

Committee: UNESCO

Country: Gabon

Topic 1: Governance and its Effect on Education

A nation's education is directly impacted by the government's policies. Most often, the root of low levels of education is poor governance. In other words, the governing bodies are badly managing public resources and poorly conducting affairs towards the education system. Unfortunately, there are still many countries dealing with corruption, political instability, financial crises and much more, thus, unable to progress in their education system. For instance, South Sudan, Afghanistan and Somalia are ranked in the top ten countries with the lowest level of education¹. Coincidentally, they are also among the top 10 countries in the world with the most corrupt governments². When capitals and resources are not fairly distributed back to the population, how is it possible to gain progress in a country?

Moreover, countries faced with wars and conflict will have their schooling system interrupted, affecting sometimes millions of children. Syria, for instance, has seen 1.2 million children out of school in 2013, two years after the beginning of the civil war. ³Governments are investing all their money in acquiring military arms without considering the population's needs, specifically the children's education. Political instability is negatively impacting the majority of the citizens: it should be better framed, and even prevented based on different situations.

Fighting corruption is a major key in the access of education. The United Nations Convention Against Corruption is a document aiming to eradicate corruption adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2003. Though it is a good start on the fight against this issue, there are many flaws which need to be taken into consideration, specifically "the lack of transparency and participation in the review process at the international level". ⁴ The review process needs the participation of external partners on the international level, such as non-governmental organizations. Furthermore, organizations like Transparency International adopted the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention in 1997, making foreign bribery a crime. The Convention is made up of 41 signatory countries responsible for "approximately two-thirds of world exports and almost 90 per cent of total foreign direct investment outflows." ⁵ The result is far from satisfactory as almost half of those countries have failed to reach the goals. The Gabonese

¹<http://www.countryranker.com/top-10-least-educated-countries-in-the-world/>

² <http://www.countryranker.com/top-10-least-educated-countries-in-the-world/>

³ <http://unhcr.org/FutureOfSyria/the-challenge-of-education.html>.

⁴ http://www.transparency.org/news/feature/uncac_review_mechanism_up_and_running_but_urgently_needing_improvement

⁵ http://www.transparency.org/exporting_corruption

Republic believes that more strict sanctions should be considered as well as a tighter surveillance from the international community.

United Nation's own internal organization, UNICEF, is committed to equitable access to education for all the children as well as innovation in education, quality of schooling, emergency situations and so on. Because of the sovereignty policy, UNICEF encounters certain limits to what extent they can involve themselves in particular countries. Nevertheless, progress has been made.

The government of the Gabonese Republic has engaged in curbing corruption which has increase under Omar Bongo's regime. President Ali Bongo set up an anti-corruption legal framework consisting of the Penal Code which penalize acts such as passive and active bribery, embezzlement, gifts and other corruption offences.⁶ Furthermore, on the education aspect, since the arrival president Ali Bongo, investments in this sector has increased immensely and a National Council on Education, Training and Research has been created. The country's public school system is based on universal free access to education, mandatory from the ages of 6 to 16.⁷ As such, the country contributed immensely in the attempt of achieving the second target of the Millennium Development Goals of 2015 consisting of achieving universal primary education. As a matter of fact, between 1990 and 2012, the number of children enrolled in primary school in sub-Saharan Africa has gone from 62 to 149 million.⁸

The delegation of Gabon proposes a renewed version of the UNCAC with more specific guidelines, regulations as well as more severe sanctions. We also propose more collaborations between the United Nations and international organizations as well as support from developed countries in achieving more transparency in more "corrupted" countries.

Providing means of changes in policies inside the government can also be considered. In other words, instead of focusing on the spread of fear on the topic of corruption which can lead to politicians hiding information, we should focus more on giving second chances to those who wish to come clean and start anew. Many politicians owe their status to corruption which means few of them will take a stand against it, either out of fear of upsetting their careers or the political status⁹. If a path which includes positive change and international acknowledgement is proposed in comparison to the status quo, it will certainly motivate those who were too scared of

⁶ <http://www.business-anti-corruption.com/country-profiles/gabon>

⁷ <https://books.google.ca/books?id=1NcVBgAAQBAJ&pg=PA181&lpg=PA181&dq=gabon+education+progress&source=bl&ots=AtVsUdPW8z&sig=0n0uR02AfN1vDfaNbcIEAG-3htg&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwigyvqw uJfQA hXl44MKHV-NAgwQ6AEIMDAE#v=onepage&q=gabon%20education%20progress&f=false>

⁸ [http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20rev%20\(July%201\).pdf](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20rev%20(July%201).pdf)

⁹ http://oecdobserver.org/news/archivestory.php/aid/291/Fighting_corruption_in_the_developing_countries.html

denouncing certain unethical practices and give them a chance to turn their life around. Unfortunately, many people are unwillingly dragged into a corrupted system.

