

THE ANGOLAN STAR

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Telos: In April 2020, with the world literally closing in on itself in the Covid emergency, something extraordinary happened in one of the largest African countries: you were appointed Minister of Culture, Environment and Tourism by the President of Angola, João Lourenço. However, the post only lasted a few months. What did you achieve in that period and why did you leave?

Adjany Costa: My nomination was a surprise even to me. I do not have a political background, and neither do I aspire to pursue a political career. And that is why I was nominated in the first place: because I am a down-to-earth conservationist that could help promote applicable and realistic policies instead of those that might become obsolete with time. And I took that as the primary mission of my appointment. The first step was to create an institution to start with.

The Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Environment was a newly created Super-Ministry with no legal structure. The first few months were dedicated to creating "The Giant", progressing the competences of the 3 previous ministries to fit into the current national and global pressing issues in the three realms. What had to be left behind, what had to be emphasised and worked on, what had to be added to each of the previous ministries... and how to combine it all into one with aligned goals and interconnecting priorities. The second step was to assemble the right team for it, who had the knowledge, experience, motivation and innovative spirit to carry through each of these overloaded departments. With 46 dependent institutes (including museums, national parks and executive institutions), over 1,500 employees spread across all 18 provinces and a limited budget, the second task was key to producing robust outcomes. The third step was to create the necessary foundations to develop the established goals and priorities. Protocols, guidelines, strategies, schedules and task forces were designed to ensure that "The Giant" could move swiftly, assertively and robustly. Those were my tasks, and once I accomplished them, I was put in a different position to oversee in a more hands-on the ground, technical and practical way rather than the political execution that was required from then on.

I contributed to the advancement of climate dialogue with the first series of roundtables with civil society, private institutions and diplomatic corps to understand everyday worries, paths and objectives and combine efforts to potentialise human and financial investment. I also promoted the kick-off actions for establishing the first Marine Protected Area in Angola, which is currently in the planning phase. Moreover, I furthered the planning of the Circular Economy, providing a glimpse of civil society and private investment's role in establishing a solid business model to make this approach sustainable in the country.

What is your position now and your assignment?

I am serving as the Advisor for Environmental Affairs to the President of the Republic of Angola. My position has a flexible job structure, depending on the Presidency's priorities, wants and needs. The tasks can range from reviewing projects, plans and strategies to proposing courses of action, providing an opinion on current issues, decisions and participating in events. And because "Environmental affairs" are part of a vast description that fits in a diversity of development, conservation and sustainability topics, I can be involved in different branches of government or private initiatives. Typically, I am much more involved in Climate Action, Circular Economy, Biodiversity protection and Ethno-conservation projects.

"What motivates me right now is the local communities that I work with." This is a very interesting statement of yours. What is it like working with local communities and why is it so important?

Working with communities is humbling and fulfilling, to say the least. Conservation is a very territorial domain. We are constantly scrutinising efforts, doing case studies and researching new methods to improve our approach. We advise decision-makers based far away from the areas that need protection. Our diplomas, financial condition and accolades manufacture a false sense of "knowing best". And it is only when one truly engages with local communities that one understands it should be the absolute contrary: we are not there to teach... we are there to learn. And in the process, we use all our acquired knowledge of global action to be vessels of ownership and stewardship: Vessels to provide tools that they need to foster their own ancient culture and beliefs, whether we believe in them or not, to help them solve any problems they identify in the best way they find fit, even if on trial and error, even if we disagree. Working with communities is assuring they have more than a sit at the table, but to ensure they own their past, present and future and support them with ideas, concepts and visions that they can relate to. And by doing that, we are making conservation truly sustainable and long-lasting, as it won't depend on a person 'changing the world' but on a whole society shaping their future and protecting their (and our) heritage.

