

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Guinea-Bissau is situated between Senegal and Guinea on the Atlantic Coast of West Africa. Formerly known as Portuguese Guinea, the capital city of Bissau was an addition upon independence to distinguish Guinea Bissau from its neighbouring country Guinea.
- 1.2 The country has a total area of 36, 125 sq km and a coastline of 350 km bordering the North Atlantic Ocean.
- 1.3 Guinea Bissau’s Atlantic Ocean coast is composed of an archipelago, the Bijagos, which is made up of over 100 small islands. In 1996 the archipelago was declared a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve given the diversity of both rare and protected species which can be found on the islands.



Archipelago off the coast of Guinea-Bissau



Flag of Guinea Bissau

- 1.4 In July 2017 the population was estimated at 1,792,338. Around one fifth of the population live in the capital Bissau, while the rest live in more rural communities. The population is young and growing; it is estimated that 60% of the population are under 25.
- 1.5 The official language is Portuguese, however this is largely used as a second or third language and is spoken by 11% of the population. French is also taught in some schools, as the country is surrounded by French-speaking Guinea. The lingua franca is Crioulo, Guinea Bissau Creole, spoken by 44% of the population. Pular and Mandingo, local African dialects, are also common.
- 1.6 The main religion is Islam, practised by 45.1% of the population. 22.1% of the population are Christian.
- 1.7 The national currency is the CFA franc. Guinea joined the West African Economic and Monetary Union in 1997, and the Guinean peso was replaced by the CFA franc shortly after.
- 1.8 As a result of civil war and extreme poverty, infrastructural development has been limited. Schools and access to education is lacking, and the literacy rate is estimated at 59.9%, for those over the age of 15. In 2010, the government spent 11% of the budget on education, which is the lowest proportion spent on education by a West African country.
- 1.9 The national flag was adopted in 1973 following independence from Portugal. The colours are symbolic in meaning; the black star is representative of African unity, yellow representative of the sun, green is hope and red representative of the blood shed during the struggle for independence from Portugal.
- 1.10 The national emblem is also representative of the struggle for independence: Unidade, Luta, Progresso meaning 'Unity, Struggle, Progress'. As seen below.
- 1.11 The climate is generally tropical, influenced by the intertropical convergence zone, which is an area of converging trade winds which circle the Earth near the equator. The hot, rainy season lasts from June to November, and the hot dry season. April and May are often the hottest months of the year, as temperatures reach the mid-30s.



'Unidade, Luta, Progresso'
(Wikipedia)

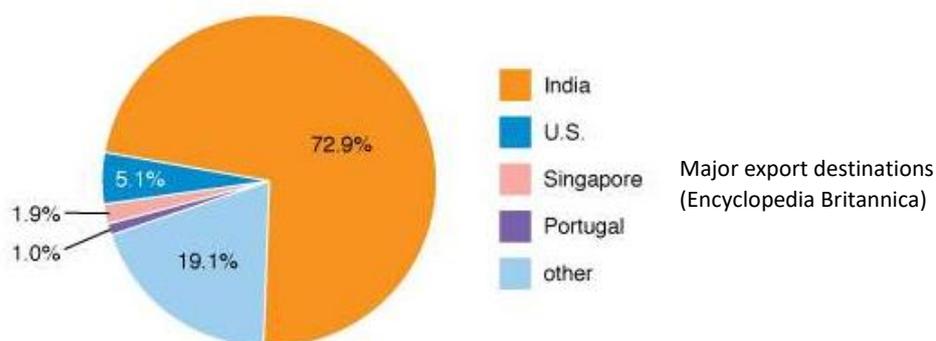
2. HISTORY

- 2.1 In 1446 the Portuguese arrived and shortly became colonial rulers of Guinea-Bissau. Guinea-Bissau was later declared a province of Portugal in 1951. Five years later in 1956, the African Party of Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) was established; founded by Amilcar Cabral. The PAIGC aimed to expel the Portuguese, initially through peaceful means. When in 1959 the Portuguese responded to a dockworkers' strike with extreme violence, the PAIGC adopted new, more violent means of protest which later progressed to an armed struggle.
- 2.2 The guerrilla movement was successful in expanding to a movement able to take on the Portuguese present across the country. By 1971 PAIGC had greater control of Guinea-Bissau than the Portuguese.
- 2.3 In 1972 Cabral was assassinated outside his home, having recently set up a government in exile in Conakry, the capital of Guinea. Cabral is today considered one of the greatest African thinkers of the 20th century.
- 2.4 The Portuguese government was destabilised following a coup in 1973. It was the new government's lacking support for an expensive empire which began the path to independence for Guinea Bissau. In 1973 independence for Portuguese Guinea was achieved, and the country became led by Luis Cabral, brother of Amilcar Cabral.
- 2.5 In 1980 a military coup established new President Jose Bernardo Vieira, while he was head of the military forces. During his presidency, Vieira described himself as 'God's gift' to Guinea- Bissau.
 - 2.5.1 Vieira was President for three terms: from 1980 to 1984, 1984-1999 and later from 2005-2009. Although Vieira originally became President through a military coup, Vieira later won a multiparty presidential election in 1994. Vieira was ousted at the end of the 1998-1999 civil war but made a comeback in 2005.
- 2.6 In 1998 a military uprising against Vieira's government triggered civil war which lasted until 1999. This period has greatly contributed to the instability of Guinea-Bissau today. During the conflict it is estimated that agricultural production fell by 17%, leading to a 28% overall drop in GDP.

