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Posted Date: 6 January 2026

doi: 10.20944/preprints202601.0322.v1

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Article

Traditional Alliance of Women in the Socio-Political Sphere and Resilient Subject to Climate Change: The Case of Guinea-Bissau

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Abstract

The role of women in conflict and peacebuilding has been insufficiently explored, despite their substantial contributions. Women's experiences during conflict frequently strengthen communities in post-conflict settings, where they play a crucial role in mediation, reconciliation, and transitional justice, drawing on their social capital and knowledge of international law. This paper examines the intersection of religion, gender, and development through a case study of Guinea-Bissau, a paradigmatic example within the Lusophone world. It analyses women's participation in political power from the struggle for independence to the present, highlighting their evolving social and political roles. The family institution, which is central to Guinean society, assigns women significant responsibility and commitment, reinforcing their leadership through long-standing traditional alliances. Using a historical approach complemented by a gender perspective, the study identifies both progress and regression in the country's development, closely linked to women's participation in public spaces as an indicator of democratic quality and social advancement. The analysis focuses on four key outcomes: food security; improved access to basic services such as health, education, and nutrition; enhanced resilience of rural communities—particularly women and youth—to climate and socio-economic challenges; and the strengthening of social protection systems. These priorities align with Guinea-Bissau's implementation of the 2030 Agenda, particularly Sustainable Development Goals 1, 2, 3, and 4, and inform emerging approaches to international cooperation centered on resilience and vulnerability.

Keywords: bioethics; climatic justice; gender approach; inclusive education; resilient subjects; strategic alliance; culture of peace; religion; sustainable development goals

1. Introduction

Religion, gender, and development are often intertwined. These three axes illustrate a historical, political, social, cultural, and even natural scenario. As is well known, religion is a social phenomenon that influences and is influenced by cultural norms, while gender, as a social construct and significant factor in human experience, has relevance in a country's development and the well-being of its citizens, with an ambivalent impact that either elevates or devalues the status and role of the individual in society. Understanding gender dynamics in diverse contexts helps to explain human development in a given society. Sometimes, religious values can hinder social development and deepen gender inequality gaps.

The role played by women as agents in conflicts and peace has not been sufficiently studied. However, the experience gained by women in conflict situations benefits communities after the conflict has ended, and women even play a crucial role in mediating between opposing parties, based on international law and their own skills, which contribute to reconciliation or transitional justice processes. Reconstructing the journey of Guinean women from two historical moments: the struggle for national independence, in which they became politically aware, and the political and economic transformations after independence (1980s-1990s) allows us to appreciate their role in a context where

educational reforms aimed at implementing equality and eradicating illiteracy stood out. In this context, women took on a unique role as a social force capable of ensuring the survival and well-being of their own families (de Carvalho et al 2021, Mbundé 2016). Despite the differences, we find in this a precedent for inclusive education and a culture of peace (Cerdas-Agüero 2015, p. 135).

This paper aims to explore a paradigmatic case in the Lusophone world, namely the participation of women in political power in Guinea-Bissau. To this end, I will analyze the social and political role they have played in genesis and transmission of this alliance in the public sphere from the country's struggle for independence to the present day. The family institution is relevant in the tradition of the Guinean people of Bissau and occupies a prominent place in the social hierarchy: responsibility and commitment are qualities attributed to women through a traditional alliance sustained over time (*mandjuandade*). This position gives them a key role in a game involving power, hierarchy, social capital and feelings of belonging, as they form the traditional ruling class (de Carvalho et al 2021).

Through the methodological proposal of global bioethics and its principle of social responsibility, and plural diplomacy, a case study that has been considered of interest is examined. The moral bonds that human beings establish with nature allow us to connect the role of religion with this moral duty (Cruz-Valiño 2024).

The gender approach makes it easier to appreciate the existence of traditional women's cooperation networks as a substrate that has been the root of a well-known, though perhaps mythologized, relevance of women's role in a Portuguese-speaking country, in a precedent for the financing lines of cooperation programs. Women can play an essential role in sustainable development as individuals who are resilient to climate change, while promoting values implicit in major religions, such as respect for nature and future generations.

It focuses on four outcomes: 1: food security; 2: increased access to basic services, such as health, education and nutrition; 3: rural communities in Guinea-Bissau, particularly women and young people, are more resilient to climate change and socio-economic stressors and shocks; 4: strengthening the social protection system. Gender issues will be addressed and people with disabilities will be included. In its efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda, Guinea-Bissau has prioritized the targets of SDG 1 (ending poverty) and malnutrition (SDG 2) and strengthening the health system (SDG 3) and the education system (SDG 4) and access to basic services.

2. Methods

This section may be divided by interpretation, as well as the experimental conclusions that can be drawn.

