

**UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW – HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL**  
**UNICEF INPUTS – GABON**

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**I. Trends**

1. Gabon is a middle-income country with wide disparities as well as weak political governance. Gabon has approximately 1.5 million inhabitants within a national territory of 25,767 thousand hectares. Around 40,000 persons are of the indigenous populations category commonly called Pygmies, who often live in remote forest areas without access to adequate basic services. Population density is 5.6 people per square km. The urbanization rate in Gabon is very high with nearly 80 per cent of people living in urban areas, especially in Libreville. This massive migration creates several difficulties, especially the dysfunction of the social and sanitary services of urban areas which are saturated and incapable to meet the needs of the population.
2. Gabon has remained relatively stable and peaceful since independence in 1960. Despite the transition from one party rule to a multi-party system since 1990, it is essentially dominated by one political party. Its social and political stability has been assured through a patronage system financed by revenue from extractive industries and an economy with significant Government participation. About half of all salaried workers are employed by the state. In the evolving context of reduced oil production and oil revenues, this model of government is likely to face some tensions.
3. While the overall political situation is generally stable and economic income is constant from the exploitation of oil resources in Gabon, children and women still remain highly at risk. Despite favourable macroeconomic indicators, Gabon's social indicators are comparable to those of several low-income African. The country is now ranked 119 over 177 on the Human Development Indicators scale and has an annual income per capita estimated to be close to USD 7,000. The significant gap between Gabon's gross national income per capita and its human development index ranking is evidence of structural poverty. It is estimated that a little less than 40% of the population live under the threshold of poverty.
4. A recent survey<sup>1</sup> of welfare indicators shows that about one-third of the population is living in poverty. The proportion of poor is lower in urban areas, but because of the high concentration of Gabon's population in urban areas, a large majority of the poor are found there. The unemployment rate is estimated at 15 percent nationally (10% for men and 20% for women). About half of poor households are employed in agriculture. Lack of adequate housing and sanitation affects poor households in urban areas, while the rural poor suffer from the lack of clean and potable water.
5. The country's persistent poverty reflects the dual nature of its economy and its choice of development policies. These policies have tended to exclude most of the population from the benefits of growth and have failed to diversify the economy or to improve its human capital.

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<sup>1</sup> Sitan, 2004 : Banque Mondiale, Gabon. La pauvreté dans une économie de rente 2 vol.

6. Reducing poverty and improving delivery of social services to all households remains one of the major challenges facing the Gabonese authorities. In 2002, Gabon adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which provide international benchmarks for monitoring success in key development areas. Gabon also adopted a Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS), in collaboration with civil society and the donor community in 2005.
7. Under-five mortality and Infant mortality rates in Gabon are high with respectively 91 per thousand and 60 per thousand in 2005 and have failed to improve in the past 20 years. Therefore, Gabon is still far from the achievement of Millennium Development Goal 4.
8. The HIV/AIDS situation presents a formidable challenge for Gabon as sero-prevalence, has increased tremendously from 1.8 per cent in 1986 to close to 8.1 per cent in 2004, according to the 2004 Epidemiological Report. The most affected population group is composed of those aged between 15 and 49 years. This results in an increasing number of orphans and vulnerable children affected by HIV/Aids. Young people from 13 to 24 years of age are most vulnerable and among them, girls are five times more affected than boys. No signs of HIV prevalence decrease are observed so far. Limited access to treatment drugs and lack of effective educational campaigns to reduce risk of infection remain serious challenges.
9. Health infrastructure coverage is relatively good. Approximately 70% of the population lives within 5 kilometres of a health facility. In rural areas, however, 75 per cent of the population must travel more than 15 km to reach a pharmacy (since dispensaries often do not have medicines), and nearly 90 per cent of rural women live more than 15 km from the nearest maternal and child health center. However, utilization of public health facilities is low at an average 0.4 outpatient visits per person per year. Less than half of the population in Gabon has access to essential drugs. Primary health care delivery systems in Gabon are ineffective. Generally, dispensaries are not able to provide the minimum package of services required for primary care. Departmental medical centers provide a better quality of care but at a higher cost to the patient. This tends to discourage their use by the poor, especially for primary and preventive care.
10. Primary education in Gabon is widely accessible. The gross enrolment rate in primary schools was 134 percent in 1998-2002, corresponding to over 90% of the 6-12 age cohort. However, classrooms are often overcrowded, especially in the rapidly growing urban areas. Overcrowding (up to 100 pupils per class) undermines teacher effectiveness. The Ministry of Education has identified a need for 2377 additional primary classrooms, as well as the need for refurbishing current classrooms in poor physical condition and lacking access to potable water.
11. Access to secondary education is more constrained. In 2002, gross enrolment in secondary schools was 54 per cent of the age cohort, corresponding to a net enrolment rate of 21%. The number of students admitted to secondary schools is limited by the space available. In recent years the government of Gabon has made substantial efforts to increase capacity at this level, notably by building more secondary schools outside of the large cities.
12. Despite being a high priority of government in terms of expenditures, in general the Gabonese education system is characterized by poor performance. This can be measured in terms of high repetition rates and low examination success rates at all levels. In