3. TRADE AND ECONOMY

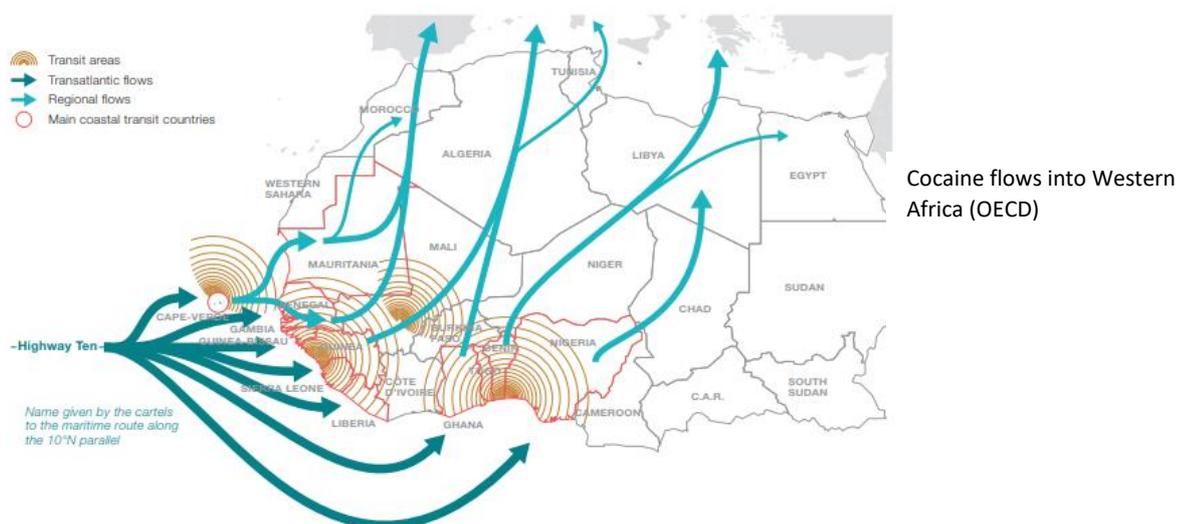
- 3.1 The country's GDP is estimated at one of the lowest in the world, forcing the country to rely heavily on foreign aid. Colonial and civil war has caused mass exodus of civilians, military personnel and political authorities. The economic infrastructure and standard of living has been compromised as a result.

- 3.2 Guinea-Bissau is, however, sufficient in food production, of which agriculture makes up a large part of the economy. The legal economy is particularly based on agriculture and fish and relies heavily on the export of cashew nuts. Fish and shrimp are raised both for domestic production and export.
- 3.3 Among other items exported are: palm products, rice, peanuts, timber and cotton.
- 3.4 Guinea Bissau is the sixth largest producer of cashew nuts in the world, and the third largest producer in Africa, after Ivory Coast and Tanzania. The majority are exported raw into China, India and Vietnam where they are processed.
- 3.5 The harvesting of cashew nuts is an important source of income for rural communities and impoverished families. In some cases, the cashew nuts are processed by family firms in-country.
- 3.6 There are also good prospects for forestry and fishery development, with forest cover on about three-fifths of land. Most wood is used for domestic consumption, but a small amount of sawn wood is exported.



- 3.7 Initiated by OECD, a trust fund financed by a range of international and national sources has been put in place for the conservation of marine protected areas in Guinea-Bissau. Some of the world’s most significant marine and coastal ecosystems can be found in Guinea-Bissau, and are under threat from coastal development, the oil industry, overfishing, pollution and climate change.
 - 3.7.1 Guinea Bissau has received commitments of EUR 5 million, including 1 million from the Guinea-Bissau government.
- 3.8 The illegal trafficking of narcotics also plays a significant role in the country’s economy. Described as West Africa’s first “narco” state, it has now been estimated that a quarter of all cocaine consumed in Western Europe is trafficked through Western Africa.

- 3.8.1 As previous routes into Europe through Jamaica and Panama are now patrolled and more consistently policed, Guinea Bissau has become a transshipment point for drugs from Latin America into Europe. Lacking and limited resources make it difficult to monitor the ports, and corruption and institutional weaknesses have allowed the drugs industry to take hold.
- 3.8.2 According to the UN office on Drugs and Crime, it was around 2005 that drugs worth billions were being shipped through West Africa. Later in November 2015, the UNODC announced at a conference in Guinea-Bissau that 34,000kg of cocaine and 22,000kg of marijuana had been seized in Guinea-Bissau since 2011, with 58 traffickers prosecuted.



