are heard from all levels, sectors and regions. Because of the often sensitive nature of issues being discussed, the programme has sometimes had to adapt to the needs of different groups. For example, smaller meetings and discussion groups were carried out with political parties, military, paramilitary and police.

To respond to the problem of lack of functioning State institutions at the local and national level, the programme also created forums of debate and dialogue called Regional Spaces of Dialogue (RSD). These groups consist of local facilitators in the villages, influential citizens, community radio staff and representatives of the groups that participated in the programme consultations. These spaces, which are used to debate various issues, are helping to create a culture of dialogue and to build bridges between citizens.

In the absence of a functional judicial system and by providing communities with the opportunity to engage in a dialogue to address issues of possible confrontation/disagreement in daily life, the programme has helped foster conflict resolution at the local level. In fact, some 50 cases of various conflicts (often related to property, land, cattle and religious disputes) have been resolved through RSDs across the country.

Throughout the programme, video has been used as a tool to support the process with a view to keeping the public, stakeholders and leaders informed and engaged in the dialogue process. The video documentaries from the consultations outlining the different points of views were sometimes shown in meetings to stimulate the discussion and increase mutual understanding.

**VOZ DI PAZ WAS STRUCTURED TO MEET THE PEACEBUILDING CHALLENGES BY
ESTABLISHING THE FOLLOWING BODIES:**

Steering Committee - The body that provides the political and moral support needed to ensure the engagement of authorities in the participatory process of Voz di Paz. It also engages with key partners and decision-makers so that the recommendations deemed most critical are acted upon. It also oversees that principles of inclusiveness, fairness and diversity remain part of the programme throughout its course.

Executive Committee – It is the central body for the technical implementation of the Voz di Paz programme. It is a team composed of experts selected on a multi-disciplinary basis, which works in conjunction with the Steering Committee.

Regional Spaces for Dialogue – A group of citizens chosen for their commitment to the service of peace, their local or national level influence and their experience in resolving conflicts. The members respond to the required representativeness of national diversity and act as ambassadors of peace under the guidance of the Steering Committee. They serve as liaison with the regions and local population. The Regional Dialogue Forums are the engine through which innovative peacebuilding approaches are assumed and owned by the people.

Multidisciplinary Working Groups – These consist of experts and resource persons who collaborate with the Steering Committee.

5. Phase 1: Defining the framework for a national dialogue on the root-causes of conflict and main obstacles to lasting peace (2007-2009²)

5.1 The consultation process

Between 2007-2009, Voz di Paz engaged Bissau-Guineans from across the country in a peace mapping exercise to identify the major peacebuilding challenges in the country. Over 3000 people participated in these consultations, representing civil society at a local level, the State at a community level and members of the Regional Spaces for Dialogue put in place by Voz di Paz. Journalists from community radio stations also took part. The programme in addition, carried out consultations with over 1000 members of the security forces (military and police) and some 200 members of the Bissau-Guinean diaspora in Lisbon.

All consultation meetings initially started with a brief presentation of the Voz di Paz programme. The team and participants then collectively identified expectations, which helped build a positive environment for debating and exchanging ideas and reflecting on the challenges facing the nation. The participants went through various stages of reflection individually and in different groups.

After extensive discussions convergent ideas and themes were consolidated and ranked by a single scoring system. Once the list of obstacles to peace had been identified and a hierarchy established, group discussions focused on solutions and the specific contribution each social professional group could make towards the consolidation of peace.

At the end of the meetings the work done by different groups was presented in a plenary session which brought together their findings on the different views on peace-related issues in the country.

² The March 1st 2009 assassinations of the President of the Republic and the army Chief of staff sent the country into a socio-political crisis and therefore severely disrupted the planned activities of this phase.

5.2 The validation process

Originally the programme had intended to organize a validation of the findings at a national level event in March 2009. However, given the complications and the fragile political environment at that time, a regional level validation process was organized instead of one big national meeting.

This idea was something new and the process turned out to be a success. In fact, the regional process encouraged greater participation of the people in the identification and validation of the causes of conflict. The 13 validation meetings involved over 6000 Bissau-Guineans across the country. It gave the team an opportunity to compare the way ideas about the conflict differ between the various regions and groups.

The purpose of the validation process was to choose four main priorities most relevant for the consolidation of peace. The next volume of this report will analyze the findings of this validation process.

5.3 Roots of Conflicts in Guinea-Bissau: The voice of the people

This report, originally in Portuguese, is a translation and synthesis of the ideas, views, and perspectives of the participants who took part in the consultations on the obstacles to peace and the geography and causes of conflict in Guinea-Bissau. The report also contains testimonies and statements made by participants as a way of illustrating important issues and concerns. The report is structured around four categories and the formulation of issues that came out of the consultations.

A supporting video documentary captures the essence of the discussions, emotions and conveys the importance of the issues that are at the heart of the interests of Bissau-Guineans.

It is hoped that the dialogue that was created by the programme will continue and will serve decision makers in their efforts to undertake and implement the needed reforms that ultimately will support the peace and reconciliation process.

CHAPTER I: NATIONAL ISSUES



Photo: Voz di Paz

NATIONAL ISSUES

A weak and ineffective State, bad governance, endemic poverty, poor functioning and administration of the justice system, political and institutional instability and a poorly managed legacy of the independence struggle are issues affecting every region of Guinea-Bissau.

1.1. Ineffective State institutions and bad governance

The weakening of the State appears to the Bissau-Guinean population to be the source of many problems. This feeling cuts across all social classes and geographical regions. The manifestations of the problem vary according to the region, and the perception of the problems themselves also changes according to social class.

For the majority of people consulted, the State structures are absent, especially at local level where administrative services are virtually nonexistent. This situation has created a power vacuum enabling disorder to prevail in all administrative sectors.

Even the Tabanca Committee³, which in the early years of independence would bring the State and citizens, including those living in distant areas together, has become almost completely defunct. The progressive disappearance of State structures at a local level has especially affected remote regions and intensified their isolation from the rest of the country.



Regional Administration Office, Bubaque. Photo: Voz di Paz

³ Tabanca is the creole name for village. The Tabanca Committee or Village Committee is the structure that represents State authority at the grassroots level.

The State's Administrative sectors have also become almost nonexistent, to the point where they are now only a symbolic function of State representation. The lack of resources needed to ensure the full functioning of the administrative structures has compromised and discredited the institutions. The symbolic representations of the State are seen as undignified and thus perceived as a sign of weakness.

Participants pointed out that there were early signs of the disappearance and degradation of local government infrastructure in all the departments, sectors and regions of Guinea-Bissau. A participant who took part in the consultation in Bubaque highlighted the issue:

*"With all the tax paid by the population, it is strange that the buildings of the State Administration can't be maintained. Nobody can perform management functions in the rain. Look at the Administration building – the roof leaks water into the offices"*⁴

Several participants who took part in the consultations, especially in Caió, Sonaco, Tite, Bubaque, Catió, Iemberém, Komo, Buba and Pirada, felt that local State structures were disappearing and/or become irrelevant because of their incapacity to act.

A consequence of the absence of the State at local level is the progressive isolation of the country's 37 sectors that make up the local administration. Perhaps the one most affected by this phenomenon is the Sector of Boé, where the local population has become increasingly marginalized.

Participants who took part in the consultation held in Tchetché, in the Sector of Boé, felt deeply marginalized. This feeling of isolation was exacerbated by the fact that Boé is considered the cradle of the country's independence. The absence of the State in such an important and historical area is fuelling feelings of resentment and rejection by the State. Participants felt the region's historical significance has indeed been forgotten.

The incapacity of the State to meet the aspirations of this sector is leading to a level of disassociation from the rest of the nation. Most people of Boé do not even have a birth certificate identifying them as citizens of the nation. As a consequence, the sector has formed closer ties with the neighbouring region of Guinea-Conakry rather than with the rest of Guinea-Bissau. A participant who took part in the discussion in Tchetché explained:

*"In the twelve tabancas in the Section of Guiledje, they (the young people) leave to look for work in Guinea-Conakry. Why? Because there's nothing for them over here on this side of the border. Nothing."*⁵

⁴ Maria Uducuré, Ex PAIGC deputy in the years of the single party regime, opinion leader in the Island of Uno. Bubaque, 24 May, 2008.

⁵ Tcherno Aliu Baldé, Imam. Tchetché, 14 June, 2008.

The same phenomenon is observed in other frontier regions, but on a smaller scale, for instance in the North with Senegal. While the long-term consequence of the disappearance of the State, especially in remote areas, combined with stronger ties with border regions are not yet known, one may speculate that it will have an impact on the sovereignty of the State in the future.

THE PRESENCE OF THE STATE IN KOMO

Komo is the birthplace of the State of Guinea-Bissau we know today. Even if the Bissau-Guinean State was proclaimed on September 24, 1973 in Lugadjol in the Boé hills in the East of the country, it was born in Komo, an island off the South coast. This is the island where the exclusive authority of PAIGC was established after the first major defeat of the Portuguese colonial troops. As a result Komo, like Boé, is a cradle of the Bissau-Guinean state.

Today, however, it is the place where the State's presence is at its bare minimum.

The only signs of the emaciated State lie within a radius of 300 metres - in a kind of miserable "single window" on the first island in the country to achieve liberation.

Anyone arriving in the "main square" of Komo will find it very difficult to identify the presence of the State beyond the symbolic notice "Committee of the State", which is on an impoverished building on what appears to be a sleepy village shop but is actually the State's seat of power. Furthermore, both the offices and the residence of the administrator are within those four walls. Although there is a flagpole, the State flag is not even hoisted.

Opposite the Committee of the State is the second most obvious sign of the presence of the State - the Komo health centre. As for the largest primary school, located near the Committee of the State, that is still under construction.

The local police force, housed in the building of the Committee of the State, is limited to one agent. This is despite the huge problems of livestock theft, which was constantly being mentioned in the consultations.

1.2. Poverty

Poverty is one of the issues raised most often as a factor causing conflict and affecting social harmony. The perceptions of poverty and the hierarchy of its causes vary from one region to another. But generally, the people consulted emphasized that poverty is a major cause of tension and conflict in Guinea-Bissau.

The notion of poverty is perceived mainly as it relates to food security or insecurity.

In all the consultations almost all participants agreed that hunger was the major cause of concern and discontent⁶. A proverb has been often cited by people to illustrate the link between food security and conflict: "In homes where there is no bread everyone fights and no one is right."

A representative of the fishermen of Rio Geba (East Bafatá) who was describing how hunger affected their daily lives and livelihoods highlighted the point:

*"Throughout the world, hunger is a cause of war. Conflicts are born of hunger."*⁷

When speaking of hunger participants associated the problem with a range of circumstances that included:

- the loss of purchasing power in urban areas;
- the impoverishment of workers with irregular salaries;
- the exodus of people from rural areas to larger cities;
- the migration of young adults which leads to reductions in available workforce;
- environmental degradation (loss of cropland, low rainfall, salinity of rice polders, etc.) creating food shortages; and
- the precariousness of households living on a single daily meal called "the shot".

Rice is central to the Bissau-Guinean diet. Its sustainable production is therefore a fundamental concern. However, participants mentioned that its productivity is often severely affected by poor maintenance, clearing of mangrove areas and salt water intrusion, to name a few. These factors pose a threat to the nation's food staple.

The consultations that took place in Mansoa, Calequisse, Cossé, São Domingos, Cumura and Quinhamel highlighted the impact of the destruction of the rice polders in the loss of food security. A village elder in Catió stressed the serious impact of the rural exodus and emigration on the degradation of rice cultivation:

*"The rice polders have ended up in the hands of the elderly."*⁸

What is known as "the flight of the youth to the cities" was highlighted in many contributions, particularly in Catió, Komo, Cossé, Pitche, Sonaco and Calequisse (North - Cacheu), as a scourge that contributes to the impoverishment of rural areas, depriving them of their work force.

For some regions, poverty is related to the lack of quality infrastructures. The populations of the South unanimously stressed the suffering caused by the lack of decent roads, which traps the region in economic isolation. This isolation is almost total in some areas such as the islands of Komo and Caiar. In the consultation held in Komo, the participants devoted the bulk of their contributions to

⁶ Iemberém (South), Pitche, Gabú, Bafatá, Boé, Sonaco, Pirada, Cossé, Bambadinca (East), Farim, Mansoa, Nhacra, Bissorã (North - Oio) Calequisse, Caió (North - Cacheu).

⁷ Representative of the fishermen of Rio Geba. Rio Geba (East Bafatá).

⁸ Village elder, Catió.

their geographical isolation. They see this not only as a factor in poverty, but also in their disconnection from any prospects for development. It prevents realization of local potential, and deprives the area of access to basic services such as primary healthcare and schooling.



Poverty is widespread throughout the country. Photo: Voz di Paz

In general, lack of infrastructure was considered in all the consultations in the Southern regions of the country (Quine Tombali, Bolama-Bijagós) to be one of the greatest causes of poverty. The drastic reduction in rice production in the South, still regarded as the national granary, is in the opinion of the participants in the consultations, linked to the geographical isolation. The population feels condemned to economic marginalization because they have no way of finding outlets for their products and cannot increase production without the risk of seeing their products rot for lack of access to markets. In certain areas of the North and East (Ganadu and São Domingos) the problem of roads that are poorly adapted to the need for connection with the rest of the country was repeatedly mentioned as a cause of poverty and associated social unrest and political discontent.

The isolation and entrapment is linked to another facet of poverty that was frequently illustrated and deeply resented by the participants – the low valuation of national products. This was repeatedly discussed in consultations in areas as diverse as Iemberém, Buba, Fulacunda, Ganadu, Cossé, Gabu, Pirada, Sonaco, Pitche.

The participants view is that the first factor that contributes to the reduced value of domestic products is the government policy that favours low prices to the detriment of the rural community. A local farmer in the consultation at Iemberém simply expressed the problem as: "The government ruins the land."

Particularly in the regions on the border, the government is accused of failing to protect its farmers against the assaults of foreign traders who buy the fruit of Bissau-Guinean labour at rock bottom

prices. Several participants complained about this in the groups in Pirada, Gabú (East) and São Domingos (North - Cacheu).

