



United  
Nations



# SOCIOECONOMIC IMPACT

Assessment of COVID-19  
in Equatorial Guinea



2020



This study was led by the United Nations Development Program in Equatorial Guinea, as part of its technical role in the United Nations socio-economic response framework, with the financial participation of UNICEF and technical participation of all United Nations agencies working in Equatorial Guinea.

## Table of contents

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<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>I. Introduction</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>II. Leave no one behind: the people we must reach</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>III. Expected effect of the pandemic on the SDGs</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>IV. Strategic pillars</b>	<b>29</b>
A. Health First	30
B. Protecting people: basic services and social protection	31
C. Social cohesion and community resilience	36
D. Macroeconomic response and multilateral collaboration	43
E. Economic response and recovery: protecting jobs, SMEs and workers in the informal sector	46
<b>V. Resource Mobilization and Partnerships</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>VI. Discussion of strategic recommendations</b>	<b>57</b>

## Preamble

This consultancy was carried out within the collaboration framework between the Ministry of Finance, Economy and Planning with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and following the formal request of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. During the consultancy different aspects of the COVID-19 crisis in Equatorial Guinea were analyzed. This project is also part of the United Nations Development System's response to the pandemic at the global level, which focuses on understanding the effects of COVID-19 in the countries of the system and coordinating a response based on 5 pillars: i) putting health first, ii) protecting people through social protection and basic services, iii) promoting social cohesion and community resilience, iv)

supporting the macroeconomic response and multilateral collaboration. All with the objective of advancing towards the Sustainable Development Goals, with the premise of leaving no one behind.

This document summarizes and adds points to the work developed during the consultancy, which comprises the following analyses: rapid macroeconomic and fiscal analysis, sectoral analyses (agriculture, tourism, ICT, education and health) and analysis of socioeconomic vulnerability and expected impacts of the crisis on the ODS.

## Acknowledgements

During the response to a crisis, especially one with the scale of COVID-19, several challenges arise that make it difficult to carry out analyses and develop a response. Throughout this consultancy, decision makers who had the most valuable information had to distribute their time between coordinating the response and providing information to the consultants to develop the analysis and recommendations for action.

In view of this important challenge of availability and difficulty in obtaining information, several actors provided their valuable time and dedication for the development of this endeavor. In this section, we would like to thank those who helped in the production of this study, particularly from the roles of guidance, coordination, information gathering and document review, carried out by several members of the United Nations Development System and the Government of Equatorial Guinea. The project was supported by focal points for technical and high-level guidance through a dedicated committee at the ministerial level and a technical committee at the level of General Directors within the ministries, with the

support of representatives of the United Nations and multilateral agencies such as UNDP, the United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office, UNICEF, FAO, UNESCO, ILO, IMF, World Bank, among others.

The study was requested by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation. During its development, the Ministry of Finance, Economy and Planning, then headed by His Excellency Minister Cesar Mba Abogo, chaired the high-level committee and was a key pillar for its development. At the same time, His Excellency the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Mr. Simeon Oyono Esono Angue, supported as vice-president of the high-level committee. Under the leadership of UNDP, headed by Dr. Elsie Laurence-Chounoune, the coordination of the different parties involved in the research was achieved. Finally, consultants from Data-Pop Alliance and Aide à la Décision Économique conducted the research in a joint effort to address the challenges generated by the pandemic.

# Executive Summary



## Context of Equatorial Guinea prior to COVID-19

In the early 2000s, with just over 606,000 people (World Bank 2020b)<sup>1</sup>, Equatorial Guinea experienced significant economic growth driven by oil production. This growth was accompanied by increased public investment, infrastructure development, and low levels of foreign and public debt. During this time the country developed a strong dependence on hydrocarbons, with more than 80% of government revenues coming from this sector until 2019. However, the reserves created during the economic boom were not sufficient to face the oil price shock in 2014. Public debt increased considerably (from 8.7% of GDP in 2014 to 40.8% during the period 2014-2019), there was negative economic growth between 2013-2019 (-9% in 2015-2016) and real GDP decreased by 29% between 2014 and 2019 according to the IMF. The economic crisis led the country to revise its National Development Plan 'Horizon 2020' in the context of the III National Economic Conference, in 2019. Despite the vast infrastructure modernization program carried out in the last two decades, deficiencies in the country's socioeconomic development and economic diversification were maintained.

Currently, Equatorial Guinea has approximately 1.3 million inhabitants and a GDP of US\$11.027 billion (World Bank 2020b)<sup>2</sup> (GDP per capita of 8,132 USD at current prices). Its economy is still dominated by hydrocarbons and remains poorly diversified. Its banking sector has stagnated, with a large amount of non-productive loans linked to government arrears. Despite the creation of the National Institute of Statistics of Equatorial Guinea (INEGE), there are still challenges in the production of key information to design social policy. In particular, the exact levels of economic and social vulnerability of the population are unknown. The last estimate of monetary poverty in the country dates back to 2006 (76.8 percent of the population with less than USD 2 per day) and the last estimate of wealth (approximated from socio-demographic indicators and

asset ownership) comes from 2011<sup>3</sup>. Currently, through administrative records and information gathering with community leaders, it is estimated that around 30 thousand households live in vulnerable conditions.

## The arrival of the COVID-19 in Equatorial Guinea

With the arrival of COVID-19 to the country (March 2020) and a new drop in oil prices, uncertainty was generated about the relevance of the country's development plan and the effects of the pandemic on the population. As of October 22, 2020, the Ministry of Health reports that Equatorial Guinea has had a total of 5,079 cumulative cases, 83 deaths, 4,962 recoveries and 20 active cases<sup>4</sup>. At the macroeconomic level, the most recent World Economic Outlook (October 2020) forecasts a fall of -6.1% of GDP in 2020, a gradual recovery of 2.2% in 2021 and an additional fall in 2022 (-2.2%)<sup>5</sup>. An estimate made in this consultancy with simple statistical and econometric methods indicated that for an average Brent price forecast in 2020 of \$38 per barrel (IEA assumptions, June 2020), the deficit for the State could be between 410 billion and 476 billion CFA francs, or about -38 to -39% of government revenues compared to 2019<sup>6</sup> (DPA-ADE 2020). In this context, budgetary limitations reinforce the pressure on the country's health system and together with the measures taken to prevent the spread of the virus, tension has built up in other areas that were already struggling; this has taken the country from a health crisis to a socioeconomic crisis that permeates all of its sectors and is of concern, particularly considering that during the Ebola crisis, for example, more people died globally from the disruption of social services and the economic crisis than from the virus itself (UNDS 2020).

Several vulnerable groups in the country are at risk of suffering the consequences of COVID-19 to a greater extent if no appropriate action is taken (see section on 'leaving no one behind' for information

1 <https://datos.bancomundial.org/pais/guinea-ecuatorial>

2 2019, with data from the World Bank. <https://datos.bancomundial.org/pais/guinea-ecuatorial>

3 In 2015, a report on the progress of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG 2015) was produced, comparing the monetary poverty of 2006 with the wealth index of 2011 without methodological information on the equivalence between both indices. Likewise, a projection was made for 2015 without methodological clarifications.

4 The data is available at <https://guineasalud.org/estadisticas/>. There is a small discrepancy in the numbers, as the sum of deaths, recoveries and active cases results in 5,065 cases, while the cumulative number of cases is 5,079. Equatorial Guinea reports imported cases, which total 34, but these cases do not explain the detected difference of 14 cases.

5 The National Institute of Statistics of Equatorial Guinea (INEGE) made forecasts at the beginning of 2020, where a GDP contraction of 5.8% was expected in 2020 in an optimistic scenario (oil GDP -7.2% and non-oil GDP -4.7%) and -8.9% (oil GDP -12.5%) in a more pessimistic scenario.

6 The evolution of Brent oil has been slightly better than this forecast, but the latest IEA report (October 2020) notes that the ICE Brent oil was priced at less than \$42 per barrel by the end of September and does not see the long-term curve reaching \$50 per barrel until 2023 at best.

on vulnerability by population group). COVID-19 interrupted a household survey that INEGE had planned with the World Bank, which could shed light on the vulnerability situation in the country. Without it, there is a risk of leaving behind vulnerable populations that are not detected through administrative records and community presidents.

Women in the country, who represented about 51% in 2015 (INEGE 2019), were more likely to be poor, unemployed, have lower wages, child-marriage, drop out of school, and face higher levels of gender-based violence (DHSEG-I 2011). In addition, in 2011 it was found that the rate of mothers' education and socioeconomic status had an inverse relationship with the neonatal and postnatal mortality rate of their children, meaning that interruptions in access to education and reductions in women's income could have an impact on future child mortality rates in the country.

Older persons, despite representing about 3% of the population in 2015, are more likely to die from COVID-19. Furthermore, the last records available show that they live in low-income households, where at least 65% of them lived in poverty (Ministry of Social Affairs and Promotion of Women 2012). In addition, only 4.1% had a retirement plan. Children had low rates of immunization (only 26% had all the immune-preventable vaccines in their childhood, United Nations 2019)<sup>7</sup>, 26% were below the expected growth. Together with youth and adolescents, this population group faced high dropout rates (of students who start primary education only 9% reach the end of secondary education<sup>8</sup>) and showed a marked gender difference in terms of unemployment (women: 36.9%, men: 30.3%<sup>9</sup>, 15-24 years old) (United Nations 2019). According to the statistical yearbook of Equatorial Guinea (INEGE 2017), 3,055 people had a disability, and require differential policies to address the consequences of the pandemic. The migrant population in the country, which in 2015 had reached 153,000 people, was at risk of seeing its income significantly affected due to the precariousness linked to informal work.

## Expected effects of COVID-19

In health care, the density of health personnel is 1.81 per 1000 inhabitants (2018)<sup>10</sup>, below the recommended 4.45 in the SDG targets (WHO 2016)<sup>11</sup>- and is accentuated in rural areas, leaving the rural population more vulnerable to the pandemic and other existing diseases. Despite the increase in healthcare workers to deal with the pandemic, it is important to consider the indirect effects of COVID-19 on the population, including the potential 10% increase in TB-associated mortality over a 5-year period, the 20% increase in HIV-associated mortality, and the 36% increase in malaria for developing countries found in (Hogan et al. 2020).

In education, more than 220,000 students would have been seriously affected in their learning cycle<sup>12</sup>, and would have lost approximately 26% of the education provided in a normal school year<sup>13</sup>. This, without taking into account potential school dropouts, which can be accentuated by a reduction in household income and an increase in the cost of teachers linked to the increase in school shifts - morning, afternoon and evening-, to cope with the risk of contagion. The latter phenomenon would occur mainly in private schools, whose supply has increased in recent years.

In food security, fluctuating consumer prices tend to be one of the greatest concerns, especially when one considers that in 2012 only 20% of the population was able to cover 100% of its daily nutritional needs in terms of calories and proteins (FAO 2012). As a country that imports nearly 80% of its food, the main impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the agricultural and food sector has been the closure of borders and restrictions on international mobility and transport logistics, which has constrained both the arrival of food products and the import of production inputs. According to the IMF Consumer Price Index reported in (World Bank 2020a), food price inflation shot up between April and June 2020 (+6.5% in April, +7.8% in May, and +8.8% in June), while the general index remained more moderate, although clearly up from the low levels of recent years (+2.4% in April, +3% in May, and +3.7% in June). A significant part,

7 <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G19/049/18/PDF/G1904918.pdf?OpenElement>

8 Sectorial analysis of education made for this consultancy, based on the Statistical Yearbook of Education 2017-2018 (Ministry of Education, University Education and Sports 2018)

9 Sectorial analysis of education made for this consultancy, based on the Statistical Yearbook of Education 2017-2018 (Ministry of Education, University Education and Sports 2018)

10 According to information provided by the Ministry of Health, collected for the health sectorial study.

11 <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/250368/9789241511131-eng.pdf?sequence=1>

12 Based on the figures of the Statistical Yearbook of Education (Ministry of Education, University Education and Sports 2018)

13 It should be noted that these calculations are not intended to provide precise estimates, but are simply provided to give an order of magnitude of potential learning losses in the case of Equatorial Guinea.

of the population may suffer from low nutrition.

Social protection is limited in the country. A report from UNICEF on social protection in Equatorial Guinea mentions that existing policies are focused to a very limited extent on old age, disability, illness, and occupational risk coverage, and only for formal employees, civil servants and military personnel. These programs are mainly financed by employers and the Government, with a small contribution from the employee (see OGAWA 2015).

Regarding social cohesion, the pandemic further highlighted the lack of information on the population's vulnerability and the inequalities in access to basic services, which may increase in the absence of the social protection systems that will hardly be implemented with the expected loss of State revenue. In terms of scope, the Social Guarantees Program has provided support to 36% of the vulnerable population identified by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Gender Equality, with about 64% not yet receiving this assistance<sup>14</sup>. The identification of vulnerable populations through administrative records and consultations with community presidents represents an effort of social cohesion, which, however, risks excluding those who are not visible to the community presidents. The digital gaps in the country, due to the lack of last-mile connections, limit the access that the population can have to measures against COVID-19 infections, such as telework and tele-education, receiving digital cash transfers, and online procedures to reduce red-tape in the private sector. In terms of human rights, the country ratified international treaties for their protection and has allowed the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to send missions to analyze compliance in the country. However, during the pandemic force has been used against the population. Through the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, (ACLED 2020) and an data analysis in the Global Database of Events, Language and Tone (GDELT 2020), it was found that the military and police used force against civilians to enforce the confinement. In general, it is important to join efforts to preserve the principle of proportionality in the measures that protect the population from contagion and to ensure the safeguard of human rights, including freedom of expression<sup>15</sup>.

As for employment, although the Equatoguinean economy is dominated by oil products, the hydrocarbon sector only offers about 1% of jobs for the working age population (ILO 2019). Most of the employees in the formal and informal sectors are in the service sector, particularly the public administration, and in agriculture, where more than half of the production is estimated to be for subsistence. This distribution of employment implies that changes in oil prices affect directly a very small part of the employment. However, given the importance of the hydrocarbon sector to the country's production and income, the indirect impact can be very significant. Many of the sectors that grew most in their contribution to GDP, and which are at the same time drivers of employment, such as hotel and restaurant services and transport, are strongly dependent on a sufficient level of activity in hydrocarbons, which has declined and could decline further as a result of the pandemic. In turn, the good health of the retail sector depends on the population having sufficient disposable income, which in light of the lack of economic diversification depends largely on the number of formal jobs in the hydrocarbon industry. An impact is possible for agricultural jobs, possibly dependent on fluctuations in input trade, which are directly influenced by oil prices, and on the prices of world agricultural products, also indirectly affected by the price of hydrocarbons. Estimates by the ILO show that labor income is distributed in a very unequal manner in the country, with the top decile of the income distribution representing more than 46% of the total labor income, while the poorest half of the workers would receive less than 14% of the total labor income. In addition, according to ILOSTAT's estimate, almost 10% of the population that claims to have a job lives on less than \$1.9 PPP per day. Consequently, income losses, even minimal, can lead a large proportion of people into poverty, or even extreme poverty.

## The response of the government, NGOs and multilateral organizations

Faced with a number of important challenges, the Government, different multilateral entities and NGOs have worked together through multi-sectoral teams to coordinate the response to the crisis. With decree

<sup>14</sup> In the interview with the Ministry of Social Affairs, it was stated that the intention is to reach more people, although at the moment the consultants do not have visibility on the plan to do so.

<sup>15</sup> <https://acleddata.com/about-acledd/>. On July 9, 2020, a group of five soldiers and police officers attacked a doctor at the Loeri Comba hospital in Malabo, as the doctor was attending to another emergency case and refused to give priority to the young man brought by the military to the hospital. Around June 9, 2020, it is reported that the military forces beat one person in the city of Malabo, while enforcing the confinement. Around June 9, 2020, it is also reported that five police officers violently beat a woman while enforcing confinement measures.

43/2020, an emergency fund was created amounting to 5 billion CFA francs (about 8.5 million dollars). The health system has been strengthened to address the direct needs of pandemic management, including the purchase of hygiene supplies, increased testing capacity and the arrival of health care personnel from abroad. SMEs have received support from UNDP and through a Partial Guarantee Fund. They have also received tax reductions and discounts on electricity and telecommunication bills (Ministerial Order 2/2020). The regularization of arrears in domestic payments is being carried out aiming to provide more liquidity to the banking system. Educational programs were implemented through television and radio and the materials were made available online. Agreements were created to provide access to the online course platform Coursera between November and December 2020. In addition to the donation of hygiene and food kits to about 11 thousand vulnerable families via the Government's Social Guarantee Program, UN agencies and NGOs have contributed financially and in the distribution of food and hygiene kits, as well as granting purchase vouchers. Furthermore, a pilot application was developed for the digital registration of vulnerable families and 4 robots were donated to help prevent infections at the Malabo airport and in 2 clinics<sup>16</sup>.

## Funding in the context of the pandemic

While the shortfall in incomes is almost a certainty in Equatorial Guinea, this does not mean that the solution lies only, or even mainly, in new financing. Rather, the priority is to continue the reforms to improve public financial management, to increase efforts to mobilize tax and customs revenues, and to strengthen the technical capacity and professionalism of the public administration. The current programs of the various partners, and in particular that of the IMF, rightly favor the governance dimension, where UN agencies should exploit their complementarity with development financial institutions and their added value in rights-based approaches. Measures under implementation include:

- Strengthening the framework for fighting corruption, addressing conflicts of interest, implementing a robust asset disclosure regime for senior officials, and strengthening law enforcement and international cooperation;
- The promotion of transparency in the hydrocarbons

sector, in particular via the country's recent membership in the EITI, conducting and publishing audits of public hydrocarbon companies and the publication of periodic reports on sector data; and

- Improving the framework for combating money laundering, in particular by reporting suspicious activities linked to politically exposed persons and by improving corporate transparency through the availability of information on the actual ownership of companies.

Private financing looks a promising option. In June, the Government of Equatorial Guinea launched the year of investment 2020, which seeks to attract \$1 billion in Foreign Direct Investment. However, an improvement in the business environment, a parallel mobilization of national domestic savings and a more innovative and original attitude on the part of the banks are necessary to enable development financial institutions to invest. These institutions include the International Finance Corporation, which was once active in the country, or their European or bilateral counterparts (EBRD, DEG, Proparco, Norfund, CDC etc.).

The IMF program foresees the settlement of arrears to suppliers by issuing government bonds, with a significant amortization of these obligations over the period of the agreement. If this component is successful, national financial institutions could indeed be in a position to reactivate credit to private investment excluding hydrocarbons, and even work hand in hand with development financial institutions. However, this would only take place if bankable programs and projects have been designed by then, in accordance with the country's general development guidelines and with a special attention to the sectors most likely to generate employment for vulnerable populations, such as agriculture and agro-industry, fisheries, retail, perhaps ICTs and tourism.

A catalytic role can be played by the tools that were devised for the responsible and equitable management of oil revenues in Equatorial Guinea, the "Fund for Future Generations" and the "Co-Investment Fund". The "Fund for Future Generations" is Equatorial Guinea's sovereign wealth fund, created in 2002 and estimated to be worth \$80 million. In February 2014, after the first national symposium on economic diversification, the government of Equatorial Guinea created the Co-Investment Fund (FCI), apparently

<sup>16</sup> [https://www.gq.undp.org/content/equatorial\\_guinea/es/home/presscenter/articles/2017111/lanzamiento-del-proyecto-robots-anti-pandemicos-en-guinea-ecuato.html](https://www.gq.undp.org/content/equatorial_guinea/es/home/presscenter/articles/2017111/lanzamiento-del-proyecto-robots-anti-pandemicos-en-guinea-ecuato.html)

financed by a sum of one billion (USD), whose objective is to invest in profitable projects that reduce economic dependence on hydrocarbon revenues. As a previous UNDP study underlined, “these are totally opaque instruments in terms of capitalization, management and strategic objectives”, which should be reformulated in accordance with international best practices in the field.

Finally, from the perspective of leaving no one behind, speeding up business creation also requires greater financial inclusion of the most disadvantaged populations, if necessary, through better dissemination of the FinTech innovations that have been piloted in Africa. Due to the fact that there is no Findex data in Equatorial Guinea, and therefore reliable conclusions can hardly be drawn, one can assume that the country is most likely behind the others in terms of dissemination

of mobile accounts amongst ECCAS countries. In this regard, there are several examples of good practices for piloting sustainable business models with potentially interested telecommunication companies in Central and especially West African countries. This could represent an opportunity for Equatorial Guinea if the deployment of last-mile infrastructure is completed and an ambitious training program for the population and companies is launched.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are presented following the main lines of action of the United Nations system to face the COVID-19 pandemic.

