

ICT in Education in Guinea-Bissau

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Source: *World Fact Book*¹

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This short *Country Report*, a result of a larger *infoDev*-supported *Survey of ICT in Education in Africa*, provides a general overview of current activities and issues related to ICT use in education in the country. The data presented here should be regarded as illustrative rather than exhaustive. ICT use in education is at a particularly dynamic stage in Africa; new developments and announcements happening on a daily basis somewhere on the continent. Therefore, these reports should be seen as “snapshots” that were current at the time they were taken; it is expected that certain facts and figures presented may become dated very quickly.

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Overview

Guinea Bissau is a small country of fewer than two million inhabitants. Civil war in the late 1990s destroyed its infrastructure and economy and displaced hundreds of thousands of its population. Recent multi-party elections installed a civilian regime in 2005. A key priority of the new government is infrastructure reconstruction, including those related to education, telecommunication, and electric power. The government of Guinea Bissau has obtained assistance from the African Development Bank and the World Bank to rehabilitate some of the destroyed infrastructure. That said, the state of telecommunications is quite poor and the electricity supply is sporadic.

Country Profile

The Republic of Guinea-Bissau borders the North Atlantic Ocean and lies between Senegal and Guinea on the West African mainland with 18 islands off the coast. The country covers 36,120 square kilometres of land and has a population of 1.586 million.

There are 21 living languages spoken in Guinea-Bissau with the most prominent being the Balanta Ketonho. The elite in the civil and public services speak Crioulo, a mixture of Portuguese and ethnic languages. Portuguese is the official language.

Guinea Bissau is classified 172nd out of 177 countries featured in the United Nations Human Development Index of 2004, with 88% of the population living on less than USD\$1 a day. Agriculture is the dominant economic sector and engages 82% of the labour force with the remaining 18% in the industrial and services sectors. Industry contributes approximately 15% to GDP and includes a sugar refinery, a rice and groundnut processing plant, brewing, and urban construction. Guinea Bissau ranks sixth in the world for cashew-nut production.

The recent discovery of oil fields along the coast, with estimated production capacity of 30,000 to 60,000 barrels per day, has restored hope and should contribute to the resolution of the country's recurrent government budgetary problems.

Table 1 provides some selected socio-economic indicators for the country.

Table 1: Socio-economic Indicators: Guinea Bissau

Indicator	
GDP (US dollars)	\$295.1 million (2006)
GDP per capita (US dollars)	\$192
Growth rate	2.9% (2005)
Inflation (% of GDP)	-0.7% (2005)
Budget balance (% of GDP)	-10.1% (2005)
Investment (% of GDP)	12.8% (2005)
Domestic saving (% of GDP)	-1.4% (2005)
Total debt (% of GDP)	279.3% (2005)

The current poor economic situation is the result of six turbulent years, beginning with the civil war from 1998 to 1999, which destroyed most of the country's infrastructure.

The Education System

Primary education consists of four years followed by secondary education which takes three to six years in the specific field of choice. Education is compulsory from age seven to 13, but in 2000 UNICEF estimated that 65.4% of children between the ages of five to 14 years in Guinea Bissau were engaged in trading, farming, or domestic labour. The numbers are worse during the cashew harvest when school-going children are withdrawn from school to work the fields.

Adult literacy rate was projected at 58.1% for males and 27.4% for females in 2003.² Youth literacy rates³ (between ages 15 to 24 for both sexes) stood at 61% in 2002.

Infrastructure

Telecommunications

In 2003 there were 10,600 main telephone lines, fewer than the 13,120 in 1997. The decline was because of the destruction of the telephone infrastructure during the war. By 2005 the number had increased again and there were 67,000⁴ mobile phones in use— an average of 49 per 1,000 people.

Internet access is available only in Bissau, the capital, where many cyber cafés offer low-speed connection. The youth are mainly the occasional users of the Internet. In 2006 Guinea Bissau had about 30,000 Internet users.

There is no nationwide coverage of the mobile phone networks. Only Bissau, the capital, boasts two operators: Areeba and Telecel. Further, there is a limited number of fixed lines in the other big cities and localities. There is no telephone infrastructure, mobile or fixed, or Internet in the rural areas.

Electric power supply

Electrification covers only 12%⁵ of the country and tariffs are five times the levels of its neighbour, Senegal. Currently, only Bissau has power supply for 18 hours a day, from 6 p.m. till noon of the next day. The other big cities like Bafata, Cacinek Cachea, and Catio usually have power supplied from 6 p.m. till midnight of each day.

It is unusual for the national electricity company to provide power 24 hours a day: the financial difficulty it faces has made it impossible to purchase fuel to power the generators. It is estimated that the envisaged Saltino hydroelectric dam⁶ to be constructed to span the Corubal River will be able to meet about 60% of the country's energy needs by 2015.

ICT Policies

Guinea Bissau has no ICT policy.⁷ There is also no evidence at present of the government moving to initiate one. However, the country promulgated its Telecommunications Basic Law, Decree No. 03-99 in 1999. That decree stipulates, among other things, the need to:

- Promote the development of telecommunications in Guinea Bissau through the definition of an adequate legal framework in accordance with globalisation demands
- Promote and emphasise the role of telecommunications as a fundamental instrument in economic and social development
- Create conditions favourable to the emergence and development of competition in the telecommunications sector in order to facilitate access to users of new services at the best prices
- Develop and improve telecommunications services for public use aiming at better coverage nationwide in terms of universal access to telecommunications

The government deregulated the telecommunications sector and, in 2003, replaced Guinea-Telecommunications, the national carrier, which till then was owned by Portugal Telecom (51%) and the state (49%). The new company, Guinetel,⁸ is 90% state-owned; the company's workers own the other 10%. This move was meant to break the monopoly of Portugal Telecom and make way for cellular and mobile telephone operators to invest in the telecommunications sector. The 20-year contract signed with Portugal Telecom expires in 2009.