The poor policies of the past that have ruined the prospects for local processing of agricultural products, particularly fruit, were also blamed as responsible for worsening poverty. In all the regions, the devaluation of domestic products is explicitly related to the drop in the price of cashew nuts every year. The slide in prices caused by inappropriate marketing policies for this strategic product, coupled with the unfavourable global situation, was the subject of unanimous outrage at all consultations, as all regions of the country depend to a large extent on cashews as the main product for income generation.

Policies favouring the export of fresh cashews, combined with weak incentives for local processing which would add value and generate employment, are regarded as aggravating factors of poverty, especially for the many unemployed young people.

Finally, poverty is blamed for many of the vices and evils that feed the general unrest in the country.

Another elderly man in Farim concluded:

"Whoever is hungry is not ashamed of anything. The hungry are not afraid of anything"⁹

LABURO AND KEBUR IN COSSÉ

In Cossé a village elder explained the situation as follows:

"Our children no longer want to work the land. They spend the day drinking wargá (tea) or taking other prohibited drug-type products. Many migrate to the city".

"When the time comes for them to work on the farm, they don't turn up. It is the parents who have to do all the work, sowing maize for example, even though they are weak".

"But as soon as the corn is ripe, our children appear with knives in their hands to cut the ears, put them in bags and take them to Bissau to earn money".

"Now the young don't work. The older people do the work and the children eat the fruit of the labour of the elderly".

1.3. Poor administration of justice

This issue was mentioned in every consultation session. From the perspective of the participants, Guinea-Bissau's malfunctioning justice system is a sickness. Justice, which should be the foundation of peace between citizens, has become a stumbling block for the whole of society.

⁹ Braima Sané, Imam of Farim Central Mosque. Farim, 3 May, 2008.

At the top of the list of evils that pollute the judicial system is corruption, which is rife at all levels. Most of the participants denounced the fact that justice is almost exclusively a protection of the strongest, the richest, the most influential, the most astute and those who are highest in the social hierarchy.

People have the impression that the entire legal apparatus is undermined by vice and subject to manipulation by those who know best how to exploit it to their advantage. The competence and honesty of the judges are questioned.

The freedom of the entire judicial system is undermined, the different panels indicated, because of the widespread and regular interference of the 'most powerful' in the application of justice. In São Domingos, one participant said "Justice is at point zero", adding:

"The rigor of justice is only for the poor. When a wealthy person is arrested and protected, there is a flurry of phone calls that ends up getting their freedom."¹⁰

This robust statement is corroborated by similar statements made by many citizens who believe that justice does not get priority treatment as a concern of the government. Examples cited are the limited coverage of the country by judicial bodies; low budgetary allocation which leads to the situations where courts are functioning in private homes. These home owners then try to get eviction orders for rent arrears; and lack of prison space to hold criminals who therefore end up being released.

At the group held in Bissorã, one participant said:

"When they take a thief to the authorities, before the victim gets back to his house, the thief has returned home!"¹¹



Photo: Voz di Paz

¹⁰ Paula Pereira, women's representative. São Domingos, 26 April, 2008.

¹¹ Aliu Mané, Regulo (traditional chief) Bigene. São Domingos, 26 April, 2008.

THE COMPLAINING THIEF

One of the anomalies mentioned in relation to the poor functioning of justice is the ease with which criminals can distort the system, even achieving a complete reversal of its procedures and values.

A case was mentioned of thieves who complain in court against their victims. The testimony of a member of the Cabaz de Biur Association, which works for the development of the Incheia sector, one of the areas most affected by theft, violence and lawlessness, serves as an example.

The organization had, at the time of the consultation, three lawsuits in the regional court of Bissorã because of complaints of thieves who were caught red-handed and then beaten by the victims of the robbery.

Once released by the people, the thieves, who knew they could take advantage of the fact that they had been beaten up by the population, were quick to complain to the police that they had suffered unjust violence and false accusation.

This reversal of roles is facilitated, according to the testimony of the participants, by corrupt practices, including the payment of 100,000 francs.

The victims of theft have become targets for prosecution due to complaints filed by thieves who exploit the justice system with impunity.

This is a general observation, because it was made on many occasions in the consultation sessions. “They should remodel the sites where the Portuguese put the thieves,” said a nostalgic participant in the consultation held in São Domingos.

Nostalgia for the justice administered during the colonial era is widespread, showing that the Bissau-Guineans deplore the degradation of the administration of justice during the period of national sovereignty.

When one considers the way the colonial justice system was denounced in the past, the extent of the failure of the current system indicated by the participants is deeply felt.

Linked to this nostalgia for colonial justice is the impression among the citizens that impunity is widespread in the country.

The proliferation of crimes, sometimes heinous crimes, without the slightest judicial consequence has completely discredited the judicial system. It is seen as impotent in the face of some categories of crime and certain social groups or individuals.

Cases of national significance were cited linked to drug-trafficking or politics in addition to the thousands of lesser crimes at local level that go unpunished. This has led to a return to people taking justice into their own hands. The sense of widespread impunity not only brings the judicial system into disrepute, but also reinstates traditional justice as an alternative to resolve local conflicts and maintain social order.

The most outrageous example of impunity, in the view of the public, is the amnesty that was granted by Parliament to those who threatened the security of the State and perpetrated public crimes during the 1980's. The amnesty law for politicians was justified by the need to turn the page. It dismissed cases that were due to be tried involving many politicians, governors and military leaders. It was harshly criticized by a large number of participants who consider this a law of impunity which only encourages more killings and crimes.



The slowness of the justice system to deal with criminal cases was mentioned as an obstacle to peace. Photo: Voz di Paz

The slowness of court cases, which can last several years due to the weak capacity of the system, and the consequent overloading of the agents of justice, was mentioned as an obstacle to peace and was exemplified as follows by a participant in the session in Caio (North):

“The sectors of Caió and Canchungo have the same court. But the problems of Canchungo exceed the capacity of the court, and moreover there is only one judge. There are trials that have remained unresolved for more than five years. The judge cannot come to Caio because there is too much to do in Canchungo. So, no justice”¹²

Legal costs were unanimously judged very high. In general, the administration of justice was deemed very costly and discriminatory to the poor, who are forced to put up with the remains of judicial resources without seeing any results in return.

In short, due to the interference of politics, money and power, and the limited concern of the authorities for the malfunctioning justice system, it seems doomed to a neglect that fosters impunity. This in turn generates further conflict, as is made clear in the conclusion of a contributor in Quinhamel, on the outskirts of the capital:

“Guinea is like a woman without a husband. Any man can do to her what he fancies, because nothing will happen if he does something bad.”¹³

¹² Quintino Francisco Manga, Vice-regulo in Caió, member of the Cacheu Regional Dialogue Space. Caió, 30 April, 2008.

¹³ Samanta Té, Quinhamel women's representative. Quinhamel, 17 February, 2008.



The proliferation of crime is such that even school doors are stolen.

Photo: Voz di Paz

1.4. Political and institutional instability

Political and institutional instability was harshly criticized in the consultation sessions as one of the most perverse manifestations of the poor understanding of the pluralistic system that Guinea-Bissau chose in the early 90s.

A participant in the group held in Cacheu (North) makes a dangerous prognosis:

"The biggest conflict we have is that no legislature ever manages to reach its full term. We never wait for the ballot box to throw out a ruler. This is one of the factors that promotes conflict in our country."¹⁴

This finding was confirmed in the many different examples of the premature end of either the legislature or the government that have marked the fifteen years since the practice of pluralism through the ballot box began. It is underscored by the violence and subversion which marks the way by which power changes hands, undermining the State institutions and making them irrelevant.

The awareness of the fragility of the institutions of the republic has led the public to lose confidence in them:

"If you ask us if we have confidence in the State, we will say no because they (the leaders) do not have time to get established. So they cannot give others the chance to establish themselves either. If you're standing, how can you tell others to lie down? You can't do it."¹⁵

¹⁴ Ernesto da Silva, Cacheu, 17 May, 2008.

¹⁵ Saido Embaló, butcher. Farim, 3 April, 2008.

This was the firm opinion of a participant in the consultation of Farim. There is widespread mistrust in institutions that have become discredited through the episodic crises that have brought considerable suffering along with instability. Loss of faith in institutions is extremely dangerous as it hinders the deepening of the democratic spirit. Several participants in the consultations blamed the malfunctioning democratic system for the negative situation in which the country finds itself.



Years of political instability have done little to improve development; schools remain in the same poor conditions.

Photo: Voz di Paz

Dysfunctional democracy was widely criticized in most of the sessions, as was the proliferation of political parties:

"We have more than sixty parties. Each party thinks it is better than the others. When a party wins the elections, instead of forming alliances with other parties to work together, they seek to destroy them."¹⁶

This was said in the panel in Pitche (East) by a participant who exaggerated, perhaps voluntarily, the number of parties, which in reality was actually thirty-four at the time he was speaking. However, the exaggeration shows that the population is weary of the proliferation of political parties that have no real grassroots foundations.

A high number of political parties simply add to the tangle of political intrigue which marks the chronic political and institutional instability that is rife throughout the country.

Coupled with what the population considers to be petty politics and intrigue is weak institutional collaboration. This is seen as an additional factor causing institutional instability and political conflict, and may take more complicated and dangerous directions. The frequent disputes between the President and Prime Ministers were cited as an example. The frequent clashes between Presidents of the Republic and Parliament were denounced as evidence of arrogant attitudes of one party towards the other, a lack of institutional culture, a lack of patriotism and of democratic immaturity.

¹⁶ Jaime Na Bunque, soldier. Pitche, 13 June, 2008.

Most session participants connect the phenomenon of political and institutional instability to the development of corruption and the mismanagement of public assets. The protest of a participant in the group at Bambadinca (East) reflects this sentiment:

“When did you hear that in Senegal ministers are changed the way you change your shirt, the way we do in Guinea-Bissau? If the prime minister works well in a country, we should let him stay at his post. Same thing for the President. But there is no stability when whoever sits in the seat of power gets it pulled out from under him. Every minister knows he will not last in his post so everything he gets he takes home with him.”¹⁷



Many believe that while other countries move on Guinea-Bissau remains stuck in instability and conflict.

Photo: Voz di Paz

This line of reasoning was common to all the panels, which also linked institutional instability to the dubious distribution of portfolios, which are seen to be rewarded with portfolios bearing no relationship to merit or competence. Citizens identify the primacy given to political requirements at the expense of ability as a source of institutional impoverishment. Many portfolios have been used to reward men with low levels of training or even some who are illiterate. The institutions are therefore reduced to the level of slices of a cake being shared between friends and accomplices.

This downward spiral has its greatest expression in the politicization that infects all levels of public administration. From the top to the bottom of the institutions, dubious placement of friends prevails. The entire State apparatus becomes an instrument for personal and partisan ends. This has created frustrations, resentments and retaliations that are the sources of major conflicts. In illustrating this trend, a participant in the Pitche panel said:

“Each party that wins has to throw out all the employees who don't belong to it and puts its own in their place.”¹⁸

The deep instability this generates is seen as the cause of the inability to implement public policy. This, in turn, traps the development process in Guinea-Bissau in a vicious circle where advances are always followed by setbacks. While neighbouring countries move on, Guinea-Bissau remains stuck in instability, poverty and conflict.

1.5. Poorly managed legacy of the independence struggle

The lasting consequences of the struggle for national liberation were classified by the participants in the consultations as one of the structural causes of conflicts.

¹⁷ Samba Buaro, adviser to the Regulo of Bambadinca. Bambadinca, 19 July, 2008.

¹⁸ Jaime Na Bunque, soldier. Pitche, 13 June, 2008.

The first source of conflict is the division of the population into two categories of citizens: those who went to fight, and the others.

The process of struggle has historically been a cause of division between citizens and gives those that fought a privileged status. To this day, it still creates situations of conflict. Former employees of the colonial administration, the militants of the rival movements of PAIGC, such as The Struggle Front for the National Independence of Guinea (FLING), are all examples of sectors of society that suffer the stigma of having been on the wrong side in the past.

This discrimination between categories of citizens was one of the causes of the conflicts that took roots soon after the founding of the Bissau-Guinean State and has had damaging effects that continue to the present day.

The second conflict-generating element that was soon evident in the process of creating the Bissau-Guinean State was the purge that followed the victory of the PAIGC. People who had supported the Portuguese settlers (which several participants in the sessions categorized as an “original sin”) were victims of retaliation that brought lasting hatred. Some saw the persecution of those who collaborated with the Portuguese as the first link in a long chain of retaliatory violence, vengeance and counter-vengeance which hardened the division of Bissau-Guineans. A young participant in the Bubaque (South – Bijagós Islands) panel recalled:



The struggle for independence has left the country divided between those who went to fight, and the others.

Photo: Voz di Paz

“At independence, there was persecution of the former colonial troops. This led to killings. Then there came persecution among those who went to fight, and that led to 14 November. And all this continued, shootings, arrests, up to the war of 7 June, 1998.”¹⁹

As this young man emphasized, after the persecution of the so-called traitors or enemies, came another even more complicated division: the division inside the group of former liberation combatants.

This group, supposedly united by the ideals of liberation and nation-building, became fragmented by issues of personal or other interests. The monopolization of privileges for some former combatants at the expense of the majority created deep and destabilizing divisions in the country.

¹⁹ Agostinho Lé, civil servant. Bubaque, 24 May, 2008.

