

The Baianas Of Acarajé and The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGS): Promoting Culture, Equality and Sustainability

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Article History	Abstract
Original Research Article	<p><i>The Bahian women/men who make acarajé are guardians of a tradition and cultural heritage of Bahia, occupying a prominent place in generating income for their families and connecting with socioeconomic and environmental issues. Their craft is aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), contributing to the promotion of gender equality, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, in addition to cultural appreciation and preservation of know-how. The objective of this study is to verify how the activity of these entrepreneurs is aligned with the global goals of the SDGs. The methodology used was a bibliographic review, with a qualitative and exploratory approach. By recognizing and supporting the role played by these women, their cultural heritage is preserved and progress is made towards a more just, egalitarian and sustainable future. The results highlight the importance of public policies that value this traditional activity, integrating it into the strategy of sustainable and inclusive development.</i></p> <p>Keywords: Cultural diversity, Empowerment, Social inclusion, Sustainability, Tradition.</p>
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INTRODUCTION

The baianas of acarajé represent a cultural and historical symbol of Brazil, specifically Bahia. The tradition of selling acarajé on the streets dates back to the colonial period, carrying with it centuries of resistance, identity and tradition, even though these professionals face a lack of recognition and socioeconomic difficulties. During the imperial period, they were called "ganhadeiras", as they sold their delicacies door to door in order to raise funds to buy their letter of manumission and that of their family members. They also sold the delicacies to obtain funds for their religious obligations, for the maintenance of the terreiros or to share the earnings with their masters [1], [2], [3], [4], [5]. As guardians of a centuries-old tradition, they play an important role in the preservation of Afro-Brazilian culture [6].

Figure 1 - Woman from Bahia selling acarajé from her tray



Source: oglobo.globo.com (2010)

Most of the baianas of acarajé come from the outskirts of the cities, belong to low-income strata and start the craft in

childhood, with the aim of obtaining income for survival. The work they do is informal, carried out in the streets and alleys, and marked by precariousness, since they have no rights or any type of social and/or labor protection. They work on their own and often reconcile their activity with household chores and raising children. The workday begins at dawn and ends just before bedtime, usually extending beyond 10 p.m. Despite the challenging conditions, the activity of the baiana of acarajé moves the economy and fosters the circulation of income [1], [2], [3], [5], [6], [7].

The baianas of acarajé face several obstacles, ranging from the lack of adequate infrastructure to carry out the activity to unfair competition and difficulty in accessing credit and training. The work is carried out in precarious conditions, without appropriate places to prepare and sell the acarajé and, often, without sanitary facilities near the point of sale. This reality requires public entities to implement specific policies to support this suffering category, preserving the cultural dimension of the activity and promoting the socioeconomic inclusion of these workers [6], [8], [9].

The craft of the baianas of acarajé has been a Brazilian intangible heritage since 2004, when it was recognized by the National Historical and Artistic Heritage Institute (IPHAN) and registered in the Book of the Special Registry of Knowledge and, in Bahia, in the Book of the Special Registry of Knowledge and Ways of Doing. Its practices are endowed with social, traditional, regional and cultural value, being commonly associated with Bahia and linked to Afro-Brazilian religious worship. This recognition is an important and necessary milestone for their preservation, valuing the Bahians as representatives of a category and legitimizing their work. However, it has not been enough to solve the problems faced by these baianas of acarajé [1], [2], [3], [4], [5], [6], [7], [10], [11], [12].

The know-how of this art has been transmitted through the generations, from mothers, grandmothers and other women, and is linked to its place of origin and its identity. In the Afro-Brazilian religion, it is a sacred food, although it is seen as a street food and not as a formal meal, like lunch or dinner, and can be consumed at any time and/or place. It is most often enjoyed after sunset, usually after hours. The product is also marketed by evangelicals, who call it "Jesus' cake" and do not use the typical and appropriate clothes for the sale of acarajé and for the expression of their identity, because the use of this costume represents the postcard of the city of Salvador, the construction of Bahianity and Africanism, being a symbol of Bahian black culture [1], [2], [3], [4], [5], [10], [11], [12].

