Tiniguena — “This Land is Ours”

Constructing sustainability through the governance of spaces, natural resources, and cultures in a peripheral country

| Guinea Bissau |

Community participation, conservation, and transformation

The name “Tiniguena” originates from the language of the Cassanga ethnicity and means “this land is ours.” Tiniguena is a Guinea-Bissauan nongovernmental organization founded in 1999 that is part of an emergent movement of civil organizations that aim to foster a new dynamic of effective popular participation in the construction of Guinea-Bissau’s future.

During the ongoing processes of political and democratic liberalization, the first NGOs were established in the country. Tiniguena is thus one of the organizations that marks the evolution of Guinea-Bissau's formal civil society, which has taken on the challenge, even within this fragile context, that it is possible to promote an alternative development model from that which had been, until recently, concentrated at the level of State institutions.

This organization’s mission, “**to promote participatory and durable development based in the conservation of natural resources and cultures and in the exercise of citizenship,**” envisions a Guinea-Bissau where local populations can contribute to the country’s well-being and benefit from the self-realization at all levels generated by this

participatory process.

This mission allows Tiniguena to intervene in a number of different areas depending on local needs, transversally, including in themes such as small-scale family agriculture, food sovereignty and security, the socioeconomic valuing of local products and biodiversity, environmental education for citizenship, management of protected areas, and gender equality and equity.

Active primarily in the regions of Bissau and the southern coast of the country, specifically the Green Zone, Cantanhez, and the Urok complex (Formosa, Nago, Tchediã), Tiniguena's activities have fostered the valorization of local agricultural products derived from local cultures and biologically diverse species and have promoted the conservation and use of various cultures, agricultural practices, and local phytogenic resources, with a particular focus on the interests of women in agricultural biodiversity. In addition, Tiniguena has facilitated the awakening of a national consciousness that values local flavors, knowledge, and practices associated with ecosystem services and continues to support making local organizations more dynamic in order to strengthen citizen participation in the management of resources and space.



Meeting of Urok Management Council Members, Formosa Island – Guinea- Bissau, 2019, Tiniguena Archive

To realize these activities, Tiniguena has adopted various methods according to specific contexts and needs. These methodologies include information, communication, and awareness building; mobilization, networking, advocacy, technical assistance, and capacity support; micro-financing, material support, conducting studies, fact-finding, and systematizing popular knowledge.

The annual calendar that Tiniguena has produced since 1994 has also become an important tool for awareness. From its consistent approach in drawing attention to environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic issues in Guinea-Bissau to the climate of celebration that

accompanies its release each year (now a much anticipated institutional tradition), the calendar has become a Tiniguena highlight.

Tiniguena 2020 Calendar Cover, Cadique- Cantanhez 2019, Simon Nancy

Kil ki di nos tem balur

Kil Ki Di Nos Tem Balur Product Line, 2010, Emanuel Ramos

Tiniguena's commitment to its mission is evident in the numerous projects it has carried out over the years. These include the creation of the first co-managed Community Protected Area in the Urok islands in the Bolama-Bijagós Archipelago Biosphere Reserve and the support of small-scale producers in the production, transformation, and commercialization of the "Kil Ki Di Nós Tem Balur" (What is Ours Has Value) product line, which aims to promote land and marine biodiversity. This innovative initiative has had a multiplier effect since 2006 by inspiring other similar projects in the country: "Anós Ku Ten Terra" (We Are the Owners of the Land) which contributed to the legalization of peasant communities' communal productive lands threatened by private groups and the creation of popular committees for land management; and "Know to Love, Love to Protect," a volunteer organization, which has, for the past 25 year, promoted environmental education for adolescent and youth citizenship through visits to the country's natural, historical, and cultural patrimony sites. This initiative has contributed to the creation of a critical mass of young people dedicated to their land and people, helping Tiniguena in its awareness and information campaigns among youth.

Additionally, in partnership with the World Food Program (WFP), Tiniguena has participated

with local family farmers in the “Purchase Local Food” project to supply products to school cafeterias. The project’s goal is to improve children's and adolescents’ learning conditions within the public school system, with a focus on gender equity, promoting and preserving diets based in local cultural and culinary practices. Similarly, the project “Rural Women” seeks to reinforce participatory democracy in Guinea-Bissau through the promotion of the exercise of equal rights within the framework of the United Nations Peace-building Fund.

Natural Resource Monitoring

As the first environmentalist-oriented organization in the country, and in the face of the threat of over-extraction of natural resources like fish, forest, oil, and minerals, Tiniguena has, since 2016, developed a public Natural Resource Monitoring project. The European Union and Inter Pares financed the project in light of the fragility of public management in the maintenance of natural resources due to a lack of government transparency, thus empowering civil society to oversee public patrimony and establish an alert system in order to avoid abusive extractive processes.