The feeling of injustice expressed by the majority of former combatants can be illustrated by the statements of a participant in the consultation at Iemberém (South):

*"We, the veterans, we have no money, we don't have our own homes, we have nothing. We carry many things on our heads without any reward; we carried those arms for nothing. There is no veteran who has had any success in his life. Now we are powerless. On top of that we have no recognition."*²⁰

At the same time, several participants stressed that problems within the group of fighters for national liberation stem from contradictions that emerged in the very process of struggle. According to the illustration given by a participant in one of the panels in Oio (North) in Mansoa:

*"There have been problems since the time of the liberation struggle. Due to the struggle for leadership, or for mundane things like male rivalry, a lot of people died. Due to the hatred coming from the bush, many died unjustly."*²¹

Another aspect of the destructive effects of the liberation process is the gap between the liberators and the supposedly liberated population. For many, the process of independence ended up frustrating the hopes for true liberation. Outraged by what he regards as a long process of lies, a village elder on the Bambadinca panel vehemently denied the very meaning of independence:

*"Guineans have no shame. They said they liberated the country. Lies. They did not liberate a single person. They just stole, robbed and abused power. So now tell me, what have they done?"*²²

This sentiment is shared by many who believe that the entire history of the period of independence is flawed:

*"It is a pity. Independence came in with sin, it worked with sin, and today the sin has still not stopped. But what is important is the recognition of the Tite Sector."*²³

Others also felt that the process of liberation of the country has been a sham. They consider that the discourse of liberation is disconnected from practice, creating an increasing gap between the people and those who have usurped the leadership of the country. This deception is a source of deep resentment and conflict between different components of society:

*"The leaders said they fought for the people. That's a lie. They fought for their guts. For their bellies. If they had fought for the people, we would not be so ground down. The killings, they ordered them. The robberies, they are the ones who ordered the robberies."*²⁴

²⁰ Aua Camará, former combatant (Cacine). Iemberém, 30 May, 2008.

²¹ Paulo Bodjam, ex Social Renovation Party (PRS) deputy, teacher. Mansoa, 19 April, 2008.

²² Umaru Baro, elderly man. Bambadinca, 19 July, 2008.

²³ Aladje Queluntam Sambú, member of Quinara Regional Space for Dialogue. Tite, 31 May, 2008.

²⁴ Adja Suntú Mané, elderly woman. Bissorã, 10 May, 2008.

These critical opinions expressed by large segments of the population reflect the broad perception that the country and its people have become hostages of those who claim to have liberated them. This manifests itself in condemnation of the almost exclusive role played in the period of independence by the liberators, who, in the opinion of their critics, monopolized the direction and the destiny of the country which led to stalemates that produced conflicts.

This same perception influences the analysis of the relationship between political power and the military. Unsuccessful efforts to bring the military under civil authority and the political instability that has resulted are seen as major sources of conflict. The frequent violent intrusion of those who claim to have a historical legitimacy that puts them above State institutions is also pointed to as a source of conflict.

Rights usurped by the military delegitimized civilian control at the institutional level. Several examples were cited of the military monopolization of land claimed by civilians. The example of the military expropriation of lands claimed by civilians was emphasized in Bula.

Included in the category of the negative legacies of the war of national liberation is the culture of violence that plagues the country.



Another legacy of the war of national liberation is the culture of violence that plagues the country. Photo: Voz di Paz

In the view expressed by the panels throughout the country, the successive outbreaks of armed violence such as coups d'état, civil wars and massacres, all contribute to a culture of violence that has become the modus operandi of part of the Bissau-Guinean population. Allied to this culture of violence is the cult of the use of weapons and their proliferation. This has been exacerbated by the dissemination of the stocks of weapons stores during the wars and the weak control exercised over them.

Finally, some current imbalances in the armed forces which are also holdovers from the legacy of war are worrying sources of conflict. The ethnic imbalance in the defence forces and the links between some sections of the armed forces with certain political parties has eventually created a parallel tendency towards the politicization of the military and the militarization of politics – both of which have a high potential for generating conflict.

THE FIGHTERS' NIGHTMARE

The hatred began in the bush during the national liberation struggle, according to many of the participants in the consultations. It was then transferred from the bush to the town centres.

In Mansoa a participant gave a personalized version of this process. "The Guinean is angry," he said. "There are so many cases. These began in the bush. One night someone has a dream. When he wakes he interprets the dream. Such and such a person took out a witchcraft contract and sent the plane that destroyed the guerrilla encampment. He concludes that the guilty party must be punished. This person is taken out and shot for witchcraft. Another day, a commander is about to fire his gun. It jams. The commander concludes that it is another person in his group who put a spell on his gun to make it jam. He orders the death of the combatant suspected of witchcraft. In reality he is only settling a score. The fighter accused of witchcraft was a brave man. He was starting to prosper. The commander, to eliminate him, accused him of witchcraft. The liberation struggle is full of such cases that are woven into the plot and drama of modern Guinea-Bissau. The official story never speaks of these cases that cemented the hatred from the bush."

CHAPTER II: REGIONAL ISSUES



Photo: Voz di Paz

REGIONAL ISSUES

The insecurity of property and people, mismanagement of space and resources and poor socio-cultural practices create tensions at regional level.

2.1. Insecurity of people and property

Evident from the repeated mentions in all the consultation sessions, insecurity is a nationwide malady. Underlying this opinion are the multiple ways in which this national phenomenon is realized on a local level and in very specific ways.

In the Cacheu region, where insecurity is a real plague, it is most evident in cattle-raiding where the region is truly under siege. An elderly person who has seen the situation deteriorate over the years, with no end in sight, laments:

*"In the Cacheu region, we ask ourselves how we can end the problem of theft, taking goods and items from people with no penalty. Cattle-raiding has existed since even before I was born. But back then, it sufficed that someone said something and the burglar went away. Now if you talk, he'll shoot you and take your life."*²⁵

Cattle-raiding has reached levels that now hamper efforts to develop the economy of the Cacheu region which is renowned for its cattle. Cattle are valued as vital assets, symbols of wealth and high social status and these animals play a central role in many ceremonies that reflect social status. A traditional chief, overcome by the hopelessness of the situation, puts it down to the failure of all traditional and modern authorities, asking himself:

*"Theft in Canchungo? Don't even get me started. Because there are no cattle left in Canchungo. None at all. But where do the cattle go? If we have a government, we must ask them where the cattle go. Do they go to Senegal?"*²⁶

According to some participants, this phenomenon began to spread uncontrollably after the year 2000. "Theft became outright brazen beginning in 2000", stated a participant at the consultation session in Bissorã having witnessed the situation decline to such an extent that cattle farmers are now in ruin.

The cultural source of this phenomenon is well known to Bissau-Guineans: cattle-raiding is a practice of the Balanta people. In the past, this practice did not create real hostility with other social groups. With the worsening of this phenomenon during the past decade and the transformation from a marginal practice to an organized and established undertaking against cattle farmers from all regions, these thefts have become a source of inter-ethnic conflict.

²⁵ Sene Lopes Bandé, Pelundo Vice-Administrator. Canchungo, 12 April 2008.

²⁶ Fernando Baticã Pereira, Canchungo Administrator. Canchungo, 18 February 2008.

The Balanta people are accused of stealing from the working segments of society through organized banditry.

According to locals, the expansion of these raids is a result of the following main causes: the proliferation of small arms, giving the thieves a capacity that they did not have before; the fact that they now have the protection and support of Balanta soldiers, guaranteeing their impunity; the complacency of many authorities that use the same cultural logic as the thieves; and the diversification of the origins of these raids, which is no longer a Balanta cultural practice, but a national phenomenon prevalent across all social strata. As one participant explained at a session on insecurity of people and property in Canchungo (North):

THE FEARLESSNESS OF THE CATTLE THIEF

Raiding grew to shameless levels after 2000. Formerly, if you stole a cow from someone's cattle shed, you would not dare go back to the area for a while. But not anymore. Today, if you steal two cows, tomorrow you will go back for more.

*"Formerly, there was one ethnic group that stole: the Balantas. But when they were detected, you needed only talk, and they left. The Balantas never kill anyone when they steal. Now everyone steals: the Manjacks, Pepels, Fulas, Felups... But when the Manjacks steal, it is much more dangerous."*²⁷

This growth in theft among other ethnic groups has not cleared the Balantas, nor prevented them being made a target of stigmatization for the act of theft. This results in tension hotspots between the Balanta tabancas. To this effect, in a session carried out in Bambadinca, a cattle farmer said with indignation:

*"The Balantas are here all the way to Pirada and no one ever said they can't move here. But when they steal our cows, we wouldn't dare approach them. If they say we are all Guineans and we have no ethnic differences, if we marry Balantas and the Balantas marry Fulas, we can say that what we used to say is no longer true."*²⁸

Thus, this phenomenon of theft has brought about another more worrying situation: hatred between ethnic groups that used to live together without problems.

This deterioration in inter-ethnic cohabitation was illustrated in a rather dramatic way in the Cacheu region between two neighbouring villages, Jol and Pelundo. The Manjacks in Pelundo, deeply affected by the regular loss of their cattle, prepared an armed expedition to recover their property in Jol, primarily populated by Balantas. The people of Jol, having been warned of this danger, organized an ambush. Mediators and authorities had to intervene to prevent a massacre, which could have spiralled into an ethnic conflict.

²⁷ Ambrósio Nintch, cattle raiser in the Tame Sector. Canchungo, 18 February 2008.

²⁸ Mamadú Embaló, representative of cattle raisers in the Bambadinca Zone. Bambadinca, 19 July 2008.

Insecurity takes other forms, for example in recent years from drug-trafficking.

In the Biombo region, these activities have greatly decreased security, due not only to the presence of traffickers, but also to the behaviour of corrupt police officers who, in the name of fighting drug-trafficking, have arrested and mistreated many local citizens.

Near the borders, insecurity is primarily felt from the uncontrolled smuggling of weapons. This is the case in the Cacheu and Oio regions, both of which border Senegal where the Casamance rebellion has been stagnant for nearly three decades. At the consultation sessions in São Domingos and Farim, the theme of cross-border violence sustained by the permeability of the borders dominated the dialogue. This highly dangerous situation creates conflicts on both sides of the border, increasing the risk of violent confrontation.

In all cases, the increase in insecurity of people and property is viewed by Bissau-Guineans as patent evidence of a weakened State which has lost all authority and does not even maintain a prison system. The issue of insecurity has vast implications in relation to justice.



Consultation meetings highlighted that insecurity is a nationwide concern.

Photo: Voz di Paz

2.2. Mismanagement of land and resources

Mismanagement of resources is one of the major sources of recurring conflict in Guinea-Bissau, setting different actors and the way they manage resources against one another. Land tenure is one of the most powerful factors in conflict.

Land has a profound real and symbolic value for different economic actors, as was made clear at all the consultations. Symbolically, land is seen by rural populations as a given right with a tremendous emotional value. This results in an attachment so strong that any threat to the close links between the land and its owner generates conflict.

Currently these strong links with the land are increasingly threatened as new means and systems of land ownership clash with ancestral traditions still valid for the majority of Bissau-Guineans. Many participants highlighted the conflicts resulting from the transfer of land, which is now increasingly based on market value.

Land in Guinea-Bissau is traditionally seen as a collective asset and is only transferable via well-codified traditions of inheritance. However, today land has become a commercial asset. This has altered peoples' relationship with the land as this important change has introduced a new dimension of possible conflict. There is no region in Guinea-Bissau which has not been affected by land-based conflicts.

The central factor in these conflicts is tensions within the broader family. Given that land is traditionally a collective tribal and family asset, the emergence of new means of appropriation of this asset provokes acute tensions. Serious conflicts emerge when a branch of the family, or a family member, claims the right to transfer this common asset for their own benefit. This type of conflict is difficult to resolve, in that it brings out the varied interests within a family group, and may put competing or antagonistic ideologies at odds.



Land ownership is one of the most powerful factors in conflict in Guinea-Bissau. Photo: Voz di Paz

WHY DID YOU SELL MY FATHER'S LAND?

Land conflicts are made worse by the growing market value of land resulting from the development of tourism related businesses.

The case of Rubane Island is typical. Many plots were sold by individuals who only had the right to use the land. The situation quickly became volatile and these individuals are now being sued by those that have the traditional right to the land ownership, as the original occupants, that is, the "landowners."

Participants at the consultation in Bubaque pointed out that the disorderly selling of land not only provokes speculation that deprives inhabitants of better lands, but also encourages encroachment practices on the part of individuals who do not even have the legal right to do so, creating terrible dilemmas dangerous to social balance and peace.

One participant revealed that an administration secretary, without consulting him, sold his lands. In a riotous confrontation with the clandestine seller, he asked the corrupt government official, "Why did you sell my father's land? Do we happen to have the same father? And therefore the right to the same inheritance?"

The response of the official is unknown, and the practice of abusive transfer of others' assets has not stopped.

Cases involving family divisions, and over-heated and endless land disputes, are now commonplace both in rural and urban areas.

In Safim, a suburban town outside Bissau where land is in high demand, numerous cases of family feuds over contested inheritance arise every day. The main cause of conflict in these cases is the clash between a commercial ideology and a communal ideology.

Another contradiction arises in the varying categories of heirs. These conflicts are almost impossible to resolve in regions where customary law codifies matrilineal inheritance, with inherited property going to nephews/nieces instead of children, who in turn must inherit assets from their own maternal uncles.

These situations become true quandaries when, with the support of the modern State's legal system that gives the right of inheritance to children, these individuals contest the matrilineal lineage. The clash between laws creates not only family conflicts, but also generates conflicts between traditional institutions and State institutions. Thus, in Safim there are contentious disputes between the people, traditional authorities, and the State Commission which is the representative of the government authority. In Mansoa (North - Oio), the weak State presence in intervening to resolve conflicts was exposed:

"There are land conflicts... People are killed with machetes over land. And the authority does not intervene."²⁹

²⁹ Nhaga Indami, participant. São Domingos, 26 April 2008.

The accelerating demand for land is not only problematic in urban regions, as urban sprawl invades neighbouring rural areas, but it also affects rural areas where land is sought for the building-up of pontas (farms).

The development of the cashew monoculture is identified as one of the factors exacerbating these conflicts, as it leads to land hoarding and an exponential increase in family land disputes.

In some cases, a dispute emerges even between villages. The thorny issue of borders between towns for the ownership of resources, whether land for agricultural use or vegetation for forestry, has become problematic. Thus, in the listening session in Bula, during which the land issue was often brought up, several examples were offered, including one regarding border conflicts between the towns of Binar and Tchokmon, and another between Tchokmon and Djugur. During that same session, the border dispute of the pools between Nhinte and Pet also came up. Dozens of cases like these were mentioned throughout the sessions.

Conflicts arising around the use of resources are not limited to land ownership, but are also said to involve harmful exploitation practices.

