

FILM SCREENING IN A MOVIE NIGHT: “UNITE FOR BISSAU: NÔ KOMPU GUINÉ: AGROECOLOGY AND FEMINISM IN GUINEA BISSAU.”

On Sunday, 08/12/2024

18:00 - 19:30

Venue: Heiliggeistkirche Spitalgasse 44, 3011 Bern

A. Background Information

As part of its activities to promote Diaspora Engagement for Development by leveraging Diaspora resources for Africa's sustainable development, the African Diaspora Council of Switzerland, in collaboration with Cultures of Resistance Films and Offene Kirche Berne, organised a film screening at a Cinema Night on 8 December 2024 at the popular Heiliggeistkirche in the centre of Bern, just a minute's walk from Bern Main Train Station.

The event, moderated by Anna S. Manyanza, was organised within the framework of the development axis of the objectives of the African Diaspora Council of Switzerland: linking Africa and her people to the Diaspora and Swiss public to enhance collaboration and development partnerships.

The choice of the film is strategic: the film does not only feature women's leadership and resistance efforts in self-liberation from the discriminatory and suppressive patriarchal system that has subjected women to diverse abuses, but it also goes further to highlight their gallant engagement efforts in the development of Guinea Guissau by ensuring food security through agroecology. These resistance efforts championed by the women's organisation APALCOF align with the visions and mission of their pro-independence great leader, Amilcar Cabral.

Amilcar Cabral, a theoretical philosopher, poet, and agricultural engineer, was assassinated in 1973. He was one of Africa's foremost anti-colonial leaders. He said, “It is not only with gunfire that one frees the land. It is not only military or political work that frees a land. The greatest battle we must engage in is against ignorance. Only when men and women understand this can they lose their fear.”

Before the National Liberation Struggle, Amilcar Cabral already talked about gender equality. Women wake up earlier and go to bed later. In the fields, women work harder than the men. When war comes, men run away! The women stay behind with the children. Women are the ones that resist.

The film's setting is in Guinea Bissau, a developing country in West Africa with an estimated population of 2 million people. After a long conflict, Guinea-Bissau gained independence from Portugal in 1973. The film lasted for 40 minutes, followed by a question-and-answer session and an aperitif at the end. Unfortunately, some left at the end and could not stay for the aperitif and photo session. A production team member, João Meirinhos, was live online to explain the background and motivations of the film, take some questions and learn the participants' impressions.

B. The film content

The film, **“UNITE FOR BISSAU: NÔ KOMPU GUINÉ: AGROECOLOGY AND FEMINISM IN GUINEA BISSAU.”** is about Guinea Bissau's women's resistance to patriarchy, female genital mutilation, child marriage and poverty through agroecology. Guided firmly by the vision and legacy of Amílcar Cabral – the activist, women's rights advocate, poet, anti-colonial figure and independent leader, the local women of Guinea Bissau are forging their future under their self-initiated association called APALCOF.

Coming from Guinea Bissau, the 40-minute film is produced in Portuguese language with English subtitles. It carried two principal powerful content messages:

To combat Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), child marriage, and poverty through the activities of a prominent women's organisation, APALCOF, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) refers to “all procedures involving partial or total removal of the female external genitalia or another injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.” FGM is a violation of girls' and women's human rights.

The intersection of child marriage and FGM leads to gender inequality, and girls have a low level of education. Many women are analphabets, live in rural areas, live in poorer households, and have religious and cultural beliefs. In Guinea-Bissau nearly 45% of women and girls have undergone FGM. In the Bijagòs archipelago, for example, women traditionally choose their husbands and are responsible for most aspects of social life.

Leveraging agroecology for food security in Guinea Bissau

APALCOF is a women's association that promotes food safety, sustainability and ecological awareness. Ms. Adja Djenabu Balde is the President of APALCOF since 1990. She visits markets to inquire where women get their produce. Most women get their produce from APACOF and sell it to the market

to sustain families, bring their children to school, pay their school fees, and provide medical support.

Ecological challenges APALCOF women face

Due to rain shortages, women cannot maximise their yield, resulting in few harvests. Despite these challenges, APALCOF produces 350 tons of onions per season. Before APALCOF, women mainly sow rice.

Since 2015, “Granja Pesssube” has grown only organic fruits and vegetables. The association's 300 female members farm 80,000 square meters of land.

Adja Djenabu Balde – President of APALCOF since 1990 says,

“We are not like women from the past. Women own what they grow and harvest. We did it ourselves. Along with 21 literacy circles, women manage the household. We can take care of ourselves and the children. We do everything. And still, men say they are in charge. Let's see who is in charge. For every man that goes to school, two women must go. Without knowledge, it's useless. If, in decision-making moments, only men are present and women are at home, how will women stop being enslaved? We will not be slaves no more!”

C. Conclusion and recommendations

Over 30 members of the African Diaspora, especially from Portuguese-speaking countries, including Brazil and the Swiss host community, attended the film screening.

In support of the women's resistance efforts against FGM, child marriage, poverty alleviation, and food security in Guinea Bissau through Agroecology, ADCS recommended and requested that funds be collected to assist APALCOF, the women's organisation. The collection is still ongoing through *Twint*. The money collected will ultimately be sent directly to APALCOF to support their activities.

It was further recommended that each participant already works to protect women's and girls' rights, starting from their homes and immediate environment, and promotes the cause with any legitimate available means.

“In this film, we were honoured to document some of Professor Malam Djassi’s final advocacy against Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). Djassi passed away in early 2021 after devoting his life to ending FGM, which he considered a nefarious and illegal tradition that should be eradicated. We dedicate this film screening to him.”

We extend our sincere appreciation to Cultures of Resistance Films for the copyright granted to use the film free of charge, the Offene Kirche Bern for the technical and mobilisation support, the Association of Guinea Bissau in Switzerland and all participants for taking the time on a Sunday evening to join us at the film screening.

Anna S. Manyanza

African Diaspora Council of Switzerland

Municipal Councillor Brienz