2.1. Approach and areas of study

The proposed case study is based on the hypothesis that women's participation in public life contributes to social cohesion and economic and social development and is particularly important in the areas of education and human capital. The starting point is the study of a traditional form of alliance characteristic of the Guinean people (*mandjuandade*), a social network that women have built up over time, which provides social cohesion and protection in the face of contingencies while contributing to the development and transformation of societies (de Carvalho et al 2021). The narrative review of sources serves to analyze the role of women as agents of transformation. To this end, I will focus on three areas:

- (a) Formation and maintenance of a traditional alliance that provides cohesion and social protection in the face of contingencies.
- (b) Human capital development.
- (c) Promotion of inclusive education.

A brief overview of its historical evolution reconstructs the stages that Guinean women have gone through since becoming politically aware during the struggle for independence from Portugal in 1974 to the present day, reflecting the political and economic transformation of the 1980s and 1990s and evaluating their role in the context of educational reforms to promote non-discrimination and

the eradication of illiteracy, as a distant precursor to inclusive education and the culture of peace (Mbundé 2016).

The historical approach, complemented by the gender approach, allows us to observe the evolution and also the involution that occurs, respectively, in the country's level of development, closely associated with women's participation in public spaces as a sensor of democracy and social progress. The gender approach facilitates a different perspective or view of history, international relations and the right to development by examining the processes of women's emancipation that take place in a given society (Mertens de Wilmars et al 2022). The geopolitical and legal context is appropriate for the study, with an emphasis on the sustainable development goals that pursue social cohesion, highlighting in this case SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 11. The need to build strategic alliances for the promotion and establishment of optimal and participatory conditions for the establishment of those goals calls for the promotion of SDG 17.

Similarly, the focus on resilient individuals and vulnerable groups, such as women and children, drives new forms of international cooperation by considering the importance not only of protecting intrinsic vulnerability, but also of strengthening the role that these groups can play on a global scale due to their particular resilience to climate change, both in terms of their potential impact (diseases, famine, migration), but also as actors in the implementation of policies and consumption habits and activities that are responsible for the environment, with a view to the conservation and protection of the natural habitat.

2.2. Conceptual approach

In order to develop the work using the methodology indicated, it is useful to make some conceptual notes on the elements that make up the areas of study indicated, namely: gender approach, culture of peace, human capital, inclusive education, vulnerability, diversity, inclusive education and resilience to climate change, vulnerable subjects, traditional alliance (*mandjuandade*). However, for the sake of brevity, I will only reflect on those that are most specific to this work, referring to more generic works for illustrations of the rest.

As for the traditional alliance known as *mandjuandade*, we can say that by reviewing sources that attempt to recover this cooperation network, we obtain an overview that brings us closer to its mutual nature, in which activities are carried out that generate credit for future needs, both for women and for the family, through the contribution of funds as a mutual savings system (de Carvalho et al 2021, Gomes, 2015). They have contributed to social cohesion in a region where diversity, including ethnic and religious backgrounds, territorial dispersion and differences between rural and urban areas, hinder any policy of equality, as progress in terms of equity is difficult to achieve. They are used to refer to the collective included that either live together in the same village or area. Nonetheless, in a recent appropriation of the Portuguese language that has sup-planted the local kriol term *manjuandadi* for the word 'community' (Santos and Morais Mourato 2024).

Some works illustrate the potential of a culture of peace as a cross-cutting competence for achieving peaceful societies, just as inclusive education promotes inclusive and integrated societies by promoting autonomy, eliminating barriers and overcoming stigmas and discriminatory biases (Cerdas-Agüero 2015, p. 135; Saucedo 2015).

Human capital is a concept that aligns with a society's development objectives by creating human capacities for community development.

Resilience to climate change stems from adaptive theories as opposed to more critical ones that focus on mitigation. The ability of humans to resist and adapt to change is promoted by international organizations and development agents as a way of dealing with inclement weather and climate disasters. Among those who are resilient to climate change, women and children stand out for their ability to adapt and for the educational role they play in traditional societies (Islas-Vargas 2020; Folke 2006), without prejudice to other positions (Mirenda and Lazos Chavero 2018). Social resilience manifests itself as a community's ability to cope with certain disturbances through adequate inter- and intra-community relations among community members and social actors involved. This allows

them not only to recover from stress but also to generate social learning to transform their socio-environmental reality (Adger 2000 and Cacioppo, Reis y Zautra 2011).

Some authors have illustrated how a community's social vulnerability manifests itself through the socio-environmental stress it experiences, altering its environment and living conditions (Adger 1999). One perspective considers that such vulnerability is a component of the community and takes into account its geoclimatic characteristics and its cultural, social and economic resources (Aguirre 2004), which brings us closer to understanding the processes that increase it. Vulnerability is dynamic, cumulative, unequal and situated, which is why actions are directed at strengthening resilience (González Gaudiano and Maldonado González 2017).

