

STRENGTHENING AND COLLECTIVE LEARNING IN THE LUSOPHONE NETWORK FOR THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION (RELUS)

THE PROCESS SO FAR

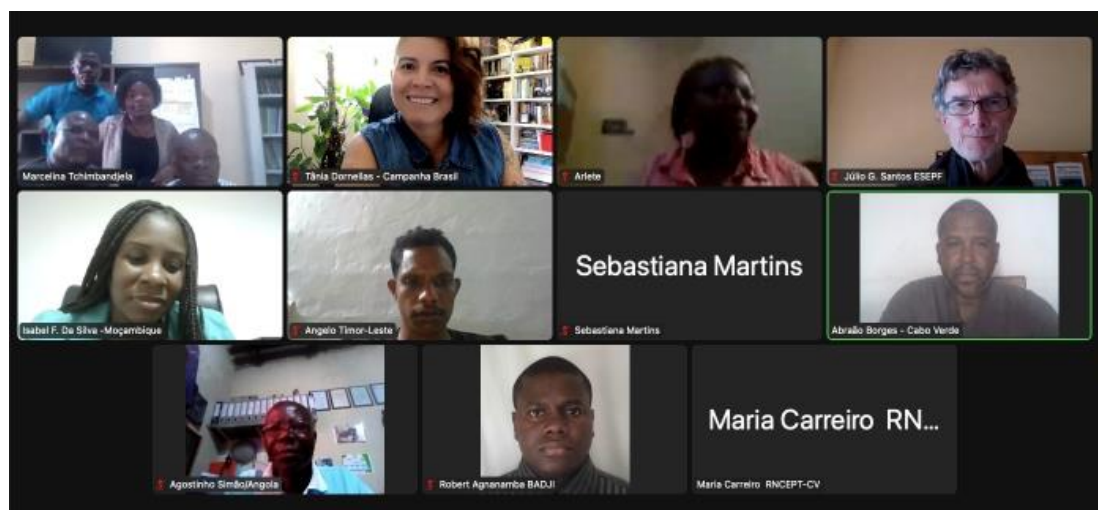
The Lusophone Network for the Right to Education (ReLus) is an international civil society coalition which brings together coalitions and national organizations from Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique, Portugal, São Tomé and Príncipe and East Timor. Therefore, being on 4 continents: Africa, Americas, Asia and Europe.

In the second semester of 2021, the evaluation and planning activities of the Lusophone Network for the Right to Education began, which were conducted by the consultancies Tomara! and Entremeios, both contracted by the Brazilian Campaign for the Right to Education, until then the Network's coordinating organization.



During the process, the strengths and weaknesses of ReLus were identified, as well as shared and discussed what its members want for the future of the Network, with the production of planning for the next three years. In addition, the members agreed on a new form of governance for the Network, which from 2022 will have a management committee made up of Brazil, Mozambique and Cape Verde.

Continuing the process of strengthening ReLus, in February 2023 the Network met for the first time in the year. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss Oxfam Denmark's proposed partnership under the Education Out Loud (EOL) Initiative and define a preliminary proposal.



This partnership developed and the Brazilian Campaign was recognized as a global learning partner of Education Out Loud (EOL) and approved funding for a project aimed at improving skills in Institutional

Development and Advocacy through participatory learning cycles and exchange of experiences on effective practices for promoting the right to education and building networks for political advocacy, with the preparation of a strategic plan to define the advocacy methodology and monitoring of SDG 4 in each country.



2º ENCONTRO
INTERNACIONAL
da ReLus

Nome: PRAIA | CABO VERDE
País: Cabo Verde

As part of the project stages, the 2nd Meeting of the Lusophone Network for the Right to Education (ReLus) took place between the 29th and 31st of August 2023, held in Praia, Cape Verde. The event represented a significant milestone in the joint effort to strengthen the coalition of entities committed to promoting and defending the right to education in Portuguese-speaking countries, including Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Portugal, São Tomé and Príncipe and East Timor. It was a time to present the reality and challenges of each coalition and thus draw up a plan for the Learning Cycle that begins in September 2023.

The meeting, which was promoted with the facilitation of the Brazilian Campaign for the Right to Education, aimed to consolidate and detail a program for the learning cycle between entities participating in ReLus, with a focus on advocacy (political influence) and institutional development. The main purpose of ReLus was to promote the exchange of experiences and strengthen the actions of each entity to implement the right to education in their countries, with a focus on SDG 4 (Sustainable Development Goal number 4, Education), from the UN.

