

## NHDR Write-Up: VDA Practitioner Course on Human Development

### National Human Development Report: São Tomé e Príncipe, 2001

By Sabina Ramos, UNDP – São Tomé

Sao Tome and Principe is a small African country with *1.000 square km* of surface and *140.000 inhabitants*; it is a former Portuguese colony in Central Africa in the middle of the Guinea Gulf, which became independent from Portugal in 1975 in the wake of the independence of the 5 former Portuguese colonies in Africa (Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique and Sao Tome and Principe). It is composed of two main islands, the island of Sao Tome with 900 sq kilometres, where the city of Sao Tome, the capital, is located and the island of Principe with about 100 sq. km.. The official language is Portuguese.

With an economy of about \$50 million GDP, which has been growing at only 2.5%-3.5% per annum since 1998, Sao Tome and Principe<sup>1</sup> is faced with a challenge of finding a way out to an accelerated growth so as to reduce poverty levels<sup>2</sup>.

The economy is largely dependent on one product, the cocoa which production has been dwindling for the last 25 years since the independence. Indeed the decline in cocoa production started before the independence. Sao Tome and Principe was once the biggest cocoa producer in the world by the 1930s when all the country was transformed in an “agricultural factory” using forced labour. Apart from cocoa the country produces and exports a very limited quantity of coffee.

The Gulf of Guinea is, according to unknown experts as well as other prestigious think-tanks, one of the most promising areas in the world in what regards oil production in the next decade.

Apparently, newly discover of significant reserves of oil in Sao Tome and Principe, its strategic location in the centre of the Gulf as well as slight stability, is creating some improvement living conditions among its people.

The question is *how to find out and potentiate the virtuous circles that link efficiency, equity and freedom that facing the Human Development paradigm in the country?*

Intentionally or not, our 2001 NHDR tried to take a different look at old issues in order to be able to raises new ones, under a HD paradigm feature, i.e. dividing HD into three of four key choices: (i) *Free participation in community life and collective affairs*; (ii) *access to knowledge in its different expressions*; (iii) *materials resources for a decent standard of living*.

Therefore, basically, the three set of human choices have been highlighted to measure STP HD in 2001, through a very polemic issue “The Change, in its policy, economic and particularly socio-cultural dimensions”.

Within the Policy framework, progressive efforts has being set enabling changes on organizational policies for this new independent country. Important and crucial legislations are approved upon new Policy Constitutions adopted since 1991 opening free participation in community life and collective affairs.

Knowledge in its different expressions is one of the HD challenges faced by STP during that period. Deficit State Budget to cover Education sector, due to i.e. Dobras devaluations and SPA effects, brought the continuous degradation of overall learning's quality.

---

<sup>1</sup> According to the 2001 census results, the country has 137,000 inhabitants, and its population grows only at 1.5% per annum. The population is about 56% urban.

<sup>2</sup> The results of a household survey carried out in 2001 indicate that 53.8% of the population lives below the poverty line, an increase from 36% ten years earlier due to poor economic performance during the last decade. Poverty affects more rural population than the urban population: 65% of the rural population and 45% of the in urban population live below the poverty line. It is estimated that 15% of the population lives in extreme poverty.

The changes of the politic model start to reflect into the economic model. The State leaves to play the dynamic within the national economy and proceeds to the Land privatization's process without a follow-up agrarian policies. The investment becomes oriented towards the foreignness and the financial and fiscal systems are reformed.

The most affected HD sector in the country is related to the changes into social and cultural field. The Country's leadership had *FAMILY* as its flag ship. Nowadays, a depth change shifted the alteration of the system of values and the norms of behavior; increasing individualism, with some standard in addition of solidarity and inter-aid into the kinship structures; valuation of the personal success, in detriment of the familiar success; unfastening in relation to the traditions.

In fact, this report didn't present any measures to deal with the HD situation in the country.

By supporting the theory that *HD paradigm is an action-oriented paradigm because it was created from the UN's interaction with governments, development agencies, and people all over the world, since it is practical in seeking to change life conditions and multiply options so that human beings can have better choices*, I'm aware that we need to identify measures that enable to enlarge these choices and to improve the HD situation in São Tomé e Príncipe.

Keeping also in mind that the HDI should be used to capture the best long-run changes in the country, following measures could be identified, through the three combined quantitative dimensions of the HD in the report (Longevity ; Educational level; Standard of life) :

### **Inequity and poverty**

Actually, the social inequities explain generally the conditions of poverty and social exclusion of important groups of the Santomeans: More than 90% of its citizens do not have the minimum incomes to satisfy its basic needs, only to take a lack pointer. Thus, a possible measure of the human Development would pass necessarily for associating with the PRSP an integrated plan of human development. It should be necessary to explore all the possibilities in such a way the inter-actions between different types of lack, using all the possible pointers of privations, monetary as well as not monetary.