### I. Health First

#### Short term recommendations

- ▶ Based on the results of the rapid assessment on Prevention and Control of Infections (PCI) and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), the 12 priority facilities for COVID-19 should be supplied with the following fundamental services that they lack:
  - One-third of the facilities required soap and water points
  - Two-thirds of the facilities required access to treated water
  - 11 of the 12 establishments required an appropriate incineration system for final waste disposal
- ▶ A second rapid assessment is recommended to track PCI and WASH indicators. In particular, the follow-up assessment should re-evaluate the preparedness of staff following the trainings conducted after the first assessment. Additionally, it would be advisable to expand the sample of facilities included in the assessment.
- ▶ It is recommended that the Government continues to strengthen awareness campaigns throughout its territory on the measures to be taken in response to Covid-19. This ‘best practices’ campaign should emphasize hygiene and social distancing strategies and discourage people’s gatherings, and should be carried out in conjunction with civil society as well as religious leaders.
- ▶ Review the level of execution of the Emergency and Response Plan for COVID-19 to identify the activities for which the implementation has been delayed or has not begun. As a result of this review, an action plan with a budget should be made, identifying immediate and medium-term tasks, as well as activities that were not implemented or are delayed due to lack of financial capacity.

#### Mid-term recommendations

- ▶ Due to its strategic importance for the health and economy of the country, it is recommended that a multisectoral commission be formed at the highest level to follow up on the emergency plan in response to the deficiencies identified in the National Health Information System, National Laboratory System, and in the infection prevention and control capacities of health facilities. The plan should include a budget and identify the source of funding.
- ▶ To facilitate future technical and financial contributions from both bilateral and multilateral development agencies, the documents resulting from these reviews should be widely disseminated, including publication on the websites of United Nations organizations in both Spanish and English.
- ▶ Review the health sector’s strategic planning to identify whether it includes sufficient and appropriate activities aimed at mitigating the risk of high vulnerability to infectious diseases. As a result of this review, the country should have identified an indicative budget for the selected activities, as well as the source of funding.

## II. Protecting people: social protection and basic services

### Short term recommendations

- ▶ As a first step towards the precise identification of the most vulnerable population, the introduction of the Single Social Registry (RUS) is recommended. A social protection law is currently being drafted but has not yet been approved.
- ▶ The creation of a social assistance program focused on education, nutrition and health goals, such as Conditional Cash Transfers, is recommended.

### Mid-term recommendations

- ▶ Re-focus and optimize spending on education and create a multi-year plan as required by the Program to Support Economic Diversification (PRODECO) 2020-2025.
- ▶ Within the Social Development Fund, it is recommended to include a group focused on subsistence farmers and agricultural workers who are not currently covered by formal social security systems.

## III. Social Cohesion and Community Resilience

### Short term recommendations

- ▶ Maintain dialogue with community presidents, train them and establish mechanisms to improve their capacity to identify and guide vulnerable populations, through actions such as
  - Establishing and communicating vulnerability criteria to avoid the risk of subjectivity when classifying vulnerable populations, which can be done with the support of multilateral agencies and NGOs.
  - Designing active ways to seek out vulnerable populations within their jurisdictions, in order to include those who may be left behind.
  - Instructing community leaders on the criteria and ways to target vulnerable populations through workshops. It is important to keep in mind that vulnerability goes beyond the lack of material possessions, as it involves the ability of people to make use of material possessions. In this sense, a differential approach is required that allows to understand, for example, that people with disabilities or who suffer conditions that are subject to discrimination such as HIV, are vulnerable even if they have a lower level of monetary poverty than others.
  - Transmitting, through community leaders, information about the risks of COVID-19 and the importance of the respective care. This is to counteract rumors about the non-existence of the virus.
- ▶ Strengthen efforts for the frequent collection of administrative information on vulnerable populations. This begins by evaluating the progress of the pilot application (app) for recording information on the population in need commented on by UNICEF, and then proposing ways to update it.
- ▶ Maintain open data on the progress of COVID-19 infections at the highest possible frequency and geographic disaggregation. Through this information the population can be kept informed and allow for research efforts to support analysis of the crisis. The updated information will provide a basis for community leaders to discuss with their communities the extent and severity of the virus. Understanding the extent of the virus is key to encouraging compliance with social distancing measures.

### Mid-term recommendations

- ▶ The 2021 household survey with the World Bank will be a key tool for planning the targeting of social spending, as it will provide information for the whole country. This is especially important given that the census of change in income conducted by INEGE is concentrated in the population of Malabo and Bata.
- ▶ In social policies, it is important to plan from the beginning the impact evaluation methodologies that can be carried out. This way, programs are designed from the start with the intention and mechanisms to be evaluated. In the long term, the ease and precision with which evaluations can be carried out will make it possible to understand the best ways to invest in social programs.

There is a need to build on the progress made in social protection for emergency response during the pandemic in order to translate it into structural social protection and social cohesion programs.

### The ICT sector in Equatorial Guinea should focus on:

- Completing infrastructure deployment, especially last mile connections. Without them, the country's digitalization efforts in education will leave a significant segment of the population behind.
- Developing ICT skills for the entire population, with special emphasis on schools, universities and businesses.
- Creating a new financing system where incentives are created to encourage fintech investment from the private sector.
- Ensuring that ICT regulation is clear and transparent, as this will allow the sector to be an engine for the flow of international capital and investment, which can boost competition and improve the supply of services for all citizens of Equatorial Guinea.
- Gathering statistical data on the sector, and in addition, devising a digitalization plan for the State that includes government open data.

### Short term recommendations

- ▶ Continue to provide and encourage the use of hygiene kits as, over time, the population will be forced to increase its mobility. In order to prioritize places, it is necessary to have geographically disaggregated information on infections. For the time being, it is important that the kits reach the areas with the highest population concentration, although one cannot forget the semi-urban and rural areas, where there is less access to hospital care. In contexts where it is difficult to provide benefits to the entire population, incentives in the form of discounts or bonuses to encourage purchases can be considered. This can be tested through pilots, starting by seeing the effectiveness of the vouchers that UNDP distributed with UNICEF.
- ▶ Analyze the results of the evaluation of the effectiveness of the “school in my home” policy as well as plan a way to evaluate the effectiveness of the Coursera program in Equatorial Guinea. In addition to creating indicators on the adoption of these programs (use, duration of use, completion of courses), it is important to ask what the barriers to entry into the program were, both for the beneficiaries and for the segment of people who did not use the program. This is in order to improve them, since these are initiatives worth maintaining.

### Mid-term recommendations

- ▶ Develop digital transfer systems and, in general, increasing the capacity of the private sector to carry out online transactions to facilitate their traceability and agility.
- ▶ Maintain the dialogue and willingness to work together with NGOs and multilateral organizations, in order to better reach the vulnerable populations and work towards the constant improvement of human rights protection in the country.

## IV. Macroeconomic Response and Multilateral Collaboration

### Short term recommendations

- ▶ Intensify socio-economic data collection in several areas where the lack of primary information limits the evidence base for socio-economic studies, especially gender data and data on vulnerable populations.
- ▶ Intensify and accelerate reforms in public financial management and governance in order to improve the country's image abroad and the confidence of the domestic private sector.
- ▶ Reform the two existing tools for responsible and equitable management of oil revenues, so that they function as catalysts for additional funding, namely the sovereign wealth fund (“Fund for Future Generations”) and the “Co-investment Fund”.
- ▶ Continue to re-focus and optimize capital spending, redirecting it from mobility and administrative infrastructure to assets that directly improve the quality of front-line service delivery, and to human capital formation, capable of supporting more inclusive economic growth, poverty reduction, and improved social outcomes.
- ▶ Assess the feasibility of innovative debt management and relief approaches in dialogue with creditors.

### Mid-term recommendations

- ▶ Reactivate and diversify the credit to the economy, to leave the oil and gas enclave where the country has been confined so far and form, with time, a more vibrant fabric of SMEs in other sectors of the economy:
  - Swiftly complete the clearance of domestic arrears to improve bank liquidity and strengthen the financial sector.
  - Technically assist the productive sectors in the development of financeable projects in areas other than hydrocarbons.
- ▶ Encourage the local production of agricultural and fishery goods in order to reduce the country's food dependency and its exposure to international price fluctuations of basic foods.
- ▶ Continue the measures initiated to improve the mobilization of domestic income, at the pace that the macroeconomic situation allows.
- ▶ Reflect on the development of value chains in the medium and long term, focusing on strategic sectors such as pharmaceutical manufacturing, which will strengthen the capacity of the health system.
- ▶ In parallel with the customs reform, establish a system of trade statistics, which does not exist in the country.
- ▶ Modulate the reform of the customs sector, without weakening its rigorosity, to facilitate the import of medical supplies, or critical products and essential goods, in order to strengthen emergency management and crisis response preparedness.
- ▶ Assess and exploit the opportunities offered by regional or continental trading zones for joint procurement of essential drugs and medical supplies, as well as to enable future local pharmaceutical production, given the scale generated by a single market.

## V. Economic Response and Recovery: Protecting Jobs, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises and Informal Sector Workers

### Short term recommendations

- ▶ Proceed with an evaluation of the pilot program of basic social guarantees, the first social protection program in the history of the country, with a view to continuing and enhancing it in the near future in a perspective of return to employment and broad-based economic recovery.
- ▶ Based on the evaluation of the pilot program of basic social guarantees, propose a durable and scalable framework of social protection and assistance policies for the most vulnerable populations, in a perspective of return to employment and broad-based economic recovery.
- ▶ Accelerate the collection of data on jobs and disposable income, and food security, in the framework of household surveys, or rapid and gender-sensitive diagnostics of the labor market and business environment.
- ▶ Assess the timeliness and feasibility of employment-intensive investment programs to preserve the livelihoods of vulnerable workers beyond the emergency period, while building valuable skills and competencies in the workforce.
- ▶ Study international and regional best practices to implement and improve digital payment and money transfer solutions in partnership with selected telephone operators, to increase people's access to basic public services, including financial services for sending and receiving wages and remittances, grants and bridge loans to micro and small businesses, and other digital payments for individuals and households.
- ▶ In particular, to prioritize digitalization policies in the country, especially last mile connections, with the objective, among many others, of opening up new possibilities for SMEs for teleworking and the development of the service sector.
- ▶ Focus temporary tax incentives, or interest rate subsidies that the budgetary situation would allow for, on companies that recruit or keep local people in employment, or that provide apprenticeships and training.
- ▶ Assess the feasibility of technical support measures for SMEs, especially women-owned companies, including training in specific safety and occupational health measures, business continuity planning, business support, and integration of their solutions into procurement chains in other sectors of the economy, such as the oil and gas industry.
- ▶ Simplify and reform visa procedures urgently, ideally with the introduction of the online visa, in order to try to curb in the short or medium term the foreseeable fall in business tourism following COVID-19 and the stagnation of the oil sector.

### Mid-term recommendations

- ▶ Strengthen and modernize policies aimed at increasing productivity and value added in the primary sector in its different dimensions, in order to alleviate pressure on urban centers, diversify the economy and employment, and restore a certain degree of food sovereignty in the country.
- ▶ Leverage environment-based solutions for development, including SMEs, by developing a strategy for access to vertical funds such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Green Climate Fund (GCF), and the Adaptation Fund, which could foster job creation in rural or peri-urban areas.
- ▶ Adapt the current system of technical and vocational training to the needs of economic diversification, with an emphasis on increasing the productivity of the primary sector, ensuring the representation of the private sector in the design of the new system.
- ▶ In a post-COVID-19 scenario where people will travel again and show interest in going to unexplored places, avoiding mass tourism destinations, carry out studies throughout the national territory for the promotion of ecotourism and cultural tourism, emphasizing Equatorial Guinea's considerable natural capital, in order to open new employment opportunities in areas outside urban centers and for populations that are particularly disadvantaged in their access to public services.

## VI. Resource Mobilization and Partnerships

### Short term recommendations

- ▶ Continue the ongoing tax and customs reform, with a view to filling the gaps identified, particularly with regard to the tax base of major taxpayers and import and export transactions.
- ▶ Strengthen the framework for combating corruption, addressing conflicts of interest, implementing a robust asset declaration regime for senior officials, and strengthening law enforcement and international cooperation.
- ▶ Open the country to civil society initiatives, including international NGOs, and encourage the growth of an ecosystem of local NGOs active in the social and economic fields for the most vulnerable populations.
- ▶ Strengthen the collection and dissemination of socioeconomic data, to create the necessary transparency for development partners or development financial institutions to make resource allocation decisions aligned with the priorities of the population, and especially those that could be left behind.
- ▶ Improve the business climate, in particular by promoting transparency of companies through the availability of information on their effective ownership and by actively pursuing the implementation of the EITI process for the oil industry.
- ▶ Rapidly finalize the process of settling arrears to suppliers through the issuance of government bonds and monitor the evolution of company debts to national banks, which would allow them to resume and diversify credit to the private sector.

### Mid-term recommendations

- ▶ Diversify the search for partners in social and economic development, with a particular focus on vertical financing, especially for climate change mitigation and adaptation projects.
- ▶ Begin a dialogue with development finance institutions (DFI), with a view to obtaining their assistance in the design of specifically bankable projects in the most promising sectors of the country's non-oil economy and prevent the expected consolidation of commercial banks from leading to a recovery in consumer credit only, instead of focusing on investment in job-creating projects.
- ▶ Fully review the governance of the "Fund for Future Generations" and the "Co-Investment Fund" and provide them with strategic objectives and a modus operandi in line with international best practices of sovereign wealth funds.
- ▶ Study and discuss international and regional best practices in terms of financial inclusion of the most vulnerable, particularly digital financial services, in order to facilitate and accelerate the creation of micro-enterprises, SMEs and jobs for the most vulnerable segments of the population.

# I. Introduction



## Context of Equatorial Guinea prior to COVID-19

Equatorial Guinea has a population of about 1.3 million people (World Bank 2020b). In the early 2000s, the country experienced accelerated economic growth due to oil production, on which it relies considerably (about 80% of government income comes from this sector). Due to this dependence, the 2014 oil crisis led to a 29% reduction in real GDP between 2014 and 2019 according to the IMF. Since a significant part of the country's investment was concentrated in infrastructure, at the time of the crisis the government was unable to pay companies from the construction sector, which generated delays in the payment of the productive loans that these companies acquired from banks, leading to a stagnant banking sector in the country.

Equatorial Guinea is considered an upper-middle income country, which makes it difficult to access various Official Development Assistance programs. However, the country benefited from an IMF-supervised program (Staff Monitoring Program, SMP) between January and July 2018 to make budget adjustments and structural reforms (governance, anti-corruption, and economic diversification), with satisfactory performance according to the IMF. Also, in December 2019, Equatorial Guinea was granted access to an Extended Fund Facility (EFF) for 205 million Special Drawing Rights (approx. \$282.8 million) for a duration of three years.

At the socioeconomic level, the country has different challenges. One of the main ones is the scarcity of up to date data on vulnerable populations. The main sources of information regarding vulnerability come from the 2006 poverty profile, the 2011 demographic and health survey (DHSEG-1), and some public data from the 2015 census. These data are complemented with administrative records from the different ministries, such as health, education, social affairs and gender equality. Based on this information, it is known that the country had a high rate of poverty in 2006, where 76.8% of the population was under 1,020 F CFA per day (approximately 2 USD). Prior to the pandemic, the country did not have a government program to support vulnerable families in the country<sup>17</sup>, which based on administrative records and data collection with community leaders are estimated to be around 30,000 households. At the health level, the country has limitations in coverage, both because of the need for more medical personnel and because of

the infrastructure, which has led to some centers being closed. In education, the country faces high levels of school dropout or grade repetition. Wealth is unequally distributed in Equatorial Guinea, while the largest amount of income is generated by the oil sector, it is estimated that this sector employs only about 1% of the country's working-age population (ILO 2019) and more than half of the population lives from subsistence agriculture.

In view of the challenges known by the country, Equatorial Guinea developed its development plan with a view to economic diversification and prioritization of Sustainable Development Goals, according to the pillars of: i) Poverty eradication, ii) Social inclusion and sustainable peace, iii) Productivity and industrialization and iv) Environmental sustainability. These objectives were set out in the National Development Plan Horizon 2020, which was revised in 2019, within the framework of the III National Economic Conference.

## The arrival of the COVID-19

Plans to implement the next stages of the national development plan were interrupted by the arrival of COVID-19 in the country on March 13, 2020. As in many countries, the pandemic put pressure on a health system that was already significantly constrained, both in terms of medical infrastructure, personnel, and in terms of preparedness for the potential risk of a pandemic. At the same time, the country was faced with a further drop in Brent oil prices. In this context, Equatorial Guinea was faced with the need to take measures to prevent the spread of the virus, including restricting the mobility of people and closing air, sea and land borders. The fall in Brent oil prices and the measures taken against the virus occurred in a context of budget deficits resulting from the 2014 crisis and took the country from a health crisis to a socio-economic crisis that permeated all sectors of the economy, and from which important impacts are expected for the general population, especially for the vulnerable.

To mitigate the negative effects of COVID-19, the Government, different multilateral organizations and NGOs have worked together to respond to the multiplicity of challenges that the pandemic represents for the country. Equatorial Guinea has created multi-sectoral teams to coordinate the response to the crisis and among the most important decrees of response is Decree 43/2020, which created an emergency fund to address

17 In this context, the final document of the III National Economic Conference urges the government to create a Social Protection System.

the crisis, amounting to 5 billion CFA francs (about \$8.5 million). The health system has also been strengthened to address the direct needs of pandemic management, including the purchase of hygiene supplies, increased testing capacity and the arrival of health care personnel from abroad. Support has been provided to SMEs through a Partial Guarantee Fund, tax reductions and discounts on electricity and telecommunications bills (Ministerial Order 2/2020). Also, the regularization of arrears in domestic payments has been carried out, which aims to provide more liquidity to the banking system. At the educational level, to compensate for restrictions on going to school, educational programs were implemented on television and radio, which materials are available online. Additionally, agreements were created to provide temporary access to the Coursera online platform. With the Government's Social Guarantee Program, hygiene and food kits have been donated to around 11 thousand vulnerable families. UN agencies and NGOs have also contributed financially and in the distribution of food and hygiene kits, as well as in the granting of purchase vouchers and the creation of a pilot application for the digital registration of vulnerable families.

As of October 22, the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare reports that Equatorial Guinea has had a total of 5079 accumulated cases, 83 deaths, 4962 recovered and 20 active<sup>18</sup>. At the macroeconomic level, the latest "World Economic Outlook" (October 2020) forecasts a fall of -6.1% of GDP in 2020, a gradual recovery of 2.2% in 2021 and a further collapse in 2022 (-2.2%)<sup>19</sup>.

Against this backdrop, understanding the different dimensions of the pandemic in the country and coordinating efforts is critical. To support these efforts, the following document aims to provide a basis for understanding the country's socioeconomic vulnerabilities to the pandemic, report on some expected impacts, and propose a set of recommendations that will serve as a basis for coordinated actions in the short and medium term. It should be noted that obtaining data in the country presented several challenges, both pre-existing and due to the situation of COVID-19, so the best use was made of the information available and the support of government teams and UN agencies to obtain information.

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18 The data is available at <https://guineasalud.org/estadisticas/>. There is a small discrepancy in the numbers since the sum of deceased, recovered and active results in 5,065 cases, while the accumulated numbers are 5079. Equatorial Guinea announces the imported cases, which total 34, but these cases do not explain this difference of 14 cases

19 The National Institute of Statistics of Equatorial Guinea (INEGE) made forecasts at the beginning of 2020, where a contraction of 5.8% was expected in 2020 (oil GDP -7.2% and non-oil GDP -4.7%) in an optimistic scenario and -8.9% (oil GDP -12.5%) in a more pessimistic scenario.

II.

**Leave no one behind:**  
the people we must reach



The crisis caused by the pandemic represents a setback to the progress being made on the 2030 agenda and its goal of leaving no one behind. Unfortunately, had there been more progress on the ODS goals, the consequences of the crisis would have been lessened and the setback would have been smaller. As stated in the UN response to COVID-19, “in the 2008 financial crisis, countries with robust social protection systems were less affected and recovered more quickly” (UNDS, 2020). In the absence of robust social protection systems in the country, this crisis is expected to have more significant negative effects on those already lagging behind. In this sense, and in view of the COVID-19 crisis, it is essential to intensify efforts to reach these population groups, not only because this is the purpose of the ODS and the commitment to citizens, but also because it is the means to recover from the current crisis and be more resilient in future ones. Below are several population groups that are at risk of being left behind. Some of this information is based on an ongoing UNDP study on leaving no one behind and is complemented by other sources of information.

## The invisible populations

One of the most important requirements for not leaving anyone behind, and one of the most persistent challenges in Equatorial Guinea, is the lack of updated data on the population. The last household survey was conducted in 2006. Here a poverty profile was created that determined that 76.8 percent of the population lived below 1,020 F CFA per day (approximately 2 USD) (ANGE 2007). Since then, there are no estimates of the evolution of monetary poverty in the population.

A demographic and health survey was conducted in 2011 and a census was conducted in 2015. Of the latter, only some data is available online, but not the report. In 2020 the government planned to conduct a new household survey with the World Bank, which was essential to identify the vulnerability of the population, for which no information is available since 2011. However, this was postponed due to the pandemic. For this reason, much of the data representative of the population comes from the 2011 DHS. This data has limitations, particularly because during this period the country went through a phase of economic growth and crisis (2014), both related to the country's dependence on oil.