One interesting method of regulating internal affairs of a governing body from the United Nation's point of view can be the implication of a reward system to countries or political leaders who have displayed exceptional governance and contributed progress in their country. The UN can create a special institution with fundings from the international community to judge and reward countries based on certain criteria reflected from the overall state of the country after a period of time. This type of solution creates a motivational atmosphere between developing countries to strive greatness. Part of the criteria will involve government transparency, thus, governing bodies will be driven to improve their performance and less inclined to fall into corruption.

From a sustainable point of view, teaching the students about corruption as early as primary school is a good of educating the next generation of leaders that will govern our countries, and ensuring a less inclination from these students to give into corruption.

Topic 2: Preservation of World Heritage Sites

Historical sites are much more than just mere architectures or landscapes. They are stories to tell, connections to our past and elements which are vital to humanity's progress for a better society through the understanding and analysis of these sites. Preservation is a duty which all citizens are pledged to. There is not a single country in this world who does not possess a heritage site. In Gabon, for instance, the Lopé National Park was added to the World Heritage List.¹⁰ There are also other sites, mostly landscapes, who are currently on the Tentative List, waiting to be considered for nomination.

The challenge in 2016 lies in balancing historical sites with climate change and war. While preserving heritage sites might seem like the indisputable resolution towards climate change, many private and tourist industries are concerned with their country's economy. Many nations rely heavily on their tourism industry. The other problem that we face is the delicate situation of countries who deal with violent conflicts and the intervention from the international community. While many organizations and political leaders castigate attempts to damage these sites in unstable regions in the world, no concrete solutions are provided to deal with these situations.

Unfortunately, it is quite possible that more and more locations will become out of reach for tourists in order to protect them. During war times, communication between nations and the UN must become a priority in order to avoid any irreparable mistakes. Nevertheless, the delegation of Gabon believes there is always room for compromises.

We must recognize the United Nations' efforts in the preservation of world heritage sites, as they were the ones who founded UNESCO, particularly the branch of the World Heritage Convention. Without this organization, we would not be able to see today many of these cultural and naturalistic sites. With 192 countries adhered to the WHC known as States Parties, protection of properties on national territory becomes much accessible and easier. Additionally, actions can be taken immediately they are added on the List of World Heritage in Danger, leading to many successful restorations¹¹.

The Gabonese Republic is proud of its efforts in the preservation of its landscapes. In 2002, the country set 10% of its territory for a national park system. There are currently 13 national parks in the country, all developed for ecotourism as an economic alternative to exploiting Gabon's forests for lumber¹². Ecotourism is a responsible way to travel and conserve environment, involving the well-being of the local people and personal education¹³. The CEO of

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lopé_National_Park

¹¹ <http://whc.unesco.org/en/107/>

¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tourism_in_Gabon

¹³ <https://www.ecotourism.org/what-is-ecotourism>

Wildlife Conservation Society, Dr. Steven Anderson, praised the country for its preservation initiative, stating it as "one of the most courageous conservation acts in the last 20 years."¹⁴

The delegation of Gabon proposes the initiative to push forward ecotourism in all cultural and naturalistic sites, when adequate. Furthermore, we are aware of the economic aspect that these sites bring, which leads to a proposition involving shortening the available amount of time of these locations to tourists per year. Additionally, we propose to put the emphasis of the problem on climate change. Changing the perspective will make the private industries realize that by keeping certain heritage sites open to tourism, it will only accelerate its destruction caused by global warming, which in the end, will result not only the loss of an important historical element, but also the end of the tourist industry.

¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tourism_in_Gabon

Topic 3: Supporting and Accomplishing Education 2030

Education should undoubtedly be accessible for everyone, regardless of their gender, class and ethnicity. It is something which both the Millennium Development Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals have put immense emphasis on. Furthermore, the Incheon Declaration for Education 2030 was adopted at the World Education Forum in 2015 and suggest and increased spending on education of 4-6% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or 15-20% of total public expenditure ¹⁵. The initiative is great, but due to the difference circumstances of each country, and the absence of concrete strategies that is present, it is very hard to meet its requirements.