During the meeting, a learning process began to build common protocols for advocacy, in accordance with the commitments made by the countries under international agreements. Some of the central elements for carrying out advocacy were discussed, including political mapping, mobilization of society and the production of knowledge. In three intense days, we brought together representatives from different organizations, education experts and human rights defenders who are part of ReLus with a clear objective: to strengthen our ties, share knowledge and strategies, and chart a joint path to face the challenges that affect education in our countries.



1. REFLECTING ON CHALLENGES

During the Meeting, participants shared valuable reflections on the challenges faced in political advocacy work for the right to education. Among the voices that brought their perspectives, Isabel da Silva, executive secretary of the Education for All Movement in Mozambique (MEPT), highlighted a series of challenges that deserve attention and collective commitment.

For Isabel, one of the central challenges is the search for autonomy in society's participation in relation to the government. This involves the need to balance collaboration with government while maintaining the independence necessary to ensure effective advocacy. The issue of financing is particularly relevant in this context, as dependence on government resources can affect organizations' ability to act independently.

Another point highlighted by Isabel concerns the strengthening of the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (Ancefa) and training for fundraising with international funds. This need for additional resources is crucial to expanding the impact of initiatives aimed at promoting the right to education.

Furthermore, the lack of information on how to construct the Shadow Report in Mozambique represents a significant obstacle. Shadow Reports play a fundamental role in monitoring and accountability in relation to the fulfillment of educational goals, by providing an independent critical analysis of how the Government's public policies are working (or not), regarding the various aspects of the rights provided for in the treaties of human rights. Training in this aspect is essential.

A notable effort in Mozambique is the advocacy campaign for the production of a Fund for the Maintenance and Development of Basic Education and Valorization of Education Professionals (Fundeb) inspired by the Brazilian model. The government's commitment to carrying out this initiative is a promising opportunity, but it also brings challenges in its implementation and monitoring.

The continuity of technical activities, the creation of financing and resource mobilization mechanisms, as well as strengthening advocacy at the provincial level, are other fundamental challenges highlighted by Isabel. Finally, implementing the memorandum of understanding, also at provincial level, is a challenge that requires rigorous and constant monitoring to ensure that commitments are fulfilled in all instances.

Abrão Borges, representative of the Education for All (EPT) network in Cape Verde, highlighted the complexity and breadth of educational issues in Cape Verde and the continued importance of seeking solutions that promote access, quality and equity in education at all levels. Among these concerns is the need to effectively integrate inclusive pre-school education into the educational system, ensuring that it is accessible and of high quality for all children.

Furthermore, adequate financing of inclusive education is a critical concern. Ensuring sufficient resources to improve infrastructure, train teachers and provide educational materials, also for children and young people with special needs is essential to improving the quality of teaching.

Another significant challenge highlighted by Abrão is the high cost associated with student travel. This includes issues related to transportation to access schools and universities, which can be a significant barrier for many students who want to obtain a quality education. Dropping out of higher education due to the high cost of staying is a legitimate concern in a country comprising of islands. Many students face financial difficulties that lead them to interrupt their studies, and this issue must be addressed to ensure equal opportunities for everyone in the pursuit of higher education.

Finally, the expectation for the publication of regulations that regulate pre-school education is understandable. These regulations have the potential to establish important guidelines for the quality and effectiveness of pre-school education, including criteria for the training and specialization of professionals who work at this stage, as well as improvements in salaries.

Sebastiana Martins, president of the Board of Directors of the Association of Social Actors of Angola, brought to light a significant challenge: the need to participate politically in a formal and organized way, institutionalizing the Network with an orientation focused on interaction with the government.

Francisco de Araújo, President of the Board of the Civil Society Education Partnership (CSEP) in East Timor, highlighted two crucial challenges during the discussions. Firstly, he mentioned the need to deal with the Ministry of Education's plan to close schools, a matter of great importance that requires a careful approach.

Furthermore, Francisco also highlighted the lack of clarity in the government's budget execution for education. This challenge highlights the importance of transparency and proper management of resources allocated to education, in order to ensure that they are allocated effectively to promote the right to quality education.