During the first semester of 2020, a census was conducted in the cities of Malabo and Bata. This census, which aims to understand the change in household income during the pandemic, is currently awaiting publication (November 2020). This exercise is important for understanding the status of a large sample of the population. According to information provided by the working group created for this consultancy and made up of members of the Government, the census would cover approximately 50% of the population. In other words, the exercise does not provide information on the other half of the population, which lives in rural areas and whose situation may vary significantly from that of the sample<sup>20</sup>.

As will be seen in the development of this document, this does not mean that the actions taken by the Government to respond to the pandemic are concentrated in Malabo and Bata. However, because of this context, several pandemic response actions were planned with administrative records and support from community presidents (see section on social cohesion). Such records, while important, have limitations, in part because records such as the Municipal Register are not systematically updated (INEGE 2019). In addition, this data increases the risk of systematically excluding the population with the least access to State services. Therefore, one of the most vulnerable population groups in Equatorial Guinea is the invisible population in the data.

## Location matters: vulnerability due to population density

The goal of leaving no one behind is limited by the need to prioritize resources, especially during a crisis. While the risk of COVID-19 spreading is higher in more densely populated areas - as more individuals may have frequent contacts - it is critical not to leave behind less populated areas, where access to health care and other social services tends to be lower.

Nationally, the health worker density in 2018 was 1.81 per 1000 people<sup>21</sup>, while the WHO recommends that the minimum should be 4.45 in the SDG targets (WHO 2016). At the same time, the concentration of medical personnel is found to be high in Malabo and Bata. That is, the lack of medical care can be exacerbated in areas of medium and low population density, far from Malabo

20 According to the IV General Population and Housing Census MEPIP (2015), the provinces where Malabo and Bata are located, that is, Bioko Norte and Litoral, have 88.2% and 90.2% of the urban population, respectively. Thus, the effects of the pandemic on other provinces with larger populations in rural areas (e.g., Kie Ntem with 61.7% of the rural population and Wele Nzaz with 59.9%) may present different realities

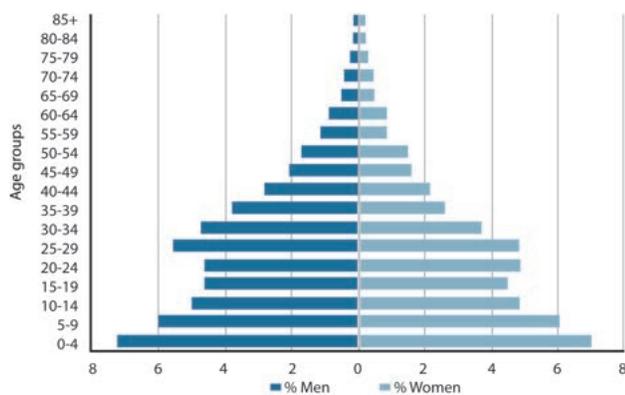
21 According to information provided by the Ministry of Health, collected for the health sector study.

and Bata. For example, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights reported that several health centers in rural areas were not in operation because of a lack of qualified personnel, equipment, and supplies of essential drugs and supplies (United Nations 2019). Additionally, about 50 percent of households in Equatorial Guinea depend on unimproved water sources. This phenomenon is accentuated in rural areas, where access to improved water decreased from 41 percent to 31 percent (Ibid.). It is worth noting that sanitation coverage was above 70 percent, one of the highest in West and Central Africa (Ibid.). However, in general, people living in rural areas are more at risk of being left behind.

### Vulnerability by sex and age

In 2015 it was estimated that Equatorial Guinea had a population of 1,225,377 people (INEGE 2019). Of these, 50.8% are women. In the population pyramid (Figure 1), it can be seen that the distribution of the population by sex is relatively symmetrical along the age intervals. Most of the population is young. The most important population groups were in the intervals of 0 and 4 years, 5 to 9 years and 25 to 29 years, which in 2015 represented approximately 14, 12 and 11% of the population respectively. For this reason, the age-specific fatality effects of COVID-19 are expected to be lower than in countries with larger adult populations. On the other hand, the collateral effects of the COVID-19, related to health care not related to the COVID-19, loss of employment, food security, education, among others, can significantly affect the population of the country in general. The following information on vulnerability is presented for women and girls, adolescents, boys, girls, and young and old adults.

Figure 1: Population Pyramid of Equatorial Guinea in % (2015)



Source: IV General population and household census

### Women and girls

There are several factors that put women, who represent half of the population in Equatorial Guinea, at greater risk of being affected by the pandemic. The 2006 poverty profile study in Equatorial Guinea showed that poverty affects 77.5 percent of women (compared to 75.9 percent of men). Similarly, the country has pre-existing significant inequalities in employment between women and men. In DHSEG-I 2011, only 46% of women had worked in the last 12 months, while 92% of men had done so. Regardless of age, most women reported lower wages than their spouses (across age groups, between 53.7 and 68.9% of women reported earning less). In a context of labor and economic vulnerability for women, the inequitable distribution of household tasks may exacerbate the phenomena of double working hours for women or even limit their access to better paying jobs, particularly when children remain at home during the pandemic.

Given the risk of hospital saturation due to COVID-19, one of the priorities is to maintain the supply of medical services to the population, particularly to avoid preventable deaths. Given the low density of medical personnel per inhabitant mentioned above, maternal mortality -which in 2011 stood at 308 per 100,000 inhabitants (DHSEG-I 2011)- could increase. This risk may be exacerbated in the context of pregnancies in children under 15 (Conde-Agudelo, Belizán, and Lammers 2005), which in 2011 stood at 177 per thousand (ESDGE-I 2011). Save the Children estimated that in West and Central Africa, 260,000 girls under 18 will be at risk of teenage pregnancy by the end of 2020 (Save The Children 2020). Additionally, UNFPA indicated that HIV prevalence was higher in women than in men, with the rate for women being 8.3 percent and for men 3.7 percent (United Nations 2019). In addition, they pointed out that the use of condoms is limited (ibid). However, through the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, a project has been developed and adopted to improve access to sexual and reproductive health services for adolescents and youth with emphasis on the prevention of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), HIV and pregnancies in adolescent girls.

For girls and women, the risks extend beyond health and can lead to significant human rights consequences. Save the Children warns that by the end of 2020, 90,000 girls would be at risk of child marriage in Central and West Africa (Save The Children 2020). In Equatorial Guinea in 2011, 14% of women aged 25-49 were already living with their partner before their 15th birthday and 34% before

their 18th birthday (ESDGE, 2011)<sup>22</sup>. Due to the association between early marriage and teenage pregnancy, sexual and reproductive health care is critical to avoid leaving them behind.

In the educational field, according to the Statistical Yearbook of Education (AEE) 2017-2018 (Ministry of Education, University Education and Sports 2018), despite the fact that there are no significant differences in enrollment between boys and girls, the risk of dropping out is greater for girls than for boys in secondary education. In early childhood and preschool education, the proportion of enrollment is 50.1% for girls and 49.9% for boys. In primary education for the same year, the distribution was 49.2% for girls and 50.8% for boys. In secondary education, 48.9% are girls and 51.1% are boys. According to the sectoral analysis of this consultancy (see section on social protection), girls in secondary education are also at greater risk of dropping out of school. This is because girls, who represent between 49.1% and 50.7% of students in the first cycle of secondary education (ESBA), go on to represent 48.3% of students in BACH 1 and 46.3% in BACH 2.

Due to mobility restrictions to reduce COVID-19 infections and job losses, there is a risk that gender-based violence (GBV) will increase. In Equatorial Guinea, the DHS survey indicates high levels of prevalence of GBV. Among the findings highlighted in the survey, 63 percent of women had been subjected to physical violence since the age of 15. Most of the violence was caused by their husband, current partner or most recent partner; there were also cases of fathers, stepfathers, mothers and stepmothers. In this sense, for a large part of the population staying at home represents a risk, even in delicate moments such as pregnancy, the DHS mentions that 17% of pregnant women had suffered domestic violence during their gestation period. In addition, physical violence in the homes was high, 46% of women who suffered domestic violence in the year before the survey were injured. Overall, 32% of women reported having been victims of sexual violence at some point in their lives. It is worrisome that to some extent these behaviors are normalized, as the survey reported that slightly more than half of men and women believe that there are legitimate reasons for hitting their partner.

In the medium and long term, the effects of the pandemic on women may have negative consequences in subsequent generations. In the 2011 DHSEG-I, the

socioeconomic and educational level of mothers was found to have an inverse relationship with the neonatal and postnatal mortality rate. In other words, the consequences on the reduction in women's income and education, accompanied by deficiencies in health care, could potentially exacerbate infant mortality in the country. This evidence reinforces the importance of a differentiated approach to protecting women and girls from the consequences of the pandemic. As several studies have shown, reducing the barriers women face to their social and economic development brings benefits not only to women but to society as a whole.

## Older adults

As presented in the population pyramid, the proportion of older adults in Equatorial Guinea is low. It is estimated that the percentage of people over 65 years old in relation to the total population is 2.82%. Despite being a minority population, it is the one most at risk of dying from COVID-19. In addition, there is a risk that hospital demand will prevent this population from having access to other health services. On the one hand, because of the saturation of the system and on the other because of the latent fear of receiving care in a hospital and contracting the virus. Likewise, this population is economically vulnerable and subject to the country's limitations in the supply of social protection. Among the socioeconomic challenges facing the older adult population are low pension coverage and limited social support networks. The study on the elderly in Equatorial Guinea (Ministry of Social Affairs and Promotion of Women 2012) revealed that of those over 55 years of age, 34.8% were active in the labor market and the other 65.2% were estimated to be inactive in the labor market and subject to conditions of poverty. With respect to monthly household income, approximately 82.8% of households lived on less than 50,000 CFA francs and only 4.1% of the elderly population was under a pension scheme. The study states that the "a large majority of the tested population is living below the poverty line with 53 cents a day. Most of the country's elderly are in a state of extreme poverty". In terms of future income, 8.3% of the population responded that they would have the income of retirement or pension in the future, 1.3% would have other income (income, property, etc.) and 90.4% responded that they would have no income at all. In addition, the social protection systems did not compensate for the economic

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22 It is worth noting that the mean age to live with a partner increased for younger generations, with 19,1 for women between 45-49 year olds and 12,2 for those in the 25-29 age group. However, there is no more up to date information on these indicators.

deficiencies of the population group. In 2012, only 5.5% of the households in the study received some economic aid through social assistance; of these, 56.7% received less than 50,000 CFA per month.

## Girls, boys, adolescents and youth

Despite being a group with a lower risk of mortality from COVID-19, children, adolescents and young people are very vulnerable to the side effects of the pandemic. In 2018, infant mortality stood at 62.1 per thousand live births, when in sub-Saharan Africa it was 53 (World Bank 2018). As previously mentioned, the consequences of the virus on mothers may negatively affect these indicators in the near future. This population group is also vulnerable in terms of immunization. In 2019, coverage of diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis (DTP3) vaccine was 53 percent, compared to an average of 88 percent in sub-Saharan Africa (United Nations 2019). Overall, the United Nations had noted that only 26% of children in the country had received all recommended vaccines against immune-preventable diseases in their childhood (ibid). In this context, the government's Expanded Vaccination Program is an important tool to prevent this population from falling behind in immunization. In terms of child development, UNICEF mentions that 26% of children under 5 years of age were below the expected growth, with 3% suffering from wasting and 56% of children not having an adequate diet. Only 10% of children from 0 to 4 years old did not suffer from deprivation, in the 5 to 17 years old range only 27% (ibid). Additionally, UNICEF reports that 11% of school-age children are overweight (based on 2016 data, (UNICEF 2019). In general, in a context of economic vulnerability, it tends to be more difficult to access healthy foods, which can be replaced by those with lower nutritional value that are more economical, affecting the nutrition and development of this population group.

Another cause of vulnerability of this population is in the access to education, infrastructure and the risk of being in school while the COVID-19 is latent. School retention is low. Of the students who begin primary education only 32% advance to sixth grade -without dropping out or repeating grade-, and only 9% reach the end of secondary education. In infrastructure, according to the AEE 2017-2018, almost 84% of primary schools in the country do not have access to drinking water. At the province level, Bioko-Norte and Annobón have the highest proportion of schools with access to drinking water (34% and 100% respectively, however, Bioko-Norte has 164 schools and Annobón 2). For the other provinces, the proportions vary from 26% for

Bioko-Sur (with 34 schools) to 5% in Kie-Ntem (Ministry of Education, University Education and Sports 2018).

Additionally, UNFPA mentioned that unemployment tended to affect more the population of young people between 15 and 24 years old, where a rate of 33.2% was found, with an important gender difference. For women of this age, unemployment was 36.9%, while for men it was 30.3% (United Nations 2019). The lack of economic opportunities tends to affect other aspects of young people's lives. For example, UNESCO indicated that the "number of adolescents and young people in conflict with the law has increased since the economic boom due to the lack of educational opportunities, employment and drug addiction" (ibid).

## People with disabilities

According to the Statistical Yearbook of Equatorial Guinea (2017) (INEGE 2017), 3055 people have a disability. As shown in the table below, most of the people have physical or sensory disabilities, and were located in Bioko Norte or Litoral. Below is the distribution of people with disabilities geographically, by type and gender. The highest concentration of people with disabilities was located in Bioko Norte (906), followed by Litoral (715). In Kie-Ntem, there are 435 people, this area contains the largest number of people (295) for whom the type of disability has not been specified.

In schools, the distribution of people with disabilities shows that 46% have hearing disabilities, followed by 37% with intellectual disabilities. As with the general population, there is a greater concentration in Malabo and Bata. In this young population, it is important to keep in mind that the measures taken by the government to maintain education through TV, radio and internet, may not be prepared for students with disabilities.

## Migrant population

According to the 2015 census, approximately 153,000 foreigners live in Equatorial Guinea. On average, non-national women represent only 28.7% and men 71.3%. Geographically, the largest concentration of foreign population is in the province of Wele Nzás. Although the level of employment of this population is unknown, it is important to keep in mind that in a context where informal employment may be high and related to tourism and subsistence agriculture, migrants may be a vulnerable

population that does not necessarily appear in the records of vulnerability available in Ministries, such as Social Affairs and Gender Equality. Additionally, the UN OHCHR country report (United Nations 2019) mentions that during the period of hydrocarbon exploitation, a significant number of foreign children were on the streets, subsisting on street vending.

*Table 1: Disabilities by sex and typology by province (2014)*

AREA	Physical		Sensory		Psychological		Physical-sensory		Psycho-physical		Psycho-sensory		Psycho-physical and sensory		Non-specified		TOTAL
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
Annobón	9	21	4	8	6	11	-	-	5	4	3	1	1	-	-	-	<b>73</b>
Bioko Norte	191	165	129	120	98	70	3	3	59	48	1	2	1	3	6	7	<b>906</b>
Bioko Sur	37	32	69	35	23	18	1	-	19	11	-	1	-	1	-	-	<b>247</b>
Centro Sur	73	56	55	50	16	13	1	-	9	5	-	-	-	-	37	55	<b>370</b>
Kie-Ntem	35	16	31	25	11	9	1	3	3	5	-	1	-	-	132	163	<b>435</b>
Litoral	157	121	101	120	32	26	2	3	21	14	1	1	1	-	64	51	<b>715</b>
Wele-Nzas	92	65	58	51	8	12	6	3	8	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	<b>309</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>594</b>	<b>476</b>	<b>447</b>	<b>409</b>	<b>194</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>239</b>	<b>276</b>	
<b>NACIONAL</b>	<b>1070</b>		<b>856</b>		<b>353</b>		<b>26</b>		<b>217</b>		<b>11</b>		<b>7</b>		<b>515</b>		<b>3055</b>

Source: SED

Table 2: Students with educational needs (2017<sup>23</sup>)

Location	Hearing	Motor	Intellectual	Total
<b>Region</b>				
Continental	347	140	347	834
Insular	334	85	202	621
<b>District</b>				
Aconibe	10	1	9	20
Acurenam	5	2	20	27
Annobón	6	7	4	17
Añisok	5	5	20	30
Baney	14	14	34	62
Bata	252	83	158	493
Ebibeyin	12	17	30	59
Evinayong	12	7	22	41
Cogo	-	-	1	1
Lubá	15	2	20	37
Malabo	299	62	144	505
Mbini	14	5	13	32
Micomiseng	13	5	16	34
Mongomo	13	10	13	36
Niefang	7	4	13	34
Nsok-Nzomo	3	1	20	24
Nsork	1	-	2	3
Riaba	-	-	-	-
<b>National</b>	<b>681</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>549</b>	<b>1455</b>

23 <https://www.inege.gq/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/ANUARIO-GE-2017.pdf>

# III.

## Expected effect of the pandemic on the SDGs



Credits: Government of Equatorial Guinea.

The crisis generated by COVID-19 represents a major challenge to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the global level. In the context of Equatorial Guinea's vulnerability, it is expected that the effects of the pandemic will affect its achievement, and even generate a setback. In order to measure the potential impact of the pandemic on the SDGs, and in light of the lack of recent information on their status in Equatorial Guinea, a methodology for analyzing the effects of COVID-19 on the SDGs is used, based on a literature review at the global level, which emphasizes the SDG targets that Equatorial Guinea prioritized for its development plan<sup>24</sup>. In other words, the type of effect that the pandemic and actions taken could have for each of the SDGs of importance to the country is based on the number of targets that have been affected to date by the global health situation. The impacts fall into 5 categories: Direct Negative Impact (-2), Indirect Negative Impact (-1), Neutral Impact (0), Indirect Positive Impact (1), and Direct Positive Impact (2). Then, a simple average allows the overall expected effect to be understood. The literature review that allows us to propose the effects of COVID-19 on the SDGs comes from recent academic studies, including academic journals, working papers, policy notes from multilateral organizations, and media analyses produced by experts, which provide recent estimates on the specific objectives<sup>25</sup>.

## The SDGs in Equatorial Guinea

In order to promote its sustainable development, Equatorial Guinea proposed 4 strategic axes in the National Development Plan of Horizon 2020:

- I. Eradication of poverty
- II. Social Inclusion and Sustainable Peace
- III. Productivity and industrialization
- IV. Environmental sustainability and territorial development

In the Horizon 2020 Plan, the 17 ODS were included in each of these strategic axes and additionally, each of their goals were classified under 4 criteria: Priority, Urgent, Very Urgent, and Not Applicable.

Because of the relevance of this analysis to Equatorial Guinea's compliance with the SDGs, the analysis focused on determining the impact for the goals prioritized as "Very Urgent" by the government. Of the 80 goals rated as very urgent, studies were found for 70 of them. Of the other 10, there are no studies, or the impact was not considered relevant to the country of study. Thus, only SDG 7 "Affordable and Clean Energy" (Block 4 environmental sustainability, of the government of Equatorial Guinea's prioritization) is not considered in the analysis because none of the SDG targets are considered to be Very Urgent.

## Expected effects on SDG

Figure 2 shows the average effect of the virus on 16 of the 17 sustainable development goals. Overall, it is clear that the effect will be negative for the SDG targets that Equatorial Guinea has prioritized as "Very Urgent".

In the same way, the Figure 3 shows the impact that the current situation could have on 16 SDGs. Of the 16, 25% have a negative direct to indirect impact, 18.7% have a negative indirect impact, 37.5% have a neutral to negative indirect impact, and 18.7% have a possible neutral impact.

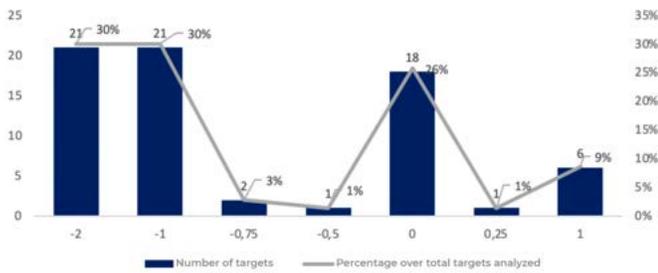
*Table 3: Strategic axes and number of goals by category*

Strategic axes	Associated SDGs	Priority	Urgent	Very Urgent	Not applicable
Eradication of poverty	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 17	6	14	25	1
Social Inclusion and Sustainable Peace	5, 10, 16, 17	6	14	10	1
Productivity and industrialization	8, 9, 17	3	5	11	1
Environmental sustainability and territorial development	7, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17	8	18	33	4

24 The literature review methodology used in the study was developed by the Center for Sustainable Development Objectives in Latin America (CODS). In addition, the literature used was complemented with documents produced by the Sustainable Development Goals Center for Africa (SDGCA).

