



SABER IN ACTION: GUINEA-BISSAU BUILDING SCHOOL AUTONOMY & ACCOUNTABILITY

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A coastal country in West Africa, Guinea-Bissau has a population of approximately 1.8 million, with annual population growth of around 2.4 percent (2015). Its population is very young: 41 percent of residents are 14 years old or younger. Given its GDP per capita of US\$573 (2015), Guinea-Bissau is one of the poorest countries in the world, with around 70 percent of the population falling under the poverty line of US\$2 a day.

Education in Guinea-Bissau is governed primarily by the 2010 Basic Education Law, which affirms the right to basic education for all, as guaranteed by the constitution. Access to education in Guinea-Bissau has improved over the last decade; however, the country remains far from achieving the goal of universal education. In addition, completion rates and learning outcomes are both low. Education in Guinea-Bissau is also constrained by limited resources, with less than 2 percent of GDP allocated to the sector. Furthermore, the education budget is almost entirely absorbed by salaries, making the education sector heavily reliant on donor support.

SABER Engagement in Guinea-Bissau

In Guinea-Bissau, SABER began collecting, validating, and scoring data on school autonomy and school accountability in late 2016, and finalized the draft country report in the early months of 2017. In the country report, the SABER School Autonomy and Accountability team analyzed Guinea-Bissau's education system to better understand the extent to which schools are autonomous and accountable—that is to say, the extent to which they have authority to make decisions about operations and, in turn, are responsible for those actions.

The SABER School Autonomy and Accountability team found that the education system in Guinea-Bissau is largely centralized. Schools do not receive an operating budget, teaching staff are contracted at the central level, and though various forms of school management committees exist, these groups lack a defined role and have minimal support. The analysis also found that much more needs to be done to ensure sufficient accountability. Regulations about financial management and school operations exist, but compliance with those regulations isn't linked to rewards or sanctions. In addition, the team found that school performance assessments are sporadic and not used to inform policy.



The SABER School Autonomy and Accountability team suggested three principal policy recommendation areas as priorities for Guinea-Bissau to move forward, to improve education outcomes:

- Systematically formalize and consolidate national policies
- Build capacity for entities that have been given authority at the central, regional, and school levels
- Use data to strengthen accountability in the system.

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The analysis and country report, which were shared with the government, are being used to inform the National Education Plan (Plano Sectorial da Educação da Guiné-Bissau 2016–2025), which will guide the country's education sector strategy for the next decade. The plan prioritizes expanding education coverage, improving education quality, and supporting vocational and higher education, while also strengthening school management and governance by improving coordination, decentralization, and financial management.

The results are also informing an upcoming Bank operation, Quality Education for All in Guinea-Bissau, which aims to improve the teaching and learning environment in grades one through four in targeted schools across the country. The results have also spurred further data collection using a version of the SABER Service Delivery tool to help researchers collect baseline data at the school level on critical information such as student learning and teacher ability.

Lesson Learned

In fragile nation states that are politically unstable, autonomy indicators could sometimes conflate with the lack of proper control, rendering some SABER School Autonomy and Accountability parameters ineffective and inaccurate. Therefore, to make the country report actionable in the policy implementation process, merely collecting policy intent data is sometimes not enough. In the case of Guinea-Bissau, the SABER School Autonomy and Accountability team also adapted the SABER Service Delivery modules to conduct small-scale policy implementation data collection in the country. By adapting the existing evaluation tools into project preparation tools, the team was able to get more detailed policy data.

When a country's education system is obviously underperforming, SABER's greatest value is not to be used primarily as a benchmarking tool, but for organizing the policy dialogue, as well as connecting implementation practices and service delivery at the school level.