

Globe  
EDIT



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**Sustainable Development -  
Education, Health, Climate Change  
and Tourism**

Contributions by Authors from Lusophone Countries

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### Article 3

#### **The deviations of the Guinean educational system**

*Cláudia Luísa, Ana Baião and Fátima Djata*

##### **Abstract**

"The deviations of the Guinean educational system" by Cláudia Luísa, Ana Baião and Fátima Djata is a work that aims to make known the educational structure of the country and its evolution, at different levels of education. It is intended to describe the current educational situation, considering the various levels of education as well as the challenges that Guinea-Bissau still must overcome, in terms of educational and social equity.

This text aims to analyse educational processes in Guinea-Bissau and, with that, to weave some considerations around the current educational model. The countries of the Global South, such as Guinea-Bissau, where human development, the fight against poverty, access to education, the country's economic growth, and the improvement of living conditions are priority areas and still a concern.

Education is no longer seen as a mere transmission of knowledge, but also a tool for empowerment, social transformation, decision-making power, promoting better living and working conditions. The Guinean Government over the next decade will have to invest in the education system, based on concerted strategies, to reduce inequalities in access, as well as issues of equity and inclusion of all in school.

**Keywords:** *Education; Teaching; Challenges; Weaknesses; Guinea Bissau.*

##### **1- Introduction**

Guinea-Bissau is a country located on the west coast of Africa, with a territorial extension of 36,125 km<sup>2</sup>. It is limited to the north by the border with the Republic of

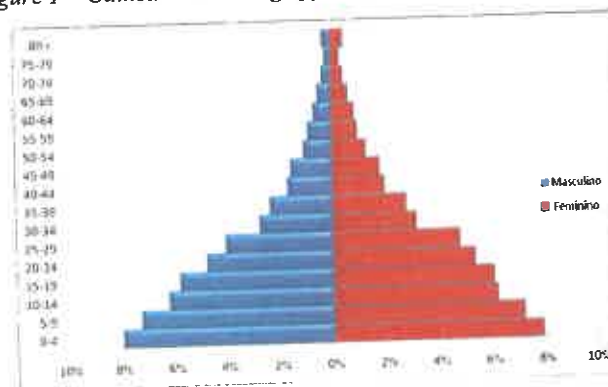
Senegal and to the east and south by the borders with the Republic of Guinea-Conakry, opening the western coast of the continent to the Atlantic Ocean.

It was a Portuguese colony until 1974, the year in which it became independent after a long war of liberation and having unilaterally declared independence in September 1973 (Sané, nd.).

According to data from the last population census carried out by the National Institute of Statistics (NIS) in 2009, Guinea-Bissau had 1,520,830 inhabitants, of which 13,590 are people with disabilities, where men represent the highest rate with 53.9% and women, with 6.1%. 48.6% of the total population are male and 51.4% female. Of this population, 1,449,230 live in family accommodation and 4,606 in collective accommodation (NIS, 2009a, p.11).

As for the demographic structure, the country is characterized by the predominance of the young population and a shortage of elderly population, resulting in a pyramid characterized by a broad base due to high fertility rates and a narrow apex due to low average life expectancy, as we can see in Figure 1.

Figure 1 – Guinea-Bissau's age pyramid (NIS, 2009)



The average age of the population in the country is 21.7% and the median age is 18.8 years for the female population and 17.5 years for the male population.

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The population is very unevenly distributed in the national territory. Indeed, more than ¼ reside in the SAB, followed by the regions of Oio (14.9%), Gabú (14.2%), Bafatá (13.9%) and Cacheu (12.8%). The regions of B/Bijagós and Quinara are those with the smallest number of resident populations, corresponding to only 2.2% and 4.2%, respectively.

The child population (0-5 years) represents about 19% of the country's total population, and its percentage is relatively higher in rural areas (21.3%) than in urban areas (15.7%). While the population of school age (6-12 years) has the same weight as the child population, it is also higher in rural areas (about 20%) than in urban areas (about 17%).