25 See appendix for literature used and scores assigned to each goal.

**Figure 2: Impact values of Covid-19 on SDG targets in Equatorial Guinea**

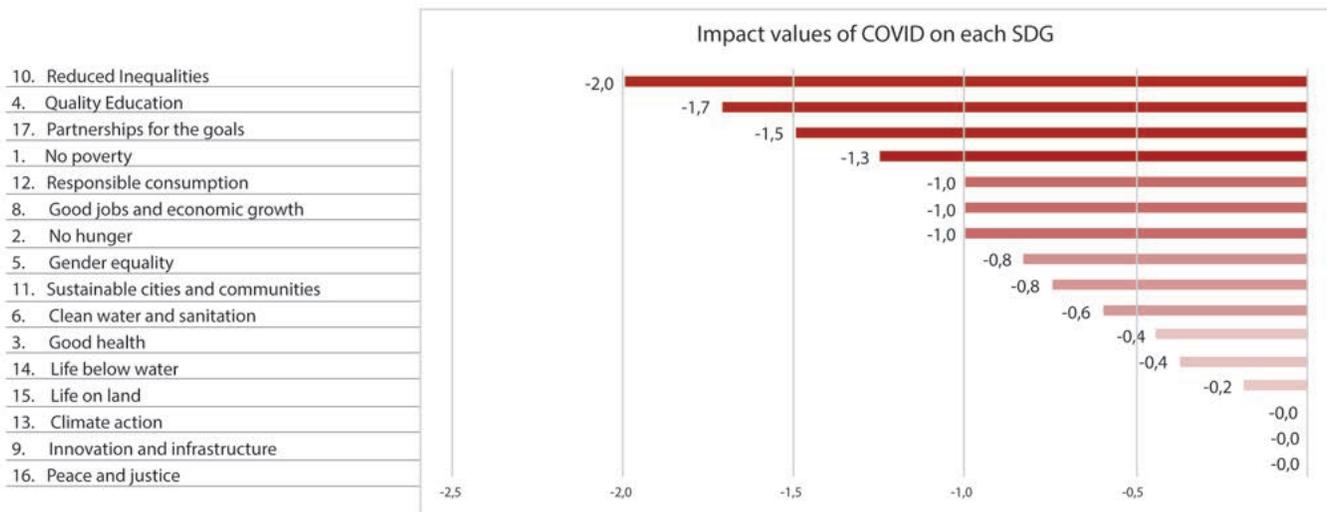


**Own elaboration from literature on the impact of COVID-19 on ODS goals**

Of the four SDGs with the most negative scores, SDG 10, 4, and 1 are consistent with some of the most read articles in the last 6 months worldwide<sup>26</sup>. Inequality, quality education and the end of poverty, will be affected globally. In turn, because of the interrelationships among SDGs, those with negative effects, but of lesser magnitude

such as food and nutrition security, may exacerbate the negative effects of SDGs that are severely impacted by the pandemic, such as poverty and inequality. Current conditions are pushing more than 70 million new people into poverty (World Bank 2020c) in 2020 alone, the number may increase depending on how long it takes to find a global solution to the pandemic. ODS 17 has mixed effects, especially since to date there are studies that refer to the potential impacts of COVID-19 on the indicator, but no impact assessments in the strict sense have been conducted (SDGCAFRICA 2020; UNECA 2020). However, it could be expected that at this time partnerships are focusing primarily on the solution of the pandemic. In the present context of the pandemic, the production of academic literature on its effects is advancing rapidly. For this reason, continued monitoring of the literature specific to both Africa and countries similar to Equatorial Guinea will be key.

**Figure 3: Average impact on indicators with "Very Urgent" targets for Equatorial Guinea from Covid-19 in SDGs**



**Own elaboration from literature on the impact of COVID-19 on SDG goals**

26 <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/06/1067502>  
<https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/updated-estimates-impact-covid-19-global-poverty>

# IV.

## Strategic pillars



From the various analyses carried out in the consultancy, we present the context, the most important findings and recommendations in each of the UNDS pillars for COVID-19 response.

## A. Health First

### Access to Health and Sanitation, Water, and Hygiene Services

One of the first steps taken in the face of the pandemic to have a diagnosis of the public health situation was the joint study conducted in April 2020 by the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and United Nations among others (2020)<sup>27</sup>. More specifically, the assessment sought to provide a rapid diagnosis of the system's preparedness for Covid-19 in terms of infection prevention and control (IPC) and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). The assessment focused on priority care facilities for Covid-19 cases in the island region of the country. More specifically, a situation analysis was conducted of the 12 facilities with the highest flow of patients, with patients in quarantine, or with patients hospitalized for positive diagnosis of the virus. The study, conducted two weeks after the first case of local transmission of COVID-19 in Equatorial Guinea was diagnosed, identified some important deficiencies in the use of personal protective equipment, availability of protocols for its use, as well as in the availability of points with water and soap, and the final disposal of waste.

Specifically, only 42% of staff were trained in IPC or in the use of personal protective equipment and only 25% of facilities had an IPC plan. In addition, not all facilities evaluated had soap and water points (about a third lacked this essential service), 59% did not treat water, and 92% disposed of their solid waste in public dumps.

The evaluation also identified limitations in staff training. However, the same report indicates that staff training was conducted immediately after the evaluation<sup>28</sup>.

The study highlights that despite the mobilization of available human resources to optimize the diagnosis and care of patients with COVID-19, the deficiencies in the number of health professionals available are compounded by limitations in technical capacities.

The availability of human resources adequately managing

the crisis of COVID-19 is a priority, not only because they could become focal points of transmission among the population, but because they are required to continue providing other health to the population, including prevention, diagnosis and treatment of malaria, HIV and Tuberculosis.

With regard to service provision, multiple reports have indicated the consequences of suspending or reducing access to health services. Among them the best documented include changes in service provision related to HIV, TB, immunization, reproductive health and surgery. It has been quantified that one of the side effects of COVID-19 may be a 10% increase in TB-related mortality over a five-year period. This increase in HIV-associated mortality was estimated to be 20% and 36% for malaria (Hogan et al. 2020). Causes for these impacts include difficulties in accessing health facilities due to measures to prevent transmission of HIV-19 either because of fear of infection, unavailability of health personnel for regular activities (e.g., vaccination campaigns, screening for respiratory symptoms, or follow-up of patients receiving ARVs), or disruption in the supply chain (e.g., vaccines, diagnostic tests, or drugs).

The government of Equatorial Guinea must ensure that it continues to deploy awareness campaigns throughout its territory on the measures to be taken in response to Covid-19. This 'best practices' campaign should emphasize hygiene and social distancing strategies and discourage congregations of people and should be done in conjunction with both civil society and religious leaders.

It is important to make clear that this does not mean that the country's other health measures are neglected with respect to important issues such as malaria, HIV, or reproductive health. The government should maintain its current operation while making additional efforts to contain the impacts of Covid-19.

The following is a summary of the main short and medium-term recommendations for Health, Water and Sanitation:

27 This evaluation consisted of an analysis of the situation in the 12 establishments with the highest flow of patients, with patients in quarantine or with the internment of patients positive to covid-19.

28 In addition, for the sectoral study contracted for this consultancy, we investigated this issue with an informant from the health sector. This informant indicated that as part of the actions in response to COVID-19 the Ministry of Health has organized additional training for sta .

**Short term recommendations**

- ▶ Based on the results of the rapid assessment on Prevention and Control of Infections (PCI) and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), the 12 priority facilities for COVID-19 should be supplied with the following fundamental services that they lack:
  - One-third of the facilities required soap and water points
  - Two-thirds of the facilities required access to treated water
  - 11 of the 12 establishments required an appropriate incineration system for final waste disposal
- ▶ A second rapid assessment is recommended to track ICP and WASH indicators. In particular, the follow-up assessment should re-evaluate the preparedness of staff following the trainings conducted after the first assessment. Additionally, it would be advisable to expand the sample of facilities included in the assessment.
- ▶ It is recommended that the Government continues to strengthen awareness campaigns throughout its territory on the measures to be taken in response to Covid-19. This 'best practices' campaign should emphasize hygiene and social distancing strategies and discourage people's gatherings and should be carried out in conjunction with civil society leaders as well as religious leaders.
- ▶ Review the level of execution of the Emergency and Response Plan for COVID-19 to identify the activities for which the implementation has been delayed or has not begun. As a result of this review, an action plan with a budget should be made, identifying immediate and medium-term tasks, as well as activities that were not implemented or are delayed due to lack of financial capacity.

**Mid-term recommendations**

- ▶ Due to its strategic importance for the health and economy of the country, it is recommended that a multisectoral commission be formed at the highest level to follow up on the emergency plan in response to the deficiencies identified in the National Health Information System, National Laboratory System, and in the infection prevention and control capacities of health facilities. The plan should include a budget and identify the source of funding.
- ▶ To facilitate future technical and financial contributions from both bilateral and multilateral development agencies, the documents resulting from these reviews should be widely disseminated, including publication on the websites of United Nations organizations in both Spanish and English.
- ▶ Review the health sector's strategic planning to identify whether it includes sufficient and appropriate activities aimed at mitigating the risk of high vulnerability to infectious diseases. As a result of this review, the country should have identified an indicative budget for the selected activities, as well as the source of funding.

## B. Protecting people: basic services and social protection

### Education

Government action on education is critical in the current context of the pandemic. As noted in the section on the impact of COVID-19 on SDG's 4th goal, which refers to ensuring quality education, is one of the purposes that will be most affected by the consequences of the pandemic. According to the analysis in that study, which ranks the 17 sustainable goals according to expected negative impact, quality education is the second goal that will be most affected after the goal on reducing inequality.

#### **Effect on education and policy response**

The Covid-19 crisis triggered a coordinated government response in education. A consensus was reached on how best to organize the response among stakeholders, from the political to the technical level. This led to the adoption of decrees that gave legal support to the actions of the Ministry of Education.

The immediate response was to close the schools to prevent the mass transmission of the virus. To mitigate the effect of school closures on the learning cycle, the government (with support from international donors) took several measures:

- Set up a distance learning platform (<http://escuelaencasa.gq/>) for teachers, students and parents (with support from UNICEF). Although it is open to all levels of education, its main objective is to support secondary school students (who are expected to be able to use the platform autonomously).
- To support distance/home learning for preschool and elementary school children, educational television and radio programs have been developed and broadcasted for 1 hour per day. The content is also uploaded to an online learning platform. Some 123,075 preschool and primary school children have benefited from it (Covid-19 Progress Report #09, June 25 - July 22, 2020, UNICEF 2020).
- To facilitate the implementation of the online learning response, particularly the loading process of the educational content, the staff of the Ministry of Education

has been provided with information technology equipment and high-speed Internet. In addition, 124 teachers have been trained to deliver distance education (and provide training to other teachers).

- Home learning guides and materials for math in the sixth grade have also been developed to reach a wider audience. It is estimated that it will benefit some 13,994 primary school students (50 percent of whom are girls) during the school closure period (UNICEF 2020c).

Guided by safety considerations, several provisions will guide the organization of teaching for the reopening of schools. To prevent schools from contributing to the spread of the virus, the main measure is to organize teaching in three shifts (i.e., morning, afternoon and evening) so that class sizes are reduced by 50 percent. More information on how this will be implemented in practice is not yet available. This could be complemented by measures to improve school infrastructures, in particular with regard to access to water and toilets, as well as providing the necessary sanitary equipment to students.

### ***Potential effects on learning (and long-term outcomes)***

While the above measures may counteract the effects of Covid-19, school closures and subsequent changes in educational service delivery are expected to significantly affect student learning outcomes.

The effect of Covid-19 on education has two main axes: one direct impact is on student's learning capacity due to school closures and the other main impact is on student dropout (mainly due to income limitations).

All students have been seriously affected in their learning cycle, which corresponds to more than 220,000 students (based on the figures of the AEE 2017-2018). The direct and main effect of Covid-19 is related to the amount of education, that is, in terms of students' exposure to educational opportunities. Despite the availability of a distance learning platform, students' learning time has most likely been reduced. Not only may students have missed out on learning opportunities, but some may also have missed out on the learning acquired by not being able to use it. Students have also been exposed to new teaching practices and learning methods that may affect their learning outcomes as well. This includes the effects of changes in school organization when students resume their education. However, it is still unclear whether or not these changes will contribute to overall learning.

A rough estimate of the magnitude of the short-term effect of school closure on learning can be obtained based on the methodology developed by Azevedo et al (2020). The loss of learning depends on the duration of school closures (i.e., about one-third of the school year in Equatorial Guinea) and the effectiveness of mitigation measures (expressed as a percentage of learning regained). Given the relatively low use of the Internet among the population (26.2 percent in 2017 according to International Telecommunication Union data in (World Bank 2017) and the limited duration of radio and television broadcasts (i.e., 20 percent of normal school duration), mitigation measures cannot be expected to offset a large proportion of learning losses in Equatorial Guinea. A mitigation effectiveness of 15-20 percent (corresponding, respectively, to the calibration used for low and upper-middle income countries in the case of the intermediate scenario) seems appropriate. This would imply that students in Equatorial Guinea have possibly lost between 40% and 43% of the education provided in a normal school year.

However, this estimate does not take into account the effect of Covid-19 on the proportion of students who dropped out from school. Losses of income in vulnerable households could push students out of school. Low-achieving students may also not be able to catch up on learning after school closes and eventually drop out. In the context of Equatorial Guinea, where the survival rate to secondary and tertiary education is low, it is expected that a large proportion of students will be "at risk of dropping out. This risk is particularly acute in Equatorial Guinea, where a large proportion of students (i.e. 61% in primary education and 62% in secondary education according to ESA 2017/18) are enrolled in private schools that require a higher level of expenditure than public schools. Since the chances of re-enrolling in school after dropping out are very slim, this can have serious consequences on the learning achievements of young people.

The overall magnitude of the effect of school closures will depend crucially on the "transient" nature of the effect. In other words, will short-term learning losses be offset over time or will there be lasting consequences for affected students? This will depend on the government's policy response, as well as the response strategies implemented by students and their families.

A major concern is the effect of Covid-19 on inequalities in learning outcomes. School closures (and income shocks) will disproportionately affect students from vulnerable households, i.e., with limited capacity to cope with lost learning opportunities and fewer possibilities to benefit from distance learning. Students from lower socioeconomic levels are less likely to have access to the

Internet, television or radio. Repeaters, students who do not live with their parents, and students with disabilities are particularly vulnerable. Conversely, students from a more advantaged socioeconomic background may benefit from parental support and guidance in the absence of the teacher, or from remedial classes in the future. Therefore, mitigation measures should be directed to these students as a priority.

To avoid the social impact on the most vulnerable households, the government adopted social protection measures (with the support of UNICEF). Some 12,000 vulnerable families (some with more than 7 members) have been identified to receive food and hygiene kits. UNDP is also providing assistance. The scale of support is limited, but it will help reduce the risks of school dropout.

### **Potential effects on schooling**

The Covid-19 crisis will also affect the general supply of schooling opportunities, especially in private schools. Teachers will be affected as well, as they will teach less, be confronted with new teaching approaches and tools (distance learning) and will have to adapt to the new school organization when education resumes. Moving to 3 shifts in schools implies increasing the overall instructional time. This can be achieved either by stretching teachers' hours and/or hiring more teachers. Thus, educational service delivery will be particularly affected in private schools, as it depends on students' ability to pay fees. Considering the effect of the current economic crisis on household finances, private schools are likely to experience a decline in income, which will prevent them from paying teachers and will lead to a reduction in the number of teachers in private schools. This is particularly worrying, as a large proportion of teachers are paid directly by private schools: 26.8% in preschools, 33.3% in primary schools and 51.6% in secondary schools in 2017-2018. This could lead to an overall reduction in schooling opportunities in Equatorial Guinea and increased pressure on the public system if families opt to send their children to public schools.

It should be noted that in terms of the pre-pandemic

situation, access to early education in Equatorial Guinea is low<sup>29</sup>. Moreover, retention in the school system is problematic, as demonstrated by the low level of enrollment in the higher levels of education.

With regards to inequality in access to education, it should be noted that the socioeconomic situation of students is a strong determinant of educational achievement, as illustrated by the large increase in the supply of private educational opportunities.

Additionally, there is a low quality of education due to the lack of qualified teachers and teaching materials. Another difficulty is the fact that the supply of formal education and technical and vocational training opportunities does not match the needs of strategic sectors for economic diversification.

As indicated above, the Covid-19 crisis triggered a coordinated government response in education. To mitigate the effect of school closures on the learning cycle, the Government (with the support of international donors) implemented measures such as the adoption of online learning platforms. However, telecommunications infrastructure is limited in the country (see section on social cohesion).

As part of the educational response to the Covid-19 crisis, it is recommended that a package of actions be developed to target the most vulnerable children in order to prevent them from dropping out of school. Such a package should combine measures to resume education -compensating for losses in education- and financial support (this proposal is developed in more detail at the end of this section).

In the medium term, the sector study concludes that the lack of a concrete education plan seriously hampers expenditure management, which currently focuses on infrastructure mainly. The Education Development Program of Equatorial Guinea (PRODEGE in Spanish) 2020-2025 requires an increase in education expenditures and the creation of a multi-year plan. As such, one recommendation in the medium term is that investment in education be given higher priority within the budget.

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29 According to UNESCO data (based on population predictions made with the 2001 census), net enrollment rates (NER) were 31% for preschool education in 2015, and 42% for primary education. Gross enrollment rates are higher (but still very low by international standards), at 43 percent and 62 percent, respectively, for preschool and primary education. Guinea has one of the lowest elementary school enrolment rates in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). It compares with Niger, Mali or Senegal, countries with a much lower GDP per capita (UIS, 2020). In fact, net and gross enrollment rates have declined by about 10 percentage points between 2011 and 2015. Data from the 2011 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) suggest that the primary NER was as high as 82 percent (and the gross enrollment rate about 136 percent) in 2011. These estimates are nearly a decade old, and access to education may have declined since then. However, the World Bank's education diagnostics suggest that they are reliable estimates.

It is reasonable to think that the enrollment rate falls between these two estimates, indicating a slightly more acceptable level of access to primary education, although it is still low considering Equatorial Guinea's per capita GDP.

## Food Security

As indicated in the sectoral study on agriculture, since the arrival of the oil crisis and even more so in the current context of the pandemic, the agricultural sector plays a key role in the economic diversification strategy. This study emphasizes the need to develop the professionalization of the sector in order to guarantee food security for the country, reduce poverty and decrease dependence on food imports.

According to the sectoral study in Equatorial Guinea, two main types of agriculture are identified: (i) subsistence family agriculture, which accounts for the majority of producers on small areas (less than 1 ha), where more than 50% of the production in this type of agriculture is for subsistence. The other type is; ii) industrial agriculture oriented to exports. Family farming accounts for the majority of the land area.

As a country that imports nearly 80% of its food, the main impacts of the Covid-19 crisis on the agricultural and food sectors has been the closure of borders and the restrictions on international mobility and transportation logistics that led to limits on both the arrival of food products and the import of production inputs. As explained in the sectoral study, due to the lack of inputs, production was reduced and the income of Equatoguinean producers fell, resulting in an increase in their vulnerability.

The regional study identifies the lack of sovereignty in food production<sup>30</sup> as one of the greatest threats to food security and consequently a threat to the adequate nutrition of the population.

As such, agricultural production does not meet the food needs of the population. It is estimated that national production does not satisfy more than 30% of domestic demand<sup>31</sup> (BAD 2018)<sup>32</sup>. Therefore, a large amount of food is imported (mainly from Cameroon), which results in high food costs for the whole population of Equatorial Guinea.

As a consequence, a significant part of the population suffers from low nutrition. According to a study carried out by FAO (2012), in 2012 only 20 percent of the population was able to cover 100% of its daily nutritional needs in terms

of calories and proteins, 15% had a deficit in either, while the remaining 65% did not meet either daily requirement. As noted above, the lack of a more recent DHS has not allowed for an update of this nutritional survey.

Finally, as mentioned above, it should be noted that despite the establishment of a Social Development Fund in 2007, in line with the National Development Plan for the Country Horizon 2020, subsistence farmers and agricultural workers are not being covered by formal social security systems.

## Social Protection

As indicated in the study 'Leaving No One Behind' (Ntutumu, 2020) the current social security system in Equatorial Guinea is modest and not very inclusive. As such it only reaches a small proportion of workers in the formal sector in urban areas. The study highlights that social protection coverage for the poor is very limited. In contrast to policies that have specific exemptions from health commissions, there is virtually no social assistance or social insurance provision for the poor (see Holmes, 2009 cited by LNOB, 2020). There are greater options for health commission exemptions while programs to increase the capacity of families to use social services or invest in productive activities are limited or nonexistent, for example, cash transfers or transfers of productive assets to manage risks through social security (OGAWA 2015).

As pointed out by Ntutumu's study (2020), the social protection system is constituted by public interventions with the objective of helping individuals and families in the management of their risks, as well as comprehensive programs to fight extreme poverty. In Equatorial Guinea, INSESO is the only provider of social benefits for workers in the formal sector of the economy (ANGE 2020).

According to Ntutumu (2020), although a Social Development Fund was established in 2007, in line with the National Development Plan for the Country Horizon 2020, subsistence farmers and agricultural workers are

30 It is estimated that domestic production does not satisfy more than 30% of domestic demand (ADB, 2018, p.31). The low population density in rural areas, associated with the economy's dependence on oil, poses the problem of the country's food security. In fifty years, Equatorial Guinea's population has quadrupled (from 255,000 in 1961 to 1,068,183 in 2011). At the same time, agricultural production has grown slowly, barely doubling in volume in 50 years (from 143,100 to 317,230 tons according to FAOSTAT, cited in the PNDES). Agricultural productivity per capita fell by almost half, from 0.56 tons/year in 1961 to 0.31 tons in 2011, in a context of significant urbanization, influx of immigrants and increase purchasing power induced by the rapid growth of oil and gas exploitation.