Acarajé, or *Akará*, in Yorubá – a term that means "ball of fire" or "food that burns" – is a typical dish from Bahia sold on the streets of several Brazilian cities and also in other countries, such as Australia, occupying a central place in socioeconomic terms. Of West African origin, but specifically from the Gulf of Benin (Benin, Nigeria and Togo), where it was traditionally

prepared by the Yoruba people, it is a delicacy made with black-eyed peas, onion and salt, fried in palm oil and served with vatapá, salad (tomato, onion and coriander vinaigrette), pepper, shrimp (smoked or fresh) and, sometimes, with caruru [1], [2], [3], [4], [6], [7], [10], [11], [12], [13].

Figure 2 - Acarajé



Source: Google (2026)

Representative of the culture of enslaved African peoples and Bahian cuisine, acarajé is mentioned in works by Jorge Amado, such as *Gabriela* and *Bahia de Todos-os-Santos*.

Another delicacy sold is abará, prepared with ground black-eyed peas, cooked in a bain-marie and wrapped in banana leaves. In addition to these, the *passarinha* (ox spleen), the student cake (tapioca, coconut, cinnamon and flour), the *cocada* (grated coconut candy with sugar), among other delicacies, are also found on the trays.

Its preparation and/or commercialization are done by the skilled hands of women, mostly black, called baianas of acarajé, who are elements linked to Bahian culture and Afro-Brazilian religion [2], [3], [4], [10], [12], [13]. Currently, the product is also produced and/or marketed by people of other genders, although it remains strongly associated with women, who represent the craft in the popular imagination [3], [10].

Figure 3 - Products sold by the Baianas of Acarajé on their trays.



Source: Google (2026)

To sell it, in any space - urban or not, public or private - they depend on authorization from various agencies to install themselves on public roads. They usually create bonds with the surrounding community, sometimes serving as confidants and advisors, due to the proximity and intimacy with their customers and the establishment in a fixed location or point of sale. For some baianas of acarajé, the sale of the product is a means of survival for those who depend financially on them and constitutes an employment opportunity for their entire production chain. Acarajé is also served and consumed in bars, restaurants and inside homes, and the industrialized version is sold frozen on the shelves of markets and supermarkets [3], [6], [10].

Most of the customers are from the community where the point of sale is located, including workers from the vicinity

Figure 4 - National Association of Baianas of Acarajé, Mingau, and Receptive Services of Bahia (ABAM)



Source: Google and Vanessa Castañeda (2026)

The economy based on the sale of acarajé is self-sustaining and is closely linked to environmental, social and economic issues, which can be addressed through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), established by the United Nations (UN) in 2015. The SDGs constitute a global agenda composed of 17 goals, which aim to eradicate poverty, protect the planet, ensure prosperity and promote sustainable development by 2030, balancing economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection [14], [15], [16].

The work carried out by the baianas of acarajé is directly related to some of these goals, especially with regard to culture, gender equality and sustainability, namely: SDG 1 - Eradication of Poverty; SDG 2 - Zero Hunger and Sustainable Agriculture; SDG 5 - Gender Equality; SDG 8

and tourists - especially those who visit Bahia in the summer and during periods of popular festivals.

After a request made by the president of the National Association of Baianas of Acarajé, Mingau, and Receptive Services of Bahia (ABAM), Dona Rita, for this craft to be recognized as a profession - as it is a specific activity that deserves respect and consideration -, the federal government inserted the occupation in the Brazilian Classification of Occupations (CBO) in 2017. There was also joint action by the Municipal Secretariat of Public Policies for Women, Childhood and Youth (SPMJ) with the Ministry of Labor. It is estimated that about 3.5 thousand professionals have benefited [10].

- Decent Work and Economic Growth; SDG 10 - Reduction of Inequalities; SDG 11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities; SDG 12 - Responsible Consumption and Production; SDG 13 - Action Against Global Climate Change; and SDG 16 - Peace, Justice and Efficient Institutions [14], [20], [21].

METHODOLOGY

To investigate the role of the baianas of acarajé in the promotion of the SDGs, a qualitative and exploratory approach was adopted, with data collection in different locations, in order to enable a more in-depth analysis. The methodological steps aimed to understand the relationship between this traditional activity and the SDGs, as well as to identify its challenges and opportunities.

The bibliographic review was the starting point, seeking to contextualize the theme through the analysis of scientific articles and course completion works related to the SDGs, Afro-Brazilian culture, the role of the *baianas* of acarajé and public policies. This stage allowed the identification of the most relevant SDGs for the study and established a theoretical framework.