The economically active population (15-64 years old) represents more than half of the total population (54.1%), mostly living in urban areas and especially in the SAB and in the B/Bijagós region. The population aged 65 and over, its percentage is only 3.2% of the total population, being more representative in rural areas than in urban areas (INE, 2009b, p.64). Administratively, the Guinean territory is composed of eight regions: Bafatá, Gabú, Oio, Cacheu, Tombali, Quinara, Biombo and Bolama Bijagós (island area) and autonomous sector of Bissau, capital of the country, and thirty-six sectors, as Figure 2. illustrates

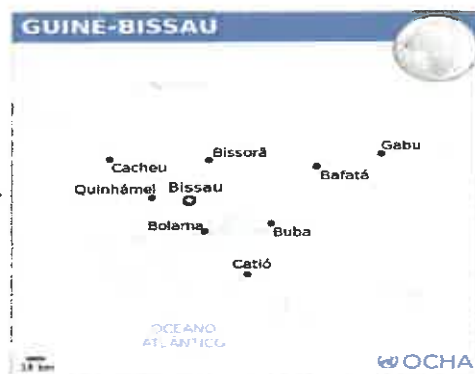


Figure 2 – Guinea Bissau Map (OCHA)

It is a democratic, secular, heterogeneous state constituted by cultural, ethnic, and religious diversities. The official language is Portuguese and the national language Creole, among other ethnic languages.

The landform is characterized by lowlands and a very jagged coastline subject to flooding. There are no significant elevations, the highest point in the interior of the country is 300 meters high the lowest point the Atlantic Ocean (0 m), with predominantly red feralitic and hydromorphic soil.

On the coast near Bissau there is the Bijagós archipelago with more than 40 islands. It features a warm and humid tropical climate with two seasons. The rainy season is from May to October, with August being the month with the highest rainfall and the dry season from October to May, with April and May being the hottest months. Annual average temperatures range from 30°C to 35°C. The vegetation is savanna and tropical forest type (NIS, 2009).

## **2 - Education in Guinea-Bissau**

“Education is one of the main means to implement defenses for peace in the conscience of men and women around the world” (UNESCO, 2000).

Education and training vary according to the country and its characteristics. Knowledge of the context became essential for understanding the problems and overcoming them (Grilo, 1999).

The evolution of the education system in Guinea-Bissau lived through three major historical periods: Period of colonial education, period of education during the armed struggle for national liberation (the emergence of liberated areas) and period of education after national independence.

The colonial school [...] [was] undemocratic in its objectives, in its content, in its methods, divorced from the reality of the country, [...] it was a school of the few, for the few and against the great majority. It even selected the small minority of those

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who had access to it, expelling most of them after the first encounters with it and,  
continuing its selective filtering [...] (Freire, 1978, p.20).

The two major educational periods that preceded Guinea-Bissau's national  
independence had one characteristic in common: ideological education, with the first  
educational period being marked by the selective education system and the second  
educational period being differentiated by the liberation education system.

During the period after Guinea-Bissau's independence, the educational system was  
marked by the multiplication of the offer of "Boom Escolar" educational services  
(...). This exponential increase in the educational offer had some consequences,  
which, according to Monteiro and Silva, corroborate by stating that "This  
massification of the school offer effectively had positive effects in terms of equity,  
but it seriously compromised the quality of education (...)" (1996, p. 176).

The Government faced many challenges regarding implementing a solid education  
system that would meet the needs of the country's children and youth. This is because  
education is a determining factor in development and a priority given the importance  
it reflects the social, economic, scientific, cultural, and technological domains.

Education must be understood, considering the mobilization, organization, and  
training of people, at a scientific, technical, artistic, humanistic level, with an impact  
on a personal, social and political level, being an exercise of active citizenship, a  
political practice with multiple axes. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights  
(1948) also states that education is a basic right for everyone and must be ensured in  
every nation or state.

Guinea-Bissau's educational policy was inspired by international  
recommendations, such as the World Conference on Education for All, held in  
Jomtien, in 1990, and the National Plan of Action, Education for All.

At a national level, the Government of Guinea-Bissau, more specifically, the  
Ministry of National Education drew up the Framework Plan for Education for  
Human Development (PQEDH-1992), the Emergency Program (1996), the Basic

Law for the Educational System Guinean (BLES, 1999), the State Report of the National Educational System (SRNES, 2011), among others (MEN-PNA, 2011).