Eduardo Elba, Permanent Secretary of the Federation of NGOs (FONG-STP), São Tomé and Príncipe, outlined a series of wide-ranging challenges that are currently being faced in the area of education in São Tomé and Príncipe. He began by highlighting issues related to the schooling process, noting that, despite the high percentage of school-age children (around 93%) being enrolled, other aspects are equally challenging, such as the quality of education, which calls into question the ability to meet Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number 4.

The Covid-19 pandemic has worsened the precariousness of education, contributing to challenges such as the lack of adequate teacher training and overcrowding of classes. Furthermore, Eduardo mentioned the importance of establishing quality standards in education and the concern with the quantity of teachers properly trained to teach.

Budgetary issues are also a critical point. Although 12% of GDP is allocated to education, the allocation of resources does not effectively translate into improving conditions in schools. The difference between budget allocation and budget execution is substantial, resulting in less than half of the resources actually applied in practice. This occurs in a scenario where the number of school-age people is increasing while resources are decreasing.

Finally, Eduardo highlighted the need to formalize the Education Network, highlighting the importance of establishing a solid organizational structure to face these educational challenges in a coordinated and effective way.

Miguel de Sá, from the Education for All Guinea-Bissau Campaign Network, highlighted a series of crucial challenges affecting education in his country. One of these challenges is early marriage, which has significant impacts on girls' education. Early marriages often interrupt young women's educational paths.

Furthermore, Miguel noted that religion has a considerable impact on the decisions made by girls and women in relation to education, influencing their access and opportunities. The distance between the school and students' homes also proves to be a relevant challenge, as it can make access to education difficult, especially in rural areas.

Finally, political instability emerged as a substantial concern, with the country experiencing a rapid change of education ministers in a short space of time. This could hamper the consistency of education policies and the implementation of reforms needed to improve the education system.

Andressa Pellanda, general coordinator of the Brazilian Campaign for the Right to Education, addressed a series of complex challenges that stand out as critical issues in promoting the right to education in Brazil.

One of the challenges highlighted by Andressa is the need to maintain the constancy of the network's mobilization, even in times of crisis. This highlights the importance of perseverance and continuous engagement in education, regardless of the challenges that may arise.

Another critical issue is the technology used in education, a relatively new topic in which little is known about the potential dangers related to its use. Furthermore, technology governance often does not adequately include education actors, which can have significant negative implications for the sector.

Andressa also mentioned the importance of education financing and how the impact of President Dilma Rousseff's impeachment in 2016 may have affected this financing. Furthermore, the demilitarization of schools is a challenge that highlights the need to promote safe and inclusive educational environments.

The influence of the press and media, including the creation of Jeduca (Association of Education Journalists), was highlighted as a concern in Brazil, especially when part of this influence can be co-opted by partial interests that understand education as a profitable business and not as a right. Finally, the incidence of conservative groups in educational curricula is a delicate issue.

2. SHARING STRATEGIES

During the 2nd Meeting of the Lusophone Network for the Right to Education (ReLus), participants were invited to discuss strategies for defending rights, advocacy and institutional strengthening. After these moments of sharing there was also a training, organized by the Brazilian Campaign for the Right to Education, on Theory of Change.

The Campaign, Brazil presented how to identify and interact with public agents, civil society organizations and experts in the field of Education. Through its history of impact on public education policies at a national and international level, it has presented advocacy strategies developed over the last few years, especially on the Fund for the Maintenance and Development of Basic Education and Valorization of Education Professionals (Fundeb), in 2020. Andressa Pellanda, general coordinator of the Campaign highlighted the participation of the Campaign Network in these processes, communication strategies, especially digital ones during the Covid-19 pandemic and the importance of knowledge production and articulation for communication strategies on advocacy.

The representative of the National Network of the Education for All Campaign in Cape Verde, Albertino Delgado, presented about the specificities of carrying out advocacy in the area of education in the country. According to him, the island country, made up of 10 islands, with a population of 587,925 inhabitants, has the starting challenge of in-person participation due to its geographical characteristics. Therefore, the Network has carried out advocacy training in the different locations where it carries out activities, to promote a more consistent mobilization of society.

Another important advocacy action carried out by the Network in Cape Verde has been the National Mobilization Campaign to Increase the State Budget for Education, which has achieved important achievements, such as increasing public resources allocated to pre-school education. When they started the Campaign, the resource for pre-school education in the country was 0.1% (2014), this remained until approximately 2020 and is currently 2.3% (2023). Another important strategy developed by the Network is the partnership with local journalists through the Citizenship Observatory to guide newspapers on the topic of education.

