Chapter six: São Tomé and Príncipe

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6.1 Country profile

São Tomé and Príncipe, officially the Democratic Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe, is a Portuguese-speaking island nation in the Gulf of Guinea, off the western equatorial coast of Central Africa. With an area of 1 001 square km and an estimated population of 175 000 inhabitants, the major challenge facing the country has been sustainable development in areas such as health, education, agriculture and infrastructure. São Tomé and Príncipe (STP) became independent from Portugal on 12 July 1975. Since independence, the country has evolved from a one party, socialist state to a liberal, multi-party democracy.

Constitutionally, the country is a semi-presidential republic: the president is the head of state and the prime minister the head of government. The current president is Manuel Pinto da Costa and the prime minister is Patrício Trovoada, the son of the former president Miguel Trovoada. In 2009, the Freedom House report ranked STP sixth in Africa in terms of civil liberties and political rights, and in 2011, STP scored 2 out of 7 (1 being the highest) in both of these categories. Freedom of the press is respected, and there are several independent newspapers (AEO 2012).

The free and transparent presidential elections of July 2011 (with a run-off in August) demonstrated the country’s progress in consolidating stability. The second round was won by Manuel Pinto da Costa, STP’s first post-independence president (from 1975 to 1991), who ran against the speaker of parliament, Evaristo de Carvalho. The political outlook for 2012 and 2013, however, is a matter of concern. Collaboration between the president and Prime Minister Patrício Trovoada has proven to be a challenge, and constitutes a significant risk for social stability (AEO 2012). Prime Minister Trovoada barely managed to pass the 2012 budget, and his government may find itself in a vulnerable position as it lacks a parliamentary majority.

São Tomé and Príncipe’s literacy rate is around 84.4%. The youth population (15–24 years) has a higher literacy rate (93.8%). The age range of 22–24 years has a literacy rate of 94.7%,
and literacy rates for the cohorts 15–16 and 20–21 years are 94.3% and 92.3% respectively (INE/QUIBB 2005). Portuguese is the official language of the country; the other widely spoken languages are Forro, Angolar and Principense.

In 2010 the country’s main social indicators were as follows: life expectancy: 87.9 years (UNDP 2010); literacy rate, 68.3% (UNDP 2009); HDI: 0.488 (130 in a list of 192 countries). According to the IMF (2012), the island’s economic performance in 2011 was good despite a challenging external environment. The country is considered a fragile state according to the harmonised African Development Bank (AfDB) and World Bank Country Policy and Institutional Assessment (CPIA) score, which was below 3.2 in 2010. Its vulnerability to exogenous shocks is accompanied by high dependence on agriculture and overseas development assistance (ODA). In 2011 real GDP growth is estimated to have dropped slightly to 4.3% (down from 4.5% in 2010) and was driven mainly by the construction, consumer, retail, tourism and mining sectors. The service sector dominates the economy, accounting for about 60% of GDP in 2010 and 48.6% in 2011 and employing nearly 60% of the workforce. The industrial and agricultural sectors each contributed 20% to GDP (AEO 2012). The country imports some of its food, given that domestic food-crop production is not enough to meet local consumption. Other than agriculture, the main economic activities are fishing and a small industrial sector engaged in processing local agricultural products and producing a few basic consumer goods. The picturesque islands have great potential for tourism, and the government is attempting to improve its rudimentary tourist industry infrastructure. Since 2009 the government has made significant progress in reforming the management of public finances. The measures implemented have led the country to be ranked 12th out of 53 countries in the 2011 Ibrahim Index of African Governance (Ibrahim 2012).

6.2 Background and historical context of higher education

Higher education in São Tomé and Príncipe was established in the early 1990s. In 1975, when the country became independent, no HEI existed on the islands. From 1975 to the mid-1990s higher education could only be acquired overseas, mainly in Portugal and in the then-socialist countries. In 1994 the first HEI was established, the School of Accounting, Business Administration and Computing (IUCAI). IUCAI is a private institution (Lúcio 2012, interview).

Two years later, in 1996, the first public HEI, the Polytechnic Institute, was established and opened its gates in the academic year 1997/1998. By the mid-2000s, these two institutions were still the sole HEIs in the country, until the Portuguese Grupo Lusíada created the Universidade Lusíada de São Tomé e Príncipe in 2005.