There are other problems faced by a large proportion of children which are elements out of our control: natural disasters and conflicts. Learning in these conditions is very difficult. Gender inequality is also an obstacle dealt by many girls in countries where the issue is very present. Furthermore, while it is ambitious to project the intention of giving access 12 years of free primary and secondary education across all countries, due to the differences of programs between different states as they are not subjected to international regulations, it will be difficult to judge what is an adequate education is consisted of.

Nevertheless, the biggest concern right now is to give access to all children in the world basic knowledge and establish a funding system that will help support the developing countries, as well as finding methods of schooling in unstable situations such as natural disasters and violent conflicts.

The United Nations and its branches have been tackling on this issue since a long time ago. UNESCO, UNICEF, UNCH, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the International Labour Organization (ILO), and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) are all focusing on accessible education through different aspects. Each of these different organizations are concentrating their efforts in one particular aspect, whether it is refugee children, girls and women, minority groups, combatting child labour, helping children in unstable areas, raising funds for better institutions or eradicating poverty. Other NGOs such as International Task Force on Teachers and Teachers Without Borders are contributing as well in their own ways. Setting up objectives such as the the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) also helps keep track of progression.

Advances are definitely made: 47% of countries achieved universal primary enrolment, 50 million more children enrolled in school than in 1999, and a doubling of students in lower secondary education is seen in sub-Saharan Africa¹⁶. Still, we are far from satisfactory results.

¹⁵ <http://ssuns.org/static/BG/UNESCOFinalDraft.pdf>

¹⁶ <http://sdg.iisd.org/news/gmr-2015-despite-progress-world-will-not-achieve-education-for-all-goals/?rdr=sd.iisd.org>

Gabon's education system is consisted of free and public primary and secondary schools. Attendance is mandatory for primary and lower secondary school which touches approximatively children from the ages of 6 to 16. ¹⁷ In 2010, the government has adopted a development strategy based on the National Education Conference which drew attention to weaknesses in the public school system. The state has also worked on increasing the number of schools, and the training and recruiting of teachers. The budget for the schooling aspect of the country has increased over the years and the government is working on gathering pertinent, reliable and up-to-date statistics on the education system in order to improve it. ¹⁸

The first Lady of Gabon, Sylvia Bongo Odimba, is personally involved in creating full-time education project that would help shape the country's future. Along with her supporting team, she opened the Ecole Ruban Vert. Served as a complementary institution consisting of teachings of future challenges and adaption methods, it also focuses on creating leaders equipped with the skills to face the fast-paced-changing world. The core element of this school lies in how it will help shape the country and the region's future. It is the first school in the region created to cultivate a generation whose education is based on sustainability. ¹⁹

The delegation of Gabon proposes a greater capital contribution from developed countries, considering many states in the world, such as the ones on the African continent, were colonies of European empires and are faced today with conflicts resulted from the occupation of those empires. The funds will cover each nation's system where it is the most needed, wether it is in strong buildings to confront natural disasters, infrastructures that will facilitate the students transportation or road to school, better wage for teachers, or simply a greater number of establishments. International aid can also create great relations between countries and establish a solid partnership.

The delegation of Gabon also proposes the creation of a document with universal principles of education, produced by a number of individuals, who will decided based on certain criteria. These individuals can be experts in education, psychologists, or renowned teachers from all around the world. From there, these principles can be adapted according to the needs and cultural norms of different countries. The challenge lies more in the arts faculty rather than the science faculty, which are mostly consisted of universal facts.

The training of qualified teachers can also be more emphasized as well as their conditions. Children tend to learn from people they appreciate. Forming qualified and passionate mentors is of great significance in a child's education journey.

¹⁷ <http://www.epdc.org/country/gabon>

¹⁸ The Report: Gabon 2013

¹⁹ <http://time.com/4318534/first-lady-of-gabon-education/>

Finally, for children who are denied access to education due to wars, the Gabonese Republic proposes a stronger collaboration with the NGO Teachers Without Borders, ensuring the volunteers better safety and equipment. Refugee camps often see the emersion of improvised teachers, thus, the UN can provide a certain amount of basic tools to those camps in order to help the teachers with their teaching.