

TERRA MADRE IN GABON

1. Introduction

The first visitors in Gabon were Portuguese traders who arrived there in the 15th century and named the country after the word *gabao*, Portuguese for a hooded coat resembling the figure created by the estuary of River Komo. The coastline suddenly became the center for the slave trade. Over the course of the 16th century, the country welcomed traders from the Netherlands, the UK and France.

The first European country that settled along the coast of the country was France. Through its contacts with the chiefs of the tribes, France turned the coast into a protectorate and started to strengthen its position in Gabon, appealing to the management of the fight against slave trade for the setting up of military settlements.



In 1849 the Frenchmen seized a slave ship and freed the passengers at the mouth of River Komo. The slaves named their town Libreville, “Free Town”. French Explorers went deep into the thick jungle of the country between 1862 and 1887. The most famous was Pietro Savorgnan di Brazzà, explorer of Italian origin. The key persons in these expeditions were the local guides from Gabon who – under the control of the explorers – looked for the sources of the River Congo.

In 1910, Gabon became one of the four territories of French Africa, but in 1946 it managed to gain independency from the administrative point of view, and internal autonomy. The territories became independent August 17, 1960, and were divided into four independent countries: Central African Republic, Chad, Congo-Brazzaville and Gabon.

On the same day, pro-French Lèon M'Ba was appointed as the first president of the Independent Republic of Gabon.

2. Territorial Context

Farming in Gabon is much less developed as compared to other African countries: this is due to the low population density (1,200,000 over 268,000 km²), to the high cost of transportation, and to the high cost of manpower.

Farming is carried out on less than 1% of the land, whereas forests cover 85% of Gabon.

The urbanization experienced a fast growth (27,000 inhabitants in 1960 in the capital Libreville, 70,000 in 1970, 200,000 in 1980, 420,000 in 1993, and 550,000 in 2000); at the same time the income of the population is increased, bringing about a change in the food habits of the country. A growth in the consumption of cereals, fruits, vegetables, meats and dairy products has been registered, to the detriment of tuber consumptions. All this caused a considerable growth in the importation of food products.

At the same time, the flight from the countryside towards the cities and the aging of the population in the villages caused a decrease in the portion of land devoted to farming.

3. The partners

GEDER – Groupement d'Entraide pour le développement rural (Foreign Aid Group for Rural Development) is a non-political organization which represents the community of Gabonese farmers. Born in 2004 a Libreville, GEDER was created with the aim of improving the conditions in rural contexts in Gabon. The organization works in various fields for social, economical and cultural development in inland Gabon. It is mainly composed of women.

Slow Food International.

4. The Project

The aim of the project – an event to take place in Libreville – consists in spreading and promoting awareness on local gastronomy and on local cuisine.

Terra Madre Gabon – First Gastronomic Days North-South

300 participants are expected to take part in the event planned by GEDER in collaboration with Slow Food International and Terra Madre, in order to discover and promote the gastronomic traditions of the country. The event will last 2-3 days, during which conferences and debates on the social impact of the gastronomic traditions and on the promotional tools will be organized. Also, there will be taste workshops where the cooks and producers will offer their local products for tastings, and where the school pupils will be able to attend classes on local cuisine.

The event will also allow starting a work of cataloguing Gabonese recipes, to be collected in a recipe book, which would be the first one ever published on the subject.

The Terra Madre producers and cooks who attended Terra Madre 2006 from Gabon will play a central role in the event, which will also be the occasion to organize the first local edition of Terra Madre Gabon. The food communities and the cooks will invited to participate in the event, to give their contribution in the workshops and in the debates, providing their perspective to the other attendees, with the aim to share the experience of Terra Madre to a larger audience.

The event will set the basis for the creation of a local Terra Madre network, made up of the food community delegates who attended Terra Madre (but also of those who couldn't attend but share the same values), of the cooks, of the co-producers, of the members that joined Slow Food during Terra Madre, that is, of all the people that will be the leaders of the Slow Food movement in Gabon. The participants will also take the opportunity to prepare their participation in Terra Madre 2008, and to recruit new delegates for the next edition of the worldwide event.

Gabon at Terra Madre 2006

Food Communities: 9

Producers: 17

Cooks: 2

Slow Food Members: 21 (attending members have also paid membership fees for non-attending members of the same community).