31 In 2011, it was estimated that the country imported 28,000 tons of cereals, some 8,000 tons of rice, and some 20,000 tons of wheat (FAO, 2018. Country Briefings. Equatorial Guinea.) Imports for the period 2011-2017 were broken down as follows 40% of beverages, 20% of meat, 8% of cereals and 5% of dairy products. Moreover, while very few fruits and vegetables were imported in 2011, in 2017 they represented over 5% of the value of imports, indicating a growing dependence on foreign markets for this type of supply.

32 BAD, 2018, p.31.

not being covered by formal social security systems.

According to a UNICEF's diagnosis on social protection in Equatorial Guinea, existing policies are focused to a very limited extent on old age, disability, illness, and occupational risk coverage only for formal employees, public officials and military personnel. These programs are mainly financed by employers and the government, with a small contribution from the employee (see, OGAWA 2015).

Additionally, the lack of a child protection policy in Equatorial Guinea is evident. The UNICEF Country Programme Document (CPD, 2013-2017) states that there is no formal child protection system in Equatorial Guinea. It reports a phenomenon of exodus from rural areas due to recent rapid economic growth. Consequently, this has weakened the traditional community and family protection networks. Although the report points out the lack of data as a limitation to the analysis, it discusses some of the challenges of implementing a child protection policy. Among the greatest challenges are low rates of birth registration, the situation of children in conflict with the law, and orphans and vulnerable children.

The Ntutumu (2020) report indicates that a social protection law has been drafted but has not yet been passed. It provides for the introduction of several schemes targeting poor and vulnerable groups, as well as a Single Social Registry (RSU in Spanish) to manage the programs. Finally, the report warns that there are considerable institutional gaps that must be addressed in order for the government to fulfill its social protection program.

Given the context of the pandemic crisis and taking into account the challenges identified in the previous sections on health, education and nutrition, a strategy recommended to the Government is the creation of a social assistance program focused on education, nutrition and health goals, such as Conditional Cash Transfers. These transfers are focused on the most vulnerable population, whereby targeting is usually done through an identification instrument that assigns a vulnerability score according to the socioeconomic conditions of the household as recorded in a survey conducted in the most marginalized areas.

The transfers are given to the head of the household (in many cases the woman is given priority), subject to school

attendance and regular medical check-ups for the children. Through a system of conditional cash transfers with clear goals and processes, the government of Equatorial Guinea could ensure that, over the next 5 years, starting in the context of the pandemic, children from public schools are kept in school under the monetary support of the government. To date there are multiple examples of programs like this in various developing countries<sup>33</sup> with positive results in both education and nutrition and health indicators, even in the case of "labeled" transfer programs, i.e., programs in which transfer conditionality is not as strictly enforced (Baird et al. 2014)<sup>34</sup>.

It could be relevant to start this type of program for several reasons. The first one being that social distancing could represent an opportunity for the government in terms of aid provision, the program could focus not only on education and nutrition issues, but it could also make sure that the selected households have the necessary elements of both internet connection and financial mechanisms to receive the resources. This way, a government aid shock package could bring about a complete change in the lives of the most vulnerable people in the country.

Secondly, by starting a program like this, the government would be making targeted use of its current resources. If its efforts are focused on a social program, it will be easy to realize the potential impact that the program will have on each of the families. Additionally, by structuring such a program, help from multilateral agencies could be requested, with resources for both the execution and the implementation of an impact evaluation. This will yield positive results even if the program does not have the expected result, as such the creation of such an alliance can be beneficial in the long run.

Third, the government will not only be focusing on children and their participation in schools and nutrition indicators but may also focus on the participation and reception of resources by women in the household. This could have positive effects (based on experiences in South Africa and Ethiopia (World Bank 2012)) including progress towards closing the gender gap within the selected households, one of the most relevant issues for the country's development.

The following is a summary of the main short- and medium-term recommendations regarding social protection and basic services:

33 See also: Fiszbein, A. and Schady, N.R. 2009. Conditional Cash Transfers: Reducing Present and Future Poverty. World Bank Policy Research Report. Washington, DC, United States: World Bank. <https://publications.iadb.org/publications/english/document/Conditions-for-Success-in-Implementing-CCT-Programs-Lessons-for-Asia-from-Latin-America-and-the-Caribbean.pdf>

34 For more details on "labeled" or "unconditional" transfer programs, see Baird, S., Ferreira, F., Özler, B., Woolcock, M. 2014. Conditional, Unconditional and Everything in Between: A Systematic Review of the Effects of Cash Transfer Programs on Schooling Outcomes. *Journal of Development Effectiveness*, 2014, vol. 6(1), pp. 1-43

### Short term recommendations

- ▶ As a first step towards the precise identification of the most vulnerable population, the introduction of the Single Social Registry (RUS) is recommended. A social protection law is currently being drafted but has not yet been approved.
- ▶ The creation of a social assistance program focused on education, nutrition and health goals, such as Conditional Cash Transfers, is recommended.

### Mid-term recommendations

- ▶ Increase spending on education and create a multi-year plan as required by the Program to Support Economic Diversification (PRODECO) 2020-2025.
- ▶ Within the Social Development Fund, it is recommended to include a group focused on subsistence farmers and agricultural workers who are not currently covered by formal social security systems.

## C. Social cohesion and community resilience

Social cohesion and community resilience are two complementary and necessary elements to overcome the COVID-19 crisis. Social Cohesion<sup>35</sup>, is key to achieving a joint response, which will reduce the spread of the virus and facilitate solidarity between different actors to address the socio-economic needs created by the pandemic. Community resilience depends heavily on this coordination, as it is the ability of communities to use their available resources efficiently to overcome crises.

However, indirectly, social cohesion is at risk because of the measures taken to protect the population from the virus. In order to reduce infections, governments around the world, including in Equatorial Guinea, have imposed measures that restrict the rights of individuals, with clear examples like the restrictions on free mobility and freedom of assembly.

In order to mitigate the negative effects that these measures may have on the population, the different actors in the country, such as the government, civil society, the private sector and multilateral organizations, have had to innovate and find synergies to catalyze their efforts and succeed in providing support to vulnerable populations. In spite of this, the lack of social protection mechanisms, the limited access to basic services and the lack of robust information on the population's vulnerability conditions, limit the scope of response actions to COVID-19. The difficulty in reaching the most vulnerable and the unequal way in which the restrictions imposed may affect the populations with scarce resources, generate spaces that affect social cohesion; here, both the well-being of the population and the trust in the institutions are threatened. We recall that during the Ebola crisis, more people died

from the disruption of social services and the economic crisis than from the virus itself (UNDS 2020). The following section analyzes factors that contribute to social cohesion and community resilience from social, technological and governance gaps.

## Equatorial Guinea's context of exclusion

### Social gaps

Prior to COVID-19, social cohesion was affected by the country's context of inequality. For example, economic growth resulting from oil exploitation was not reflected in significant job creation outside of hydrocarbons (see section on economic response), which created significant differences in the income of Equatoguineans. Additionally, informality prevails in the country, which implies a high presence of jobs that generate fragility in the population and diminish their resilience to economic shocks. The country's dependence on oil also affected migration dynamics and strengthened other sources of vulnerability. The United Nations reported that, amidst the significant influx of foreigners since the beginning of hydrocarbon exploitation, the presence of foreign children engaged in street vending increased (United Nations 2019). In addition, access to land is unequal, marked by significant gender differences where 88% of men own land, and women have only 12%.

Several of the infrastructure developments have not been able to improve access to basic services for the population. In the previous sections, it was mentioned that health care capacity is limited, as is access to it by informal workers. It is evident that school dropout is high and tends to harm girls in secondary school more than boys. Similarly, access to clean water in both major hospitals and schools is considered

35 Understood as the way in which a society works for the well-being of all its individuals, fights exclusion and marginalization, creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust and offers its members an opportunity for positive social mobility, <https://www.oecd.org/dev/inclusivesocietiesand-development/social-cohesion.htm>

inadequate. These conditions of vulnerability are affected by the lack of social protection mechanisms, such as the cash transfers mentioned above.

A significant negative effect is expected on the most vulnerable due to COVID-19 and the restriction measures imposed. The expected contraction of GDP can be related to job losses and, above all, to Government income, making social spending significantly more challenging (see Macroeconomic Response section).

Despite this challenging outlook, the Government, multilateral agencies and civil society organizations have made various efforts to support the population. The Government identified about 30,000 vulnerable households, of which, according to the Ministry of Social Affairs, 11,050 have been supported with food assistance and sanitary hygiene products as of October 2020. Through specific actions of immediate response, the UNDP made a donation of 50 million CFA francs, which were complemented by 5 million CFA francs donated by a private sector company (UNDP 2020), -about 100,000 USD in total-, would allow the delivery of 25,000 CFA francs vouchers to 2,200 vulnerable households in Equatorial Guinea (approximately 45 USD per household). This distribution would be carried out in coordination with the Ministry of Social Affairs, as well as the Red Cross and other NGOs. UNICEF, together with UNDP, provided 3,500 hygiene kits to vulnerable populations (UNICEF 2020b). UNICEF and UNAIDS assisted with food and hygiene kits for people affected by HIV (ibid).

These actions are evidence of the coordination efforts that different actors have made to protect vulnerable populations. However, this support network still has limitations. In terms of scope, the Social Guarantees Program has provided support to 36% of the vulnerable population identified by the Ministry of Social Affairs, with about 64% not yet receiving this assistance. Similarly, until a cure has been found for COVID-19, the need for hygiene kits remains, which can represent a significant cost for the vulnerable population. If this need is not met on an ongoing basis, those most in need may be more exposed to the virus.

Another example of social cohesion was presented in the way households eligible for aid were identified. According to the Ministry of Social Affairs, for the identification of vulnerable families, neighborhood presidents were asked to identify those most in need in their jurisdictions. The identified individuals were then eligible to receive support from the Ministry. UNICEF reported that data from the 2011

DHSEG-I survey and administrative data from Social Affairs were also used to target vulnerable families. This exercise conducted in an emergency context underscores the importance of social cohesion at the local level, since the identification of the vulnerable depends on the community presidents' knowledge of the set of needs of the population they represent. Undoubtedly, this procedure has a margin of error that may lead to the systematic exclusion of those in the population who are not visible to the community presidents. Despite this margin of error and the lack of data on the population, this effort is valuable and worth reinforcing. Especially because in the future, updates of information on the vulnerable and crises are unlikely to coincide, making it hard for recent information on the population at risk to be available.

Making people aware of the existence and importance of the virus is also important to motivate people to maintain good hygiene practices. Although there is no exact figure for Equatorial Guinea, UNICEF reported that, during the collection of information on the vulnerable population, community leaders reported that several people did not believe in the existence of the virus. This was because they had not seen any negative health effects on the population. In this regard, UNICEF also organized four training workshops for 180 community agents, social communicators, and volunteers from local NGOs in the Continental and Insular Regions to help sensitize their communities about COVID-19 (UNICEF 2020a)<sup>36</sup>. The government has also reported on the progress of the pandemic through different means such as the "COVID Response" tool enabled on the website of the Ministry of Finance, Economy and Planning. However, in this regard, it may be appropriate for the population to receive information on the progress of the number of cases at a high frequency, in order for people to understand the extent of the pandemic in the population. To this end, it is important to disseminate the information available on the website of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare<sup>37</sup> and publish it at a greater level of disaggregation, e.g., district or city. Similarly, allowing this information to be exportable (xls, or csv formats) can facilitate the dissemination of information and facilitate analysis by academics and epidemiologists outside the ministry of health.

36 The article reports 60 people trained, however in the review of the document by UNICEF it was mentioned that the number of people trained had increased.

37 <https://guineasalud.org/estadisticas/>

## Digital Divide

Before COVID-19, Equatorial Guinea already had challenges in terms of access, use, and appropriation of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT).

- 53% of the population has a cell phone connection, while the average in CEMAC is 79% (DATARE 2020).
- Broadband connections are scarce, reaching 0.12 connections per 100 inhabitants in 2018, the CEAAC average was 0.26, and Gabon had 1.37 on the same date (ITU 2019).
- Internet penetration in the country is low, reaching 26% of the population in 2017, the CEMAC average is 40.82% (Datare portal, 2020).
- The percentage of people using the internet on laptops or desktop computers reached 63% in 2020, however, this is a decrease from 2017, when the country had 76% (Datare portal, 2020). Even if this is due to an increase in the number of people with access to the Internet, it is expected that, with the deployment of infrastructure, the percentage of people using the Internet on computers will increase, since this means a greater penetration of Internet services throughout the country.
- In the ICT Development Index, Equatorial Guinea ranks 163 out of 175 countries, with a score of 1.9 out of 10 (ITU 2018).
- Equatorial Guinea does not have data for relevant indicators in the area of open government, open data, and continuous information flow between government, business and society<sup>38</sup>.
- The country ranks low in the Online Services Index (OSI)<sup>39</sup> compared to the CEMAC countries (0.1 and 0.3 respectively). However, Guinea's growth rate in this area is high, a behavior that must be maintained in order to reach at least the average of the CEMAC countries.

Despite the difficulties, Equatorial Guinea has a fairly comprehensive policy for the ICT sector. In 2018, the Digital Agenda for Equatorial Guinea (ADIGE) was created with the objective of creating an information society and a digital economy. The Agenda has 4 strategic objectives (Inclusion, universalization of access; e-government; training; development of the ICT sector) and 4 lines

of action (Inclusion, Competitiveness, Administration, Training) with which they hope to “[universalize] access, protection and security, in a fair and competitive market, to meet the challenges of globalization, promoting sustainable development and cooperation” (ADIGE, 2018). The plan is ambitious and has a clear focus on transforming the use of ICT in Equatorial Guinea. Its goals relate to a single ICT law, infrastructure deployment, radio spectrum frequency plans, public Internet access, training of professionals and the general public in ICT tools, digitization of public administration, and use of ICT in the business sector. In addition, the country has worked in recent years on large infrastructure deployments to close the digital divide. Equatorial Guinea has a solid backbone deployed in the country, in addition to the connections to 3 underwater cables.

However, infrastructure deployment will only work if it is accompanied by complementary infrastructure for home and school connections (last mile). In an interview with GITGE, it was mentioned that at the time of the interview (August) only 4 schools and one university had been connected, out of a total of 150 planned institutions. In addition, training needs to be developed in schools, universities and the general population, which is particularly relevant in the context of COVID-19 in the country.

The speed of last mile deployment in the country has been slow. In interviews with Ministry officials, the expected deployment of connections was 5% of the total deployment. Although, during the pandemic the Telecommunications Infrastructure Manager (GITGE) (Infomarket 2020) increased the Internet capacity by 30% and the Ethernet capacity by 100% of the local telecom operators as long as the preventive measures of Covid-19 contagion last. Also, GITGE increased the connection speed to 100Mbps at Baney's research lab and Sampaka Hospital. In addition, the civil work that will allow the connection to the Sampaka Hospital by optical fiber to the entity has begun.

Despite the increase in Internet capacity, the lack of last mile connections and a digital culture in the country, - at least at the level of updated data of vulnerable population -, create difficulties to face the challenges created by mobility restrictions. There have been difficulties in providing education outside schools, in working at a distance - leading people to travel to their jobs and put themselves at

<sup>38</sup> Open Government Index, Open Data Barometer, or el Global Open Data Index.

<sup>39</sup> UN indicator that measures the use of ICT in the world's governments. The exact methodology is not public; however, the index has some of the following components: Foreign language support, navigability, speed of loading State portals, ease of finding state portals online, mobile accessibility, authentication of portals

risk of contracting the virus - and the absence of updated databases of the vulnerable population makes it difficult to deliver aid to the population. Also, the absence of online procedures forces people to travel to government entities to carry them out.

Despite the limitations, Equatorial Guinea and multilateral organizations have collaborated to develop digital innovations, with short- and medium-term initiatives to offset some of the challenges imposed by the pandemic. To safeguard access to education, the “School at Home” program was implemented, in which educational content for preschool and primary levels is broadcasted on television and National Radio for one hour. At the same time, there is content available on the open digital platform<sup>40</sup>. In the same way, the government recently launched the Coursera Equatorial Guinea initiative. With this initiative, the government wants to give 25,000 licenses, with which users could complete courses available on the digital learning platform between December and February<sup>41</sup>. Despite the limitations of access to the internet that the population has, it is an important effort that can strengthen the commitment to develop digital education. UNICEF also reported that, during the process of assigning social benefits to the population, a pilot was developed to digitize the records of the vulnerable population through an app. Finally, in the near future, the UNDP plans to develop an analysis of the country’s capacity to carry out money transfers digitally.

## Human Rights Gaps

Equatorial Guinea has faced governance problems for which it has taken important steps. These include the adoption of Decree 75/2018 on 18th April 2020 establishing the National Committee for the Coordination of Policies against Money Laundering and the Financing of Terrorism. The country has also ratified international treaties such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Social and Cultural Rights, the International Convention against Racial Discrimination, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment,

the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, including the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights for child trafficking, prostitution and pornography.

In addition, the country has opened its doors to representatives of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to prepare special reports on issues related to these treaties, which could mean there is a willingness by the country to provide independent analysis for human rights in its territory. Significant challenges are encountered in the reports created within this framework. Although a temporary amnesty against the death penalty was granted in 2014, it has not yet been abolished. In recent years, there have been allegations of political persecution, arbitrary detention and mistreatment of prisoners. In turn, there has been mention of government interference - direct or indirect - in radio and television. The media were regulated by Law 6/1997 on “the registration, operation and control of all means of social communication”. Moreover, defamation is a crime under the Criminal Code and not a civil offense.

During COVID-19, challenges emerged around the world. OHCHR has compiled a list of the 15 countries where the most serious human rights violations occurred during states of emergency. Although Equatorial Guinea is not among these countries, conflicts did occur during the year. The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) reports on events in which military and police used force, resulting in the abuse of civilians<sup>42</sup>. In general, but even more so in times of crisis, it is important to join efforts to maintain social cohesion and protect the rights of the population, both to preserve freedom of expression and to ensure proportionality in the measures to protect the population from contagion of the virus. Maintaining dialogue with the public and protecting people in vulnerable situations, such as health workers, are key measures that must be taken to ensure that no one is left behind, especially the most vulnerable populations.

40 <https://escuelaencasa.gq/>

41 <https://www.guineaecuatorialpress.com/noticia.php?id=16443>, <https://coursera-eg.com/>

42 ACLED. (2020). “Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) Codebook, 2020.” <https://acleddata.com/about-acledd/>. On July 9, 2020, a group of five military and police officers assaulted a doctor at the Coeri Comba Hospital in Malabo, as the doctor was attending to another emergency case and refused to give priority to the young man brought by the military to the hospital. Around June 9, 2020, it is reported that the military forces beat up a person in the city of Malabo, while enforcing the confinement. On or about June 10, 2020, it is also reported that five police officers violently beat a woman while enforcing confinement measures.

## Conclusions

COVID-19 poses a major challenge to social cohesion, in part because of the inequality present in the country and the difficulty in accessing vulnerable populations. The efforts made so far have not been sufficiently developed to address the crisis. The lack of a policy and program to support the vulnerable population, the pause of the household survey with the World Bank and the missing path for health, education and ICT infrastructure to reach the population are key factors that made the response to the pandemic difficult. However, despite pre-existing weaknesses, the country has taken several steps towards overcoming these barriers. The action of various actors has been coordinated to support the vulnerable. In response to COVID-19, the social guarantees program was developed, as well as distance education initiatives and pilot projects for the digitization of information on vulnerable families. The crisis reiterated that the development of last-mile infrastructure to close the digital gap plays a cross-cutting role for the functioning of the country. Not only in terms of education, but also in terms of distance work and mechanisms to support those who need it most. In general, these activities have been developed in coordination with multi-sector teams from the government, multilateral organizations, NGOs

and some members of the private sector, a relevant fact for developing the country's social cohesion. Community resilience to future crises will depend on the effective and transparent management of the resources available for these initiatives and on the capitalization of these efforts in the construction of solid social policies. In this context, community leaders play a decisive role, since the identification of vulnerable populations has depended largely on them. Here, multilateral agencies and NGOs have an added value to provide training in the identification of vulnerability, so that community leaders carry out best practices in the selection of vulnerable populations. Despite the difficulty of this crisis, willingness and mechanisms have been established among various entities to coordinate efforts to strengthen dialogue and support the community. These efforts are an important foundation for ensuring that the needs of the population are heard, for preserving and caring for their rights, and for joining forces to leave no one behind.