One of the issues that was brought up most often by those being consulted was deforestation. There was a strong renunciation of the policies of government authorities managing forest resources without respect for the interests of local residents. Highlighting the improper practices of State services, one panellist who did not hesitate to give his name, sent a clear and direct message to the head of government, in the following words:

*"The Forest Service is ruining the forest. The Prime Minister is destroying our forests. Tell him that Aladje Abdulai says so. We've already told them to go to the tabanca right over here to verify this fact. The forest there has turned to nothing. There's not a tree left standing there. If you protest, they'll tie you up and beat you, and no one says a thing."*³⁰

The subject becomes more complex when actors involved in conflicts are identified as foreigners associated with Bissau-Guineans. One example was the devastation of the forest in Buduku which was the focus of a forceful denunciation by a prominent citizen. He expressed both his indignation

Tamarind or Calabash?

During the consultation in Sonaco, an elderly man lamented the exponential increase of border conflicts between tabancas and complained of the Government's lack of authority to put an end to embarrassing and dangerous situations.

The man related how, when there was a border dispute between a tabanca inhabited by Fulas and a tabanca inhabited by Mandinkas, a traditional elder chief would put an end to the dispute.

The elder chief would go to verify what plant was more predominant on the land in question.

If the tamarind tree was more predominant, the land certainly belonged to the Fulas. If on the other hand the calabash tree was more predominant, the land was Mandinka property.

This decision was based on the eating habits of the two ethnic groups, and allowed the case to be resolved without causing havoc.

³⁰ Aladje Abdulai. Tite, May 31, 2008.

and visionary concern regarding the exploitation of lands with no regard for the rights of current and future residents:

“If you go to the Cacine forest, to the South, to the Buduku forest, there is nothing left. It was all destroyed. The trees in Bissilao were all destroyed. If you want proof, you can go yourselves to Fulacunda, you can see the cibes cut down. Our children and grandchildren, what will be left for their benefit?”³¹

The awareness of destructive deforestation practices harmful to sustainable development and the cause of current and future conflicts, was evident in many consultations. For example, the near extinction of the cibe³² is another case which has received national attention:

“In the Forea area, in Quebo, in the Balana region, when two people were speaking neither could hear what the other was saying due to the noise of the cibe. Now there is no cibe standing. After destroying the cibe here, they went to the Empada region.”³³

The Chinese and the Buduku Forest

In the Quinara region destruction has a symbol: the Buduku forests.

This once dense vegetation filled with bissilon, a tree sought after for its resistance and utility in civil constructions works, was devastated in 2007 and 2008 by a Chinese company associated with a Bissau-Guinean lumber company.

The Bissau-Guinean company, with rights as it was a domestic company, obtained licenses to extract wood, which it used in a joint venture with a Chinese company with modern lumbering equipment.

According to citizen witnesses from the areas affected, and a video made by Voz di Paz, the devastation was immense. After the trees were chopped down, the company carried out further milling on site and loaded the product onto ships to China.

This uncommon practice, which leaves little place for supervision, became emblematic of the abusive deforestation in the South of the country. This particular case, denounced in the press, was also criticized in Parliament by a deputy elected from the region.

However, these modern logging practices, considered to be extremely harmful by residents who fear a profound and lasting effect to their environment, continue to the present day.

³¹ Aladje Salvador Dabo, Member of the Regional Space for Dialogue. Tite, May 31, 2008.

³² Cibe is the local name for palm tree. It's often referred to as the African fan palm, Borrassus palm, African palmyra palm, ron palm or ronier palm (from French). The tree is intensely used in construction because of its natural properties against termites, and as a result has been severely over-exploited in last decades.

³³ Aladje Djalo. Buba, 19 February 2008.

Naturally, these practices generate conflicts between Government representatives that allow harmful initiatives and the people that seek to defend what they consider their property. So clashes between forest rangers and locals are common:

“If you see someone destroying the forest, it is because they were given authorization. If they have this authorization, what can you do? The much talked of Malians have documents. Those that sell the cibe have documents. I ask, who is destroying the forest? If it is not the Government, who is it? They cut down forests because it is in their personal interest to do so.”³⁴

This statement of a panellist at the session in Bambadinca highlighted not only the hypocrisy of the authorities, but also the waning patience and trust of residents in the face of the continued poor practices and mismanagement of common resources. This results in increased conflicts with these same authorities and in increases in initiatives by local farmers in defence of their property. Such is the case in the dispute between authorities and residents of Candjadja regarding the logging of the cibe.



Intensive and destructive deforestation practices are harmful to sustainable development and the cause of current conflicts. Photo: Voz di Paz

³⁴ Samba Buaro, Counselor to the Bambadinca Administrator. Bambadinca, 19 July 2008.

Various practices causing conflicts were also denounced with regard to river and ocean resources.

The people of Bafatá are listening to us. They eat the fish we caught in the river in the past, and what we get today. Is it the same? We cannot catch quality fish in this river any more. Why? The bad practices of foreigners, Malians, who use poor nets. All the large fish in this river are gone.”³⁵

The harmful practices reported by a fisherman from Bafatá is not the only problem. The conflicts regarding river resources also divide local fishermen from those coming from other regions, as was seen in Caio in a long-standing conflict between local and Pepel fishermen.

In this instance, Caio residents deny fishermen coming from other regions the right to fish freely. They require them to sell part of their product at a lower price, contrary to the principles and practice of free commerce which are the right of every citizen in national territory.



The river and ocean resources are also at the root of conflict between communities and groups. Photo: Voz di Paz

In addition, indigenous fishermen claim their right to resell products acquired in violation of market regulations at higher prices. The tensions resulting from such practices have a detrimental effect on relations between people who are otherwise closely linked.

Such is the case with the conflict arising for reasons of access to resources between the Manjacks and the Pepel who are historically tied by ethnic and cultural ties.

2.3. Harmful socio-cultural practices

The topic of adverse social practices came up repeatedly throughout the consultations, varying significantly by region. Bissau-Guineans understand adverse practices through a wide lens in terms of usage, customs and emergent behaviours. Included in the consultations were female circumcision; belief in and accusations of witchcraft; trial and summary execution of people falsely accused of mystic practices; traditions that diminish the rights of certain population groups especially women; ostentatious funerals; forced marriages; distortions of traditional inheritance; certain educational practices, such as sending children to tutors that send them to beg; and the kidnapping of women.

The issue of female circumcision is highly controversial as it results in a clash of beliefs between groups that are diametrically opposed. Parts of the Islamic population consider female genital mutilation to be related to a religious belief that conditions the woman's social and spiritual life. Scientific, historical or rational arguments have no validity in the eyes of those who participate in

³⁵ Idrissa Ba, Fisherman. Bafatá, 28 July 2008.

this practice. The result is a “dialogue of the deaf” with no effective mechanisms to repress the practice. This underlying conflict inherent in the complex issue of female circumcision is not limited to the specific circles where it is practiced. It causes conflict within families as well, pitting generations against each other.

The debate on banning female circumcision is a serious issue of national contention which has already reached the floor of the National Parliament.

Elected officials have been accused of evading their responsibilities by indefinitely postponing a parliamentary debate on the issue, as a session participant in Tite (Quinara Region) criticized:

“We have said we must end female circumcision. Many refused. Even those we have elected as deputies, they are afraid to vote on a law on female genital mutilation.”³⁶

The truth is that this issue places deputies in an impossible position. Their popularity depends on their stance on a controversial issue with cultural, religious, public health, human rights and other implications, and which above all generates a strong reaction from communities. When Muslim politicians take a position against female circumcision, they are labelled as traitors. When it comes to Christian or Animist politicians, they are accused of ignorance, a lack of understanding, or even disregard for the customs and cultural values of different socio-cultural groups. Whatever position is taken, it creates conflicts.

Another important source of conflict is the belief in witchcraft, which generates accusations and retaliations. Occult practices such as “soul-robbing” or introducing sicknesses through mystical channels were often mentioned as the source of conflicts. Accusations with no rational base cause irrational reactions and become conflicts difficult to settle.

The most dramatic example of these provocative conflicts was offered during a session in Tite, in the Quinara region. This region is, in fact, a hotbed of conflict due to the increase in and intricate nature of the many tensions rising from accusations of witchcraft, forced marriage, young women fleeing from traditional or forced marriages, and the clash between Christian and traditional belief systems. As one participant mentioned with regard to the strong prevalence of adverse practices in the Quinara region:

“The crimes of these criminals are right here where they are. Bad things, bad habits, and mistreatment are all among us.”³⁷

Standing out within this quandary is the issue of summary executions made when people are suspected or condemned by irrational popular decisions.

³⁶ Manuel Djú, Evangelical Church Pastor. Tite, 31 May 2008.

³⁷ Fátima Djicó, President of the Para Ka Tem Association. Tite, 31 May 2008.

One of the participants at Tite said:

“How many people have been killed because they were said to practice witchcraft? Women become widowers, the children are here... Do they not hold such anger in their hearts? How can there be peace in the Quinara region?”³⁸

These conflicts can continue from generation to generation, perpetuating hatred. Trafficking of Taliban children, who are children from Koranic schools begging on behalf of their teachers either in cities within Guinea-Bissau or abroad, is a source of conflict within Islamic communities. This was often referred to in the regions of Bafatá and Gabú. It was highlighted that this practice brings discord within families and between parents and advocates of children’s rights.

This practice, which is not new, has become a significant source of conflict in recent years given the overlap of commercial interests and the role education must play in the Koranic schools.

The fact that religion is the basis for these practices inspires passionate opposition, as is the case with female genital mutilation. Community opposition keeps a close eye on any changes in position or activity.

Other practices, such as funeral rituals, generate conflicts in the Cacheu region, where the Manjack ethnicity gives a special importance to expensive funeral rights. There are sharp divergences between representatives of younger generations who condemn these practices, in the name of economic rationality and the value of savings and capital accumulation, and representatives of the older generation who favour a social and cultural ideology giving an extremely high symbolic value to post-mortem extravagance.

Assets laboriously accumulated over a lifetime are used for the sole purpose of serving the social consecration of the deceased. For some it is a waste, for others it is the culmination of a lifetime of work. Between these widely differing ideologies, the margins for conciliation are narrow.

The issue of inheritance also appears among the most controversial topics. The point of controversy lies between the traditions of matrilineal inheritance and the laws of a modern State.

Certain ethnic groups, including the Pepel and Manjacks, have a tradition of matrilineal succession, passing inheritance from uncles to nephews. This tradition is now challenged by younger generations who prefer to receive inheritance directly from their parents.

The conflicts between the logic of inheritance strongly rooted in the traditional mentality, and the logic instilled in the laws of the modern State have been increasing. The Cacheu and Biombo regions are among those most affected by this type of conflict.

³⁸ Formosinho da Costa, School Inspector and head of the Guinean Human Rights League in the Quinara region. Tite, 31 May 2008.

This legal and cultural tension is exacerbated by certain traditions that deny or limit women's rights to access inheritance in the same way as men. Conflicts over women's social status also feed the now controversial practice which gives a man the right to inherit his deceased brother's wife, and in certain regions, make that wife a share of the inheritance bequeathed by the deceased. This tradition and its social, economic, legal and other implications is an extremely controversial point of conflict.



Some traditions deny or limit women's rights to access inheritance in the same way as men. Photo: Voz di Paz

**KANKURÃ* IN THE CHURCH:
GETTING TO THE BOTTOM OF THE ISSUE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST THE CHURCH IN TITE**

In recent years the Tite district has become known for the outbreak of problems between the Evangelical Church and traditional practices.

During the consultation that took place in Tite, debates between members of different creeds were heated, tense, noisy and passionate. The Voz di Paz team required great know-how and diplomacy in facilitating this session, to soften a debate where they were faced with various family dramas.

With great passion, a pastor who suffered an ambush with dozens of young people recounted how, while they were at a camp for young evangelicals people arrived with an improvised kankurã, beating them, threatening several young people with a machete and raping the pastor.

This attack against a religious group was the climax of a cultural clash between evangelical missionaries and the Balanta, faithful to their social practices which are disregarded by the evangelists.

The issues raised by the Voz di Paz team succeeded in uncovering the true source of this violent quarrel: the removal of young girls from their families' custody.

In fact, over the years, as the evangelical faith had spread in the Tite district, dozens of young girls had left home to escape forced marriage, taking refuge in Bolama, where they continued on to Bissau. Their parents, and especially uncles, who traditionally arrange marriage for their nieces, grew frustrated and angry to such an extent that their hatred was violently expressed in the beating of these young evangelicals.

Given the severity of the conflict, Voz di Paz decided to intervene together with the pastors and leaders of the Evangelical Church, keeping in mind the risk of greater and more dramatic clashes.

Shortly after the first consultation, the parents and religious evangelicals found a solution in which girls who left home could return without fear of being forced to marry.

*A traditional figure responsible for maintaining order and discipline ceremonies, with a severity intended to frighten and earn the allegiance during initiation of everyone.

CHAPTER III: CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES



Photo: Voz di Paz

CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

Corruption, a weak culture of dialogue and a general loss of values are issues raised throughout the consultations.

3.1. Corruption

Corruption was thoroughly and widely discussed in all the consultations. It is considered the worst of all vices. Its diffuse nature is denounced: it is widespread at all levels and is integrally linked to the poverty that pervades the country. The corruption of leaders is particularly denounced as creating conflict and poverty. As one panellist in the Bissorã session said:

“The President steals. The Governor steals. The minister and even the Prime Minister steal. The administrator steals. Who will not steal?”³⁹

From the perspective of participants in the consultations, the corruption of officials is highly condemned because they have a mission to ensure the public good. Therefore, the betrayal of that mission is seen as a destructive public crime that causes irreparable damage. Such is the feeling of indignation on the part of one of the participants of the Bissorã session:

“The country is being destroyed by the President. It was there that the destruction began. If the President takes twenty four billion (CFA), what is left?”⁴⁰

The issue of the high level of corruption opens up a range of consequences. In the population's view, what is important, is more than the act of corruption by a manager; it is the chain of corruption that results. The Head of State is held in high esteem by the population. When this example becomes negative, which is not what is to be expected, the abyss of negative consequences is profound.