The data collected were analyzed with the objective of identifying the contributions of the *baianas* of acarajé to the SDGs and to cultural and sustainable practices, in addition to establishing connections between the themes. The analysis sought to validate the conclusions, offer a comprehensive view on the subject, understand the role of these *baianas* of acarajé in promoting the SDGs, and examine their contribution to culture, sustainability, gender equality, and the reduction of inequalities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

SDG 1 - POVERTY ERADICATION

The *baianas* of acarajé are, for the most part, black, peripheral and low-income women. They usually sell their delicacies to obtain a source of income to support themselves and their families, which prevents them from accumulating savings focused on the future [17], [18], [19]. The generation of employment and the increase in income provided by this activity contribute to the reduction of poverty and boost cultural tourism, creating, in turn, new economic opportunities [14].

Their working conditions are precarious and they do not have social and labor protection, since they work informally. This means that they are not eligible to access various protection measures from the National Institute of Social Security (INSS), such as sick pay, retirement, and other benefits.

Public entities must implement public policies to promote the formalization of work, in addition to ensuring access to microcredits and training in financial management – measures that aim to increase income and promote their exit from poverty. It is equally important to implement productive inclusion programs, with the strengthening of ABAM, a channel of struggle for the category that aims to obtain benefits for its members, whether or not they are affiliated.

SDG 2 - ZERO HUNGER AND SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

Acarajé is a traditional and cultural food made with local ingredients, such as black-eyed peas, onions, and salt, fried in palm oil and served with shrimp among its accompaniments. These inputs have a strong connection with artisanal fishing and family farming, which generally does not use pesticides in its plantations, thus configuring a

more sustainable production [1], [2], [3], [4], [6], [7], [10], [11], [12], [13].

The valorization of these products tends to encourage family farming and the consumption of healthy foods, thus contributing to food and nutritional security and promoting more sustainable agricultural systems. Public policies aimed at this local productive segment can strengthen the entire production chain and ensure food security. In addition, the use of sustainable products in the production of acarajé contributes to environmental preservation.

SDG 5 - GENDER EQUALITY

The commercialization of acarajé is mostly carried out by women, who have historically faced gender and race discrimination. They use this activity to generate income and, consequently, obtain financial autonomy. The craft of the *baianas* of acarajé thus represents a form of female empowerment, since women take the lead in the production and sale of acarajé [17], [18], [19].

In the past, public agencies did not grant a license for the commercialization of acarajé by males, a situation that was changed with the support and struggle of ABAM. Public policies should promote gender equality through specific actions aimed at valuing and empowering women, such as professional training courses, access to credit, and support for ABAM leaders. In addition, it is essential to combat gender-based violence and ensure access to health, education and social protection services.

SDG 8 - DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

The sale of acarajé is an important economic activity for the city of Salvador and for other cities in Bahia. In some cases, it constitutes the main or only source of income for the *baianas* of acarajé and their families, generating resources and contributing to the local economy [3], [18]. Valuing this traditional activity strengthens the creative economy and cultural tourism, aligning with the objective of promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

However, informal work represents one of the main challenges faced by the *baianas* of acarajé, since the absence of labor registration deprives them of labor and social security rights. To address this situation, public entities must promote the legal recognition of the profession and create a specific regime for the activity, in addition to facilitating access to microcredits. These measures aim to ensure more dignified working conditions and contribute to local economic growth. At the same time, the appreciation of cultural tourism can generate new job opportunities and, consequently, increase income.

SDG 10 - REDUCING INEQUALITIES

The baianas of acarajé are a historically marginalized group since the imperial period and, to this day, face socioeconomic inequalities, as they mostly come from peripheral and marginalized communities [3], [6], [10]. The strengthening of this activity and its cultural recognition can contribute to the reduction of inequalities, promoting the social and economic inclusion of these vulnerable groups.

In this sense, public policies must be implemented to foster the socioeconomic inclusion of the baianas of acarajé, with improvements in the infrastructure of the points of sale of acarajé and in access to fundraising programs – measures that would help reduce inequalities. It is equally essential to ensure the inclusion of the baianas of acarajé and/or ABAM in the formulation of public policies related to their activity, thus promoting social participation and their empowerment.

SDG 11 - SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

The baianas of acarajé are intrinsically linked to the urban space, where their points of sale serve as a cultural and tourist reference. The promotion of its traditional practices contributes to the cultural diversity of the city, making it more inclusive and sustainable, especially through the responsible use of local ingredients and the reduction of waste.