addition, the educational system does not adequately address the needs of the productive sector. High repeater rates represent the major weakness in the education system in Gabon. The repetition rate stands high in all the sub-sectors. During the period 2002-2003, the repetition rate was about 37% in primary schools 30% in secondary. In 2003 the success rate in completing the sixth grade was 66%; it was 54% for entry into the sixth grade (the level at which students are screened in relation to the space available in secondary schools).

## **II. Recent developments in relation to children and human rights (2005 - 2007)**

13. In 2006, a national debate on children in conflict with the law was held by the ministry of justice in collaboration with UNICEF in 2006. Following this first debate, a specific law was elaborated to protect children in conflict with the law in conformity with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and international guidelines. A validation meeting on this juvenile law was held at Libreville with judges and magistrates in October 2007. The juvenile law was validated and must be presented to the parliament in 2008 for ratification.
14. Gabon had strengthened its legislation to prevent the scourge of trafficking in children for the purposes of economic exploitation, a problem that it experienced as a host country. In September 2004 Gabon's anti-trafficking law was ratified by the National Assembly. The law protects children under 18 against all forms of trafficking and provides for prison sentences of five to 15 years and stiff fines. Forced labor, slavery, abduction, and pimping are outlawed by the penal code. In July 2006, Gabon signed the multilateral cooperation agreement to combat trafficking in persons, especially women and children in West and Central Africa.
15. In December 2007, an integrated campaign for the survival of the child in Gabon was launched throughout the country with the aim of delivering integrated life-saving interventions including vaccination against measles, deworming, Vitamin A supplementation and free distribution of impregnated bednets to protect against Malaria. The campaign aims at the coverage of close to 300,000 children under the age of 5 throughout the 9 provinces of the country. As of December 2007, the routine vaccination rate moved from 49% in December 2006 to 86% in July 2007. This situation has led to the selection of Gabon as one of three Sub-Saharan countries receiving in the 2007 Task Force Immunization prize for Africa from WHO/Africa
16. In 2007, the government of Gabon creates a National Observatory on the Rights of Child with four main objectives: (i) child rights monitoring, (ii) realization of a data base on children's issues, (iii) advocacy, awareness raising and participation of children and youth and (iv) development of children-related initiatives.
17. The second Gabon CRC report is about to be validated and submitted to the International committee on the rights of children in 2008.
18. The Gabonese government abolished in September 2007 the death penalty from its statute books. The government said the time was ripe for such a move as Gabon had not applied the death penalty in over 20 years.