6.3 Trends of expansion, diversity and differentiation

It is difficult to accurately map HEIs in São Tomé and Príncipe because of inconsistency in the data with respect to significant features and trends, along with related problems of data availability. The ministry of education does not have an institutional culture of gathering
statistical data on higher education. The report presented here is therefore incomplete. It is based on primary sources obtained through interviews with key informants and the few available papers written on the country's higher education.

In 2012 São Tomé and Príncipe had three HEIs: two private and one public institution. As mentioned above, the Instituto Universitário de Contabilidade, Administração e Informática (IUCAI), was the first private HEI to be established in 1994. In 1996, the government established the Instituto Superior Politécnico (ISP), making it the sole public institution and in 2005, the Universidade Lusíada de São Tomé e Príncipe (ULSTP) was founded as the first fully fledged university in the country.

Table 6.1 Higher education institutions in São Tomé and Príncipe (2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Public</th>
<th>Annual fees</th>
<th>Private</th>
<th>Annual fee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Instituto Universitário de Contabilidade, Administração e Informática (IUCAI)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>95 Euro</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Instituto Superior Politécnico (ISP)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>82 Euro</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Universidade Lusíada De São Tomé e Príncipe (ULSTP)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>75 Euro</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s field work 2012

IUCAI’s Graduate Institute of Accounting, Business Administration and Computing thus emerged as the first institution of higher education in August 1994 by order No. 8/94 operating as a private institution. This private initiative resulted from an act in 1993 on the law of private and cooperative education (Law, 11/93). In Article 32, Law 11/93 allows other entities other than the state to operate higher education service providers.

By enacting this law the state aims to regulate the establishment of private education by recognising the universal right to high quality learning and teaching. However, the state continues to play a critical role in providing higher education to its citizens.

Table 6.2 below shows the evolution of enrolments in STP HE starting from the academic year 2000/2001, both in public and private institutions. Initially, private institutions did not keep enrolment records. The figures begin to appear in the academic year 2007/2008 with 558 enrolled students. The only public institution, the ISP, has kept enrolment records since 2000. Currently, there are more students in the two private institutions (1 050) than in the public institution (771). As we can read from these figures, higher education in STP is a young and very small system.

6.3.1 Students in the higher education system

Table 6.2 shows the evolution of the student population from the year 2002 to 2012. It was not possible to obtain data for the years 2000 to 2007/2008 for the private institutions.
### Table 6.2 Student enrolment 2000–2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>ISP</th>
<th>LUSTP e UICAI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000/2001</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>No data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001/2002</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>No data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002/2003</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>No data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003/2004</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>No data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004/2005</td>
<td>427</td>
<td>No data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005/2006</td>
<td>474</td>
<td>No data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006/2007</td>
<td>539</td>
<td>No data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007/2008</td>
<td>604</td>
<td>558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008/2009</td>
<td>704</td>
<td>670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009/2010</td>
<td>766</td>
<td>782</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010/2011</td>
<td>643</td>
<td>789</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011/2012</td>
<td>771</td>
<td>1 050</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author's field work 2012

### 6.3.2 Academic programmes

Data concerning the academic programmes offered by the HEIs in São Tomé and Príncipe shows that the Instituto Superior Politécnico offers Bachelors degrees in several academic disciplines, such as Portuguese, French, mathematics, biology and history. The IUCAI mainly offers Bachelors degrees in business-oriented academic programmes: management, accounting, taxation and auditing, law, petrol management and economics, telecommunications and computer science engineering, law, civil engineering and tourism.

The Universidade Lusíada de São Tomé e Príncipe is also a business-oriented institution: it offers degrees in law, economics, business sciences and computer science. It was impossible to obtain data on the academic programmes offered by the fourth university, Universidade Lusófona de São Tomé e Príncipe (Pontifice 2003, Cardoso 2004). Moreover, data on the academic programmes offered by the other three HEIs presented above is likely to be incomplete and not updated. The field work research helped somewhat in obtaining systematised and updated data on higher education in São Tomé and Príncipe, mainly concerning enrolment trends in each HEIs from 1994 up to date, academic programmes and degrees offered since establishment and tuitions fees for each institution (see Table 6.1).