However, an educational policy is needed to allow a coordination between the government and the various partners who are working in the field of education, specifically in teaching.

This sector includes different levels and types of education, including pre-school education, basic education (elementary and complementary), secondary education, technical and vocational training, and higher education, and includes both public and private education.

Formal education is formed by the following educational responses: a) Pre-school education, of private initiative, predominantly in the capital and some urban centers, aimed at children aged 3 to 6 years; b) School education that comprises public and private basic, secondary and higher education, as follows: in public education, basic education is compulsory and free and lasts for six years, comprising two sequential cycles, elementary education, with duration four years (1st to 4th years) and complementary basic education, lasting two years (5th and 6th years); c) Single-track secondary education is also structured into two cycles: general secondary education, lasting three years (7th, 8th and 9th years) and complementary education, lasting two years (10th and 11th years); d) Non-university Higher Education is still in its infancy and is represented by only two institutions: the Escola Normal Superior Tchico Té and the Faculty of Law, both located in Bissau.

The degrees are bachelor's and bachelor's degrees. There is no polytechnic education for training senior technical staff. Higher education has a university, which was initially public with private management – Amílcar Cabral University, established in 2003 and aimed at integrating the existing non-university higher education institutions, namely, the Faculty of Law, Medicine, the Escola Normal Superior and other institutions such as the School of Nursing and National School of

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Administration (NSA), to offer a diversified range of areas and training profiles in response to the immediate and future needs in Guinea-Bissau. Currently, this university has been transferred to the private sector. The country also has other private universities, namely, Colinas de Boé

University, since 2003, Catholic University of West Africa (UCAO) established in 2007, Jean Piaget University since 2010, among others.

According to the Multiple Indicators Survey - MISC6, data for the 2018-2019 school year, one in ten children aged 36 to 59 months attend early childhood education, with the net attendance rate being early childhood education, higher among children living in urban areas (40%) compared to 5% among children living in rural areas. The completion rate at primary level is 27%, and it is higher in urban areas, with 47%, compared to rural areas with 14%. The completion of secondary level is lower, 42% at national level, the urban areas present 31% while the rural areas presents 7%. The percentage of children of primary school age out of school is 28%. Among children of lower secondary school age, 23% are out of school.

Enrollment in primary education by means of residence and adjusted attendance in primary education, the ratio is one urban child to 0.3 rural children. As for entry into lower secondary education, regarding the frequency adjusted in lower secondary education, according to the means of residence, the ratio is one urban child to 0.2 rural children (Ministry of Economy and Finance, General Directorate of the Plan, 2020, p.80).

Facing daily discrimination in the form of negative attitudes and lack of adequate policies and legislation, children with disabilities are effectively prevented from exercise their rights concerning health, education and even survival. Children with disabilities are often among the poorest members of the population and are less likely to attend school, access medical services or be heard in society. Discrimination and

exclusion of children with disabilities also puts them at greater risk for physical and emotional abuse or other forms of neglect, violence, and exploitation.

Children with functional difficulties are generally marginalized groups in society and are the ones the least access to school, and the ones who have the least access to other basic services, such as healthcare. In the country, 5% of children aged 2 to 4 years and 16% aged 5 to 17 years have functional difficulties in at least one domain. In children aged 2 to 4 years, 0.3% have functional difficulty related to vision, 0.1% to hearing, 0.2% to locomotion, 0.2% to communication, 0.2% to learning, 0.1% to playing, 4% to the control behavior. Among children aged 5 to 17, 14% of children have anxiety problems and 5% have depression problems. Oio, SAB and Cacheu are the regions with the highest percentages of functional difficulties in children aged 2 to 4 years (17%, 4% and 4%, respectively). For children aged 5-17 years, the regions of Gabu and Biombo have the highest percentage with functional difficulties (42% and 24%, respectively) (Ministry of Economy and Finance, General Directorate of Planning, MISC6, 2020, p .111).

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989) and the most recent Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2006) explicitly state the rights of children with disabilities on an equal level with other children. Having attested to the difficulties in inclusive education, given that in the country there are no conditions of equality in school structures, we understand that to practice a policy of equal opportunities is to give everyone the same right, a fair and visible education.