Some studies were conducted from the perspective of the transformative political dimension of existing socio-environmental conditions as a dynamic and specific process in which factors protecting the community structure interact and are energized in the face of certain risk factors, such as geoclimatic conditions, exposure to threats and risks in the territory, as well as community resources to take action against the risks they face (Kais and Isam 2016). To this end, it focuses on the power relations between the social actors involved in risk management and the social vulnerability associated with it, as well as citizens (government officials, civil organizations, educational and economic entities) (Keck y Sakdapolrak 2013).

3. Case Study: Guinea-Bissau

3.1. Geographical context

To illustrate this work, I will provide some brief details about the context of the country studied, in terms of its geography, politics and society. In terms of its geographical context Guinea-Bissau is a coastal and low-lying West African nation bordered to the north by Senegal to the east and south and by Guinea-Conakry, and covers an area of 36,125 km², which shows how small it is compared to other African countries. It is home to approximately 2 million people of over 30 different ethnicities. Guinea-Bissau is constituted by the Bolama-Bijagós Biosphere Reserve, an archipelago of 88 islands and islets of which 21 are inhabited (Santos and Morais Mourato 2024).

It is worth noting its unique orographic conformation, distributed across a continental part and a conglomerate of numerous islands called the 'Bijagós archipelago'. This special territorial conformation gives it a cultural and linguistic diversity as a unique characteristic, as can be seen in the existence of diverse ethnic groups and sub-groups, which number more than thirty. The reference to matriarchy or women's rule on the island of Orango is legendary in the Lusophone world. More of a legend than a practical application, it reflects the symbolic role that this country has played culturally in the empowerment of women in the public sphere, making it particularly suitable for study from a gender perspective.

This is of extraordinary importance in a country that is not only an extraordinary reserve of environmental wealth, nature and biodiversity (a stopover point for birds migrating to Europe), but also as a reservoir of emerging or infectious diseases with incalculable value for scientific and biomedical cooperation (Cruz-Valiño 2024 b), p. 51). This does not prevent it from benefiting populations and ecosystems.

Most of Guinea-Bissau's inhabitants live along its coastline, which is highly susceptible to flooding and erosion. Rising sea levels and more frequent coastal storms will have devastating effects on ecosystems when combined with high tides. The detrimental effects of droughts, temperature variations and changes in precipitation patterns are already being observed in livelihoods linked to healthy ecosystems and bio-diversity hotspots for livestock farming, agriculture and fishing. Not surprisingly, coastal communities depend on fishing for their food security. Added to this is marine fishing by foreign fleets, whose techniques destroy sustainable practices and lack oversight. Extreme inequality in the distribution of wealth is a crucial issue for development. Without minimal investment in infrastructure, the Guineans of Bissau lack a functioning welfare system, healthcare, education, roads, electricity and drinking water. However, their socio-cultural and ecological values

seem inadequate in the face of rapid changes in land cover over time. In addition to deforestation caused by cashew monoculture, forest cover has been replaced by shifting agriculture, mangrove clearing for rice cultivation, and artisanal fishing. Together with forest fires and abusive illegal logging, these practices are causing rapid destruction of forest ecosystems in a context of weak local governance and a lack of institutional management and oversight (Santos and Morais Mourato 2024).

3.2. Cultural, politic and social context

Portuguese Guinea, it has the historical distinction of being the first country to gain independence from Portugal in 1974, when it took the name Bissau. Since independence, Guinea-Bissau has struggled to secure stable government and development. Plagued by unstable governance, widespread impunity and dependence on a single cash crop, cashew nuts, the country has seen several successful coup d'états. Ranked 177th in the 2017 Human Development Index, the country is among the poorest in the world.

In light of two historical milestones, I will attempt to summarise the journey of Guinean women: 1) the political awareness gained during the struggle for the country's independence, and 2) the political and economic transformation that took place in the following years (1980s-1990s). Both will allow us to appreciate the role played by women in a context of development marked by educational reforms aimed at implementing equality and eradicating illiteracy, which, differences aside, can be seen as a distant precursor to inclusive education and a culture of peace due to its extraordinary relevance in terms of social cohesion (de Carvalho et al 2021; Gomes, 2015).

Women performed all roles during the struggle, serving as militiamen, laundresses, cooks, and nurses (Candé Monteiro, 2013, p. 102). Women participated in structuring the struggle for female emancipation through the Democratic Union of Women of Guinea and Cape Verde (UDEMU) before the armed struggle began. Their main task was to mobilise women to achieve a better political framework in the struggle. The organisation aimed not only to prepare women to react against colonialism, but also against all attitudes that undermined women's dignity (Gomes, 2015, p. 13).