Timber Logging, Guinea-Bissau, Constantino Correia

Xitole Quary, Guinea-Bissau, 2020, Tiniguena Archive

Public reports and complaints related to natural resource extraction, such as the construction of the thermoelectric center in the Lagoas de Cufada Natural Park (the largest freshwater reserve in the country) and illegal logging in various regions of the country, not only offered the public a better understanding of these issues—allowing them to become part of the public agenda through national and international communication—but they also positively impacted community oversight for those local agents engaged in popular supervision, forcing the government to pay attention to community concerns and to adopt

extraction monitoring groups and better extraction practices.

Tiniguena's Natural Resource Monitoring activities have also inspired natural resource and space management processes in West African more broadly, for example, the sub-regional project "Environmental Management of Offshore Petroleum and Gas Extraction," which is a partnership between the MAVA Foundation and the Program of West African Maritime Conservation (PRCM) involving eight countries including Guinea-Bissau.

APAC - Valuing Areas and Territories of Autochthonous Community Patrimony in Guinea-Bissau

For an equitable and participatory vision of conservation, the valorization of community forms of preservation of natural patrimony, always associated with cultural diversity, is essential. With this purpose in mind, Tiniguena's APAC project, with support from the United Nations Environment Fund, will conduct a census of autochthonous community patrimony sites in Guinea-Bissau that have been voluntarily preserved by indigenous peoples and whose ecological and economic benefits are enormous for local traditional communities.

Accordingly, information on governance in these spaces has already been surveyed, both to inform local stakeholders and advocate together with them for the formal public recognition, valorization, and development of these community-managed areas and territories of autochthonous patrimony.

João Vieira Island, Guinea-Bissau, En Haut/IBAP

Governance and Sustainability of Community-Led Change

An emblematic example of Tiniguena's activities at the community level is the work carried out on Urok Island, where the support of subsistence agriculture, natural resource conservation, strategies for boosting the local economy, female empowerment, and community governance complement the island's existing culture of popular knowledge. This type of intervention contributes to the salvaging, conservation, and valorization of favorable traditional techniques and knowledge and forms of production, the valorization of seeds, the management of natural space, and the maximization of ecosystem services.



Participants in the Marinha Community Protected Area General Assembly in Urok, Formosa Island, 2018, Pierre Campredon

In this territory, the conservation of bio-diverse resources is the primary force mobilizing populations through various collectives and interest groups. Examples include responsible artisanal fishing through participatory resource oversight and the promotion of agricultural biodiversity through community gardens in the coastal zone. In 2019, the AMPC Urok Management Council was granted the United Nations Equator Prize as a leading example of a local resource management solution that mitigates climate change.



Equator Award Reception, New York, Tiniguena Archives

Tiniguena's approach of working directly with communities privileges reciprocity, making it essentially a methodology that not only aims to reach its objective of greater civic consciousness, popular public participation, and the long-term improvement of conditions within these communities, but also affords Tiniguena opportunities for dialogue and to consolidate its own technical skills and field experience.

Over the years, beyond the community intervention activities, Tiniguena has also established important partnerships at both the national and international level and committed to working in networks. Of note are the RESSAH-GB (Guinea-Bissau Network of Food and Nutritional Sovereignty and Security); the House of Rights, an initiative that transformed the site of the country's first colonial prison into a collective space where groups act to promote rights, gender equality, and inter-operational dialogue; COPAGEN (Coalition for the Defense of African Genetic Patrimony); GTP-IE (Working Group on Oil and Other Extractive Industries); the Working Group for the Promotion of Land Products; PRCM (Regional Program for the Conservation of Coastal and Marine Zones of West Africa); and RAMPAO (West African Network of Protected Marine Areas).

This cooperation allows Tiniguena to engage in dialogues that develop and reinforce its knowledge, to influence public policies developed by civil society actors, and to strengthen its advocacy position in favor of its vision of development by demanding and influencing decisions that benefit the well-being of the most in-need communities.

Guinea-Bissau's vulnerable political and economic context presented opportunities for the creation of an active civil society, motivating the establishment of Tiniguena itself and its intervention model. However, at present, and increasingly so, this same context of cyclical crises—over the course of more than four decades—that served as an inspiration is today itself a great challenge for the institution, such that finances are mobilized for institutional support and to establish a plan of stable internal economic resilience that will allow greater financial independence. These challenges mean, first, that it will be necessary to value what has been learned up to this point and to maintain a capacity for resiliency, a spirit for sacrifice at the internal level, and a good ability to mobilize and retain human resources. It will be equally crucial to continue to nurture and consolidate already established partnerships that have worked with Tinguena since its foundation, as is the case of Inter Pares.

Tiniguena's Interventions in Response to Covid-19 in Guinea-Bissau

According to the WHO, Guinea-Bissau is among the African countries with an elevated risk

of importing cases of Covid-19 due to the movement of people and its geographical location (island borders and many points of entry). In Guinea-Bissau, 564 infections, 451 active cases, 24 recoveries, and 2 deaths related to COVD-19 have been reported, with the first cases coming from abroad.