In the Basic Law of the Educational System (2010), in its articles 33 and 34, the concept of Inclusive Education is exposed as Special Education, in view of adequate educational care for people with physical or mental disabilities or gifted people who attend regular establishments of education, depending on the type and degree of disability and the pace of learning (Republic of Guinea-Bissau/Ministry of National Education, Culture, Science, Youth and Sports, 2010).

According to *Handicap International* (2021), there are several barriers in access and retention in education for children with disabilities. Poverty, lack of accessible school infrastructure, lack of political will, lack of technical knowledge and capacity to implement the right to inclusion, negative attitudes of unqualified teachers. The

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lack of teacher training and sensitivity can be seen in the implementation of rigid,  
rather than diversified, curricular measures, a social stigma that excludes children  
with disabilities from social interactions with their peers and the lack of parental  
knowledge about how to intervene with their children. Educational inequalities must  
be seen within the scope of the school, between schools and outside the school, as  
children and young people live in its ecosystem, with micro and macro- structures.

Given the above data and realities, these allow us to conclude that there are serious  
asymmetries regarding access to and completion of study cycles, considering the  
region of the country, gender, and the existence of a disability. To minimize existing  
disparities, such as the precariousness of schools, the level of teacher training, the  
lack of equity and an inclusive policy in schools, the current State intervention  
measures go through the National Strategic and Operational Plan (2015- 2025)  
entitled "Terra Ranka". The Education Policy Charter and the "Terra. Ranka"  
National Strategic and Operational Plan defend an education for "poverty reduction",  
the "development of human capital" and for "Peace and Human Rights".

Therefore, the State defined three general strategic objectives of education, to  
guide the norms, programs, practices and management of the education sector,  
allowing uniformity, justice and equity in the access to the global development of  
people, through teaching.

In terms of the State's purposes, the following stand out: a) universal coverage and  
provision of good quality basic education for the development of human capital; b)  
good quality higher and technological education to meet the demands of labor and  
economic markets and c) education for citizenship that promotes awareness of peace,  
human rights, health, civility, the environment, and climate change. The Strategic and  
Operational Plan "Terra Ranka", 2015-2020 is aligned with many of the goals and  
targets of the 2030 Agenda on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the  
2063 Agenda of the African Union, according to the final report on the

implementation of the Istanbul in Guinea-Bissau action program 2011-2020 (Republic of Guinea-Bissau, 2015).

### **3 - Future challenges for educational and social development**

In the opinion of the Guinean government, the 2025 strategy will only have real value if it allows transformation in Guinean citizen's daily lives.

The priority is human and social development, presented in the Strategic Operational Plan "Terra Ranka". It is based on five fundamental axes: (i) Establish governance for the benefit of citizens, (ii) ensure the sustainable management of natural capital and preserve biodiversity, (iii) build a modern and competitive infrastructure network, (iv) strengthen capital human and improve the quality of life of every citizen and (v) build a private sector and a diversified economy.

In education, the program is structured around three components: (i) increasing access, equity, and completion, (ii) improving quality and relevance, and (iii) strengtheni management and governance.

The achievement of these goals will involve the implementation of public policies, which aim to build an educational system with quality oriented towards employment. Progress has been made in recent years, overall performances still show considerable margins of progress, on the one hand, thanks to universal access to primary education and, on the other, due to the training of a workforce ready for employment.

National education also suffers from a deficit of long-term strategic vision. The low proportion of qualified teachers in the education system (only 39% of qualified teachers in primary schools) and the high number of students per teacher (1 teacher to 52 students) are also obstacles to excellence in education.

The school network does not reach the entire territory, it has old infrastructures and no adequate equipment for learning, especially in rural areas. Dropout rates remain high, especially among girls. Primary school completion rates are 75% for boys and only 59% for girls.

Guinea-Bissau action program 2011-2020

### 1 social development

By 2025, the 2025 strategy will only have realized the citizen's daily lives.

Development, presented in the Strategic Plan, is based on five fundamental axes: (i) Establish and ensure the sustainable management of the environment; (ii) build a modern and competitive economy; and (iii) improve the quality of life and a diversified economy.