Working with communities assures environmental, economic, and social sustainability and, thus, balance. They depend on this balance to survive and can only achieve that balance with our help, not through our command. Their view of their environment goes beyond environmental sustainability. It intertwines the social and cultural beliefs that feeds such sustainability, never

forgetting they have livelihoods to sustain. Their traditions are and were shaped by their surrounding nature. Their history involves their surroundings every step of the way, as they are part of their surroundings, and everything that happens to it happens to them. Thus, their relationship with their surroundings goes beyond the idealistic vision of people far away from it, defining what needs to be done from the comfort of their “developed ways”, deemed civilised and educated.

Local communities should be the real stewards of conservation. They should be treated as equal stakeholders in the conservation planning process, if not the most important ones. Not only do they know their environment better, but they also depend on its resources directly. They, better than anyone else, understand the importance of nature as they depend on its health. And better than anyone, they are equipped to successfully preserve it, even with new tools, visions and approaches. They had been doing so for centuries before they were then caught up in the prejudice of development and capitalism. And now is the time to empower them to own their heritage with pride and be the true guardians of their lands, which are usually mainly exploited by and for others.

What is the meaning of ‘Climate justice’ from an African, or even better, from an Angolan perspective?

I believe that the meaning of Climate Justice goes beyond its common definition, i.e. the inclusion, at a high level of decision-making, of individuals and communities in the policies to counter the effects of climate change. In my opinion, it goes much beyond a global political agenda of “inclusion”. It needs to be understood beyond numbers, greenwashing propaganda and beyond the mere race for a “greener reputation” of the most developed countries. We need to account that different parts of the world consume resources at different rates, despite their demography. More developed countries require a higher rate of resource consumption to satisfy their quality standards, most often imported from other locations.

According to the United Nations, “The lifestyles of people in the richest nations are heavily dependent on resources extracted from poorer countries, and they use considerably more resources than the countries these resources originate from.” For example, according to a 2019 report from WWF and the Global Footprint Network, Europe consumes 20% of the world’s “biocapacity”, despite comprising only 7% of the world’s population. Meanwhile, the Centre for Sustainable Systems from the University of Michigan states that the U.S., the EU and China consume 17%, 10,4% and 25% of the world’s energy despite comprising 5%, 7% and 18% of the world’s population. These three combined uses over half of the world’s energy for 30% of its population. Their impact on the climate change footprint is much more significant than those nations considered “poor” or “undeveloped”, whose resources are majorly exploited to feed the needs of the most developed nations. Yet, countries like Angola, which are at the bottom of these lists of usage of resources (note, use, not exploitation, as most our resources are exploited for others), are judged and suffer more with climate change than the countries that are demanding the most.

With all this information, climate actions need to be more considerate of the real polluters, the sufferers and the actual flow of resources around the world to create global plans and strategies that are more equitable and tailored to local action plans instead of unfairly demanding. And only then, can we all participate in a more realistic way to improve the future of climate on our shared earth.

Marco Sonsini

Editorial

Female, young, knowledgeable, competent. These are already all the ingredients you need to make a highly respected minister. And that’s just what happened. Not a European woman, but an Angolan scholar, who was Minister of the Environment, Tourism and Culture for a few months in 2020.

At just 30 years old, biologist Adjany da Silva Freitas Costa took on this onerous task on 6 April 2020. For many this was a sign of change, wanted by the president João Lourenço, who had managed to cut the number of ministers from 28 to 21 in a country where the vested interests often outweigh the good management of public affairs.

But Lourenço didn’t stop there and grouped three ministries into one, “The Giant” as Adjany calls it in her interview for PRIMOPIANOSCALA, and appointed a woman to lead it, in a matriarchal society where yet men still hold the reins.

Adjany Costa is a brilliant scholar, biologist and researcher; however, her CV wasn’t enough to curb local resistance and it failed, at least initially, to silence people’s perplexity. Her commitment to the environment made her the right person to take on an important, decisive challenge for Angola.

For Adjany, change happens through ideas, disrupting the status quo. Winner of the 2019 Young Champions of the Earth award, which the UN gives to environmentalists between the ages of 18 and 30, she was the director of the National Geographic Okavango-Zambezi project.

