

# Gabon: an example for all of africa



## Gabon: An Example For All of Africa

The country of Gabon is praised as being one of the most successful countries in Africa. Gabon is a very diverse country in many ways. There are a variety of different tribes that call Gabon home. Also, the land differs through out the county.

Gabon is one of the smaller countries of Africa with the area of 267, 670 square miles. Comparatively, this is the almost the same size as Colorado.

The terrain of this tiny country consists of narrow coastal plains; a hilly interior; and Savannah in the east and south. Much of the interior is rain forests and is not arable. Only 1% of the land is arable The remaining land is either meadows, permanent crops, or other land forms. (The World Fact Book 1995)

Gabon is one of the most thinly populated countries in Africa. It has a population of approximately 1, 155, 000 (July 1995 est.) There are 11 people per square mile. The majority of the Gabonese are of ages 15-64 years. The average life expectancy is 55. 14 years. Women live to be around 58, while men are usually around 52 when they die. This is why only 5% of the population is older than 65. The infant mortality is lower than many other African countries, 92.

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per 1, 000 live births. (The World Fact Book 1995)

As in most African countries, there are many Bantu tribes make up the ethnicity of the country. There are four major tribal groups. The Fang, Eshira,

Bapounou, and the Bateke. (The World Fact Book)

The largest of these tribes is the Fang. They live mainly in the northern area of Gabon. Many years ago they were considered the fiercest warriors of the area. Now, they dominate many of the countries governmental

positions. (World Book Encyclopedia page )

One of the earlier tribes that is since gone was the Omyene. They lived along the coast. The Omyene are important because they were the first of the

natives to meet the European traders and missionaries. They played an important

role of keeping peace with the Europeans. (World Book Encyclopedia, 1992 page

2)

Along with there being so many different ethnic backgrounds, there are many religions as well. The major religion is Christian, 75 % of the population.

About 1% of the population is Muslim. The remaining 24% are animists.

These

include all of the tribal practices. (The World Fact Book)

One of the reasons why Gabon has been so successful is that it has a

stable government. It is a republic and has multiple political parties. The capitol, Libreville ( aprox. 275, 000 people), is where all of governmental issues are taken care of. (1996 World Almanac pages 764-65) This is where the the National assembly, Gabon's legislative branch, meets. Also this is where the president lives. President Omar Bongo has been president for 29 years. He has been getting reelected every 7 years since 1967.( Clement's Encyclopedia of World Government 1996, page 146)

As president, Mr. Bongo has many different jobs. He serves not only as chief administrator but also as Head of the State. In order to help him to govern the country well he gets to choose a council of ministers. Also out of the 120 representatives in the National Assembly, 9 are appointed by the president. The others are voted in by the people. The president can also adjourn the Assembly for up to 18 months in order to rule alone. ( World Book Encyclopedia 1992 page 2)

Gabon has a peaceful history. They were first discovered by the Portuguese in the mid 15th century. The Portuguese didn't settle though. But during the 19th century France started gaining interest in Gabon. The first French settlement was in 1839. In 1848, Gabon became part of the French Congo.

It wasn't until 1957 when Gabon became a French republic. Less than five years

later, on August 17, 1960, full independence was granted by the French to the

Republic of Gabon. That same year the first president was elected.

(Clement's

Encyclopedia of World Government, 1996 pg. 146)

Yet another reason for Gabon's success is its economy. Gabon is an oil-rich country. Oil accounts for 80% of their exports. Besides petroleum, substantial timber resources and expansion of its agriculture section has allowed Gabon to grow economically. (Call and Post (Cincinnati) 12/1/94 pp. PG.)

Gabon exports much of its natural wealth. The United States and France are the major trading partners of Gabon. The top commodities are crude oil, timber, and manganese. The major imports are foodstuffs, chemical products, and

petroleum products. The major partners for imports are France and other African

countries. (World Fact Book, 1995)

The labor force is made up of 120,000 salaried workers. 65% of the people work in the agriculture field. 30% work in industry and commerce. The

top industries in Gabon are food and beverage, lumbering, textiles, and petroleum refining. The major agricultural cash crops are cocoa, coffee, and palm oil. Livestock raising has yet to develop but, there is a small fishing industry. (World Fact Book 1995)

The currency of Gabon, the CFA Franc, is not worth much compared to the dollar. The exchange rate was for every US dollar there is 529.43 CFA Francs

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in

1995. The per capita income is twice as much as most other African countries,

\$4, 800. This means that the average Gabonese household will make 2, 540, 784

Francs per year. (The World Fact Book 1995)

Despite its small size, Gabon is one of the most advanced and extensive air transport networks. They have a total of 69 airports. Thirty eight of these airports have paved runways. Even though the runways may be paved, many

of the roads are not. Out of the 7, 500 kilometers of highway, only 560 kilometers are paved. The remaining of the roads are crushed stone or earth.

(The World Fact Book 1995)

Gabon may seem like paradise, but it does have some problems. There has been a recent outbreak of the Ebola virus, the first in Gabon's history. The outbreak started in a remote rain forest area near the town of Booue, in central Gabon. It started when a family of 18 shared a meal of chimpanzee meat.

It had spread slowly to 14 other friends and family starting in July. Luckily, the virus was contained by the swift action taken by the Gabonese government.

They prevented the disease from spreading by supplying the local hospitals with

proper equipment. This has been the only major problem in the past year,

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besides Maritime boundary disputes with Equatorial Guinea. (Newsday, 10/12/96, pg. 6)

No other nation in Africa, possibly the whole world, has undergone such a spectacular change in the twentieth century- from mud huts to mini-sky scrapers. Gabon's future looks very bright. Soon enough they will be one of the leading countries of the world.

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History