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the implementation of public policies, which are quality oriented towards employment. The current performances still show considerable gaps in terms of universal access to primary education and a workforce ready for employment.

The lack of long-term strategic vision. The current education system (only 39% of qualified teachers) and the number of students per teacher (1 teacher to 40 students) is a major challenge to the education system.

Throughout the territory, it has old infrastructures, especially in rural areas. Dropout rates are high and primary school completion rates are 75% for

Primary school completion rates are 75% for boys and only 59% for girls. The lack of infrastructure for professional and technical training; the lack of private sector participation in higher education and vocational training; the inadequacy of university training in view of the needs of the labor market; and the lack of qualified human resources represent problems in accessing higher education and the excellence in education.

The State's challenge for the next decade aims to an improvement in the qualitative performance of the educational system.

The policies to be implemented must include: a) structural measures, such as the reduction of abnormal situations (insufficient equipment, disrespect for learning time and the reduction of leads; b) educational measures: review of curricula (especially in the third cycle of basic education, with a view to unified basic education), harmonization and definition of new curricula (in secondary and pre-school), initial and in-service teacher training and pedagogical supervision and c) measures to review initial and in-service teacher training at all levels, which will involve a review of the curricula, the creation of new training courses, the modernization of trainers and the professionalization of training. The development of a continuing education program with the objective of updating and certifying teachers; d) local quality management measures accompanied by a highly decentralized organization for continuous training and support for teachers in their establishments, mainly attended by inspectors, study groups and subject coordinators (Republic of Guinea-Bissau, 2020, pp.39- 40)

Changing and effectively adapting the education system is urgent, given its importance for the global development of people. Freire, in 1978, in his book *Letters to Guinea-Bissau*, referred the importance of the educational system for the development of society:

Cabral knew and knows it better and better, due to his militant practice at the head of the Education Commission, that the relations between the educational system and

global society are dialectical and not mechanical. Recognizing the limits of formal education, as a subsystem of a larger system, it also recognized its fundamental role in the formation of a new mentality in line with the objectives of the new society to be created. A fundamental role, however, that could not be fulfilled if, instead of adopting the current social practice in the country, an education that corresponded to the future society, in the process of gestation, was tried. Such an attempt, rigorously idealistic, could not, for that very reason, be carried out. (p.20)

#### **4 - Conclusion**

Guinea-Bissau's political and government instability over the past few years has affected several indicators/sectors in the country. This political-institutional crisis had a serious impact at the level of the paralysis of public administration, particularly in the education sector, which, although there were significant improvements in the national coverage of the educational offer, the functionality and quality of the system was strongly affected by successive strikes due to lack of payment to teachers.

From the analysis of various official documents and the result of the testimony of a Guinean teacher, it was possible to understand the educational conditions in Guinea-Bissau.

Although there have been improvements, especially in access to primary school, there are still many weaknesses in the system. There is an urgent need for an inclusive education policy that provides equal opportunities for all children and young people. The improvement of the school network and the adequate training of teachers, as well as respect for the profession, must be objectives to be implemented in practice.

Thus, it is concluded that Guinea-Bissau continues to be a fragile country, with institutions and policies, highly dependent on external demand developments. It is up to the Government to guarantee justice, inclusion, transparency, and social transformation to its population. Access to human rights cannot fluctuate. Access to education, health, housing, food, care, employment and training, gender equality, social protection and justice must be guaranteed to all citizens.

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Empowerment through education is fundamental to the overall development of a nation, to strengthening citizenship and preserving social cohesion. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development clearly reflects this view of the importance of an adequate educational response. Education is formulated as a stand-alone goal – Sustainable Development Goal 4, which aims to “Ensure quality inclusive and equitable education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”.

We conclude by referring that it should happen,

A fundamental change in the way we think about the role of education in global development because it has a catalytic effect on people’s well-being and on the future of our planet [...]. Now, more than ever, education has a responsibility to align with the challenges and aspirations of the 21st century, and to promote the right kinds of values and skills that will enable sustainable and inclusive growth and peaceful coexistence (UNESCO, 2017, p.7).

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