For a country with a fragile national health system, where continuous cycles of political instability have hindered the development of the sector, certain measures were indiscriminately adopted from the West despite different socioeconomic realities. The country has been in a state of emergency since March 27th, meaning that all economic activities and means of subsistence have drastically decreased or stagnated for an overwhelming number of families.

This policy spurred insecurity and resistance among the population, especially informal workers who depend on daily sales for their survival[1]An IMF report (2017) suggests that the informal sector represents 40% of Guinea-Bissau's economy. The informal market is dominated by women, who typically have more difficulties accessing the formal market despite generally being the heads of households. (Plataforma, 2020)., which, in turn, generated some level of antagonism between police forces and the general population, with numerous reports of physical violence and arrests in what are clear human rights violations.

High levels of vulnerability and poverty and a lack of public resources in the country have been exacerbated by the weak campaign to commercialize cashew nuts—the principle export and source of income for families—and diminishing remittances sent by Guinea-Bissauan migrants. In this context, families have fewer means of resistance and are unable to access public assistance from institutions due to political instability and the international community's refusal to recognize the acting government.

Thus, the national lockdown means that, for the vast majority of families that survive through the daily sale of goods, household income has decreased; as a secondary effect, coronavirus has exacerbated existing poverty. Simply put, for those who depend on the informal economy, "it is better to die from the disease than from hunger[2]Diário de Notícias

(2020) ″É melhor morrer da doença do que morrer de fome″. Angolanos desafiam restrições [online]. Available from: https://www.dn.pt/mundo/e-melhor-morrer-da-doenca-do-que-morrer-de-fome-angolanos-desafiam-restricoes-12033934.html.”

Much of what is sold in informal markets are agricultural products and the pandemic coincided with the cashew harvest. Cashews are one of Guinea Bissau’s primary trade goods, representing 90% of total exports[3]UNIOGBIS (2020) Guiné-Bissau vulnerável ao choque do COVID-19. [online] Available from: https://uniogbis.unmissions.org/en/guiné-bissau-vulnerável-ao-choque-do-covid-19. The economy’s dependence on the cashew monoculture has also made the country vulnerable even during normal economic circumstances, but with the closing of the border and markets, the sector has become paralyzed.

In rural communities, the population depends on subsistence farming, but the state of emergency limits their access to both national and international markets and thus reduces their gross household income. This, together with the reduction in remittances sent by family members who migrated to urban centers to participate in the informal economy, means that these rural populations face an added layer of vulnerability[4]World Food Programme (2020) Economic and Market Impact analysis of COVID-19 on West and Central Africa [online] Available from: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/WFP-0000113974.pdf.

A Democratic Perspective in the Fight Against the Pandemic

In light of this scenario, civil society organizations have taken the lead in offering assistance. These organizations have played a fundamental role creating hygiene awareness campaigns and food drives in order to diminish the impacts of the virus at various levels. And Tiniguena is no exception, having adapted its programming to address the new context,

adjusting the work of its specialists and mobilizing financial resources through its partnerships in order to establish an action plan against Covid-19.

Training young volunteers in preventative measures against Covid-19 , Formosa Island, 2020, Tiniguena Archives

These plans are carried out through Tiniguena's network. Members of SiSSAN (The Food and Nutritional Security Tracing System) mapped out their respective interventions against spreading the virus, as well as against the food insecurity that the virus has exacerbated.

As a partner, Tiniguena aims to minimize these adverse impacts, particularly in rural zones where the most vulnerable populations live. It has concentrated its efforts in areas where it already operates, such as in the Urok Islands, where the Etikapun'ha project, in collaboration with IBAP (Institute for Biodiversity and Protected Areas), supports young volunteers in awareness campaigns in different villages on Formosa Island and supplies these communities with hygiene products and food. Similar activities have been planned for Gabú, Quinara, and Tombali in the coming months.

To support food security and sovereignty in its areas of operation, Tiniguena has worked to establish food banks supplied with local products, thus helping the income security of these farmers. It has also organized activities to strengthen local capacities in small-scale farming methods to guarantee long-term food security, as well as providing training and technical support to women farmers.

Tinguena has also planned awareness campaigns via community radio stations in local languages in order to more widely spread information about the coronavirus. In addition and in partnership with The Guinean League for Human Rights, it plans to establish a system of protection and support for women and girls who are vulnerable to exploitation and domestic violence.

Nearly 30 years since its founding, Tiniguena has consolidated its experience, despite

innumerable political disruptions that have plunged the country into successive economic, political, and social crises. These disruptions have produced important learning experiences at the level of institutional survival that have strengthened Tiniguena's capacity for resilience and adaptation in complex emergency situations such as the present-day Covid-19 pandemic.

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