There were many meetings during the struggle, and women were very interested in hearing what was happening. The men refused to let them go three or four times, but the women kept insisting. Finally, the men were forced to accept. Now, women are part of village committees and are sometimes elected as chairpersons. Men now accept that women lead meetings because it is a party directive and it is the right thing to do (Candé Monteiro 2013, p. 204; Mbundé 2016).

In 1969, progress was made in educational training "as the liberated areas began to be structured as a state, creating a regular army and a People's Militia, schools and hospitals. The effort to train nurses, a unique advance in the effort to train nurses, a remarkable increase in the number of women in training, and also the creation of the Pilot School, which began to train young people to 'be men and women useful to the people and the struggle' (Candé Monteiro 2013, p. 173). Between 1966 and 1988, there were UDEMU activities to transform women's conditions and their development (in the areas of agriculture, health, social, cultural and economic space).

As for the traditional alliance known as *mandjuandade*, closer to its mutual nature, in which activities are carried out that generate credit for future needs, both for women and for the family, through the contribution of funds as a mutual savings system (de Carvalho et al 2021, Gomes, 2015). This alliance based on bonds of solidarity enhances the social status of women and increases their emancipation. It also shows how it has evolved since its origins, from a more restricted and homogeneous composition (in terms of age and ethnicity) in step with social evolution, to a broader, more diverse and heterogeneous composition. They have contributed to social cohesion in a region where diversity, including ethnic and religious backgrounds, territorial dispersion and differences between rural and urban areas, hinder any policy of equality, as progress in terms of equity is difficult to achieve.

Currently, the political regime is structured as a republic with a head of state or president and a government, or prime minister, and a unicameral National People's Assembly. Despite the glimmer of

democracy following the parliamentary and presidential elections of 1999 and subsequent modest economic and political liberation, Guinea Bissau's political instability has taken a heavy toll. Engulfed in structural crises and social dissent, the country gained the label as a fragile, failed, and narco-state, perpetuates the notion that development is only possible through external interference. This diverts attention away from the need for structural reforms (Santos and Morais Mourato 2024).

Women are substantially under-represented in the national assembly and government. A law requiring that women hold at least 36 percent of national assembly seats was passed in August 2018 and promulgated in December 2018. Legislative elections took place successfully on 10 March 2019 and constitutional reform began to change structural issues that affect government stability.

It is useful to situate it in the international sphere, both for its participation in various international organisations and in the community of countries where Portuguese is the official language, or Portuguese-speaking African Countries (PALOP). In the first area, relating to the international community, its participation in the following organisations, among others, is noteworthy:

- United Nations (UN)
- African Union
- Economic Community of West African States
- Organisation of Islamic Cooperation
- International Organisation of La Francophonie
- South Atlantic Peace and Cooperation Zone
- Permanent Inter-State Community for Drought Control in the Sahel.

It is also important to highlight the importance of strategic alliances and cooperation maintained over time with world powers, such as the United States, which actively collaborates in donating funds for food aid and post-conflict landmine clearance. At the same time, the influence of the countries in the former Soviet sphere of influence has been a constant since the struggle for independence, where the training and education of women stood out, both as key agents in the conflict and in the formation of leadership for subsequent reconstruction. Trade relations with the former metropolis (Portugal) are more than healthy, accounting for nearly 40% of trade perspective (Santos and Morais Mourato 2024).

With regard to the Portuguese-speaking world, it should be noted that there are two organisations that bring together Portuguese-speaking countries: on the one hand, 1) the community of countries where Portuguese is the official language, or African Countries with Portuguese as an Official Language (PALOP), which includes only countries on this continent: Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, and São Tomé and Príncipe. On the other hand, 2) the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries (CPLP) includes regions and countries whose co-official language is Portuguese, such as Goa (India), Macau (China) and Equatorial Guinea (Africa), among others. Based on this distinction, it is worth noting that the country under study belongs to the PALOP.

3.3. *Religious context*

Guinea-Bissau is home to people of diverse ethnicities, language groups, cultures and religions. All of this social heritage builds a milestone or social network that allows these underlying values to be strongly promoted. Although it is true that two religions predominate, Catholicism and Islam, distributed approximately fifty-fifty among the population.

The significance of tribal structures must be taken into account when conducting any form of field research. As communalism and the African philosophy of Ubuntu are deeply embedded in Bissau-Guinean society, interactions with a single respondent frequently extended to other individuals and households. It was reported that a wide range of unstructured and semi-structured interviews had often been derived from snowball sampling. It was explained that the researcher had initially approached the community chief (comité) or a religious leader (régulo), who would then welcome the researcher and introduce them to the community. Nevertheless, in some places as Soga, many people in have converted to monotheism, but animism remains the predominant spiritual philosophy as the King's islet (Santos and Morais Mourato 2024, p.143).