19. In Gabon, about 60000 people are living with HIV and 2795 people living with HIV are on antiretroviral treatment in 2007. About 2,500 children orphaned by AIDS are receiving food and support to enable them to continue going to school. Some 20,000 condoms were also distributed to help prevent the spread of HIV. The country's capacity to treat people is improving, but weak coordination and institutional information systems remain major challenges.
20. The national policy and standards on the mother to child transmission of HIV were adopted in 2006. In 2007, the number of pregnant women reached with Preventing Mother to Child Transmission services through antenatal clinic (ANC) was 12,449. Out of 12,449 pregnant women in ANC, HIV test facility was proposed to 11,402 pregnant women (92%). Out of 11,402 pregnant women, 9,501 pregnant women have accepted to be tested (83%). Out of 9,501, 6,981 pregnant women have been effectively tested (73%), 395 pregnant women were found HIV + (6%) and 205 HIV + pregnant women have received Antiretroviral therapy (52%).
21. A new national strategy "2008 -2012" to fight against HIV/Aids in Gabon should be finalized in January 2008 with the support of United Nation System and UNICEF playing a leading role in this regard.
22. To provide quality health services, a concept of community friendly health services was adopted by the ministry of health and communities. In 2007, the existing health centres in Libreville were provided with the minimum equipment and technical capacity to make them more community friendly. This action will certainly bring about a high rate of utilization of health facilities and community participation and parent involvement in the reduction of child mortality in the areas of interventions.
23. A national study on the determinants of community participation and development is completed in December 2007 and the findings, lessons learned and recommendations will be validated in January 2008. This study should help to increase public awareness on the issues affecting children and families at community level and the local authorities and community leaders to establish community development networks/mechanisms which will serve to organize communities around common goals and general interests.
24. A national seminar of all social sector departments was held in September 2007 to ensure that issues affecting pygmy children are given high priority within national policies and programmes. Currently, the government is planning to adopt a clear policy in terms of establishing new budget lines for children and families in pygmy villages. A solid knowledge base is being effectively established on the issues affecting health, hygienic education in the hard to reach pygmy villages and a strong public awareness was achieved on the issues affecting pygmy children and families in Gabon.
25. The Government has, in recent years, recognized the importance of transparency and good governance in promoting development, and has undertaken measures to advance this agenda. The National Commission against Illicit Enrichment (CNCEI) began preventive operations in 2004 by organizing awareness-raising workshops with financial administrations in two subcommittees, the Prevention and Education Subcommittee and the Investigation Subcommittee. The Government has embarked upon a wide range of structural reforms to facilitate diversification of the economy and poverty reduction. These reforms have involved (i) reducing external debt and eliminating external and

domestic arrears, (ii) improving revenue collection, particularly in the non-oil sectors, (iii) drastically reducing government participation in public enterprises, and (iv) promoting private investment.

### **III. Summary of UNICEF capacity building and technical assistance programmes**

26. UNICEF's Programme (2007-2011) is designed around four components: (i) "Child Survival and development" aimed to reduce infant mortality, (ii) "HIV/Aids and Children" aimed to improve the access of pregnant women to the Preventing Mother to Child Transmission services, (iii) "community Child Friendly Capacity Development" aimed to conduct a national study on the determinants of community participation and development in Gabon and (iv) "child protection".
27. UNICEF is supporting the validation of second Gabon CRC, ensuring a participative approach with all stakeholders.
28. In the framework of nationwide integrated Campaign of vaccination, conducted in December 2007, UNICEF worked with the authorities and the WHO to monitor the work and to assess overall effectiveness of the integrated campaign.
29. UNICEF with the support of private sector has contributed to support routine immunization and roll back malaria in Libreville and Port-Gentil. This collaboration was an opportunity to effectively use routine immunization as an entry point to fight malaria in Ogooue Maritime province. As of December 2007, 12 041 children have received impregnated mosquito nets.
30. With UNICEF support, the ministry of social affairs has organized a national seminar to promote public awareness on social policies development. This seminar was an opportunity for national dialogue on the measures that need to be taken to address the key issues affecting children and vulnerable groups.
31. UNICEF supported the Ministry of Justice to elaborated the law on Juvenile Justice and the 2008 UNICEF's work plan will focus on the following key priorities: The implementation of juvenile law and particularly (i) personnel shall be trained to deal with juveniles, as shall judges and police officers, (ii) detention of juveniles should only take place under conditions that take full account of their particular needs, status and special requirements according to their age, personality, sex and type of offence, as well as their mental and physical health, (ii) within jail, juveniles should be separated from a
32. UNICEF has proposed a road map on child rights issues and to review institutional mechanisms that will be supported by UNICEF to make the National Observatory of Children's rights more results-oriented.
33. With technical and financial support from UNICEF and UNESCO, the ministry of education is supporting 213 anti-AIDS Clubs within schools in order to improve youth access to appropriate prevention.
34. Based on UNICEF guidelines for the Protection of Victims of Child Trafficking, national guidelines were elaborated and adapted to the Gabonese context in collaboration with all actors involved in the fight against chills trafficking.