Eduardo Elba, representative of São Tomé and Príncipe, spoke about the influence they have carried out to monitor the State budget for education, based on the [“Budget and Children’s Rights - A guide and support for the preparation and monitoring of the State Budget”](#), by 2014. The main challenge in carrying out this impact, according to Eduardo, is the lack of information and transparency on the part of the State in relation to the budget and education expenses. In this sense, the need to form an office to coordinate these resources, as well as manage donations received by the country for investments in education, was indicated.

The second moment of the training dealt with Strategic Planning guided by the Theory of Change. Marcele Frossard, program and policy coordinator of the Brazilian Campaign for the Right to Education, contextualized the Theory of Change, highlighting its applications and benefits for the construction of impactful actions in the field of education and its importance for the strategic planning of organizations. As part of this moment, those present were invited to review the strategic plan developed for ReLus, as mentioned previously, and reflect on the characteristics of the Theory of Change to chart the path to social change. Marcele Frossard, highlighted that the construction of the Theory of Change must be participatory, involving the beneficiary community through consultations, which must be carried out through adaptive management, capable of adapting to circumstances, and monitoring indicators to understand the results achieved.

Finally, those present were invited to analyze an example of Theory of Change, developed by the Transformative and Anti-Racist Educational System Project (SETA), which the Campaign is part of, and discussed how to appropriate this tool in their organizations to guarantee institutional development.

3. BUILDING COLLECTIVE LEARNING

From the meeting in Cape Verde, the exchange and training program was designed, to align expectations in relation to learning cycles, to agree on responsibilities between participants, to improve planning, monitoring and evaluation processes (Theory of Change), as well as for the construction of common protocols for advocacy and monitoring of SDG 4 in each country.

With this, it was agreed to carry out 3 learning cycles (virtual training moments) for which an entity from the ReLus Management Committee was designated as responsible for coordinating and organizing each of the following topics:

- Institutional Development (Theory of Change, Communication and Mobilization - campaigns on social networks, press coverage, data collection)
- Institutional Articulation (Alliances/building of networks for political advocacy) and

- Advocacy (Strategic advocacy plan) to improve practices, expand articulation capacity and promote cooperation and articulation of the entities that make up ReLus.

This cycle of activities will include:

- a) critical in-depth analysis of the advocacy process in the different contexts of each country;
- b) the exchange of experiences of good advocacy practices in each country; It is
- c) identification of stories of change around the realization of the right to education, based on the diversity of advocacy strategies.

The learning cycle schedule was organized as follows:

[22/09] Institutional Articulation - Cape Verde coordination

Institutional articulation for advocacy

East Timor and Cape Verde

Methods and articulation for research with evidence for advocacy

Center for African Studies at the University of Porto

[27/10] Institutional Development - Mozambique coordination

Development of projects to mobilize resources, with an emphasis on the Theory of Change and strategic planning

Brazil

Network formalization

Angola and Mozambique

[24/11] Advocacy - Brazil coordination

Monitoring and advocacy on public works

São Tomé and Cape Verde

Closure of civic space and social tensions

Guinea-Bissau and Brazil

Advocacy in emergency contexts

Mozambique

For the training cycle, each country nominated 3 participants. Live classes will take place via the Zoom platform and a space has been created on an online platform where recorded classes, support and reading

material will be available to deepen the content given in class as well as assessment exercises to be developed at the end of each class.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In summary, the process of collective construction and the establishment of contacts with such diverse networks, covering countries on 4 continents, play a vital role in the formation and strengthening of the Lusophone Network for the Right to Education (ReLus) and in the advancement of our efforts in the fight for the right to education in Portuguese-speaking countries.

Interacting with global partners broadens our perspectives, enriches our understanding of educational complexities, and provides us with valuable insights to address the common challenges we face. The diversity of contexts and experiences enriches our repertoire of solutions and strategies, strengthening our ability to promote inclusive and quality educational policies.

Through this international contact, we build bridges of solidarity that transcend borders, reinforcing our commitment to education as a universal and shared right, which is the essential basis for sustainable development and equality in all Portuguese-speaking nations. Together, we are shaping the future of education, with the conviction that global collaboration is key to ensuring that all children, youth and adults have the opportunity to learn, grow and thrive.