Because of cultural and religious practices many Bissau-Guineans are unregistered at birth or ethnically undergo different age transitions (Santos and Morais Mourato 2024, p.144). Some ritual practices of communion with nature have been described:

Ilhéu do Rei's comité originates from south Guinea-Bissau (Quinara) where rainmaking rituals were once common. The comité believes that the current lack of such ceremonies is to blame for the lack of rain. Since agriculture is limited to half of the year, communities frequently express concerns about food security; however, their survival depends on the fish they catch and sell in Bissau in order to buy other food staples. From the comité's perspective, sea-level rise has yet to affect the island, and the flooding of rice paddies is seen to result from the lack of dyke maintenance. A group of local women, however, observed that trees are falling into the sea all over the island (Santos and Morais Mourato 2024, p 148).

In the worst case, some ethnic groups discourage girls from attending school, force them to drop out of school for early marriage and early pregnancy, restrict the participation of women and girls in household and community decision-making and politics. Even practice female genital mutilation (FGM) which prevalence is 45 percent among women and girls aged 15–49 and 30 percent for girls aged 0–14. The practice is most prevalent in the region of Gabu, where 96 percent of women and 69 percent of girls have undergone FGM.

Thus, women and girls are more vulnerable to violence, abuse, discrimination and injustice as the justice system lacks the capacity to enforce gender-based protection.

3.4. *Climate change in Africa*

In less than 80 years, Africa will grow from 17% to 40% of the world's population, and the continent will be home to an increasing proportion of vulnerable people exposed to climate change. It is urbanising faster than anywhere else in the world, with the rural population falling from 57% to 60% urban in the next 30 years. Poverty is widespread, with 40% of the population living on less than £1.90 a day (in 2018). Life expectancy at birth is low, ranging from a maximum of 67 years (in Botswana and Senegal) to 52 in the Central African Republic (Trisos et al. 2022).

The relationship between the region's contribution to the creation of climate hazards and its exposure to them is dramatically disproportionate. Africa has one of the lowest per capita GHG emissions in the world. However, all GHG emissions from African countries have increased over the last thirty years, demonstrating the imperative of sustainable development (Trisos et al. 2022).

Recent assessments of climate change in sub-Saharan Africa indicate that the continent is experiencing the impacts of rising temperatures, including water scarcity, reduced food production, loss of life, and loss of biodiversity. It suffers from the highest number of extreme events (droughts, floods, and tropical storms), which will worsen.

Multidimensional poverty and intersectional vulnerabilities exacerbate people's experiences of climate change. The colonialism, and neocolonial relations have created structural inequalities that impact contemporary debates on how to address climate change (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2023; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015).

Colonial and postcolonial power dynamics, with unequal funding, leadership and narratives, reinforce the stereotype of African citizenship as requiring foreign intervention (Eriksen et al. 2021), while certain transformative alternative models as ways of imagining just environmental and climate futures include attention to diverse social inequalities (gender, ethnic, class) and the construction of development strategies through dialogue (Bezner Kerr et al. 2018; Madsen et al. 2021).

Adaptation approaches that support biodiversity, ecosystems and indigenous knowledge are implemented (Goïta et al. 2013). Recognising power inequalities at multiple scales and redressing such inequalities is part of the approach (Chapman and Ahmed 2021). The gender perspective and other intersectional lenses in relation to climate justice view vulnerability as something relational, a lived experience or source of knowledge that can contribute to broader debates on development interconnected with climate justice. From this perspective, sectors, knowledge and actions can contribute to justice and well-being in the context of the global threat of climate change through the

relationships between humans and nature and informal socio-economic relationships, enabling an understanding of climate actions from the bottom up and the role of social movements.

A study concludes that local perceptions of climate and non-climate change, as in other parts of Africa, among subsistence communities in Guinea-Bissau have a strong and intimate relationship with nature and are therefore sensitive to changes in their biophysical environment. As a result, scientific research is shifting towards community-based approaches that promote greater recognition and inclusion of local voices in broader debates on climate change (Santos and Morais Mourato 2024, p. 148).

The authors call for a critical reassessment of the concepts of vulnerability and resilience, moving beyond victimization frameworks and questioning “resilience building” based on neoliberal reasoning. Remaining in place does not mean accepting a passive state while waiting for something to change, but rather, in a context where self-sufficiency is crucial for survival, this desire is sustained by relationships of solidarity and a constant state of resistance (Santos 2025, p. 1).

4. Moral Connection with Nature: Bioethical Approach and Religious Value

As a premise, it is worth remembering the moral bonds that human beings establish with: a) nature, b) other living beings, and c) other human beings.

This compels us to form bonds in order to survive, and because we have obligations to them, we are responsible for caring for them, just as we are for ourselves. Moral explanation of why we are obliged to care for the environment around us (Cruz-Valiño 2024b), p. 41).