## Recommendations

To give continuity to the development of this important moment is recommended:

### Social Cohesion and Community Resilience

#### Short term recommendations

- ▶ Maintain dialogue with community presidents, raise their awareness, train them and establish mechanisms to improve their capacity to identify and guide vulnerable populations, through actions such as
  - Establishing and communicating vulnerability criteria to avoid the risk of subjectivity when classifying vulnerable populations, this can be done with the support of multilateral agencies and NGOs.
  - Designing active ways to seek out vulnerable populations within their jurisdictions, in order to include those who may be left behind.
  - Instructing community leaders on the criteria and ways to target vulnerable populations through workshops. It is important to keep in mind that vulnerability goes beyond the lack of material possessions, as it involves the ability of people to make use of material possessions. In this sense, a differential approach is required that allows to understand, for example, that people with disabilities or who suffer conditions that are subject to discrimination such as HIV, are vulnerable even if they have a lower level of monetary poverty than others.
  - Transmitting through community leaders information about the risks of COVID-19 and the importance of the respective care. This is to counteract rumors about the non-existence of the virus.

#### Mid-term recommendations

- ▶ The 2021 household survey with the World Bank will be a key tool for planning the targeting of social spending as it will provide information for the whole country. This is especially important given that the census of change in income conducted by INEGE is concentrated in the population of Malabo and Bata.
- ▶ In social policies, it is important to plan the impact evaluation methodologies that can be carried out from the beginning. This way, programs are designed from the start with the intention and mechanisms to be evaluated. In the long term, the ease and precision with which evaluations can be carried out will make it possible to understand the best ways to invest in social programs.
- ▶ There is a need to build on the progress made in social protection for emergency response during the pandemic in order to translate it into structural social protection and social cohesion programs.

- ▶ Strengthen efforts for frequent collection of administrative information on vulnerable populations. This begins by evaluating the progress of the pilot application (app) for recording information on the population in need commented on by UNICEF, and then proposing ways to update it.
  - ▶ Maintain open data on the progress of COVID-19 infections at the highest possible frequency and geographic disaggregation. Through this information the population can be kept informed and allow for research efforts to support analysis of the crisis. The updated information will provide a basis for community leaders to discuss with their communities the extent and severity of the virus. Understanding the extent of the virus is key to encouraging compliance with social distancing measures.
  - ▶ Continue to provide and encourage the use of hygiene kits as, over time, the population will be forced to mobilize more. In order to prioritize places, it is necessary to have geographically disaggregated information on infections. For the time being, it is important that the kits reach the areas with the highest population concentration, although one cannot forget the semi-urban and rural areas, where there is less access to hospital care. In contexts where it is difficult to provide benefits to the entire population, incentives in the form of discounts or bonuses to encourage purchases can be considered. This can be tested through pilots, starting by seeing the effectiveness of the vouchers that UNDP distributed with UNICEF.
  - ▶ Analyze the results of the evaluation of the effectiveness of the “school in my home” policy as well as plan a way to evaluate the effectiveness of the Coursera program in Equatorial Guinea. In addition to creating indicators on the adoption of these programs (use, duration of use, completion of courses), it is important to ask what were the barriers to entry into the program, both for the beneficiaries and for the segment of people who did not use the program. This is in order to improve them, since these are initiatives worth maintaining.
- ▶ The ICT sector in Equatorial Guinea should focus on:
    - Completing infrastructure deployment, especially last mile connections. Without them, the country’s digitalization efforts in education will leave a significant segment of the population behind.
    - Developing ICT skills for the entire population, with special emphasis on schools, universities and businesses.
    - Creating a new financing system where incentives are created to encourage investment from the private sector.
    - Ensuring that ICT regulation is clear and transparent, as this will allow the sector to be an engine for the flow of international capital and investment, which can boost competition and improve the supply of services for all citizens of Equatorial Guinea.
    - Gathering statistical data on the sector, in addition, a digitalization plan for the State that includes government and open data should be created.
  - ▶ Develop digital transfer systems and, in general, increasing the capacity of the private sector to carry out online transactions to facilitate their traceability and agility.
  - ▶ Maintain the dialogue and willingness to work together with NGOs and multilateral organizations, in order to better reach the vulnerable populations and work towards the constant improvement of human rights protection in the country.

## D. Macroeconomic response and multilateral collaboration

Without minimizing the impact of Covid-19 on Equatorial Guinea’s economy, it should be noted that the economy has been sick for a long time, stagnating because of its dependence on mineral resources and underinvestment in the social sectors and primary production, while an ambitious physical infrastructure program could not be sustained financially and has not contributed as much as expected to the recovery of other sectors of the economy, leaving banks and construction companies in difficult economic conditions. In fact, like most Central African economies, which are poorly diversified and characterized by little local value addition, Equatorial Guinea’s economy had from the outset little structural resilience to the crisis.

The most important repercussions from Covid-19 that are likely to occur in the medium term are the reduction of a fiscal space that had already been compressed due to the low price of oil in recent years and the interruption of supply chains, leading to an unprecedented increase in food prices, which already stands out in the current global context of stable food prices.

It is clear that rising food prices are hurting the poor most of all, and the limited capacity to undertake fiscal stimulus is limiting opportunities to strengthen social resilience. That said, while a large-scale stimulus is unfortunately not possible, the country’s debt situation is not one of the most unbalanced in the CEMAC region, and there is an opportunity to contribute to building a more resilient and diversified economy by reallocating budgetary resources to the needs of the most vulnerable and to productive

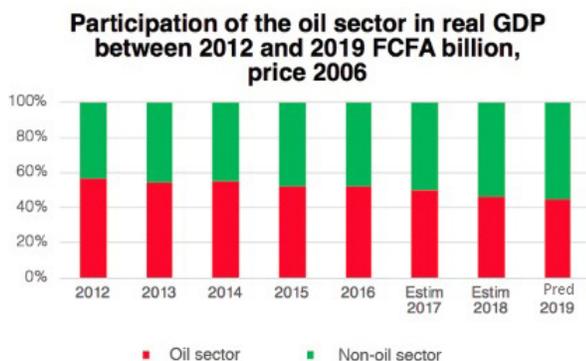
diversification. One of the main challenges is to create enough formal employment in the private sector to sustain inclusive endogenous growth, in a country where most employment is related to the oil and gas sectors, or to the public service. A clear improvement in the country's business climate is a sine qua non condition.

## Macroeconomic Impact Channels

### Immediate shock: decrease in demand and price of oil products

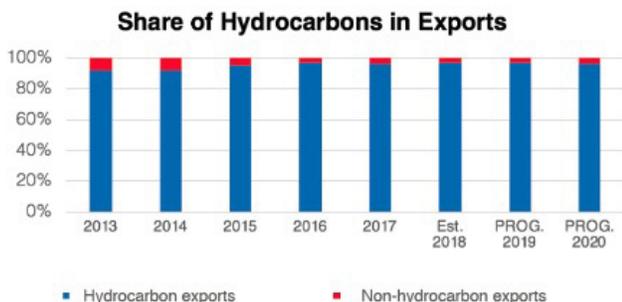
The main shock affecting Equatorial Guinea's economy during Covid-19 is undoubtedly the change in international demand for hydrocarbons, a major component of the country's GDP. In 2019, the oil sector's share of Equatoguinean GDP was 44% and although this rate has declined slightly in recent years, it has never been less than 40%.

Figure 4: Share of the oil sector in real GDP



The importance of the oil sector in the balance of payments and in the expenditure multiplier (public and private), especially for construction and services, remains essential and difficult to replace in the short and medium term. The overwhelming share of oil exports in total exports reached 97% in 2018 and does not seem to show a downward trend.

Figure 5: Share of hydrocarbons in exports



Source: ADE based on IMF data

It is not yet possible to determine the duration and magnitude of this impact. The different forecasts on the global economy as a result of the crisis are still very uncertain and depend at this time (October 2020) on the evolution of the health situation in North America and Europe, which is not positive. This makes it difficult to predict the evolution of oil demand in Equatorial Guinea, and consequently, the level and destination of exports. On the one hand, most exports (56%) went to Asia in 2019 - especially to China, where demand has fully recovered. India, currently in a severe recession, is also an important trading partner. On the other hand, the euro zone still accounts for 21% of exports, with Spain and Portugal, two of the most affected economies, being its most important customers.

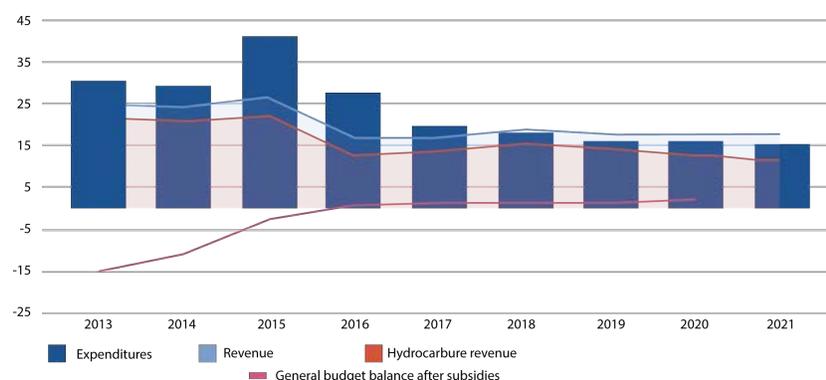
The "World Economic Outlook" (October 2020) sets the annual change in real GDP at -6.1% in 2019, and forecasts a fall of -6.0% in 2020, a gradual recovery of 2.2% in 2021 and a further collapse in 2022 (-2.2%). These are slightly more pessimistic forecasts than the base scenario formulated by INEGE at the beginning of 2020, which foresaw -5.8% in 2020 (oil GDP -7.2% and non-oil GDP -4.7%), while INEGE's more pessimistic scenario mentioned -8.9% in 2020 (oil GDP -12.5%). For its part, the first estimates of CEPA foresee a negative impact equivalent to a 7.5% fall in the country's GDP, or even greater, depending on the shape that the global economic recovery will take.

### Immediate shock: fall on state revenues (macro-fiscal analysis)

One of the immediate effects of the foreseeable drop in exports is a drop in government revenue. The share of hydrocarbons in revenues has never fallen below 75% (see IMF pre-Covid estimates for 2019, 2020 and 2021 in the figure below).

The effect of a drop in the price of the barrel on budget revenues, even with unchanged, and even slightly increasing, production, could be far-reaching and reinforce the trend of erosion in the state's spending capacity, which has so far fueled the economy. The study that was carried out in June 2020, with simple impact assessments and based exclusively on publicly available data (OPEC, IMF and BEAC), estimated that, for an average Brent price forecast in 2020 of \$38 per barrel (IEA assumptions, June 2020), the deficit for the State could be between 410 billion and 476 billion FCFA, or about -38 to -39% of budget revenues compared to 2019. The evolution of the Brent has been slightly better than this forecast, but the last IEA report (October 2020)

**Figure 6: Evolution of revenues, expenditures and overall budget balance (% of GDP)**



Source: ADE based on IMF data

notes that the ICE Brent cost less than \$42 per barrel at the end of September and does not see the long term curve reaching \$50 per barrel until 2023 at best.

Thus, in its most recent World Economic Outlook (October 2020), the IMF does not anticipate any improvement in Equatoguinean public finances, with forecasts of government net borrowing of -4% of GDP in 2020 and -2.2% in 2021, that is, a considerable deterioration in its financial capacity. Still, this would be a little less severe than the average for Sub-Saharan Africa, where IMF forecasts are -7.6% and -5.9% respectively.

### Secondary shocks: evolution in demand and supply chains

The consequences of Covid-19 on imports are not yet completely clear. It is certainly necessary to distinguish the different imported products. Foreign Direct Investment in extractive infrastructure is an important source of imported goods and services (30% to 35% of imports), which will be reduced in the short term because it is mostly linked to a stagnant oil industry. However, at least the essential maintenance of hydrocarbon extraction facilities should support a certain level of industrial activity.

In terms of consumer goods, Equatorial Guinea is one of the most import-dependent countries in the world, even for high-consumption products - according to the agricultural sector study, 70 to 80 percent of food demand is met by imports - for daily consumption products, the elasticity of imports to available income should be lower. Imports of these goods are not expected to decrease in the same proportion to income, but they should see an increase in prices, due to domestic containment measures and disruptions in international supply chains, and this is likely to have an impact on inflation.

The current data confirm this chain, because according to the IMF Consumer Price Index in (World Bank 2020a),

food price inflation shot up between April and June 2020 (+6.5% in April, +7.8% in May and +8.8% in June, according to the monthly data of INEGE), while the general index remained more moderate, although clearly up from the low levels of recent years (+2.4% in April, +3% in May and +3.7% in June).

This is worrying, because rising prices of basic foods increasingly threaten the poor, who tend to spend a greater percentage of their income on food. The latest reported data (EDSGE-I 2011) imply a moderate or severe malnutrition rate of 26.2% for children under 5 years old. Although economic growth in recent years may have improved the situation, the pandemic could create needs that have been hitherto overlooked by Equatorial Guinea and were not necessarily on the policy agenda.

### Shocks to financial flows

The current account balance is likely to deteriorate steadily over the next few years. In its October 2020 projections, the IMF expects it to reach -16.9% of GDP by 2025, the fourth worst performance in Sub-Saharan Africa. An important factor explaining this alarming performance in the long term is the large decrease in the trade surplus in goods, not compensated by the possible decrease in the deficit in the net primary and secondary income balances. On the latter point, it should be noted that foreign workers - generally nationals of other African countries - resident in Equatorial Guinea, whose presence had increased in previous years thanks to ambitious infrastructure works, before shrinking again with the dramatic halt in physical investment, are going to be a vulnerable category, having few job opportunities both in Guinea and in their country of origin.

The poor health of Equatoguinean banks, a result of the prolonged recession in recent years, is a major constraint to private sector and SME development and is likely to

worsen in a context of widespread capital outflow from emerging countries. Even before Covid-19, the high volatility of bank deposits was entrenched in Equatorial Guinea and was mainly the result of large and highly irregular payments made by the government to service providers; a factor that has long been stemming the supply of new credit to the private sector.

### **Covid-19 second round effects: impact on employment**

In general, the expected effects on employment at the global level refer to the reduction in the number of working hours as a result of the bankruptcy or recession of companies, which the International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates for the third quarter of 2020 at 12.1% globally, or 345 million full-time jobs. Although the Equatoguinean economy is dominated by petroleum products, the hydrocarbon sector offers few jobs, about 1% of the population of working age (ILO 2019). Most employees in the formal and informal sectors are in the service sector, particularly the public administration, and in agriculture, where more than half of production is estimated to be for subsistence. This distribution of employment means that variations in oil prices directly affect a very small part of employment.

However, given the importance of the hydrocarbon sector to the country's production and income, the indirect impact can be very significant. This is primarily for workers in the industrial and service sectors, where the drastic reduction in public investment already begun in recent years should lead to a considerable reduction in job opportunities. An impact is possible for agricultural jobs, dependent on fluctuations in input trade, which are directly influenced by oil prices, and on the prices of world agricultural products, also indirectly affected by the price of hydrocarbons.

In addition to the impact of oil prices, employment may be affected by the social distancing measures adopted in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. In the context of the prevalence of informal employment, quarantine and distancing measures should have, as in other emerging countries, a disproportionately high impact on the poorest segments of the population, even if concrete data are not available in Equatorial Guinea due to the lack of household surveys. The issue will be explored in more detail in a subsequent section.

### **Government macroeconomic measures and multilateral collaboration**

Prior to Covid-19, Equatorial Guinea had benefited from an IMF-supervised program (Staff Monitoring Program,

PMP) between January and July 2018 to make budget adjustments and structural reforms (governance, anti-corruption, and economic diversification). Although the program was delayed, its performance was considered satisfactory and in December 2019 the country secured an access to the Extended Fund Facility for 205 million Special Drawing Rights (approx. \$283 million) for a duration of three years. Once again, the program will focus on governance and anti-corruption reforms. Although indebtedness is still an issue, in comparative terms public debt has always remained below the CEMAC average, rising from 8.7% of GDP in 2014 to an average of 40.8% during the period 2014-2019, with a peak of 46% of GDP in 2019. On the other hand, most of the outstanding debt is linked to domestic arrears, not to foreign debt.

Within the framework of this program and in the post-covid context, the first measures to contain the expected budgetary slippage after the sharp drop in oil revenues become ever more relevant, including the regularization of the government's position to construction companies, and the postponement of non-essential expenditures, especially investment expenditures. In addition, to cover the balance of payments deficit, the country continues to repatriate the State's financial assets located abroad, which should become more challenging in a context of widespread capital outflows from emerging countries.

Although the IMF program is contractionary, given the need to address growing macroeconomic imbalances, the intent is to safeguard human capital expenditures, especially in health and education. Here, the ambitious program of infrastructure modernization of recent years has not always been supported by the necessary investment in service quality, "soft skills" and equal opportunities for all; especially the most vulnerable. To enable a response to the unforeseen expenses resulting from the response to Covid-19, which consist of interventions in the health system, a pilot program of social assistance, educational continuity measures and specific aid to the business system, which are estimated at 1.5 and 2% of the GDP, the IMF is preparing a second emergency program (Rapid Financing Instrument), which has not yet been completed by October 2020.

As there is an opportunity in every crisis, the presence of some shock absorbers is worth noting, which could create a margin of recovery in the macroeconomic situation. The difficulty in reducing certain maintenance costs in oil and gas infrastructure, and the fact that investments in the gas sector have apparently not been postponed, are rebalancing factors that, among other things, could save a certain number of jobs. So is the regularization of the Government's debt, which may give some breathing

space to several companies and their employees. On the other hand, the possibility of redirecting imports to non-European products could become a factor in stabilizing prices and even, over time, create additional incentives for local production, or at least for regional imports. This would undoubtedly be beneficial for the most vulnerable population, which is the one suffering most from the rapid increase in food prices in recent months.

The following table summarizes the preliminary recommendations for the government, distinguished where possible between short and medium-term recommendations.

## Macroeconomic Response and Multilateral Collaboration

### Short term recommendations

- ▶ Intensify socio-economic data collection in several areas where the lack of primary information limits the evidence base for studies, especially gender data and data on vulnerable populations.
- ▶ Intensify and accelerate reforms in public financial management and governance in order to improve the country's image abroad and the confidence of the domestic private sector.
- ▶ Reform the two existing tools for responsible and equitable management of oil revenues, so that they function as catalysts for additional funding, namely the sovereign wealth fund ("Fund for Future Generations") and the "Co-investment Fund".
- ▶ Continue to re-focus and optimize capital spending, redirecting it from mobility and administrative infrastructure to assets that directly improve the quality of front-line service delivery and human capital formation, capable of supporting more inclusive economic growth, poverty reduction, and improved social outcomes.
- ▶ Assess the feasibility of innovative debt management and relief approaches in dialogue with creditors.

### Mid-term recommendations

- ▶ Reactivate and diversify the credit to the economy, to leave the oil and gas enclave where the country has been confined so far and to form, with time, a more vibrant fabric of SMEs in other sectors of the economy:
  - Clear Swiftly complete the clearance of domestic arrears to improve bank liquidity and strengthen the financial sector.
  - To technically accompany assist the productive sectors in the development of financeable projects in areas other than hydrocarbons.
- ▶ Encourage the local production of agricultural and fishery goods in order to reduce the country's food dependency and its exposure to international price fluctuations of basic foods.
- ▶ Continue the measures initiated to improve the mobilization of domestic income, at the pace that the macroeconomic situation allows.
- ▶ Reflect on the development of value chains in the medium and long term, focusing on strategic sectors such as pharmaceutical manufacturing, which will strengthen the capacity of the health system.
- ▶ In parallel with the customs reform, establish a system of trade statistics, which does not exist in the country.
- ▶ Modulate the reform of the customs sector, without weakening its rigorosity, to facilitate the import of medical supplies, or critical products and essential goods, in order to strengthen emergency management and crisis response preparedness.
- ▶ Assess and exploit the opportunities offered by regional or continental trading zones for joint procurement of essential drugs and medical supplies, as well as to enable future local pharmaceutical production, given the scale generated by a single market.

## E. Economic response and recovery: protecting jobs, SMEs and workers in the informal sector

As has been discussed in several academic and non-academic articles, the pandemic will have a strong and negative impact on poverty globally, and even more so in developing countries. In this context, it is important to emphasize the lack of data on country poverty that was addressed in the section on leaving no one behind. This section seeks to identify the factors of this likely impoverishment in Equatorial Guinea and the measurements that might be needed to mitigate it, taking into account a context that is particularly scarce in dependable empirical data.

The key factor for poverty reduction in the country is undoubtedly the increase in employment opportunities in the non-oil sectors that have been most dynamic in recent years, such as retail, hotel and restaurant services, and transportation, in the light of the inability of other sectors to take over in the short and medium term. This said, the country would have comparative advantages in some of the sectors neglected so far, especially in fishing, forestry, and agriculture. The oil and gas enclave in Equatorial Guinea's economy does not generate many jobs, as is often the case in most producing countries, and its foreseeable stagnation in the coming years is destined to further reduce its multiplier effect in sectors such as construction, which are already heavily affected by the decline in public orders. The foreseeable changes in the labor market will affect young people, women and the low-skilled even more.