4. POLITICS

- 4.1 Since independence, 4 successful coups have been recorded in Guinea Bissau. Another 16 have been attempted, plotted or alleged. The frequent changes in government are another manifestation of the country’s political instability and have hindered relations with the international aid community.
- 4.2 The most recent military coup took place in April 2012. Following mediation from Economic Community of Western African states, a transitional government was established, aiming to restore a civilian government.
- 4.3 The current President Jose Mario Vaz was democratically elected in 2014, winning by a large majority. Vaz’s election has provided hope to citizens that a line will be drawn under previous corruption and instability. No elected leader in Guinea Bissau has so far completed a full term since independence in 1973.

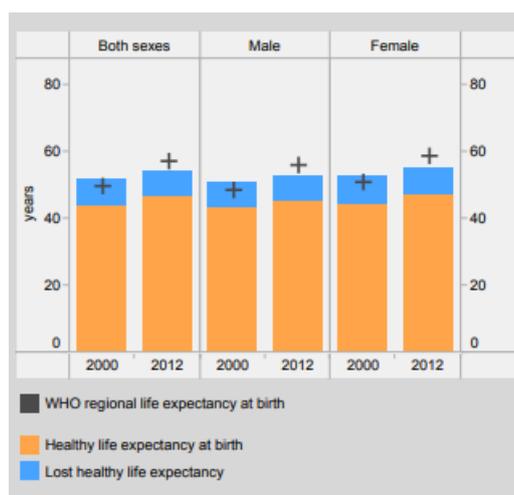
- 4.4 Put forward in 2016 by ECOWAS, the Conakry agreements aim to provide a framework for a peaceful resolution of the political crisis by fighting against corruption, improving public administration and basic public services.
- 4.5 In February 2018 President Vaz appointed a new prime minister Da Silva with the view to establishing stability to avoid sanctions from ECOWAS. Guinea Bissau has been experiencing a power struggle since 2015, when Vaz sacked the then prime minister.

5. SECURITY

- 5.1 According to the foreign commonwealth office, crime rates are generally low in Guinea Bissau. Those visiting are however reminded to take sensible precautions and avoid carrying valuables.
- 5.2 There are ongoing operations to remove land mines outside the city centre. In 2006 the capital Bissau was declared mine-free by the national de-mining centre (CAAMI) which is responsible for de-mining operations.
- 5.3 Guinea-Bissau contributes to the UN peacekeeping initiative in Mali (MINUSMA) and may therefore be considered a legitimate target by Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) and its associated groups.

6. HEALTH

- 6.1 Life expectancy in Guinea – Bissau is estimated at 49 years for females and 47 years for males. WHO also estimates that there are fewer than 5 doctors per 100,000, which is down from 12 per 100,000 in 2007.



Life expectancy in Guinea-Bissau – updated in 2015 (WHO)

- 6.2 In 2008 a cholera epidemic killed 225 and affected 14,222 people. Although surrounding countries have seen a fall in the rate of cholera, Guinea Bissau has seen rising rates. Outbreaks of cholera are more likely to happen in the rainy season between June and November.

- 6.3 The United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund for 2012 estimated that 41,000 people (adults and children) were living with HIV, which is about 3.9% of the adult population.
- 6.4 UK health authorities have also classified Guinea-Bissau as having a risk of Zika virus transmission. It is reported that mosquitos in Guinea Bissau are infected with Zika and are spreading the disease to people. It is recommended pregnant women do not travel to Zika infected areas as Zika infection during pregnancy can cause serious birth defects.

7. SUMMARY

Guinea Bissau’s economy is beginning to expand and GDP growth is expected to average 5% over 2016-2018. Given the history of military coups and general instability, it is however difficult to form an accurate prediction as the future is particularly uncertain.

Still, in 2018 there has been little progress towards implementing the 2016 Conakry Agreements, which include naming a consensus prime minister and electoral reforms ahead of legislative elections, currently proposed for 10 May.

With help from the US and UN, there has been progress in reducing the quantity of narcotics shipped via Guinea-Bissau to Europe. Lacking resources do however make it difficult to eliminate the problem, and in the event of a coup it is likely all progress would be lost, as was the case in 2012.

References

<https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/guinea-bissau-2.htm>

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/mar/09/drugstrade>

<http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?historyid=ad46>

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Guinea-Bissau>

<http://www.oecd.org/countries/guinea-bissau/07-cocaine.pdf>

<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/guinea-bissau/>

http://www.esa.int/spaceinimages/Images/2014/01/Guinea-Bissau_and_the_Bissagos_islands

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pu.html>

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2016/jan/07/guinea-bissau-global-drugs-trade>

<http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/guineabissau/overview>

<https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/sc12988.doc.htm>