Bioethics, like the ethics of life, finds its foundation in this scenario, as we are relational beings. Likewise, ethical globalization operates within a transcultural and multi-disciplinary framework based on the acceptance of shared values and rights, whose axiological framework allows us to respond to global challenges, while reflecting on advances in biotechnology and equity in access to it. Bioethics addresses problems from a holistic perspective (social, political and economic), providing prudent solutions (Cruz-Valiño 2024b).

Religious values have been considered worthy of protection in bioethics, even in secular bioethics. Furthermore, the religions of the book (Judaism, Islam, and Christianity) accompany communion with nature in their values. In this sense, it is worth invoking the moral links that have been drawn from ethics to argue why human beings have a moral obligation to care for the natural environment.

Global Bioethics is concerned with ecological responsibility, cosmopolitan or transnational justice, and solidarity among living beings, that is, it integrates environmental considerations and duties of justice that do not end at political borders (Ten Hove and Gordjing 2020). The term bioethics is linked to life (bios) and ethos (morals) and was used by Van Rensselaer Potter in 1970 with the aim of bringing scientific and humanistic knowledge together in a pluralistic and rational interdisciplinary approach (medicine, philosophy, biology, law), considering the axiological factor (ideo-logical or beliefs). Various bioethical methods offer guidelines for action to resolve specific problems and make decisions (principlism, casuistry, deliberative method, etc.) (Cruz-Valiño 2024b),

The Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights (UDBHR) was adopted on 19 October 2005 by the 33rd session of the UNESCO General Conference, whose preamble expresses the desirability of ‘developing new approaches to social responsibility to ensure that the progress of science and technology contributes to justice and equity and serves the interests of humanity’, thus opening up new perspectives for intervention that integrate bioethics and scientific advances in the context of a debate open to the political and social world (Cruz-Valiño 2024b). The updated 2025 declaration emphasizes concerns about climate justice and comprehensive health from a One Health perspective (human, animal and environmental). At the same time, the document advocates transdisciplinarity as a democratizing factor, with a predominance of the humanities and greater respect for community values and human rights.

Climate change is a challenge to human rights because it undermines the ability to promote human development and well-being, particularly compromising the right to life and the right to

health, affecting poor and vulnerable people. People living in many low-income countries suffer the worst effects of climate change, even though their contribution to the problem is negligible (Chapman 2021).

Thus, education for sustainability should be a cross-cutting competence in all academic cycles in order to help strengthen moralities with nature (Cruz-Valiño 2022, p. 51). In any case, schools play a fundamental role because they become centers where capacities to cope with risks are developed between their members (Cheshire, Esparcia & Shucksmith 2015).

An example of strategic collaboration has taken place through the establishment of the Lusophone Platform for Bioethics Promotion, created by the Lisbon Declaration of 2022, during the Satellite Event of the WHO Global Summit held in Lisbon (2022), with the aim of contributing to global health through strategic alliances, and shows how cultural and scientific diplomacy can be a useful tool for global health governance. The Satellite Event addressed various topics on which bioethics can intervene in order to face future challenges and how countries can promote common projects that combine synergies (SDGs). To this end, it featured speakers from Portuguese-speaking countries, reinforcing the need to advance cooperation and interdisciplinary debate (Cruz-Valiño 2024, p. 51).

Guinea-Bissau's participation stood out during the debates of the constituent session as a country that had to manage a pandemic crisis caused by COVID-19 with the collaboration of thirty-three tribes distributed throughout the country. Intercultural mediation, as a specific skill, takes into account the axiological dimension and allies itself with those who hold moral authority within each community, without mimicking social and scientific practices.

Failure to address this premise frustrates the opportunity to improve the quality of life of populations or unleashes conflicts in the face of global problems. Failure to address this premise frustrates the opportunity to improve the quality of life of populations or triggers conflicts in the face of global problems whose solutions affect ritual practices or spiritual beliefs (life, illness, death). The existence of infectious diseases (which were believed to have been eradicated or did not spread to the developed world) has been reported in African countries, which has become evident and offers an opportunity for study. In fact, in response to the monkeypox outbreak reported in Europe at the end of 2022 and spread to other countries, which was declared a health emergency by the WHO, clinical protocols from countries such as Nigeria were used. The natural reservoir for these diseases is found in countries with limited resources that have dealt with them, while the developed world reveals itself to be ignorant and vulnerable, viewing them as a real threat (Cruz-Valiño 2024, p. 51).

Portugal also played a prominent role in the debates, placing particular emphasis on concerns about environmental damage. The variety, tolerance and cultural and anthropological diversity of the debates were unified by a common denominator: Lusophone culture and language on the one hand, and bioethical reflection on the other. The event was attended by the highest representative of the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries (CPLP), whose relevance has been studied due to the size of its member countries and observer countries (Cruz-Valiño 2024, p. 52).