### The overall impact on employment

According to the UNDP Human Development Report 2019 (UNDP 2019), Equatorial Guinea ranks in the bottom third of countries in the world in all four quality life indicators, which are the proportion of employed people in vulnerable employment, the proportion of the rural population with access to electricity, the proportion of the population using improved drinking water sources, and the proportion of the population using improved sanitation facilities. It is already obvious that the country is lagging behind in the implementation of the decent work agenda, although more precise data from the field is not available. Despite the inconsistencies in the poverty data, what is almost certain is that lack of employment is the main reason for poverty, as already suggested by the responses to the 2006 survey (ANGE 2007) (65% of the

interviewees indicated this factor as the primary cause of poverty). This linkage between lack of employment and poverty could only be reinforced with Covid-19, although the available data does not allow us to show it.

Excluding the oil sector, the sectors that contributed most to Equatoguinean GDP in the last decade (2012-2019) include the construction sector, public administration and trade. The construction sector's share of GDP has dwindled from 14% to 3% of GDP, in favor of services, especially commerce, restaurants and hotels, from 6% to 13% of GDP, and transportation and telecommunications, from 3% to 7% of GDP.

However, a rapid simulation carried out by the ILO in a structurally similar but much more complex economy, Gabon (ILO 2020), clearly shows the importance of import, wholesale and retail channels, and the transport and marketing chain outside national borders for the generation of modern and especially informal employment: for example, in the import of second-hand equipment or clothing, in the import of fresh fish, in the marketing of imported products, in the electricity, construction and repair sectors, etc. This simulation predicts a loss of employment equal to 5.4% of those who had a job before Covid-19 in an optimistic scenario, and 9.1% in a pessimistic scenario.

There are very few data on employment in Equatorial Guinea, and the data available are generally estimates from the ILO, not from national surveys. According to the 2015 census, which was published in 2018, about 40 percent of the population was not formally working and about 16 percent was unemployed, with peaks of 23.5 percent among young people aged 20-24.

Although the country's economy is dominated by oil products, as in Gabon, the hydrocarbon sector offers few jobs. In fact, the ILO estimates that only 1% of the Equatoguinean population of working age is employed in the oil and gas industry (ILO 2019). One reason is the very nature of extractive activities, the other is that many companies in the sector demand skilled labor, while the labor supply in Equatorial Guinea has the characteristics of a low-skills subsistence economy, which means that companies generally have to resort to foreign personnel.

The low number of jobs generated by the main activity sector in terms of income also explains why the sectoral distribution of economic activity - by contribution to GDP - is very different from the sectoral distribution of employment. The majority of assets are in the agricultural sector (42%), where more than half of production is for subsistence. There is a small sector of cash crops, estimated at no more than 20,000 hectares, but with

low labor intensity and declining productivity, which may have been affected by foreign trade restrictions due to containment measures. The tertiary sector employs a growing proportion of workers, to the detriment of the secondary sector, whose share of employment gradually declines over time.

Changes in oil prices will directly affect a very small part of employment. However, given the importance of the hydrocarbon sector to the country's revenues, and the level of public spending that has so far fueled the non-oil economy, the indirect impact of depressed oil prices in the coming years may be very significant. In fact, many of the sectors that grew most in their contribution to GDP, and which are at the same time generators of employment, such as hotel and restaurant services and transportation, are rely on a sufficient level of activity in hydrocarbons, which has fallen and could fall even further as a result of the pandemic. In turn, the good health of the retail sector depends on the population having sufficient disposable income, which in light of the low economic diversification depends in no small measure on the number of formal jobs in the hydrocarbon industry.

The distributional effects could be even more alarming. ILO estimates show that labor income is particularly unequally distributed in the country, with the top decile of distribution accounting for more than 46% of total labor income, while the poorest half of workers receive less than 14% of total labor income. Furthermore, according to ILOSTAT estimates, almost 10% of the population that claims to have a job lives on less than \$1.9 PPP per day. Therefore, income losses, even if minimal, can lead a large proportion of households into poverty, or even extreme poverty.

Little is known about gender inequalities, but it is commonly believed that most women are active in the primary and informal sectors. According to the 2011 EDSGE-I survey, 46% of women had "access to employment". As the informal sector was greatly affected by health restrictions, it is to be expected that the impact of these measures has been particularly serious for women.

## The impact on credit to the private sector

The contraction in disposable income will not reverse the adverse trend in credit to the private sector, which resumed its long-term decline in early 2019 and remains sluggish. The long-standing bottlenecks of the Equatoguinean banking sector have not been addressed, particularly the limited information on the credit history of potential borrowers and the high collateral requirements,

which are important limiting factors for financial development. Traditionally, an important part of this credit was consumer credit, thus import credit and credit for safer borrowers, such as public sector employees, and it did not always benefit the local economy, let alone vulnerable populations. However, Non-Performing Loans increased until the first half of 2019, most of which came from large loans to construction companies, often foreign ones, that had contracts with the government. When the government had to delay payments due to lack of revenue, companies were unable to repay the credit.

Although the issue of the government's internal debt should be addressed in the IMF's ongoing program through a securitization operation of the arrears, this will not by itself resolve the lack of access to credit for SMEs, especially those led by women and youth, and even less the poor financial inclusion of the most vulnerable sections of the population. Available data on financial inclusion do not exist either in international compilations, such as the Findex database, or in Equatorial Guinea, given the lack of household surveys, but the common view is that the country is lagging far behind even its neighbors in the CEMAC region.

As a first step, the government wants to boost the diversification of the banking sector by supporting, among other things, micro-finance companies, which have not been very present in the country's financial landscape compared to the partners in the region. An amount of financial innovation that has not been seen so far will be necessary to address the general lack of financial inclusion of the population, including the implementation of e-money and, potentially, of the financial technology sector (fintech).

As seen in the section on 'Social Cohesion', Equatorial Guinea is far below the preliminary conditions for this leap to be possible. The percentage of people using the internet on laptops or desktop computers has actually shrunk in Equatorial Guinea, while the other countries in the region have high and positive growth rates. When comparing mobile to fixed connections, it becomes evident that there is a gap in the deployment of last mile connections in the country. Equatorial Guinea has focused on infrastructure deployment, which has effectively connected the country's large population centers. However, without last mile deployment and without a massive campaign of skills and online services offered by the Government, it is not possible to massively access and use ICTs, let alone transform the forms of payment and credit of the population and companies, or to attract international investors -including regional ones- to the sector. The digitalization of companies in a

country like Equatorial Guinea, and the gradual creation of a digital business ecosystem, is key to increasing the use of Information and Communication Technologies and making these technologies serve the poor.

## Income in the primary sector

The primary sector was one of the pillars of the Equatoguinean economy before the appearance of the oil sector. It was based on the exploitation of wood and the production of cocoa and coffee. Although according to the ILO estimates presented above most of the working population depends on the primary sector, growing urbanization - with 72-76% of the population residing in urban areas, compared to 50% in 2000 - and labor shortages have significantly reduced output and productivity in the sector, which has particularly suffered from the transformation of the economy.

Today, agriculture and fisheries together represent only a tiny proportion of GDP, about 2.5%, compared to 32% in 1992. Cocoa production has been all but wiped out, from almost 6,000 tons in 1992 to about 690 tons in 2016-2017. With the partial exception of Bioko, farms are small, averaging 0.7ha in 2011, often itinerant (slash and burn), and yields in 2011 were three times lower than in 1968. On the other hand, fishing - 0.2% of GDP between 2014 and 2018 - is still carried out with artisanal methods, in a family and self-consumption model, and industrial fishing represents only 7% of current production. However, both sectors have significant job creation potential: the AfDB mentions in its latest economic outlook (2020) a potential of 850,000 hectares, compared to the 20,000 hectares currently cultivated, as well as the large extension of the maritime territory that would make a modern fishing and aquaculture sector a serious candidate for diversification.

In short, the exploitation of the forests continued, but with a very low rate of transformation. According to the AfDB, although Equatorial Guinea is the country with the highest deforestation rate in Central Africa, estimated at 1.2% per year in 2017, it also shows one of the lowest rates of forest product processing. Although the value added is low, timber exports account for about 6% of goods exports, according to our estimates. At the time of writing, the international timber market, far from suffering from the Covid-19, seems to be picking up, given the almost complete recovery of the Chinese economy and the fact that, even in Western countries in recession, the demand for single-family homes is stronger since the health crisis, which mechanically tends to increase the demand for building materials. What this dynamic implies

for Equatorial Guinea is difficult to predict, given the complete absence of trade statistics.

The implications of major changes in the primary sector for the country's food prices and security have been explored in another section. Several factors are likely to affect the future of the sector (difficulties in accessing local inputs and markets; restrictions on fishing activities; difficulties in accessing forest sites and limited international transport capacity). Border closures and logistical restrictions on international mobility and transport must have limited both the arrival of food products and the import of production inputs. Due to the lack of inputs, it is very likely that production has been further reduced and the income of producers in Equatorial Guinea has fallen, resulting in an increase in their vulnerability and, concomitantly, in their poverty levels. As there are no recent or quality data, it is difficult to provide more than a very general estimate of the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on the agricultural sector.

From the perspective of paying attention to the most vulnerable, it could perhaps be hoped that the crisis will, somewhat paradoxically, have a positive long-term effect, freeing up urban labor for the development of the primary sector. In fact, the expected, and potentially long-lasting, contraction of the most dynamic components of non-oil GDP (trade, services, hospitality) most likely affects the employment of many informal workers in urban areas, who may be tempted to return to their hometowns. This is an effect that has been observed several times after an epidemic, starting with the 14th century plague in Europe, and which was observed during Covid-19 in countries as different as Kenya and Madagascar.

This dynamic could well be used to alleviate pressure on urban centers, diversify the economy and employment, and restore some degree of food sovereignty to the country. This requires well-targeted policies that strive to increase productivity and value added in the primary sector in its various dimensions and to train the agricultural population in a more commercial and entrepreneurial logic. At present, despite the fact that family farmers sell their surpluses, there is very little individual or collective capacity for primary processing, packaging, or other activities that add value to farm products. There are only isolated cases of fermented cane juice production, artisanal extraction of palm oil and coconut, as well as the preparation of palm wine, papaya and pineapple jam, or cassava flour. In addition, there is very little conservation capacity and post-harvest losses are significant. The FAO, the government's main development partner in the agricultural sector, has financed pilot projects for the professionalization of women active in the primary sector, the development of non-timber forest products, and more

recently urban and peri-urban horticulture (“Strengthening urban food security in Central Africa through increased availability of locally produced food”, financed by the Africa Solidarity Trust Fund, ASTF). Almost everything has to be done from scratch in the sector, but the pedological, rainfall and socio-economic potential is unquestionable.

## Income from commercial, hotel and restaurant services

It should be noted, despite the scarcity of reliable granular data, that commercial, hotel and restaurant services, as seen in E.1, were increasingly contributing in recent years to the aggregate demand, especially in Malabo and Bata, where a middle class of public officials, national or expatriate employees of the oil sector and ancillary services, business travelers, is resident. In addition, medium-scale international conferences and conventions have taken place in Malabo, such as the African Union Summit in 2011, the African Cup of Nations in 2012 and 2015, and the Forum for Latin American-African Cooperation in 2013, which aimed to boost Equatorial Guinea’s potential as a destination for meetings, conventions and exhibitions.

As far as hospitality is concerned, the most recent partial data is from 2018 and indicates that of the approximately 130 hotels in the country, of very different categories, 40 were located in Malabo. In the continental region in general, combining other regions such as Bata, Mongomo, Ebibeyin, Niefang and Mbini, there are about 90 hotels, for a total number of rooms in the country of approximately 3,000, including all categories. Of all these hotels, one of the three owned by the French group Accor is the most luxurious hotel in the country, along with three more, with different management, in Malabo, Oyala and Bata. There are no current statistics on full-service restaurants in Equatorial Guinea, but it is estimated that there are more than 50 such establishments in Malabo and 20 in Bata. All this, of course, without counting the myriad dining rooms and lodgings for the general population, which flourish in the large urban centers, as in other African countries.

Following the national state of emergency declared on March 13, 2020, which ordered the closure of land borders, a 14-day quarantine for any foreign visitors and the suspension of international commercial flights, lodging services, bars and restaurants were forced to close their doors on March 23, 2020, leaving many workers unemployed.

The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC 2020) scenarios predict that 7.6 million tourism sector jobs will be lost in the African continent under the immediate

effect of the pandemic and its long-term implications, with global business practices shifting to a focus on virtual and distance working, and a dramatic reduction in the number of international conferences. The contribution of the hospitality sectors to Africa’s GDP is projected to fall by \$53 billion.

For a newly emerging business tourism destination like Equatorial Guinea, the impact is significant. The country has cancelled all conferences or business events scheduled until mid 2021. Furthermore, although very specific data is lacking, the vast majority of workers in the hospitality sector, as is the case in other African countries, are part of the informal economy, leaving them vulnerable to the negative effects of this crisis, especially in the absence of basic social protection coverage. In fact, according to data from the National Institute of Social Security (INSESO), only about 5% of social security affiliates were self-employed and volunteers, while most of the members are public sector or oil company employees.

Worse, the majority of workers in the country’s tourism sector are women and young people, both in formal tourism and in local micro-businesses in the lodging and restaurant sector - with a greater presence in the latter. Many of these will not have the capital to survive the closures and foreseeable drop in customers. As for employees who continue to work, they will not have the option of working remotely, and therefore are at greater risk of infection. Consequently, a priority issue will arise as incumbent workers face the unprecedented realities of a new industry, which requires a different approach to service, resilience and training in both customer-facing functions and internal operations. In the hospitality and tourism sector, the COVID-19 pandemic and the countries’ ability to cope with its effects demonstrate the importance of labor regulations and social protection and assistance systems, especially in the implementation of sickness benefit and special leave provisions.

## Short-term government measures

Decree 43/2020 provides support measures for households that have suffered a loss of income, including the creation of the Basic Social Guarantees Program - designed with the support of UNICEF - for over five billion CFA francs (approximately US\$8.5 million). The objective of this program is to provide food and hygiene kits to about 33,000 vulnerable households, with secondary components of psychosocial assistance and a mapping of access to drinking water in the various regions of

the country. The implementation of “cash transfer” type programs is complicated by the low level of digitalization, which means that citizens must go to official agencies to receive the aid.

In addition, the same decree devises a support plan for SMEs in the non-oil sector, which includes a postponement and reduction of corporate tax, and a partial guarantee fund (1 billion CFA francs) for SMEs that are affected by the declaration of the State of National Health Alarm in decree 43/2020. A tax reduction and discounts on energy and telecommunications bills is dedicated especially to companies and establishments in the hotel and restaurant sector that were forced to close, as per Ministerial Order 2/2020. A discount on social security contributions may benefit companies that recruit new employees. Employment protection measures have also been adopted in the hydrocarbons sector, including service companies that depend on this sector, as well as measures aimed at the stability of the sector, for example, through the extension of operating licenses. In this regard, 1,000,000 francs were lent, per company, to 25 small and medium-sized enterprises, in order to support their activities after the crisis they are experiencing. It is worth mentioning that a ministerial order 1/2020 regulated the prices of essential items.

**Business environment**

The business environment is perhaps the most important challenge for the development of the non-oil private

sector. In the 2019 Doing Business Index, Equatorial Guinea ranked 178th out of 190 economies, and indicators of business start-up, tax payments, and cross-border trade were particularly disappointing. In the former, and in several other indicators, with the notable exceptions of electricity availability and contract compliance, Equatorial Guinea ranked last in CEMAC. Although ad hoc reforms have been carried out in recent years, the issue does not appear to be addressed in an integrated manner.

**Vocational training**

The importance of vulnerable employment in Equatorial Guinea is further increased by the embryonic technical and vocational training system, disconnected from the strategic prospects of economic diversification and apparently lacking inclusivity. In fact, most of the vocational training centers in the country are private (40 out of 45), thus less accessible to the population at the base of the pyramid. The latest official data from the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training shows that 96% of the total number of students, or 6,844, are concentrated in the districts of Bata and Malabo, which is also where most of the educational centers at this level are located, and 97.4% of the students are in urban centers. This leaves a large part of the territory without access to the knowledge needed to modernize the primary sector of the economy.

**Economic Response and Recovery: Protecting Jobs, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises and Informal Sector Workers**

<p><b>Short term recommendations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Proceed with an evaluation of the pilot program of basic social guarantees, the first social protection program in the history of the country, with a view to continuing and enhancing it in the near future in a perspective of return to employment and broad-based economic recovery.</li> <li>▶ Based on the evaluation of the pilot program of basic social guarantees, propose a durable and scalable framework of social protection and assistance policies for the most vulnerable populations, in a perspective of return to employment and broad-based economic recovery.</li> <li>▶ Accelerate the collection of data on jobs and disposable income, and food security, in the framework of household surveys, or rapid and gender-sensitive diagnostics of the labor market and business environment.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Mid-term recommendations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Strengthen and modernize policies aimed at increasing productivity and value added in the primary sector in its different dimensions, in order to alleviate pressure on urban centers, diversify the economy and employment, and restore a certain degree of food sovereignty in the country.</li> <li>▶ Leverage environment-based solutions for development, including SMEs, by developing a strategy for access to vertical funds such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Green Climate Fund (GCF), and the Adaptation Fund, which could foster job creation in rural or peri-urban areas.</li> </ul>
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- ▶ Assess the timeliness and feasibility of employment-intensive investment programs to preserve the livelihoods of vulnerable workers beyond the emergency period, while building valuable skills and competencies in the workforce.
  - ▶ Study international and regional best practices to implement and improve digital payment and money transfer solutions in partnership with selected telephone operators, with a view to increasing people's access to basic public services, including financial services for sending and receiving wages and remittances, grants and bridge loans to micro and small businesses, and other digital payments for individuals and households.
  - ▶ In particular, prioritize digitalization policies in the country, especially last mile connections, with the objective, among many others, of opening up new possibilities for SMEs for teleworking and the development of the service sector.
  - ▶ Focus temporary tax incentives, or interest rate subsidies that the budgetary situation would allow for, on companies that recruit or keep local people in employment, or that provide apprenticeships and training.
  - ▶ Assess the feasibility of technical support measures for SMEs, especially women-owned companies, including training in specific safety and occupational health measures, business continuity planning, business support, and integration of their solutions into procurement chains in other sectors of the economy, such as the oil and gas industry.
  - ▶ Simplify and reform visa procedures urgently, ideally with the introduction of the online visa, in order to try to curb in the short or medium term the foreseeable fall in business tourism following COVID-19 and the stagnation of the oil sector.
- ▶ Adapt the current system of technical and vocational training to the needs of economic diversification, with an emphasis on increasing the productivity of the primary sector, ensuring the representation of the private sector in the design of the new system.
  - ▶ In a post-COVID-19 scenario where people will travel again and show interest in going to unexplored places, avoiding mass tourism destinations, carry out studies throughout the national territory for the promotion of ecotourism and cultural tourism, emphasizing Equatorial Guinea's considerable natural capital, in order to open new employment opportunities in areas outside urban centers and for populations that are particularly disadvantaged in their access to public services.

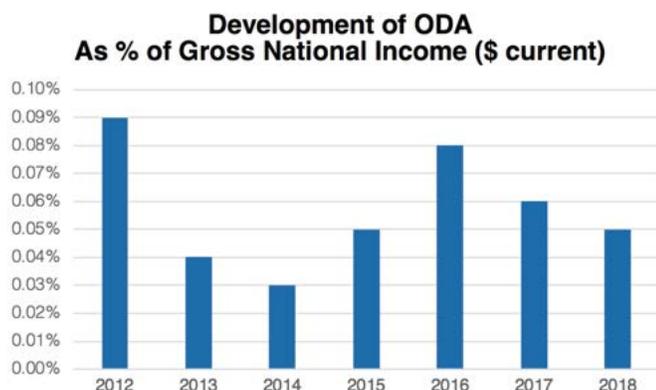
# V.

## Resource Mobilization and Partnerships



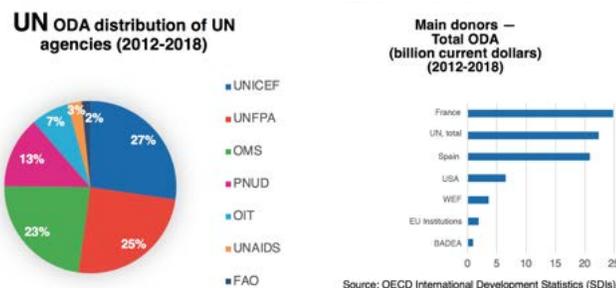
Equatorial Guinea has not received much help during the Covid-19 crisis. Due to its income level, political stability and negative perception of its institutions, Equatorial Guinea has traditionally been very little reliant on foreign aid flows, which have represented an annual average of 0.06% of GDP in the period 2012-2018 and have stabilized at around USD 10 million per year since 2013. France and Spain have been the two largest bilateral donors, accounting for 54 percent of total official development assistance (ODA) during the period 2012-2018 (see figure below). Traditional European partners are struggling with an unprecedented crisis, and their financial contribution will pursue its downward trend. The United Nations provided 26% of total ODA during the same period. UNICEF, UNFPA and WHO have contributed 75% of the aid provided by UN agencies, which in turn receive funding from the Equatoguinean Government to implement programs on its behalf. The sectors that received aid were social infrastructure and services (55% of ODA), mainly in the education and health sectors.