For the population, corruption is a major detriment to development because it diverts resources from the public to personal assets, thereby primarily hurting the poor. From the perspective of the population, corruption is not only linked to impunity and lack of justice, it also feeds on injustice at the expense of those who are weakest and most disadvantaged. A participant in the consultation in Bissorã denounced:

“The health centres do not have anything; patients have no bed and no sheets. The leaders go to build buildings. It is not the people that are spoiling them. The people are united, but the State does not want our unity. They are pitting us against each other. We are told, ‘That person is not worth anything. That lineage is not worth anything.’ So we fight while they will sit and eat together, laugh and clap.”⁴¹

This denunciation was made with cries of anguish, highlighting the cynicism the people detect behind the corruption. For them, corruption is a consciously wicked attitude of those in the main

³⁹ Aladje Lassana Dabó, representing the Muslim community Bissorã. Bissorã, 10 May, 2008.

⁴⁰ Aladje Lassana Dabó, representing the Muslim community Bissorã. Bissorã, 10 May, 2008.

⁴¹ Adja Suntu Mané, elder. Bissorã, 10 May 2008.

government positions. It is from this attitude that a web of complicity arises that spreads evil in the guise of impunity. Seen in this light, corruption grows as a result of the malfunction of justice which, in turn, leads to impunity.

Impunity is highlighted as a disease that progresses and allows other ills to grow. For this reason, in the view of the panellists, corruption is the visible part of a series of evils that are rooted in the weakness of the State and poor governance. Therefore, corruption is not only seen as a deplorable social phenomenon, but rather as a structured system of acquiring interests that benefit from the poor governance and failures in the administration of justice due to general weaknesses in the State.

Corruption is seen to generate conflicts between predators as well, in addition to undermining public well-being. The scarcity of resources requires the corrupt, in an increasingly greater number, to fight to get in on the hoarding of goods which do not belong to them.

“What is happening is that they strike out amongst themselves, kill each other and steal our goods. Why? Where is the Public Treasury? I think none of us here present went there ... How can someone rob the Treasury of about 75 million for his own benefit? The government opens its eyes, sees that these people were arrested and tells them: “Now you can go to the market in Bandim. You will be judged tomorrow.”⁴²

As noted in the previous statement, the population identifies the tremendous abuse of the already scarce public resources as one of the main causes of conflict.

There is a clear awareness of the triangular relationship between the scarcity of public resources, the race to hoard them and corruption.

Moreover, as apparent in the outrage of a participant, the race for the misappropriation of rare public goods is facilitated by the complacency of the leaders, which is based on impunity. The devastating nature of the link between corruption and impunity is illustrated by the fact that its effects reach all levels, from top to bottom, and is present/flourishes even in institutions that are aimed at combating crime and preserving social peace:

“The police are here to formalize the robbery. Because when we catch a thief we take him to the police, and the next day we see him back on the street. There are cases that the thief bribes the police with 100,000 francs and then complains about you. We have three of these lawsuits here in court.”⁴³

This denunciation made in Bissorã by a person responsible for the Cabaz de Biur association illustrates the immoral ethos of institutions with mandates to help avoid conflict and ensure social peace. This kind of value reversal represents the peak of a degradation that has deep roots.

This debased sense of values which damages the nation's well-being has even given rise to a sense of bravery based on boldness and skill demonstrated in performing acts of corruption. Thus the so-called bravery of 'Matchu', this fearless man esteemed by Bissau-Guinean society, is expressed today

⁴² Amadu Seidi. Pirada, 7 June 2008.

⁴³ Eusébio Labana, head of the Cabaz de Biur association. 10 May 2008.

primarily by the ability to commit acts of corruption that terrify the rest of society. The so-called “*matchundade*” culture has acquired a new connotation rooted in corruption.

For many participants, this disturbing reversal of values is seen as the culmination of a long negative trend that began in the early stages of the Bissau-Guinean State. The early leaders can be seen as largely responsible for the process of corruption which has generated today’s conflicts:

“Yesterday we did not know money. Now we do. Maybe too well. Those who know best are former guerrillas. They did not come to know money in the bush. This is good because otherwise we all might have disappeared. They did not know money, but now they have come to know it too much.”⁴⁴

There are contradictions between the call of past freedom fighters for the creation of a new society whose pillar was the new man, free from addictions caused by capitalism, and the realities revealed later by the greed of the ruling classes which arose from the struggle itself. It shows the ruling class as having a disregard for the general population who, in turn, accuses it of predatory behaviour that favours the emergence of conflicts, and has developed a cynical fear of those in authority.



Corruption was thoroughly and widely discussed in all the consultations. It is considered the worst of all vices.

Photo: Voz di Paz

3.2. Weak culture of dialogue

Many of the conflicting relationships that develop in a country have to do fundamentally with the lack of communication and understanding in society. The Bissau-Guinean people have been described in listening sessions as not very willing to engage in discussion, preferring the use of force to resolve situations that could be easily overcome by an exchange of wise words.

The most notable situations arise between people who are in positions of authority and the general population. A person with a vested legal authority often uses force to accomplish his aims rather than using persuasion, which might be more efficient.

⁴⁴ Aladje Queluntam Sambu, a member of Regional Space for Dialogue from Quínara. Tite, 31 May 2008.

A participant in a consultation held in São Domingos, denouncing the brutal behaviour of the security, defence, and other agents carrying out tasks related to maintaining order, lamented:

“When a local authority arrives at a place he should ask for people's identification. But they come and without asking anything, beat people. This cannot be the law of a country, displaying strength all the time. If we continue with this, there will be no peace.”⁴⁵

Underlying this behaviour is a concept of dictatorial authority and power which leads to a lack of communication between people in charge of a mission and citizens who believe that they have rights, including the right to dignified treatment.

The lack of willingness of citizens to engage in dialogue is identified as the source of frequent violence in the daily relations between citizens that hinders peaceful relations in society. The origin of this low propensity for dialogue is attributed to what is commonly called a *matchundade* culture.

Matchundade, this typically Bissau-Guinean version of machismo, is not merely a local version of the imbalance in the relationship between the sexes in society. It is a cult of virility that leads to violent behaviour which becomes brutal domination over others, fulfilling a Bissau-Guinean vision of the law of the strongest. It is a dictatorship of violence for its own sake that directly affects the victims and at the same time the authors of violence who become slaves to both their violent ethic and their deeds.



Participants in the consultations described themselves as a listening society with little enthusiasm for engaging in dialogue, preferring the use of force to resolve conflicts. Photo: Voz di Paz

⁴⁵ Issa Ndjai. São Domingos, 26 April 2008.

The cult of oppression and violence that stems from the culture of *matchundade* leads Bissau-Guineans to consider dialogue an exercise reserved for the weak. Giving in or backing down from an argument or a dispute is regarded as shameful - a capitulation. Under these conditions even the smallest frictions can generate major conflicts with severe consequences.

Participants in the consultations consider that the major conflicts in the country were often generated by the lack of a tradition of constructive dialogue and dynamic compromise that allows for graceful exits from crises for all involved.

The most cited example is the civil war of 7 June, which could have been avoided if there had been a desire for real communication between the parties. The brutality and the duration of this fratricidal conflict are attributed to the desire of the parties to demonstrate their *matchundade*, preferring to destroy thousands of lives, and even the country itself, rather than seek constructive discussion in order to reach a compromise.

This low capacity to overcome differences through dialogue was also illustrated by cases cited in the secular hostility between villages.

In a consultation held in São Domingos, one participant mentioned the case of the villages in Felupe (in the North) that have turned their backs on each other due to conflicts that occurred so long ago that no one is able to ascertain the causes of the conflict nor engage in a constructive dialogue to overcome the impasse.

“Here there are villages that are at odds with each other over very small issues. They do not interact with each other and threaten each other. You could carry out an inquiry to see why. If this is not worked out, it could mean war. We have the case of Elia, the case of Arame and the case of Jobel.”⁴⁶

The cases cited by the interviewee have become famous due to the impenetrability of the root-causes of the quarrel and for the tenacity of the conflict between village neighbours of the same ethnicity.

This aversion to dialogue is well-known as a source of conflict in villages, between villages, and in families. Not only is it absence of dialogue, but also the inability to resolve problems between neighbours or relatives through discussion. Land issues often lead to endless conflicts because of the lack of communication between protagonists. Referring to this type of situation, one participant stated in a listening session held in Mansoa (Northern region of Oio):

“Is there anyone in our region who does not know of conflicts over property? Just go to Morés, Cambedje, Nharos. Brothers go to kill each other because of land demarcation, but there is nobody to resolve it. Nobody talks about that. A great man once told me: “Sister, I'm not afraid of conflict that is at the border, I'm afraid of the conflict between us, because it is never spoken about openly.”⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Paula Pereira, public servant. São Domingos, 26 April 2008.

⁴⁷ Sister Bety. Mansoa, 19 April 2008.

Watch your step!

"The Guinean people do not dialogue. The Guineans prefer war to dialogue. The Guineans would rather dare to face death than the truth."

Such are some of the statements that can be heard every day in public conversations.

Unfortunately, these assertions are often confirmed by everyday examples produced by what is called a *matchundade* culture which is the Guinean propensity to measure the value of a man through his ability to be rough, bold, violent and arrogant, while rejecting any attempt at concession as a "lack of respect".

This cult of boldness elevated to a paroxysmal dimension turns out to be an obstacle to peace as it prevents the establishment of trusting relationships in a society dominated by confrontational behaviour and by the way of force.

As one participant said in one of the consultations held in Bissau:

"When someone steps on a Guinean's foot, they shut up instead of telling the person the harm he caused. When the same person comes back to step on it again, the hurt person remains silent out of shame or a fear to tell the truth. When for the third time, the person unconsciously steps again on the same foot, then the hurt person reacts by punching and saying, 'That is the third time you provoked me!'"

This parable of the stepped on foot illustrates the lack of constructive dialogue that explains a lot of conflict. Watch your step!

For some participants, there is a cultural convention that makes dialogue unworkable. It was stigmatized in this way by a participant in the same consultation session held in Mansoa:

*"The child of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau is resentful. The son of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau cultivates hatred. The so-called 'cases' ... How many lives have been snuffed out in this way? The hatred continues forever."*⁴⁸

The damage caused by the low capacity for dialogue and the intractability of negative perspectives throughout history reflects a kind of collective autism that sets in when confronting even common issues, whether they be truly conflicting or not, whether big or small. A young participant at the consultation session held in Bissorã expressed the almost pathological dimension of the problem: the sometimes pitiful inability to talk, even among people who are close:

*"Sometimes there are family problems. And when you do not know how to overcome them and do not have the heart of ice to contain yourself, it can cause wrangling that can lead to fights at knife point."*⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Paulo Bodjam, former representative of the Social Renovation Party, teacher. Mansoa, 19 April 2008.

The incongruity of this low capacity for dialogue appears as a national paradox. Guinea-Bissau is a small country where there is a dense web of blood ties. The Bissau-Guineans themselves often say that they are all brothers and cousins. Blood ties and geographical proximity should have favoured dialogue to resolve disputes, avoiding the transformation of mere wrangling into bloody conflicts. But the close proximity itself has become an obstacle as it prevents dealing openly with the difficult issues. People are silent. The accumulation of frustrations around unresolved minor issues, together with the penchant for managing conflict through repression, eventually transforms the country into a pressure cooker that regularly lets off excess steam with eruptions of violence.

3.3. Loss of values

The erosion of positive values was highlighted as a source of conflict between different layers of society.

The issue was mainly raised by adults to denounce the behaviour of the younger generation that increasingly disregards previously existing values.

The main problem arises around the value of work. As noted by one participant in the listening session at Calequisse (North, Cacheu Region):

“Young people have to work to give to their elders. But today the elders work to feed the young. Why?”⁵⁰

This finding reflects a social evolution which has diminished the value formerly attributed to manual labour, especially agricultural work, in the eyes of the younger generation. The changes introduced by formal education with its Western perspective, shifted the interests and appreciation of young people.

Their references to self-esteem are no longer about a rural tradition which many judge to be outdated. This development, accelerated by the penetration of city models and the increasing contact between countryside and city, creates conflict between generations. An intervention made in the consultation held in Cossé (East, Bafatá Region) illustrates the sense of helplessness felt by parents towards the disaffection of young people for what remain underlying traditional adult values.

“Now you cannot do it with your children, much less with the children of others. When it comes time to plant, the young people go to Bissau. When it comes to harvest the corn, they come with a knife in hand, cut all the corn, and take it to Bissau.”⁵¹

This emphasis on the devaluation of the social value of agricultural work is a recurring theme in all regions. But every region has its own specific problems. Thus, in certain areas, the rural exodus is the issue, leading to degradation not only in the value of work, but also the economic value of the region itself, impoverished by the flight of manpower. In the region of Cacheu, for example, both the social and economic value of rural labour is discredited by the perspective of emigration that drives young people away from the land, creating conflicts with the elderly.

⁴⁹ Eva Ribana, student. Bissorã, 10 May 2008.

⁵⁰ Amélia Pote, potter. Calequisse, 23 April 2008.

⁵¹ Calidu Baldé, Imam. Cossé, 5 July 2008.

Another value in precipitous decline is the degradation of traditional moral values. Certain practices such as the spreading of pornographic films without restrictions, even to children, create unease and conflicting views in a society where modesty is a core value and has placed real taboos on many themes related to sex. As was noted by a religious woman who participated in a consultation held in Mansoa:

“They make a small tent in the village where pornographic movies cost only 150 francs for children who are seven or eight years old. They are sometimes financed by people in high positions, leaders of society. Does anyone know this?”⁵²

Another source of conflict is the excessive consumption of alcohol as well as drug use by the younger generation. These practices tend to spread because of idleness and the increasing interaction between towns and the countryside. There is no segment of society and no geographical part of the country that has not seen this progression. The consequences for social cohesion are disastrous. As one elder in the consultation held in Cossé (East, Bafatá Region) said:

“The elders are afflicted as well as the children because they have got to know drugs, alcohol, and turn against the elders. When it so happens that they end up going to an authority, they say, ‘The child is yours’.”⁵³

The degradation of values is present everywhere, with accompanying tensions between tradition and modernity. There is a notable erosion of social solidarity, creating conflicts and exclusions - confrontations that are difficult to resolve because of extreme differences in logic and perspective.

