

Social Pensions in Cape Verde: The Story of Nha Liza

Luísa Oliveira Marques, 81, Cape Verdean, lives on the island of São Vicente in Salamansa, a fishing community in the northwest of the island. When questioned about her youth she said she did the same as all women of her time, never worked, only helped, took care of the family.

Life of rural women in the islands of [Cape Verde](#) isn't different from many others around the world, prisoners of their gender and patriarchal culture that devalues women's work. Nha Liza, as she is called by everyone, lived this reality in the countryside where she spent her childhood and youth.



Born in S. Vicente, at the age of six her family migrated. "I was taken by my father to his parents' homeland, the island of São Nicolau. We had a simple life in the village of Praia Branca, I helped at home and in farming". She had her two children very young, laughing with a naughty look as she says "it was the fate of any girl to become a mother and raise children". Her partner found work on the desert island of Santa Luzia. When asked if she liked the idea to move to a desert island, she says "in my time, a woman had no choice, she was where her father or the father of her children told her to be... but my children went to school!" she adds proudly.

"Every day I milked nine cows, fed the pigs, did the housekeeping and took care of other animals. After my children finished school they stayed with us in Santa Luzia. When they grew a little older I bought them a small boat and so they became fishermen. My life on the desert island was to look after the family and cattle. At least one thing I didn't need to fear - that my husband found other women!"

Nha Liza currently lives with a granddaughter and a great-grandson in a house with only one room and a small kitchen that she built with money spared from selling fish and shellfish that she herself fished. "I caught limpets and fish, dried it and gave the fishermen of Santo Antão to sell. When they returned to Santa Luzia they handed me the money that I kept in a tin hidden in the kitchen".

When she was no longer able to ensure her livelihood, she relied on the occasional help from her family, going through many difficulties. Her eldest son fell ill and died. "Life is difficult, my children helped as they could, but they also have a family and the sea is uncertain, I could not always count on them. I have been through many difficulties...".

How does Nha Liza live now? She promptly replied that thanks to the social pension she doesn't face as many difficulties as before.

She is a beneficiary of the [social pension](#) granted by the State, which is around 50 euros a month. When the Ministry of Labour and Solidarity of Cape Verde adopted this measure, association leaders and reference persons were contacted in all rural communities to assist officials in identifying persons with more than 62 years who had never contributed to Social Security, received no other type of pension, and needed help to survive.

The allocation of non-contributory social pension makes a big difference in the lives of many women, especially in rural areas, who worked all their lives but never received proper value for their work.

*"Every month I receive the pension and it is with that money that I live on. It's not much but my life has changed because I know I can count on it to buy the basics. Every day I buy goat milk from my neighbour, I can buy food, soap... if I need something for myself, I don't have to wait for charity from others. It is also less a concern for my family, if they cannot help me, they don't have to worry because they know I will not starve. It is good to know that I have a guaranteed pension. The moment I need something, if I do not have the money, I can buy what I need on credit because I know I will be able to pay later. It is guaranteed and it gives me peace of mind because **I can rely on it!**"*

Cape Verde was one of the first African countries to implement non-contributory [social pensions](#), which were recently unified in the social pension, managed by the [National Centre for Social Pensions - CNPS](#). The social pension Nha Liza receives covers people aged over 60, with an annual income below the national poverty threshold set at 49,485 Escudos per capita/year (441 Euros). The amount of the social pensions' allowance, which currently stands at 5000 Escudos (50 Euros) per month, has been subject to constant updating.

The social pension covers 90% of the target group. It is financed by taxes and costs 0.4% of GDP. The social pension, which receives technical assistance from the ILO project STEP Portugal, is an important element for constituting the [Social Protection Floor](#) in Cape Verde.

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