However, acarajé is sold in public spaces, such as streets and squares, which often lack adequate infrastructure – including basic sanitation and regular garbage collection – which makes it difficult for both the product to stay and sell. To reverse this situation, public entities must adapt these spaces with inclusive and sustainable characteristics, in order to improve the working conditions of Bahians and, at the same time, contribute to sustainable urban development.

SDG 12 - RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

The production of acarajé involves the use of local ingredients such as black-eyed peas and palm oil, grown in a traditional and sustainable way – a practice valued by the Bahians of acarajé. This model encourages responsible consumption and support for family farming, contributing to more sustainable production systems and promoting awareness of the importance of cultural and environmental preservation. The craft of the baianas of acarajé and the products they sell on their trays are cultural and traditional expressions that, for this reason, should be valued and consumed responsibly [3], [6], [10].

Public policies aimed at the sector should aim to promote conscious consumption and product appreciation, using cultural marketing campaigns and the creation of a quality seal as tools – an initiative that would also help to combat

unfair competition from industrialized products. In addition, they should encourage sustainable practices in production, such as the use of biodegradable packaging and the reduction of food waste.

SDG 13 - ACTION AGAINST GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE

Among the natural ingredients used in the production of acarajé, oil palm stands out, whose cultivation can generate negative environmental impacts if not managed in a sustainable and traditional way [3], [6], [10]. To mitigate these risks, policies to encourage the responsible use of natural resources must be implemented, along with the adoption of sustainable environmental practices - such as reducing the consumption of plastics - measures that contribute to tackling climate change.

Another front of action involves the consumption associated with the product: soda, common as an accompaniment, is usually served in plastic bottles. The replacement with returnable glass packaging also represents a relevant contribution to mitigating the climate problem.

SDG 16 - PEACE, JUSTICE AND EFFICIENT INSTITUTIONS

The recognition of the right of the baianas of acarajé as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Brazil promotes social justice, the appreciation and protection of traditional practices, in addition to the inclusion of historically marginalized groups, thus contributing to the construction of a more inclusive society [3], [6], [10].

Policies aimed at combating racial and gender discrimination are also essential for promoting social justice. At the same time, it is essential to strengthen ABAM, which represents and defends the interests of the baianas of acarajé, guaranteeing it an active voice and effective participation in the formulation of public policies aimed at the segment.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The craft of the baianas of acarajé is a living example of the cultural, traditional and diversified richness of Brazil. Its practice is intrinsically linked to several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), from eradicating poverty to promoting gender equality.

To enhance this contribution, public entities must formulate policies aimed at valuing and supporting the baianas of acarajé. Such measures will not only favor cultural and traditional preservation, but will also create the necessary conditions for achieving the SDGs, promoting fairer, more inclusive, and sustainable development. In addition, they will strengthen cultural roots, preserving ancestral know-

how and pointing out a possible path to a development model that is simultaneously sustainable, equitable and environmentally responsible, based on the conscious use of natural resources.

The results of this study can generate significant social impacts, especially in valuing culture, promoting social inclusion and sustainability, as well as combating inequalities. For academia, they expand interdisciplinary knowledge on the subject and can foster new research, contributing to a more solid dialogue between the public and private sectors and to the formulation of public policies aimed at this segment.

In this way, the research reinforces the tradition of the baianas of acarajé and points out ways to build a fairer, more sustainable and culturally rich future.

The limitations of this study refer to its qualitative nature, the absence of a participatory approach that included the main actors in all stages – including the dissemination of results – and the geographical cut, since it focused on the baianas of acarajé of Salvador, whose stronger representativeness may limit the generalization of the results. In addition, verifying the relationship between the activity and the SDGs is complex, as it involves social, environmental, and economic dimensions that are not always directly measurable or clearly interconnected.

As recommendations, it is suggested that studies on the subject be deepened, in order to transform academic knowledge into concrete actions that promote social inclusion, cultural preservation and sustainable development. It is also pertinent to expand the investigations to other regions and cities where the Bahians work, which will allow us to understand local variations and increase the representativeness of the results.

In this way, future research can contribute to a positive and lasting impact on the lives of the baianas of acarajé, in addition to serving as a starting point for more specific analyses, such as measuring their economic impact and applying this knowledge in different cultural contexts.

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The baianas of acarajé for the struggle undertaken daily. ABAM for fighting with public agencies to improve the living conditions of the Bahians of acarajé.

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