### 6.3.3 Academic degrees and diplomas

Law 2/2003 Art 13 prescribes the academic degrees and diplomas offered by HEIs in São Tomé and Príncipe.
• Universities can offer the academic degrees of Bacharelato, Licenciatura (Bachelors degree and Bachelor Honours degree), Masters and Doctorate;
• Polytechnics can offer bacharelato and licenciatura degrees;
• Courses leading to bacharelato and licenciatura must have the normal length of three years, but in special cases, the duration can be of one or two semesters; and
• Courses leading to the academic degree of Licenciatura must have a duration of five years.

### 6.4 Changes in higher education governance

São Tomé and Príncipe does not have a specific higher education law. Higher education issues are legislated in the general law of education, Decree Law 2/2003, approved on 2 June 2003. In the section concerning higher education (subsection III, Articles 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15), Decree Law 2/2003 defines the scope and objectives, the academic degrees and the different kinds of HEIs. The objectives and academic degrees defined in the law are similar to the ones prescribed in the other Lusophone countries.

It is however worth mentioning that the law divides higher education into university and polytechnic training. University training is more academic, scientific and culturally-oriented than the polytechnic training, which is more concerned with professional and technical training. University training is offered at universities, whereas polytechnic training is offered at vocational or technical institutions.

The higher education system is supervised by the directorate of higher education and training, an institution integrated in the ministry of education, culture and training. Specific detail on how this board regulates and supervises higher education in the country, or concerning their vision and strategic plans, is unavailable.

### 6.5 Financing higher education

São Tomé and Príncipe has no clear funding policy for higher education, apart from the money that is allocated to scholarships for overseas studies. Over the past few years the government has kept overall public spending in the education sector (including capital expenditures) at about 10% of total government spending. While this allocation remains in line with the poverty reduction strategy on the island (PRSP), recurrent spending tends to favour higher education (currently at more than half of the sector’s recurrent spending), mainly to pay for scholarships for students to study abroad (IMF 2008).

According to the IMF report, an alternative strategy to finance higher education in the country would also help to better balance financing primary and secondary education. Moreover, there are reports that suggest a higher level of corruption in the scholarship scheme. According to Vincente (2007) scholarships for higher education abroad have been a key source of social status for elite families. São Tomé and Príncipe relies exclusively on scholarships to study abroad, offered by foreign donors. Interestingly, that has been the
primary way to educate the political elite in the country since gaining independence from Portugal.

In 2010, the Universidade Lusíada de São Tomé e Príncipe organised and hosted the second higher education forum in the country. The first forum had also been organised by ULSTP in 2006 under the theme 'Higher Education and Development'. The second forum discussed among other issues the funding in higher education, divided in three themes:

- Viability of funding for higher education;
- The role of the state in financing higher education; and
- Public-private partnership in higher education funding.

No official document or report was produced after the conference. From the five page memo it is possible to conclude that the issue of clarifying the scholarship allocation criteria is paramount. We can also deduce from the document that some of the participants were pushing for the introduction of a cost-sharing policy even for the beneficiaries of scholarships. The idea is that the beneficiaries of government scholarships should pay them back once they graduate and get a job. The money from the payments could be used to sponsor other students. None of this, however, was systematically documented apart from the small memo compiled by the secretariat of the conference.

### 6.6 ICT in higher education

ICT in São Tomé and Príncipe can best be characterised as poor and inadequate. According to a survey of ICT in education in Africa report (Fall 2007), the government does not consider ICT to be a priority sector, and there is currently no specific policy that addresses ICT. Internet service has not yet been liberalised, but there is some restructuring of the telecommunications sector underway. Other than basic computer facilities at the Polytechnic, it is not currently possible to identify any ICT initiatives in the country at any educational level.

The World Bank is pushing for the telecommunication market, currently a monopoly by Companhia São Tomense de Telecomunicação (CST) to be liberalised in order to increase efficiency and dynamism. After expanding by 60% in 2009, STP’s mobile phone market grew by another 25% in 2010. With 100 000 mobile subscribers, market penetration stands at 60%. The country’s connection to a marine fibre optic cable linking Africa’s west coast to Europe, expected in 2012, should drastically improve telecommunications in the country. CST announced the conclusion of the USD 25 million contracts in June 2010. The project will be jointly financed by CST, the World Bank and Portugal Telecom. Once the cable is operational, CST plans to launch third-generation communication services (AEO 2012).
REFERENCES


Interviews

Mr Lucio Pinto. Interview 24 February 2012
Alzira Rodrigues
Maria Fernanda Pontifice