5. Opportunity Scenario for Sustainable Development

Fast forwarding to more recent times, various strategies focused on development cooperation financed by various international programmes such as the so-called 'Hora Tchiga' emphasise human capital development with investments in health, education and infrastructure, following the 2019 coronavirus pandemic. Likewise, the gender approach promotes actions that seek to provide women and their communities with specific support to participate in activities through capacity building, such as the World Food Programme (WFP), which assists the Government in this objective through technical and financial assistance and, in line with the priorities of the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Women, Family and Social Solidarity.

In the field of education, one notable initiative is the commitment to diversity in the education of students with disabilities, which reflects the concerns and historical background of the post-conflict

era, focusing on inclusive education and groups that are vulnerable and resilient to climate change, as hallmarks of social reconciliation promoted especially by Guinean women.

In the current United Nations Cooperation Framework for Sustainable Development for 2022–2026, in implementation of the 2030 Agenda, Guinea-Bissau has prioritised the targets of SDG 1 (ending poverty), SDG 2 (malnutrition), SDG 3 (strengthening the health system) and SDG 4 (education system), without neglecting SDG 11 (access to basic services). However, it is making significant progress towards achieving SDG 17, under which the Government and the United Nations team agreed on a new United Nations Cooperation Framework for Sustainable Development (UNCFSF) for 2022-2026, establishing three strategic priorities: i) transformative and inclusive governance for respect for the rule of law and lasting peace; ii) structural economic transformation, sustainable development and inclusive and resilient green growth; and iii) human capital development..

In Guinea-Bissau, future prospects appear to depend less on the extent to which the impacts of climate change on coastal and island communities are accorded heightened salience, and more on the capacity to address the multiple factors that underpin their vulnerability. A critical question therefore concerns how these communities can overcome the structural, political and socio-economic constraints that expose them to risk. Tangible livelihoods are at stake behind the persistent invisibility of affected populations, the conditionalities imposed by donors, and the rhetoric surrounding the disputes and delays of COP27. Those who remain are already situated on the unavoidable frontline of climate impacts (Santos and Morais Mourato 2024).

Prior to the implementation of this program, the intervention strategy emphasized the role of women within Outcome 4 (Guinea-Bissau country strategic plan (2019–2024), in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, national NGOs and associations of smallholder farmers, this outcome will strengthen capacity in production techniques, basic business management and citizen advocacy of smallholder farmers who supply food for school meals.

“Strategic outcome 4: Smallholder farmers in Guinea-Bissau, particularly women and young people, have improved livelihoods and increased household incomes by 2024”. Provide an integrated package of assistance interventions to associations of women and young smallholder farmers that comprises nutrition and literacy education, training in basic business skills, sensitization to their rights to adequate food and nutrition, market access through the school feeding program and the transfer of knowledge on the optimization of agricultural value chains. This strategic outcome contributes to WFP Strategic Result 3 and SDG Target 2.3.

The focus area of this strategic outcome is resilience building. This strategic outcome will be achieved through the following three outputs:

- “Smallholder farmers, particularly women and young farmers associations, that supply food for school meals receive training on the optimization of agricultural value chains to increase incomes, improve livelihoods and strengthen resilience to climate change.
- Smallholder farmers, particularly women and young farmers associations, that supply food for school canteens benefit from training in literacy, basic bookkeeping and business skills and nutrition education that improves their knowledge and fosters their adoption of best practices for food and nutrition.
- Smallholder farmers, particularly women and young farmers associations, that supply food for school meals are able to advocate for their rights, change public policies in education, nutrition and health and demand and receive timely assistance”.

These activities will strengthen women's capacities and address access to farmland, based on the clear links between, including through support to improved nutrition, women's economic empowerment and the reduction of post-harvest losses.

Through a gender-based approach, it provides women and communities with specific support by participating in activities that promote capacity building (literacy, financial literacy, civil rights) in partnership with local NGOs and civil society organisations. For example, one action considers the diversity of education for students with disabilities and addresses the concerns and historical

background of the post-conflict era, focusing on inclusive education and groups that are vulnerable and resilient to climate change, as signs of identity forged in the context of social reconciliation, driven especially by women.

This scenario is a good candidate for establishing strategic alliances between countries and advancing towards SDG 17 by incorporating experience, collaboration with other countries, and NGOs through non-legal or political instruments for governance. Three strategic priorities stand out in this context:

- i) transformative and inclusive governance - respect for the rule of law and lasting peace.
- ii) structural economic transformation, sustainable development and green-inclusive-resilient growth.
- iii) human capital development.