3.4. Injustices and social exclusion

The Bissau-Guinean people seem to be sensitive to the manifestations and consequences of injustice and social exclusion as sources of conflict. The origin of this sensitivity is rooted in the egalitarian dreams nurtured in the first years of independence, springing from a socialist ideology. As opposed to the idealism of the early days of the nation, a pervasive irreconcilable disappointment has accumulated over the subsequent three decades of misguided practices and poor governance. With this, the ideals of common good were buried, and authoritarianism took hold. This generated social inequality grounded on injustice and exclusion.

Abuse of power is one of the forms of injustice widely denounced in the consultations. This aspect is linked to the long-lasting prevalence of authoritarian powers in a country that began to deal with the rudiments of democracy only in 1991.

Added to the long history of authoritarian rule, is a mentality which tends to be domineering. This scenario, which encourages abuse of power, is complemented by the vacuum and institutional weakness left by the withdrawal of the State. This has facilitated the development of practices harmful to social cohesion and provided a breeding ground for conflict. The military and paramilitary are groups frequently denounced for abuse of power.

⁵² Sister Bety. Mansoa, 19 April 2008.

⁵³ Adji Djaló, representing the Association of the Farmers of Guiledje. Iemberém, 30 May, 2008.

This is highlighted in the bitter experience of a consultation participant in Bubaque:

“You’re armed, and for this reason you will steal my food. When will this anger leave my heart so that there is peace? Someone abuses you in your work. Just because they have a weapon, they steal your food and give it to their family.”⁵⁴

In addition to the defence and security forces, the political leaders as a group are accused of rapacity and selfishness. Regardless of the harmful effect of current injustices, communities see the behaviour of the ruling class as an attempt to establish privileged dynasties. This is expressed in the cry of indignation uttered by a participant at a consultation session in Bissorã:

“They want to dominate the poor, and for their children to take over where they leave off. This is what they want to do, but God is not exclusively for them.”⁵⁵

In parallel with the imbalances between social groups, regional imbalances are also complained of as a source of conflict:

“There must be a balance. For instance, if there is a school in one locality and not in another, there will not be peace. There will always be disagreement. We want at least one teacher in Pecixe. But this has not happened. That’s why there is peace on only one side.”⁵⁶

This reference is particularly representative of how the conflicts caused by injustice and exclusion are viewed. First there is the complaint against bad governance, often causing conflicts in schools. Next, people complain of the perverse effect induced by non-payment of teachers’ wages, which in turn leads to poor performance of the public education system which is used mainly by families of low and modest resources.

Well-off parents register their children in private schools that demand prohibitive bribes, or send their privileged children to European countries where they have access to quality education, allowing them to escape the disastrous consequences of the bad governance in which their parents are participants.

“There has to be money to pay for State education. We don’t have money. But only their children go to the white people’s countries. Ours, poor children, all they have is teachers’ strikes.”⁵⁷

Thus, the ruling classes’ indifference to the common good is seen as a strong punishment for the poor, that does not inconvenience the wealthy.

⁵⁴ Caixote Correia, fisherman. Bubaque, 24 May 2008.

⁵⁵ Adja Suntu Mané, elder. Bissorã, 10 May 2008.

⁵⁶ Raimundo Có, representative of the Pecixe Young Peoples’ Association. Calequise, 23 April 2008.

⁵⁷ Aliu Mané, Governor (*Regulo*) of Bigene. São Domingos, 26 April 2008.

From the perspective of the participants heard, injustice is also the result of corruption:

“Some of them live well and some badly. Doing the same job, some have cars and live much better than others. This also causes conflict.”⁵⁸

This accusation is one of the most common, since the session participants think that corruption is the principal cause of the imbalances that generate conflicts, whether personal or regional, leading to violence, suffering and revolt.



The widening gap between the rich and the poor are creating social imbalances and becoming a source of conflict. Photo: Voz di Paz

Even among the military community and the police, unequal treatment is seen as causing conflicts:

“There is discontent because of wages. Anywhere else in the world, the police are paid well because they work 24 hours a day. Here it is the opposite. The military earn much more than we do.”⁵⁹

Coming from a policeman who participated in the consultation organized in Bula (Region of Cacheu – North), this reference to the discontent among police officers aware of the injustices resulting from inequalities between the military and security forces, sheds a light on the extent and diversity of the feeling of injustice.

It exposes the excessive power and privileges achieved by the military, which stands out in the country’s history for its frequent incursions into the spheres of politics and governance. Many people see these privileges as exorbitant and improper. The policeman’s statement above leads us to believe that the police, with little involvement in political destabilization activities and being less of a disruptive force on institutional order, are poorly rewarded. However, the military receive more attention and are treated better in order to avoid discontent and insubordination.

⁵⁸ António Monteiro, representative of the AFASCA Association. Cacheu, 17 May 2008.

⁵⁹ Captain Alanhate Indami, Bula Police Squad Commander. Bula, 14 May 2008.

The manipulation of religions is also a cause of injustice according to participants:

“The Government’s relations with the Muslims is a problem. They receive Government grants to go to Mecca, but other religions receive nothing.”⁶⁰

This difference in treatment is often criticized because, since colonial times, favours have been granted to faithful Muslims as a means of ensuring the political loyalty of the most influential religious leaders. This on-going policy is increasingly denounced as unequal, discriminatory treatment that generates conflict.

In Boé, injustice and inequality are deeply felt as ungratefulness, since this cradle of Guinea-Bissau’s independence is today the region most isolated from the national scene, abandoned and left out of the national equation. There is a feeling of dissatisfaction that causes deep discontent.

“I’m not happy at all. The Government should pay people what it owes them. Everyone should have rights in Guinea-Bissau, then we will see whether people are happy or not. Wherever there are social differences, there are problems.”⁶¹

For some people, this discontent reaches the level of malicious despair:

“We curse Guinea-Bissau, which we made an independent country. But our efforts have never been recognized, nor our sacrifices compensated.”⁶²

The same feeling of being marginalized from the rest of the country is experienced in the Bijagós Islands.

A feeling of injustice and exclusion has arisen also between ethnic groups. This is a new expression of a feeling that has its roots in the distant past. There are real ethnic differences in Guinea-Bissau, but they never posed any problems until they were recently taken up by political groups and leaders. Stressing these differences and the differences in treatment that supposedly affect certain ethnic groups has provoked feelings of exclusion, expressed during the consultation carried out in Tite. One participant raised the discrimination and lack of respect for one’s neighbour as an affront to their values:

“The Balantas do not discriminate against anybody. But there are others who are abusive and think that they are superior to everyone. That’s what violence is.”⁶³

⁶⁰ Lucas Mané, civil servant. Bubaque, 24 May 2008.

⁶¹ Aladje Safula Camará, opinion former. Tchetché, 14 June 2008.

⁶² Aladje Safula Camará, opinion former. Tchetché, 14 June 2008.

⁶³ Carlitos Kssif, rural worker in Foia. Tite, 31 May 2008.

CHAPTER IV: EMERGING ISSUES



Photo: Voz di Paz

EMERGING ISSUES

Issues that the people of Guinea-Bissau see as increasingly dangerous, some of them unknown only a few years ago are identified as emerging problems. They are considered alien to the Bissau-Guinean mentality and proliferate in the form of worries that darken the minds of those who think about the future.

These concerns present themselves as blind threats to the tranquillity and cohesion of communities. Religious intolerance, so-called “human desertification” in some areas, tribalism, drug-trafficking and cohabitation between indigenous people and other ethnicities are all considered to be issues that are now coming to the surface.

4.1. Religious Intolerance

The issue of religious intolerance is a recent development. In the pre-colonial period, there were two co-existing situations which sometimes developed into conflict: the old animist cults, represented by traditional religions fundamentally open to pluralism of beliefs, and Islam.

Islam made progress through its claim to exclusivity, as a monotheistic and scripture-based religion and gained many adherents throughout Guinea-Bissau, especially on the coast. In the colonial period, the Catholic religion was considered privileged since it carried with it a social and cultural superiority granted by the colonial authorities. It did not, however, preach persecution of other faiths: peaceful co-existence was the norm. The privileges granted to the Catholic missions did not stop the colonial administration from using, to their own advantage, the tight controls that religion allowed in highly hierarchical Islamic communities.

The initial years of independence were marked by secularism that reduced the social influence of religion in favour of the social role of the one-party State. In fact, the totalitarian power that the party sought to establish could not afford to tolerate the more deeply rooted competition of other entities aspiring to the same social influence. However, the need to use the networks of the traditional and Muslim religious faithful led to some compromises. The rise of religious influence coincided with political liberalization that allowed freedom of association. This has been exploited by the new religions and sects that have multiplied over the last decade, making the socio-religious landscape more complex. It is within this context of change that completely novel forms of religious intolerance arise.

The manifestations of discrimination denounced by consultation participants are deeply concerning. For instance, there are cases of marriages being refused between people of different religious faiths. The Muslim faithful are considered strictly opposed to mixed marriages, except where the non-Muslim partner converts to Islam beforehand. Since women seem to be more inclined to convert, marriages between non-Muslim men and Muslim women pose more problems of rejection and intolerance. These situations cause prejudice against practicing Muslims, already considered intolerant and give little opportunity for inter-faith connections.

Another branch of religion considered to lack openness is Evangelical and Adventist Protestantism. The strictness of the way they conduct their belief confines and isolates them. It also makes relations with the traditional, pluralist, animist religions particularly difficult. This relationship is further complicated by the fact that these Christian sects serve as a refuge for young people who want to escape the clutches of some of the particularly constraining traditional practices.

The many young people of the Pepel tribe are just one example. Those who wish to escape the many long and expensive traditional ceremonies that are part of their ethnic heritage, now affirm a preference for Protestantism. The many young women of the Balanta tribe that escape arranged marriages by taking refuge in Evangelical communities is another example.

This type of behaviour generates friction which, over time, becomes aggravated leading to conflict which can often be violent. In Tite, an Evangelical Church pastor denounced the beatings inflicted on a gathering of young people at a retreat:

“Does the kankurã (animist spirit) then go to the church where the pastor is with his flock? We set up a camp between the 2nd and 6th February. The kankurã came in on the 6th and beat our young people, injured them with a katana (large knife) over their entire bodies. Sanhá’s son was there and was one of those who were beaten.”⁶⁴

In fact, the language of some proselytizing offends the sensibilities of other religions, creating situations of conflict. Some sects that make great use of radio broadcasts do not hesitate to label the traditional faiths with words such as diabolic, backward and antisocial. This aggressive language, charged with disrespect for ancestral cultural forms of worship, creates problems and feelings of revulsion. One of the participants at a consultation session in Canchungo was led to declare:

“My rights are violated. Let me identify myself: I am neither Christian nor Muslim. I am an Animist. Whether I’m in the majority or minority, I have the right to be protected in my belief. The problem began in 2006 in Caió; my place of worship was invaded. The minority has the right to be protected by the State, but I am attacked as I practice my religion. It is an injustice.”⁶⁵



Religious intolerance is a recent development but that is increasingly leading to violent clashes between religious groups. Photo: Voz di Paz

⁶⁴ Manuel Djú, Evangelical Church pastor. Tite, 31 May 2008.

⁶⁵ Quintino Francisco Manga, Vice-administrator of Caió, member of the Cacheu Regional Space. Canchungo, 18 February 2008.

This accusation was aimed at highlighting the contempt with which those who claim to be holders of the truth treat other beliefs, creating situations of conflict. A balobero (traditional priest) in Caió, commenting on the construction of a mosque near an irã, which is a traditional place of worship, said:

“This irã already existed when we were born. Before our fathers were born, and our mothers, it already existed. We cannot move it to another site. We practice our worship there. They will also worship there. If there is a collision between the ceremonies, what will happen then?”⁶⁶

THE IRÃ AND THE MOSQUE

The public hearing in Caió brought to light an old quarrel dating back many years that has resulted in a test of strength between the Islamic community and the Animists.

The situation stems from the building of a mosque a few metres from the irã, a sanctuary or place of worship of an Animist divinity.

Taking advantage of the support of a Muslim administrator, the Muslims began to build a mosque near the irã. The Animists asked for the mosque to be built further away from their place of worship. This request was based on arguments of precedent. One of the elders underlined the unorthodox nature of this type of co-existence. But these arguments were treated with contempt by the administrative authorities who did not, in this case, adopt a neutral and impartial position.

Once the deed was done, dialogue became impossible between the two communities and the situation degenerated into latent tension, at risk of imminent explosion.

Dialogue was reopened by Voz di Paz to seek a satisfactory solution for the two parties.

“Hurry up. Help us to find a solution as soon as possible, since one day we may hold a ceremony, get drunk and invade the mosque...”.

One of the driving forces behind the growing conflicts regarding religious intolerance is ignorance. Many of the practitioners of some religions have only a rudimentary knowledge of the precepts of their faith. They use this knowledge as a basis to preach in a discriminatory manner, leading to contradictions, even between branches of the same faith.

It is this type of blind confrontation which, in the Islamic community, divides Sunnis and the Ahmaddiya Islamic religious movement. The latter faith proclaims modernist tendencies but has been rejected by followers of the traditional Islamic majority in Guinea-Bissau. In a recent and memorable episode, the tension between these two branches of the same faith was so high that practitioners of traditional Islam sought to outlaw the Ahmaddiya movement, and succeeded. The fact that they managed to do so highlights the increasingly evident issue of the involvement of religion in politics, a mixture that really does generate conflict. In this respect, the problematic

⁶⁶ João Bico da Costa, *balobero* (traditional priest). Caió, 30 April 2008.

mixture has provoked expressions such as “Muslim political power”, “the right of Muslims to govern”, etc.⁶⁷

To summarize, religious intolerance is a development which is increasingly denounced, above all by the religions that do not feel favoured by the politically powerful. Over the last few years, the potential for conflict between religions has increased substantially and seems to be growing. Those who participated in the consultation sessions have not failed to notice this development. It explains the appeal for tolerance made in Buba by one of the survey participants.

“Religion is an emanation of God. This is why we have to be tolerant towards each other. Each one of us will have to give an account before God, and only before God, because each of us makes his choice. If there are people who wish to follow a religion, let them do so.”⁶⁸

4.2. Human desertification

Desertification is a phenomenon that affects the Eastern regions of the country, which is suffering intense environmental degradation due to the uncontrolled activity of the inhabitants.

Human desertification is another phenomenon that has a knock-on effect in regions that have experienced significant emigration. It is obvious in the Cacheu region, an area steeped in ancient migratory tradition.