Education policy

In April 2000, the Ministry of Education Science and Technology launched its educational policy⁹ that sought to:

- Correct the inadequate number of trained and qualified personnel in the workforce
- Identify priorities in the development of realistic plans and strategies with a view to halting the degradation of the quality of teaching
- Concentrate on implementing an assistance project for the basic education sector with funding from the government, the World Bank, and the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA)

Primary education

The civil war of 1998 to 1999 displaced both the population and the schools leaving destroyed buildings, furniture, and equipment. In April 2000, 10% of the schools were one-graders, 26% were two-graders, and 50% were four-graders with unqualified teachers having only four years of basic education.¹⁰

Children take about three times as long as expected to complete the curriculum because schools run three to four rotational shifts of pupils daily due to inadequate infrastructure. As well, the teachers are often on strike because the government fails to pay them.

In some communities, like the village of Kampada Namoante,¹¹ children haul their own seats to school while teachers turn up carrying blackboards. In one community, the poor cashew-nut farmers pooled their resources and built their own community school and appointed teachers whom they pay monthly. The teachers' monthly pay may be a few coins or mangoes or whatever

is harvested from the field – whatever the parents can afford. This is the heritage left by the civil war.

In 2006, in an effort to reduce the adult illiteracy rate, the African Development Bank (ADB) agreed to finance Guinea-Bissau's modest reconstruction project to improve the supply and quality of primary education. The project envisages the following:

- The construction of 220 new classrooms including 80 to replace the *barcas* built from palm leaves and thatch
- The rehabilitation of 100 damaged schools
- The construction of 50 annex buildings
- The provision of basic furniture and equipment for the new classrooms
- The extension and systematisation of two vocational training centres currently not in use to provide 21 basic trade courses

The project will offer 15,000 additional places in the school system and facilitate raising the basic enrolment rate of primary education from 60% to 70% in 2007. In addition, the project offers workers the opportunity to hone their skills while in service. It should equally facilitate the sensitisation of the population on sexually transmitted diseases, AIDS, and malaria.

Though the government wishes to introduce information technology courses into the primary school curriculum, it has to settle for the modest rehabilitation and reconstruction of basic schools nationwide owing to financial constraints. The government will fund 10% of the project costs of USD\$11.3 million.

Secondary, vocational, and technical education

In 2000, only 8,000 students, constituting 6% of the eligible age group, were registered in the 15 public secondary schools, despite their being available placements for 26,000. The country lacks technical schools that can train and adapt graduates for the employment market.

The ADB project is meant to provide mechanisms for the integration of vocational skills into the educational system countrywide. Two vocational institutes are to be rehabilitated under the project to prepare 7,000 learners of 21 basic trades for their first job.¹²

Tertiary education

In 1997 tertiary¹³ education catered for about 1,000 students: 64 in medicine, 300 in law, 400 in education, 120 in nursing, and 84 in sports. The two most important institutions, the schools of Law and Medicine, are almost completely financially dependent upon foreign assistance. The financial and technical dependency of these schools causes systematic delays throughout the academic year.

The very first university in Guinea Bissau, the Universidade Colinas de Boé (UCB),¹⁴ was established in September 2003 by the International Finance Company, a private sector branch of the World Bank, to provide business and management training. It is housed in a renovated cashew-nut factory, and it has only a few computers and a specialised library endowed with about

600 titles. UCB has highly trained faculty; most of the professors are active business people or managers in the public service. However, the faculty lacks ICT skills.

The second, which was established in 2004, Universidade Amilcar Cabral (UAC),¹⁵ is Guinea Bissau's public university. It has strong government support and budget allocation. The university is partnering with a Portuguese university, l'Universidade Lusofona de Lisboa (ULL), to deliver the programmes in its schools in Bissau.

UAC is located in a former army base near the city centre in Bissau. It has 16 classrooms and well-equipped facilities. It also has a few computers and has made ICT a priority. It uses the library run by INEP, the National Institute for Research, which is the country's best and largest library in Lusophone Africa. UAC is larger than UCB and has more students. It has hitherto functioned as a vocational/professional training institution.

CENFA's headquarters is in Bissau with campuses in three other provinces. CENFA and UAC are publicly owned but privately managed, while UCB is a purely private institution. CENFA has low-trained faculty¹⁶ and its only library was looted during the civil war.

Implementing ICT in Education: What Helps and What Hinders?

There is little that can be said about enabling factors in ICT development in the country. Assistance from donors and banks should help re-launch its economy and the required infrastructure that can contribute to the deployment of ICTs. Till then, the following are some of the impediments to the meaningful introduction of ICT into the curriculum at all educational levels in Guinea-Bissau:

- The government's limited and inadequate budgetary and financial resources
- The lack of high level information technology training institutes or schools
- The general lack of ICT skills in the teaching population
- The low levels of trained teachers
- The poorly equipped training institutions
- The irregular and insufficient electric power supply across the country that obliges the citizenry to resort to fuel-powered generators for their individual energy needs at great cost - a cost that cannot be borne by the national government in the educational sector even when computers are made freely available by donors
- The inadequate and unavailable telecommunication infrastructure and services including Internet
- The concentration of national efforts on the massive reconstruction and rehabilitation of infrastructure destroyed in the 1998-1999 civil war

Notes

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