A designed action considers diversity in education for students with special educational needs (SEN). It updates concerns and historical background in the post-conflict era, focusing on inclusive education and groups that are vulnerable and resilient to climate change, as hallmarks of identity forged in the context of social reconciliation, driven especially by women. Enshrouded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as in Article 49 of the Constitution of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau, which advocates the State's duty to guarantee education for all its citizens, education is a right for all Guineans. The objective is to reflect on the situation of people with special needs in relation to education in Guinea-Bissau, with a focus on formal/school education. Using research from the National Institute of Statistics as a basis, we reflected on inclusive education in the country. The results show that although there are laws on inclusive education in the country, they are not effectively implemented (Ialá and Carmolino 2023).

The Green Climate Fund (GCF) aimed to provide financial assistance to low-income countries affected by climate change. The GCF was agreed upon by the Conference of the Parties in 2010 under the auspices of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. However, it operates on technical and economic grounds, rather than ethical or human rights principles. It has a funding shortfall to fulfil its mandate and meet the needs of low-income countries most affected by climate change, which is attributed to the fact that many other countries adhere to human rights and equity principles and have a substantially stronger budget. Its main objective is to provide compensation for damage caused by climate change to low-income countries and small island states, which are threatened by global climate change, based on the level of losses and damage already suffered or expected damage in the short term (Chapman and Karim Ahmed, 2021). Middle-income countries facing climate emergencies, such as severe water loss and other climate-related calamities, may also be eligible for technical and financial assistance.

In any case, the urgency of changing the attitude and actions of the State, as well as the dependence on Western practices in a clear cultural asymmetry, has become apparent. Given the failure to meet the basic requirements of good governance, self-sufficiency and community support, civil society needs to be strengthened to enable people to continue living where they want (Santos and Morais Mourato 2024, p. 115).

6. Conclusions

Women's experiences during conflicts often strengthen communities in post-conflict contexts, as they play a key role in mediation, reconciliation, and transitional justice through their skills and knowledge of international law.

The historical approach, complemented by the gender approach, allows us to observe the evolution and also the involution that occurs, respectively, in the country's level of development, closely associated with women's participation in public spaces as a sensor of democracy and social progress, focusing on four key outcomes: food security; improved access to basic services such as health, education, and nutrition; increased resilience of rural communities—especially women and youth—to climate and socio-economic challenges; and the strengthening of social protection systems.

Religion, gender, and development are often intertwined. These three axes will illustrate, in a case study, how they intersect. The family institution, central in Guinean society, assigns women responsibility and commitment, reinforcing their leadership through long-standing traditional alliances.

Its exceptional biodiversity (Bisajo archipelago) makes Guinea-Bissau a strategic location for promoting environmental preservation measures to combat climate change, in which resilient people such as women and children play a crucial role in the context of climate justice. Their ability to adapt and the role of women as educators can promote good practices and responsible use of the environment.

All this social heritage constitutes a milestone or social network that makes it possible to strongly promote these underlying values. The religions of the book (Judaism, Islam and Christianity) accompany communion with nature in their values. In this sense, it is appropriate to invoke the moral links that have been drawn from ethics to argue why human beings have a moral obligation to care for the natural environment.

Recent assessments of climate change in sub-Saharan Africa indicate that the continent is suffering the effects of rising temperatures (water scarcity, reduced food production and loss of biodiversity). It is experiencing numerous extreme events that will worsen if greenhouse gases are not significantly reduced globally.

Intersectional vulnerabilities exacerbate people's experiences of climate change. Structural inequalities have an impact on debates about- The focus on resilient individuals and vulnerable groups, such as women and children, drives new forms of international cooperation by considering the importance not only of protecting intrinsic vulnerability, but also of strengthening the role that these groups can play on a global scale due to their particular resilience to climate change.

The Lusophone Platform for Bioethics is advancing a promising future scenario through reflection on the knowledge, prevention and study of emerging diseases, new techno-scientific developments and biomedical advances, from a One Health perspective, establishing synergies in areas of geostrategic interest. The moral links between human beings and nature are shared by the religions of the book, among others. Future research directions may also be highlighted.

The Government and the UN agreed on the United Nations Framework for Cooperation on Sustainable Development (UNFCD) (2022-2026). It prioritises goals. SDG 1 (end poverty), SDG 2 (malnutrition), SDG 3 (health system) and SDG 4 (education), SDG 11 (access to basic services). These priorities align with Guinea-Bissau's implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

In any case, the urgency of changing the attitude and actions of the State, as well as the dependence on Western practices in a clear cultural asymmetry, has become apparent. Given the failure to meet the basic requirements of good governance, self-sufficiency and community support, civil society needs to be strengthened to enable people to continue living where they want.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization.; methodology; investigation.; resources.; writing—original draft preparation; writing—review and editing.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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