The massive exodus of young male labour, debilitates the workforce, especially in the agricultural sector. The emigrants’ wives end up as the main source of labour in some areas. To compensate for the lack of labourers, they call in workers from other areas. After working on a temporary basis for some years, these migrant workers seek to settle and set up as smallholders in their fields, causing conflicts to break out with the traditional owners of the disputed land.

This aspect of the effects of the labour exodus beyond the national frontier or to the cities of Guinea-Bissau is further aggravated by the lack of interest that young people show in agricultural work.

In the regions affected by emigration, young men only dream of escaping local living conditions and entering the idealized world of the migrant. Their lack of interest and even contempt for rural work contributes to human desertification. This is not just a demographic phenomenon (i.e. the physical migration of labour), but also a psychological escape from work that is now little valued. In this case, the reduction in the workforce is accompanied by generational conflicts between the elders, with their values deep-rooted in rural life and the value of hard work, and the young, with their ill-assimilated urban values, leading them to distance themselves from the land as an income generator. As one elderly woman said in a consultation session in Calequisse:

“People should work to help the old. But now it’s the old who work to give to the young. Why do young people do absolutely nothing? They drink caju wine and shoot at each other.”⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Expressions often used by politicians and Muslim members of the social elite attempting to use religion for non-religious ends.

⁶⁸ Abdú Dabó, civil servant. Buba, 15 March 2008.

⁶⁹ Amélia Pote, pottery worker. Calequisse, 23 April 2008.



The massive exodus of young people to larger cities is debilitating the local workforce, especially in the agricultural sector. Photo: Voz di Paz

The main consequence, pointed out by consultation participants, is impoverishment, since the exodus from rural areas creates poverty and raises social tensions. This has been aggravated by the economic crises in European countries which has reduced migrant incomes, leading to a drop in remittances which used to help offset the labour shortage.

“One of the basic problems is emigration. People emigrate a lot, but for those who stay behind the remittances do not meet their needs.”⁷⁰

The end of the Eldorado myth of emigration means it is now seen as a source of imbalance, harmful to prosperity and peace. Consequently, attitudes have changed and people are calling for the preservation of the workforce as an important factor in maintaining the economic and social balance.

“We have to provide incentives for young people, so we can have a labour force, because young people are the force for development. Because if they all emigrate it’s to get an education. If they can’t find the appropriate education where they are, they’re going to emigrate.”⁷¹

As can be seen in the thinking of this young man who spoke at the listening session held in Calequisse, the reasons prompting emigration are essentially the lack of opportunities at local level.

⁷⁰ Rachid Djaló, civil servant. 17 May 2008.

⁷¹ Raimundo Có, representative of the young people’s association, *Associação de Jovens de Pecixe*. Calequisse, 23 April 2008.

The exodus of the labour force can only be stopped by establishing better conditions locally.

This realization goes beyond individual or family considerations that have traditionally caused people to emigrate. In a wider sense, the poverty caused by the lack of labour and opportunities for younger people is a national as well as a local problem and it affects all generations.

“There are many young people who leave Guinea-Bissau to seek work in Gambia, or Senegal. If 30 set out, only fifteen will return, and the other fifteen will stay away. Now I ask you: who is losing out here? Is it the Government, is it their parents, or is it the entire country that is losing out?”⁷²

It is clear from this question posed by a participant at the listening session in Contuboel that emigration is no longer seen as a solution to problems and as a mean of making money, but rather as the source of the problem of losing human resources that are vital for development. Emigration, desertification, poverty and conflict appear to be tied together in the minds of those who took part in the listening sessions.

FEMINIZATION OF THE CACHEU REGION

The rural labour force in the Cacheu region is undergoing rapid feminization. This is due to the high rate of male emigration.

The migratory tradition of the Manjaco people has remained steadfast since the early decades of the twentieth century. Senegal and France were the first destinations, before subsequent waves of migrants spread out across the entire globe.

The consequences of this haemorrhaging continue to be felt in the Cacheu region, where the land remains largely in the hands of the migrants' wives.

To work their properties, the women call in paid workers from other regions, since the young Manjaco male population has already ceased to have any interest in working the land, preferring to wait for European immigration visas or for money to be sent back by their fathers.

However, the rural workers brought to the Cacheu region end up settling their own properties, based on tolerated crops (rice, maize, beans, etc.), eventually planting perennial crops such as caju and other fruits that confer the right of ownership on occupied land.

The occupation of land claimed by absentee landlords that do not exploit it is becoming an increasingly serious problem.

⁷² Aladje Sissé, farmer. Contuboel, 12 July 2008.

4.3. Tribalism

The issue of tribalism was raised at nearly every one of the consultations. Its recurrence indicates a real malaise affecting national cohesion.

This malaise is so great that for a long time the relevance of tribal and cultural differences was denied in the “country of Amílcar Cabral,” a great figure for internationalism, Pan-Africanism and the Bissau-Guinean and Cape Verdean nationalities.

From the earliest days of independence, in the name of national harmony, the establishment refused to admit the existence of ethnic contradictions. “In the land of Amílcar Cabral, there is no place for tribalism,” was the slogan of this insidious form of denial with its roots in the naivety of altruistic volunteers.

This slogan prevailed during the first 15 years of independence, obliterating the 11 years of debate over ethnic and cultural differences in the name of a unitary ideology disseminated over the course of the struggle for national liberation that served to bring together the components of the mosaic of Guinea-Bissau’s population.



For many years the slogan “in the land of Amílcar Cabral, there is no place for tribalism” kept the country from addressing ethnic and cultural differences. Photo: Voz di Paz

However, neither speeches nor practices affirming national unity and denying tribal identities and their realities on the ground managed to stifle the behaviour and the sentiment underlying these identities.

Attacks made on the basis of strategies for the conquest of power brought tribes and their privileged relationships to the forefront once the ideological layer that served to disguise this deep-rooted reality was worn away.

The strategies of political marketing that emerged under the auspices of political pluralism must therefore take a great deal of responsibility for this resurgence.

“People aren’t ready for democracy. All of the parties have their tribal orientation. And within a party, if you say something that’s true, you run the risk of incurring disfavour if you don’t belong to the ethnic majority.”⁷³

This assertion by a former deputy who took part in the listening session held in Mansoa sums up the seriousness and generalized status of the problem.

The responsibility of the politicians is all the more in evidence insofar as it is accepted as indisputable that the path to power is through tribal ties. The participants denounced the Electoral Law as tolerant of political strategies based on tribal identity. Many of those involved requested that the Electoral Law be revised to make tribal background inoperative in efforts to win power.

Even the people that spoke out against this admit that the behaviour of the population in political matters is basically inspired by ethnic affinity. This aspect stands out clearly in the statement of a participant at the listening session held in Mansoa:

“Today there are tribal problems every single day. We ourselves suffer this in our own skin. They always tell us our father went to sell cola nuts in Nhacra, and this means that we are not part of this tribe. But how is it that an issue like this can reach such extremes? What is the negative effect of it later on?”⁷⁴

But, if the responsibility of the politicians and their strategies for winning power are plain to see, from the point of view of several participants there continues to be a tradition of peaceful co-existence among the highly diverse components of the population. In short, it is bad policy that fosters the disputes that generate ethnic conflicts, as one participant clearly points out at the consultations in Farim.

“The people never used to have any problems. They spent 11 years in the struggle. Were there tribalists there? No. If independence came and tribalism arose, who brought it? Isn’t it the people who govern?”⁷⁵

The same opinion came up at Ilha de Komo in the Southern part of the country:

“There is no Bijagó, there is no Balanta, we are all brothers. But since independence was won, there’s been one confusion after another.”⁷⁶

⁷³ Paulo Bodjam, former deputy of the PRS, teacher. Mansoa, 19 April 2008.

⁷⁴ Henrique Iaia Fati, resident of Nhoma. Mansoa, 19 April 2008.

⁷⁵ Malam Tambađu, representative from Saliquenhe and the villages in the area where phosphate is mined. Farim, 3 April 2008.

⁷⁶ Braima Mané, opinion leader. Komo, 29 May 2008.

Because of this negative development, belonging to a tribe when the tribe is in the majority is now looked upon as the key to power, as was critically pointed out at Iemberém in the Southern part of the country (Tombali Region):

“Tribalism does not bring peace to Guinea-Bissau. As long as it exists in this country, there will be no peace. Here in Iemberém, the Tandas are in the majority. So does that mean they can abuse me any way they like? Even in politics, if you belong to a minority tribe, you will never govern here in Guinea-Bissau.”⁷⁷

The automatic relationship between belonging to a tribe and having access to power if this tribe is in the majority is pointed out as an element supporting the development of tribalism, since power is the key for access to wealth in the context of scarce resources.

However, politics is not the only factor responsible for the development of tribalism. Other strategies and behaviour are seen as sources of tribalism, or as support for its prevalence and growth. The lack of safety regarding people and property is a case in point. Indeed, the stealing of cattle seems to be one of the practices that contribute to growing misunderstandings between certain tribes that



once had a tradition of peaceful co-existence.

The issue of cattle theft has taken on alarming proportions and increasing tensions between tribes which have traditionally co-existed peacefully. Photo: Voz di Paz

In the Eastern and Central Southern regions, where the people of various tribes have traditionally co-existed and mingled together, serious problems in relations between tribes and villages have arisen in recent years because of cattle theft which has taken on alarming proportions. The cattle farmers of the Fula tribe, who are becoming increasingly active as entrepreneurs, accuse the Balantas, of being cattle thieves. Furthermore, they think this uncommon boldness on their part is due to the fact that the thieves whom they assume are of the Balanta tribe, are confident of the support they can get from their “patrons” who have high government positions, particularly in the military.

Once the Pandora’s Box is opened, the deep-rooted antagonisms come to the surface and degrade relations among tribes.

⁷⁷ Amidu Quetá, deputy from Cacine. Iemberém, 30 May 2008.

This is the case with relations between the Fula and Mandinga tribes. These two groups, which have a historical rivalry that tends to lie dormant in normal times, resume their acute conflicts as soon as historical rivalries are exploited for the sake of political or other causes. A nurse in Sonaco explained that for a number of reasons the people of the Fula and Mandinga villages refused to associate with each other:

“Here, too, there was a problem between the Mandingas and the Fulas. During the vaccination campaign, the Mandingas won’t go to places where there are Fulas. You have to vaccinate the Fulas first, then you have to go and vaccinate the Mandingas. They have problems. They fought in the rice fields and actually shot at each other.”⁷⁸

Another major aspect of the ethnic question is the increasingly frequent combination of the problem of belonging to a religion with that of tribal identity. The lines of identity pass between so-called “Muslim” tribes (*raça muçulmanu*) – Mandingas, Fulas, Beafadas – and the so-called Christians (*raça criston*) or Animists – Pepel, Manjaco, Balantas, since many of the people in these tribes remain open to the Christian faith.

These ethnic-religious lines of separation, formerly loosely observed, have become rigid and serve as grounds for exclusion when issues or practices bearing on ethnic or cultural identity come up. This is the case with female genital mutilation or excision (circumcision), the criticism of which regularly stirs up controversies with radical overtones. The eventual suppression of this creates tensions and radical attitudes in defence of identity that feed on irrational reactions which foster conflict.

These susceptibilities to the claims of identity and political and tribal manipulations converge to form harsh stereotypes that sustain longstanding prejudice. Frustrations, misunderstandings and exclusions provoking radicalism and distilling hatreds weaken national cohesion and tear apart the social fabric. It was in reference to these mechanisms of stereotyping that one participant at a listening session held in Iemberém (Tombali Region in the Southern part of the country) spoke out as follows:

One speaks of tribalism, but there’s something dangerous that we have to acknowledge. Let us suppose that Sulai, who is Fula, does something wrong, let’s say he made a mistake. But they say: “Fulas are no good for anything”. You shouldn’t generalize and say that Fulas are no good for anything: That really hurts a lot”⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Iancuba Biai, nurse. Sonaco, 21 June 2008.

⁷⁹ Fodé Soare, opinion leader member of the Regional Space for Dialogue. Iemberém, 30 May 2008.

THE INVASION OF THE BIJAGÓS ISLANDS BY STRANGE FOREIGNERS

In the Bijagós Islands the notion of a foreigner has special connotations.

The foreign invader does not come from far away. He comes from the neighbouring island. Each island is a unit unto itself, and the residents tend to set the limits of their universe at their maritime boundaries. Whoever comes from the neighbouring island is in fact a foreigner.

This fragmentation of socio-cultural identity has effects that are increasingly conducive to conflict in the economic domain. The exodus to the larger islands, chiefly Bubaque, causes a lot of friction over rights of land ownership. Thus, the Bijagós who come from other islands, who have benefited from a temporary assignment of lands, are increasingly pressured to give back something that they look upon as their own property. "Go get some land on your own island," is now the refrain chanted by those who feel they have been invaded by foreigners from the distant worlds that lie only a few miles away.

4.4. Drug-trafficking

In recent years, the issue of drugs has taken on alarming proportions in Guinea-Bissau.

Drug-trafficking has been emphasized as a problem that shows up the weakness of the Government on the domestic level, and affects its foreign credibility. Attention has therefore been focused on these institutional aspects, to the detriment of the social aspects of the problem of the circulation of drugs in the country.

The consultations with the Bissau-Guineans about the causes of conflict revealed that the sale and consumption of narcotics are considered to be among the greatest dangers in the country.

One of the first aspects emphasized is the way drugs break society down in multiple ways.

The appearance of fault lines in society is exemplified by the sudden manifestation of new categories of rich people: drug dealers who show off their newly acquired ill-gotten gains. This flaunting of wealth in the midst of a poor working population creates tensions because it is seen as evidence of widespread impunity. It discredits the Government, which is seen as weak and unable to put a stop to the trafficking. These tensions were pointed out at a number of consultations.

At the consultation organized in Bula (Cacheu Sector, Northern part of the country), a major in the army, emphasizing the socially destructive effect of drugs, exclaimed: *"Drugs are the enemy of the people!"*

The harm to peace is also illustrated by the appearance of bands of young drug dealers who fight for control of the drug network.