The Okavango River Delta is part of the largest inland wetland in southern Africa. More than a million people depend on this delta, which extends through Angola, Namibia and Botswana.

The priorities of this young minister have been to come up with policies to protect ecosystems, adopt clean technologies and reduce the negative impact of natural resource exploitation, in addition to combining conservation with culture and tourism, something with enormous potential in Angola. Important goals.

Her story of how she had to get the new, colossal ministry under control in just a few months and create both a team and, most importantly, a legal framework for a new structure is truly remarkable. Right at the beginning of the interview she admits that she has little experience in politics, which for some is her greatest downfall. Yet she manages to turn this into a strength and tells us: “*I do not have a political background, and neither do I aspire to pursue a political career. And that is why I was nominated in the first place: because I am a down-to-earth conservationist that could help promote applicable and realistic policies.*”

Today Costa is Advisor for Environmental Affairs to the President of the Republic of Angola. She continues to work for her people in this role, especially with local communities, to defend the country’s natural resources.

Not with the blind obstinacy of the environmentalism of the ‘affluent’, but rather with the concrete vision of someone who, thanks to their daily contact with people, knows how important it is to find a “environmental, economic, and social sustainability and, thus, balance.”

Her image as a woman who is strong and a fighter brings to mind Nzingha Mbande, the queen of Ndongo and Matamba, the two kingdoms that correspond to present-day Angola. Mbande was a brave, intelligent warrior, and even a little cruel, according to legend.

She was also a key figure in the 17th century resistance to colonialism. Her real title in Kimbundu, the local language, was *Ngola*, a term we could translate as “majesty”, the root from which the Portuguese created the name Angola.

PRIMOPIANOSCALA^c is continuing along the same graphic line adopted for its 2023 covers, using our guests’ faces to create something akin to museum merchandise. Each month, we personalise an article using the black and white face of our guest. And voilà! A t-shirt, a magnet or a shopper becomes a memory, an experience, a symbol. We turn our guests into icons, just like on the articles you find in the museum gift shop, inspired by the works on display, such as Leonardo’s Vitruvian Man, Van Gogh’s sunflowers, Michelangelo’s fresco in the Sistine Chapel.

Each guest becomes *so* iconic they turn into a pop star singing on social media. For Costa, we’ve chosen a stainless steel water bottle, a symbol of feasible environmentalism, made up of our everyday choices. The song from the musical version of the cover, another key element for 2023, is perfect for Adjany. *Sunny* just like her.

All of us at Telos wish you a Happy Easter! A little early we know, but with the April issue we would have arrived a little late.

Mariella Palazzolo



Adjany Costa is currently the Advisor for Environmental Affairs to the President of the Republic of Angola, after serving, in 2020, as the youngest Minister in the history of the country, at age 30, to the then newly created Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Environment. With a Master Degree in Marine Biodiversity and Conservation as an Erasmus Mundus Program Grantee, Adjany has significantly been involved in establishing the first **Marine Protected Area** in Angola’s southernmost coastline, having led the official kick-off inter-sectorial assemblies for its creation, as a Minister. While in that position, she has also driven the dialogue on Climate Action with several national and international stakeholders, promoting the creation of the first climate observatory in Angola.

She has spoken at numerous significant national and international events, authored a book and several scientific papers, and received various recognitions for her work, including the **2019 United Nations Young Champions of the Earth Award** and a decoration in Angola with a Golden Medal for Civil Merit, in 2019. She is pursuing her PhD at the University of Oxford, developing a Community-Based Natural Resource Management model for the Okavango, Zambezi and Kwando headwaters in the Angolan highlands.

Her biggest passion is food, even before wilderness and nature. Adjany enjoys trying new flavours and textures and she appreciates different gastronomic cultures. Her

biggest hobbies are reading, going to the beach -reading at the beach being key- and loving her plants.

Adjany is the mother of “*the cutest 4-month-old baby boy which has brought so much meaning to everything I do and to the world I would like to help leave for the younger generations.*”

Marco Sonsini