Figure 7: Evolution of Official Development Assistance



Source: OECD International Development Statistics (SDIs)

Figure 8: Main ODA donors by country and UN agencies



Source: OECD International Development Statistics (SDIs)

On foreign credit, between 2012 and 2014, the International Finance Corporation (IFC) was a provider of important financing in the oil sector, but these investments have been closed and the organization has disassociated itself from fossil fuels. Before the Covid-19 crisis, the only really significant source of new loans for Equatorial Guinea was a line of credit guaranteed by the Export-Import Bank of China (Eximbank).

According to the economic projections of the IMF, which, as required by its statutes, carried out a debt sustainability analysis, the debt was to increase to 47% of GDP during 2020 and to begin to fall in 2021, among other things due to the operation of securitization of arrears. In reality, as it is almost certain that the government's budget deficit will be larger than expected due to declining oil revenues and unplanned expenditures, the need for financing could and would increase the debt. However, Equatorial Guinea's risk of over-indebtedness seems quite distant, even in the event of a worsening of the pandemic. That said, a Covid-19 effect on exchange rates could increase the debt service, due to the weight of non-resident and foreign currency debt (lower IMF warning threshold).

Before Covid-19, the multilateral financing foreseen by the IMF in its Extended Fund Facility (EFF) program was \$631 million from 2019 to 2022, of which approximately \$284 million was to be secured by the IMF, and the rest by the African Development Bank, refinancing of short-term debt with local banks, and to a small extent funding of other financial institutions such as BADEA. Equatorial Guinea was expected to continue using a credit line financing guaranteed by Eximbank China but not to borrow any further under this line. The IMF is prepared to provide additional support under its Rapid Financing Facility (RFI), but the government - which had a readjustment in the summer - has so far not met the preconditions for accessing the latter instrument. In the meantime, the AfDB has not disbursed any funding either. The IMF expects the RFI file to be finalized in October-November, which would allow discussions to be opened on a recalibration of the SAF program.

A priori, given its level of income, Equatorial Guinea is not a beneficiary of the two measures adopted by the IMF in the framework of the pandemic (the Disaster Containment and Relief Trust and debt service relief until October 2020, and the "Macron initiative" of the G20 governments for the suspension of payments until the end of 2020).

The current liquidity of the country is not an issue that can be elucidated with the tools of this report. Since 2016, Equatoguinean reserves have been below one month of imports, which did not represent an immediate

danger in financing the balance of payments deficit, due to the surplus trade balance and the flow of financial investments. Before Covid-19, the IMF expected a gradual increase in reserve assets, thanks to budget consolidation, support from creditors (IMF, and AfDB), and the return of government deposits held abroad and “drawable”, i.e., not tied to guaranteed debt securities. The measures in Decree 43 of March 31, 2020 does in fact prioritize the return of assets held abroad, but this is unlikely to improve the consistency of reserves, as a result of the notable fall in exports and the lower elasticity of imports. Moreover, if one of the first measures envisaged by the IMF program was the communication of oil and gas contracts to the BEAC, there are still doubts as to the government’s ability to ensure adequate compliance with exchange rate rules by public agencies and private operators, in particular the lodging of export operations with a resident bank.

## Way forward for post-Covid financial perspectives

While the shortfall in incomes is almost a certainty in Equatorial Guinea, this does not mean that the solution lies only, or even mainly, in new financing. Rather, the priority is the continuation of reforms to improve public financial management, an increased effort to mobilize tax and customs revenues, and a rather drastic strengthening of the technical capacity and professionalism of the public administration. The current programs of the various partners, and in particular that of the IMF, rightly favor the governance dimension, where UN agencies should exploit their complementarity with development financial institutions and their added value in rights-based approaches. Measures under implementation include:

- strengthening the framework for fighting corruption, addressing conflicts of interest, implementing a robust asset disclosure regime for senior officials, and strengthening law enforcement and international cooperation;
- the promotion of transparency in the hydrocarbons sector, in particular with the recent membership in the EITI, the conduct and publication of audits of public hydrocarbon companies and the publication of periodic reports on sector data; and
- improving the framework for combating money laundering, in particular by reporting suspicious activities linked to politically exposed persons and by improving corporate transparency through the availability of information on the actual ownership of companies.

In terms of mobilizing domestic revenues, the main lines of action were described in an IMF study on the continuity and recovery of revenue services and will not be repeated here. The country is working with the IMF and AFRITAC to review the organizational structure of the Directorate General of Taxes and Contributions, the mapping of risks related to compliance with tax regulations and the measures to be taken for their management, the simplification of the deposit of returns and payments, the reliable census of taxpayers and a concentration of efforts to monitor large taxpayers, the hydrocarbon sector and the sectors that increased their activities in the emergency phase of the pandemic, the standardization of inspection procedures, the improvement of VAT refund records and the strengthening of more coercive collection procedures for taxpayers who are reluctant to pay their tax debts, together with a better communication to taxpayers. An inflection in the time frame for compliance with tax regulations has been necessary to give SMEs a break in the acute phase of the closure, and other selective measures may be necessary in case of prolonged economic urgency, but the tax reform priorities have not changed much, overall, despite Covid-19.

Although the emphasis is on adjustments on the expenditure side and improved revenue collection, a greater inflow of external funds remains desirable to avoid a lasting deterioration in macroeconomic balances. A UNDP study has already examined a few possibilities in terms of grants, particularly in the area of climate finance (Green Climate Fund) and a greater opening of the country to international civil society (NGO) initiatives, the latter depending, however, on a clear strengthening and reorientation of governance in the country. However, the expected volume of these grants is likely to remain limited.

Private financing seems a more promising option. In fact, in June, the government of Equatorial Guinea launched the year of investment 2020, which seeks to attract \$1 billion in Foreign Direct Investment. However, in order to get out of the oil and gas enclave where they have been confined so far, international investors are calling for an improved business environment, a parallel mobilization of national domestic savings and a more innovative and original attitude on the part of the banks, without which development finance institutions, such as the International Finance Corporation, once active in the country, or their European and bilateral counterparts (EBRD, DEG, Proparco, Norfund, CDC etc.) would not be able to invest. An overall improvement in the business environment, where – as seen in the previous section – Equatorial Guinea shows a particularly dismal performance, is essential to open up lasting prospects for private financing.

Although the development of credit to the economy has been positive over the last decade, even after the crisis in the construction sector, it seems to have boxed itself into the financing of private consumption of borrowers deemed to be without risk, such as public employees. Credit has therefore not benefited either the most vulnerable populations or business innovation outside the oil sector. The IMF program provides for the clearance of arrears to suppliers through the issuance of government bonds, with significant amortization of these obligations over the period of the agreement. If this component is successful, national financial institutions could indeed be in a position to reactivate credit to private investment excluding hydrocarbons, and even work hand in hand with development financial institutions, but only if bankable programs and projects have been designed by them, in accordance with the country's general development guidelines and with special attention to the sectors most likely to generate employment for vulnerable populations, such as agriculture and agro-industry, fisheries, retail, perhaps ICTs and tourism.

Nor should we forget the catalytic role that could be played by the tools that were devised for the responsible and equitable management of oil revenues in Equatorial Guinea, the "Fund for Future Generations" and the "Co-Investment Fund". The "Fund for Future Generations" is Equatorial Guinea's sovereign wealth fund, created in 2002 and

estimated to be worth \$80 million. In February 2014, after the first national symposium on economic diversification, the government of Equatorial Guinea created the Co-Investment Fund (FCI), apparently financed by a sum of \$1 billion, whose objective is to invest in profitable projects that reduce economic dependence on hydrocarbon revenues. As a previous UNDP study underlined, "these are totally opaque instruments in terms of capitalization, management and strategic objectives", which should be reformulated in accordance with international best practices in the field.

Finally, from the Leave No One Behind perspective, the acceleration of business creation also hinges with a greater financial inclusion of the most disadvantaged populations, if necessary, through better dissemination of digital money and FinTech innovations that have had pilots in Africa. Due to the fact that there is no Findex data in Equatorial Guinea, and therefore no very reliable conclusions can be drawn, one can assume that the country is most likely behind the others in CEMAC in terms of dissemination of mobile accounts. There is no lack of good practices in Central and especially West African countries to pilot a sustainable business model for telecommunication companies that would be interested, if the last mile deployment of infrastructure is completed and an ambitious training program for the population and companies is launched.

### Short term recommendations

- ▶ Continue the ongoing tax and customs reform, with a view to filling the gaps identified, particularly with regard to the tax base of major taxpayers and import and export transactions.
- ▶ Strengthen the framework for combating corruption, addressing conflicts of interest, implementing a robust asset declaration regime for senior officials, and strengthening law enforcement and international cooperation.
- ▶ Open the country to civil society initiatives, including international NGOs, and encourage the growth of an ecosystem of local NGOs active in the social and economic fields for the most vulnerable populations.
- ▶ Strengthen the collection and dissemination of socioeconomic data, to create the necessary transparency for development partners or development financial institutions to make resource allocation decisions aligned with the priorities of the population, and especially those that could be left behind.
- ▶ Improve the business climate, in particular by promoting transparency of companies through the availability of information on their effective ownership and by actively pursuing the implementation of the EITI process for the oil industry.
- ▶ Rapidly finalize the process of settling arrears to suppliers through the issuance of government bonds and monitor the evolution of company debts to national banks, the clearance of which would allow these to resume and diversify credit to the private sector.

### Mid-term recommendations

- ▶ Diversify the search for partners in social and economic development, with a particular focus on vertical financing, especially for climate change mitigation and adaptation projects.
- ▶ Begin a dialogue with development finance institutions (DFI), with a view to obtaining their assistance in the design of specifically bankable projects in the most promising sectors of the country's non-oil economy, and preventing the expected consolidation of commercial banks from leading to a recovery in consumer credit only, instead of focusing on investment in job-creating projects.
- ▶ Fully review the governance of the "Fund for Future Generations" and the "Co-Investment Fund" and provide them with strategic objectives and a modus operandi in line with international best practices of sovereign wealth funds.
- ▶ Study and discuss international and regional best practices in terms of financial inclusion of the most vulnerable, particularly digital financial services, in order to facilitate and accelerate the creation of micro-enterprises, SMEs and jobs for the most vulnerable segments of the population.

# VI.

## Discussion of strategic recommendations



On a global scale, the Covid-19 pandemic has dramatically exposed the deficiencies of the underlying model underlying for the functioning of our the world's socio-economic systems. Further, in many countries, the mistrust of citizens in the future and in themselves is palpable, with specific patent risks of social, cultural and human rights reversals. Post-Covid, a new social contract will be needed, with very much reduced inequalities and a strengthening of resistance to shocks. The new social contract that must emerge from this crisis will have to rebalance absorb the deep inequalities disparities that prevail in societies. This requires systemic changes not only in policy frameworks, but also in social behaviors that encourage a rebalancing of priorities.

In Equatorial Guinea, investments need to be channelled towards sustainable human development. Equatorial Guinea's economic success in the early years of the 2010-2019 last decade coincided with a rapid increase in average incomes and was not entirely without benefits for advancing some ODSsSDGs. Yet it appears to have contributed to fueled high levels of economic and social disparity, while the country's focus was on infrastructure modernization, which was not achieved despite failed to deliver the expected effect outcome of launching jumpstarting economic diversification and easing pressure on major urban centers. Social protection and investment in people, especially those left behind, must now be at the top of the agenda. Widespread labor informality requires going beyond the protection and assistance mechanisms that cover the formal economy, to ensure that if support is to reach all of those who need it most.

During the response and recovery phases, in order for policies to be sustainable, they must be directed towards those segments of the population that are least protected and therefore most vulnerable and exposed to shocks. The recovery effort should be seen, at the same time, as an opportunity to focus on improving human capital, which can in turn open up unlock opportunities in economic sectors where the country has a clear comparative advantage, such as fisheries, agriculture, sustainable tourism and perhaps ICTs. As the only Spanish-speaking country in sub-Saharan Africa, Equatorial Guinea can also be the launching pad for intensifying the relationships between Latin America and the continent and promoting South-South cooperation, without neglecting the essential relations ties with its Francophone and Lusophone neighbors.

The arrival of external medical personnel in the country to support the response to the virus, the trainings and rapid assessments that have been conducted during

the pandemic with international support, show are a step towards solving addressing the difficulties of the health sector. However, there is still a long way to go. It is necessary to increase the number of trained health personnel and their coverage in the territory, especially in first level health, in order not to leave the rural areas behind - and to improve the equipment of the centers, both at the level of treated water, water and soap points, and the in human capacity level to protect and treat the population for with HIV and, TB, for immunization, reproductive health and surgical careery. In education, working towards vocational training in key sectors key for to economic diversification is essential, although without ignoring the structurally the challenges of school enrollment and high dropout rates need to be addressed. Social protection programs such as conditional cash transfers can help in this regard, as can school feeding programs. The development of last mile connections in the ICT sector is fundamental for the proper dissemination of digital skills in the economy. The benefits of increasing the digital environment ecosystem are can be cross-cutting in terms of the socio-economic development of countries, starting with banking inclusion, ease of transfers to the vulnerable, traceability and agility to work in the various sectors of the economy and the creation of new training and employment opportunities. Longer Broader-based and more people-owned 'bottom-up' digitalization will be able to increase enhance access to basic public services, including financial services for sending and receiving wages and remittances, grants and bridge loans to micro and small enterprises, and other digital payments for individuals and households.

The response should lay the foundation for a strategy to "build back better". Globally, the Covid-19's has as its backdrop is that of a growing climate crisis and an unsustainable development model of development based on increased limitless exploitation of natural resources and increased rising use of fossil fuels, which pushes both clashing against the limits boundaries of natural systems. As a country that produces hydrocarbons, Equatorial Guinea has particularly suffered particularly from the ills of rapid urbanization, increasing growing population and settlement densities, unsustainable changes in land use, and its indiscriminate dependence on international supply chains, even for high-consumption products. In the face of rising consumer prices, it is clear that the vulnerable population needs access to more affordable products and increased productivity of subsistence agriculture crops. While developing ways to reduce the costs of food imports, for example, through substituting imports with products from the region, the country must invest in supporting the strengthening of food security. A key

element is the development of programs to increase the resilience of small farmers and guide steer them towards structures farming systems that will decrease crop risk and increase their productivity.

In order to reorient re-focus economic systems to address social and environmental issues, which are critical in a decade-long horizon for achieving the ODSSDGs in a decade-long horizon, and to better rebuild in the response and recovery phases of Covid-19, the Government will not have much chance of leeway for fiscal stimulus, given the foreseeable fall in its oil revenues, but it will be able to shape its fiscal measures policy to rationalize its capital expenditures and stimulate inclusive and sustainable development, especially by strengthening the quality of its public health care and by progressing towards the construction setting about to devise, for the first time in the country's history, of a truly broad-based social protection and security system. The emergence of Covid-19 has led to interesting experiences (Basic Guarantees Program) that should be evaluated, capitalized built upon and expanded scaled up where feasible.

Equatorial Guinea will not be able to make social or economic progress without a major change in the collection of approach to empirical data. Although there has been some progress with the recent establishment of the National Institute of Statistics of Equatorial Guinea, the poor collection of socio-economic data results in a serious lack of primary information that limits constrains the empirical basis of studies policy-making, especially gender data, data on vulnerable populations, on employment, food security etc., and. This will compromises a true policy the orientation to leave no one behind. While developing these information systems, it is important to strengthen the administrative capacity to keep these databases updated. On the other hand, the information generated must be much more disseminated and appropriate owned to a much larger extent in the Equatoguinean society so that if it is to become a true factor of economic change.

This element converges with the prerequisite to intensify and accelerate reforms in public financial management and governance, in order to improve the country's image abroad and the confidence of the national and international private sector, which has so far been confined to the oil and gas enclave. Unfortunately, given its income level, Equatorial Guinea cannot expect much debt cancellation - which is in itself certainly limited less of an issue than for its neighbors - nor much public development aid assistance, although unused untapped possibilities do exist in vertical financing dedicated to climate change. Rather, the country must continue its

efforts to mobilize domestic resources, particularly tax and customs reforms, and radically improve its business environment, currently ranked by the World Bank as one of the worst in the world, so that private financing can closes the gap that a slowly declining hydrocarbon sector created has opened in the macroeconomic balances by a slowly declining hydrocarbon sector.

Governance issues are important, not only in reference to the business environment, but in general to the role that the "strategic state" should play in fully exploiting the country's comparative advantage, while ensuring promoting more socially and geographically inclusive growth. There is a need to strengthen and modernize policies aimed at to increasing productivity and value added in the primary sector in its various dimensions, in order to alleviate pressure on urban centers, diversify the economy and employment, and restore some degree of food sovereignty in the country. Without a clear strategic framework, and the empowerment of the various actors to design bankable projects, the primary sector will remain synonymous with marginalization and poverty. In this perspective, relations with development financial institutions (DFI) could be intensified.

In spite of a certain dynamism shown by the service sectors, such as commerce, transport and hospitality, the fabric of SMEs in the country remained weak before Covid-19, with a prevalence of informality, because the oil sector does not directly offer many formal jobs. In the medium term, the role of micro and SMEs, especially those led by women and youth, is crucial for broad-based economic development and for generating employment at the base of the pyramid. Emergency measures have been taken to temporarily relieve the MSME tax burden. In the future, temporary tax incentives, or interest rate subsidies, could be targeted at to companies that recruit or retain local people in employment, or that provide apprenticeships and training. On the other hand, SMEs, especially those led by women, also need technical support measures, including training in safety and occupational health protocols, business continuity planning, business support, and integration of their solutions into the procurement chains of other sectors of the economy, such as the oil and gas industry.

For economic diversification, the role of credit is difficult to overestimate. Until now, local credit has been mainly oriented to supporting the private consumption by of the most secure borrowers, or the large public infrastructure projects, and therefore has not benefited much from contributed to the transformation of the economy, nor to the populations in financial exclusion. To promote financial inclusion, the investments in telecommunication

networks made by the Government can be used to extend last mile connections. Similarly, international and regional best practices can be studied to implement and improve, in partnership with certain telephone operators, digital payment and money transfer solutions.

No less important is to have a well-informed strategic and operational reflection on value chains in the medium and long term, focusing on strategic sectors such as pharmaceutical manufacturing, which can strengthen the capacity of the health system, and food value chains, to overcome the dependence on external food products. It is in this context that the African Continental Free Trade Zone is a true catalyst to boost trade among African countries, promoting regional value chains that foster integration into the global economy, supporting industrial development, creating business opportunities, generating employment and boosting competitiveness and innovation.



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# Annexes

Appendix 1. Bibliographic references used by CODS in the Covid-19 impact assessment methodology

SDG	Goal	Score	Reference
1	1.2	-2	<p>UNDP (2020a). COVID-19 and Human Development: Assessing the Crisis, Envisioning the Recovery. Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo, New York, USA. Available at: <a href="http://hdr.undp.org/en/hdp-covid">http://hdr.undp.org/en/hdp-covid</a></p> <p>UNU (2020). Summer, A., Hoy, C., Ortiz-Juarez, E. Estimates of the impact of COVID-19 on global poverty. United Nations University. Wider Working Paper 2020/43. Available at: <a href="https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/wp2020-43.pdf">https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/wp2020-43.pdf</a></p> <p>(UNECA, 2020). COVID-19 in Africa: Protecting Lives and Economies. Available at: <a href="https://www.uneca.org/publications/covid-19-africa-protecting-lives-and-economies">https://www.uneca.org/publications/covid-19-africa-protecting-lives-and-economies</a></p>
1	1.3	-2	(UNECA, 2020). COVID-19 in Africa: Protecting Lives and Economies. Available at: <a href="https://www.uneca.org/publications/covid-19-africa-protecting-lives-and-economies">https://www.uneca.org/publications/covid-19-africa-protecting-lives-and-economies</a>
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Data-Pop Alliance (DPA) is a global coalition on Big Data, Artificial Intelligence and Sustainable Development, created in 2014 by the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative (HHI), MIT Media Lab and the Overseas Development Institute (ODI). Our vision is to change the world through data. DPA brings together researchers, experts, practitioners and activists from different disciplines around a single mission: to make Big Data and new analytical techniques have a positive impact on society. Data-Pop Alliance works through three approaches: (1) diagnosis of realities, (2) mobilization of capacities, and (3) transformation and strategy through community and state participation.



Established in 1990, ADE is a consulting firm that provides objective and independent services to assist public and private decision makers in formulating sound economic decisions and monitoring their implementation. ADE intervenes in all stages of the decision-making process: from problem analysis and advisory studies to support in the formulation, monitoring and evaluation of strategies/policies/programs.





# SOCIOECONOMIC IMPACT

Assessment of COVID-19  
in **Equatorial Guinea**