This trend has been confirmed by the multiplication of incidents of violent aggression (attacks on homes, murders, etc.) that regularly erupt in the neighbourhoods of the capital and surrounding areas. The outlying zones of Bissau have increasingly experienced violent disruption which disturbs the fragile peace.

Another aspect pointed out by the population is the ambiguous role played by security and defence forces. The complicity and duplicity of elements of the armed forces were extensively denounced in Catió by a participant at the listening session. He said that he had been an eye witness to the involvement of the defence forces in the activities of planes that brought bags to Cufar (in the South) containing poorly identified products:



The near absence of the State at the regional level is facilitating drug-trafficking. Photo: Voz di Paz

“Eight white men arrived. One of them spoke Portuguese properly. The others didn’t understand anything. We asked what mission they came to perform, and they replied that they came to check the runway, because planes were going to land there to take away sick people. One of them had dark glasses and was clinging to an attaché case. I said to myself, ‘That’s strange! The plane didn’t even have any seats, just crates and a number of bundles. There was only one place for a seat for the co-pilot. I asked, “So the plane doesn’t have any seats?” He said to me, “They’re supposed to arrive.” I said, “Then we’re going to speak to the governor in Catió.” He said, “I have nothing to do with the governor, my boss is in Bissau.” They came and went every day. Then the soldiers began to prevent other people from having any contact with them. I myself was upset when one day I heard a spokesman of the Army General Staff say that they knew nothing about this plane. It’s the soldiers who greet this plane, and then they say they know nothing about it. This is bad.”⁸⁰

The author of this statement, unique for his strength and courage, died shortly after this extraordinary contribution that served to illustrate the complicity between drug dealers and elements from one of the institutions that should be protecting law and order.

⁸⁰ Consultation. Tombali region, 14 March 2008.

Equally, the questionable behaviour of the police who has enriched itself from the drug trade is denounced. In Quinhamel, one participant at the consultation stated:

*"People were mistreated in Biombo in a number of ways. We have here segments of the river where these people went fishing and came upon some drugs. The police found out about it, went there, stole the drugs and beat them up. Then they went off and sold the drugs, bought nice houses, cars, everything. Those who are more powerful ought to provide a solution."*⁸¹

These incidents not only create precedents, but also discredit the State. They generate frustrations and hatred deep within the people subjected to arbitrary violence used in the name of legal authority, but in reality turned to serve its own interests. This is one of the sources of disagreement that regularly puts the police forces and the people at odds. One person responsible for State security implicitly recognized this, but put the blame on the side of parents and those responsible for education by saying:

*"Your children are trafficking the drugs, and the tabanca committee does not cooperate. If there is no cooperation, there will be no peace."*⁸²

This charge, made in the listening session held in São Domingos, highlights the responsibility of families as the main cause of children involvement in trafficking and shows that not everyone agrees on the source of the problem. However, drug-trafficking clearly contributes to the degradation of ethical-professional values among the defence and security forces and to the erosion of ethical-social values within the general population.

Another aspect of the erosion of values and its relation to the drug problem is the impotency of families to deal with the increase of drug consumption by young people. Consequently, gangs of teenagers multiply acts of aggression to obtain the necessary means to purchase doses of drugs for consumption.

The increase of violence and crime, therefore, is related to two aspects of drug circulation: selling and consumption.

The bad reputation that drugs give to some regions within the country led a participant in Quinhamel to show her indignation with this aspect by saying:

*"We don't have any kapoks that produce drugs in Biombo. It is the poor fishermen that find bags of drugs in their nets..."*⁸³

⁸¹ Margarida Cá, vendor. Quinhamel, 17 February 2008.

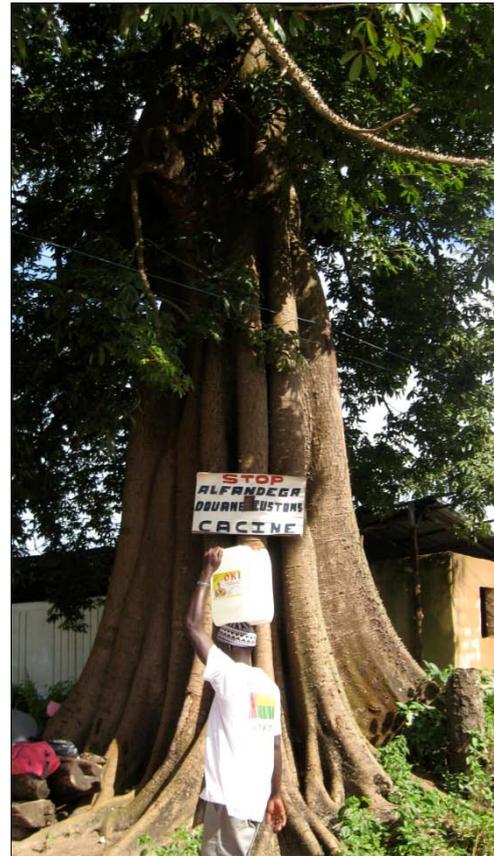
⁸² Braim Inja, director of security services in São Domingos. São Domingos, 26 April 2008.

⁸³ Margarida Cá, street seller. Quinhamel, 17 February 2008.

The same was repeated in Bijagós Islands, whose reputation as a beautiful virgin land, a natural and cultural reserve, was ruined when they were labelled as drug-trafficking islands. This complaint was expressed by a young man in the consultation held in Bubaque:

*"The Bijagós Islands were a sacred place. Why is it that today the Bijagós Islands are seen as a place for passing drugs? Because there is no control. Why is it that the Ministry of Interior exists? If we really want it, drugs will have nowhere to pass through."*⁸⁴

In all regions, the responsibility for harm caused by drugs is attributed to the State, whose weakness eases the outrageous prosperity of drugs and its disastrous consequences. The responsibilities of local accomplices are minimized by the people, while, on the other hand, they berate the security agents as a primary cause. In all cases, it is a highly controversial problem that generates many conflicts.



Porous borders make fertile terrain for drug-trafficking. Photo: Voz di Paz

BIOMBO, DRUGS, AND CORRUPT POLICEMEN

The shadow of drugs hung over the listening session held in Quinhamel. It is the region that was seriously hurt by drug cases that invaded its shores in late 2005 and greatly disturbed its population. This unique case started when fishermen found packages of pure cocaine and were unfamiliar with the product or its market value. Many used this strange powder as fertilizer, but it ended up killing all the plants that they wanted to see have a rapid development. Others that were better informed stored the product in places that were difficult to access and were part of their folklore such as shrines of local deities (baloba), holes in the woods, etc. According to a participant in the consultation session in Quinhamel, the police agents who went to make inquiries in the region turned into drug dealers. They arrested individuals suspected to having the product, tortured them, often obtained information about hiding places, recovered the drug, and sold it for their own advantage. Biombo was stained with drugs and corrupt policemen with dirty money.

⁸⁴ Braima Baldé, President of the Association of young people of Formosa. Bubaque, 24 May 2008.

4.5. Co-existence between indigenous and immigrant populations

The issue of co-existence between indigenous and immigrant people is distinct from tribalism. It originates mainly in relation to outsiders, whatever their ethnic group. This problem is closely linked to mobility—be it people coming from countries in the sub-region, or Bissau-Guineans from other regions or "grounds", as they call it. They are intimately connected to their ground, placing great emphasis on a local identity that is very relevant in the eyes of the natives. "Us" is put in contrast to "them" in a confrontational way. When this confrontation is poorly managed and governed, it gives rise to conflicts.

The issue of co-existence between indigenous and immigrant people is strongly linked to competition over access to resources. The internal logic is to defend the interests of a group that claims to be the holder of exclusive rights because it is made up of natives.

WHO RULES IN GABÚ, THE PRESSURE COOKER OF ETHNIC GROUPS?

Could the great city of the East be a victim of its own success? This is what some citizens who fear domination by foreigners coming from Guinea-Conakry think.

At the core of the issue is the commercial supremacy of these migrants from Guinea-Conakry.

Since the 1990s Gabú, located at the crossroads of trade routes to Guinea-Conakry, Senegal, and Mali, has become a commercial hub attractive to wealthy merchants from neighbouring Guinea-Conakry.

Thanks to their economic power, they now represent the most wealthy social class of the country's second city. They buy land, build houses, control the circulation of money, and progressively gain more social influence. From the perspective of many indigenous people, this supremacy makes them arrogant and domineering.

Although most immigrants belong to the Fula ethnic group, as do most of the indigenous people, a clear division is made between the Futa-Fula (immigrants) and the Fulas of Gabú, children of the ground. The latter have little consideration for the colonization that marginalizes them in their own land.

A seemingly insignificant story of charging passing cars to Guinea-Conakry sparked a conflict that almost took a violent direction in 2007-2008.

A consultation made by Voz di Paz revealed a clear phobia of indigenous people being marginalized and treated as inferior by immigrant people.

But the problem gets more complicated when one adds to this silent aversion the rivalry between Fulas and Mandinka and the tangled preconceptions among all ethnic groups. This turns Gabú into a pressure cooker.

To defuse the tension, Voz di Paz launched an inter-community dialogue, which is being formalized to be a council of scholars speaking out to promote harmony and resolve arising and re-occurring conflicts.

A clear illustration of the complexity of this problem is given by a dispute between indigenous and immigrant people. The subtleness of influences in the conflict lies in the fact that all protagonists belong to the same ethnic group (Fula) and profess the same religion (Islam). In this case, the bone of contention comes from the divergence of interests among the Fulas of Gabú and Futa-Fulas from Guinea-Conakry. Even though they belong to the same ethnic group, the indigenous and immigrant people have their backs to each other because the outside Fula has an almost monopolistic dominance on local trade in detriment to local Fula, "the children of the ground".

This clash between a successful outsider and a child of the ground hardly at home in his own land is not confined to specific areas. A more general formulation was given in Iemberém by a participant who defended the national interests in these terms:

*"Do not consider the foreigner superior to other people. The stranger has always come from somewhere else. One day when he returns to his land, he will take sides with his people. Here in Guinea-Bissau when someone comes, it is a stranger that has money. He does whatever he thinks best."*⁸⁵

This view of a stranger behaving as if they were in conquered territory is also commonly held in urban centres because of the difficulty of sharing opportunities in modern sectors of activity. In rural areas, it is a struggle for access to rare resources such as the sea, rivers, land, etc. Some factors such as population growth and environmental degradation increase conflicts. Woodcutters from Guinea-Conakry or fishermen from Mali are considered by the indigenous people working in the same areas of economic activity to be largely to blame for the destruction of the environment. A fisherman who accuses foreign fishermen, argued as follows in Bafatá:

*"The people of Bafatá are ready to hear us. [...] We can no longer catch good quality fish in this river. Why? Because of bad practices of Malian foreigners who have a bad kind of net."*⁸⁶

There are regions that show a greater propensity for this type of conflict, particularly the regions of Cacheu, Bafatá, Quinara, Bijagós, and Gabú.

Sometimes hostility is based on a specific local sense of ownership of a place that tends to exclude any alleged outsider who may have the same nationality and equal rights.

A young man, who suffered a great deal from being rejected as a foreigner because of originating from the islands and being "exiled" to Fula lands in the East, stated:

*"I, for example, came from the islands over here. But I do not have much access to young people here because of not having 'Pitche Sector' written on my identification card."*⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Fodé Soare, opinion leader, a member of the Regional Space in Tombali. Iemberém, 30 May 2008.

⁸⁶ Idrissa Ba, fisherman. Bafatá, 28 July 2008.

⁸⁷ Leónico Barbosa, teacher. Pitche, 13 June 2008.

OFF THE ISLAND, STRANGE HERD!

On the Uno island, a subject of a growing contention is a herd that grows, grows, and grows.

An increase in the number of cattle can be considered a blessing in a country struggling to develop cattle-breeding and that considers the possession of animals as savings and wealth.

This is not the case in Uno. A rapidly expanding herd belonging to one inhabitant terrifies the entire island. The reason is simple. This shrewd man with a good business mind, gradually acquired through cash and other goods the cows of the people afflicted by some urgent need.

Over the years his herd has become the largest on the island and the wandering of his cattle creates trouble for farmers, particularly during planting season.

The conflict for land occupation took on open hostility and now threatens to reach unsustainable dimensions. It can become explosive at any time because it is fed by a powerful fuel: the fortunate herd owner is a Fula, that is, a stranger whose name only brings to Bissago inhabitants' minds astuteness, venality, support given to the Portuguese to conquer the islands -- the last bastions of resistance to colonization -- and the cruelty of the overbearing, arrogant, and contemptuous soldiers of the Bissago culture.

Such are old stories of unhealed wounds that are easily reopened. Such memories hurt, and feed persistent hatred.

CHAPTER V: THE WAY FORWARD



Photo: Voz di Paz

The validation process and formulating solutions for Peace (2009-2011)

Originally the programme had intended to organize a national meeting in March 2009, to validate the findings of the consultation phase. However, given the complications and the fragile political environment at that time, a regional level validation process was organized instead.

This idea was something new and the process turned out to be a success. In fact, the regional process encouraged greater participation of the people in the identification and validation of the causes of conflict. The 13 validation meetings involved over 6000 Bissau-Guineans from across the country. It gave the team an opportunity to compare the way ideas about the conflict differ between the various regions and groups.

The purpose of the validation process was to discuss and choose four main priorities most relevant for the consolidation of peace. These turned out to be:

1. Ineffective State institutions and bad governance;
2. Poverty;
3. Poor administration of Justice; and
4. Tribalism.

The next volume of this report will analyze the findings of this validation process.

The Voz di Paz programme will now concentrate on the four priority issues identified during the validation process in order to formulate broadly based solutions contributing to the consolidation of peace. This approach will continue to yield both a broadly debated body of research and knowledge on issues critical to the consolidation of peace as well as develop practice and experience with consensus-building at national and local levels, thus building actor ownership of the process.

In the next phase, the programme will establish Working Groups, for each of the 4 priority issues. These will be charged with the identification and articulation of solutions relevant to the selected priorities. The conclusions of the Working Groups will be presented, discussed and validated in 2011.

ANNEX

Map of Guinea-Bissau



Map No. 4063 Rev. 3 UNITED NATIONS
June 2004

Department of Peacekeeping Operations
Cartographic Section