



1. Project Data

Project ID P157473	Project Name Gabon Statistical Development Project	
Country Gabon	Practice Area(Lead) Poverty and Equity	
L/C/TF Number(s) IBRD-86990	Closing Date (Original) 31-Dec-2021	Total Project Cost (USD) 50,381,891.42
Bank Approval Date 30-Mar-2017	Closing Date (Actual) 29-Dec-2023	
	IBRD/IDA (USD)	Grants (USD)
Original Commitment	50,000,000.00	0.00
Revised Commitment	50,000,000.00	0.00
Actual	50,298,529.82	0.00

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2. Project Objectives and Components

a. Objectives

The Project Development Objective (PDO) as stated in the Financing Agreement (FA) (p. 5) was "to strengthen the statistical capacity of the Borrower, fill key data gaps, improve statistical production, and enhance statistical dissemination practices." For the purposes of the ICRR, the objective is unpacked into the following two PDOs:

- **PDO1:** To strengthen the statistical capacity of the Borrower, fill key data gaps, and improve statistical production; and



- **PDO2:** To strengthen the capacity of the Borrower to enhance statistical dissemination practices.

At the first restructuring in October 2021, the target for PDO indicator #3 that tracked the number of welfare, agriculture, economic, and business surveys and censuses conducted was increased (from 10 to 15 surveys). This adjustment increased the project's scope, and therefore a split rating methodology is not warranted.

b. Were the project objectives/key associated outcome targets revised during implementation?

Yes

Did the Board approve the revised objectives/key associated outcome targets?

Yes

Date of Board Approval

23-Oct-2021

c. Will a split evaluation be undertaken?

No

d. Components

The project contained three components:

Component 1: Improved Data Collection, Statistical Production, and Dissemination (appraisal: US\$32.8 million; actual: US\$33.3 million). This component covered four main areas: (a) national accounts and real sector statistics, (b) welfare monitoring statistics, (c) agricultural statistics, and (d) data access and dissemination. These areas were prioritized based on the government's strategic needs and the National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS). The overall purpose of this component was to support the National Statistical System (NSS) in delivering reliable and timely statistics to the government, citizens, businesses, international organizations, and other institutions for informed decision-making. To this end, the project was to support a range of targeted activities.

First, the project aimed to address the shortcomings in source data and the insufficient capacity and staffing of the General Directorate of Statistics (DGS) unit responsible for compiling National Accounts (NA). It was to prioritize building staff capacity and improving data collection and processing, as well as upgrading the NA methodology to align with international standards. The project also sought to fund the realization of a national economic census, to update the business register and quarterly business surveys. It aimed to improve price statistics by updating the Consumer Price Index (CPI) base year and expanding the geographical scope of price data collection, while supporting the regular production and dissemination of macroeconomic statistics and labor force indicators (Project Appraisal Document, PAD, p. 7)

Second, in terms of welfare monitoring, the project sought to finance major household income, expenditure, and living standards surveys (the Gabonese Survey for Poverty Assessment (*Enquête Gabonaise pour l'Evaluation de la Pauvreté*, EGEP II and III) that were to be conducted in 2017 and 2020, respectively. The 2017 survey was planned to contain a module on the informal sector, and both surveys were planned to include a module on employment. The project was also to support the development of poverty maps,



socioeconomic atlases, and a Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) to update welfare and gender indicators (PAD, pp. 7-8).

Third, for agricultural statistics, the project was to support two main data collection activities: (a) an agriculture census in 2018, and (b) at least three annual production surveys to be conducted by the Ministry of Agriculture with the support of the National Statistical Agency (NSA) and Technical Assistance (TA) from the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization) (PAD, p. 8).

Fourth, the project also aimed to improve data access and dissemination by redesigning NSS and ministry websites for better openness, implementing data dissemination and microdata access policies, and establishing a small-scale printing and publishing unit to enhance the production and distribution of statistical reports and bulletins (PAD, p. 9).

Under the project's first restructuring in October 2021, some new activities were added under Component 1. The added activities included high frequency phone surveys for COVID-19 monitoring, a Census of Vulnerable Households (*Recensement des Gabonais Economiquement Faibles*, RGEF), and a school census.

Component 2: Build Technical Capacity and Modernize Infrastructure (appraisal: US\$13.5 million; actual: US\$12.7 million). This component aimed to strengthen human capital and modernize infrastructure to finalize ongoing institutional reform as part of the planned implementation of the approved decree creating the NSA. The project intended to support these efforts through training of staff, financing of scholarships for students, and financing of the renovation and refurbishment of the future headquarters of the NSA.

This component aimed to build technical capacity by investing in a comprehensive training program for existing staff and providing scholarships for Gabonese candidates to study abroad in internationally accredited statistical schools. The goal was to enhance the proportion of National Statistics Office staff with formal degrees and specialized training in statistics, demography, economics, and information technology (IT), particularly programming. The in-house training program was to be tailored to address specific needs and improve the quality of statistical products (PAD, p. 9).

The component was also to modernize infrastructure with an investment in renovating the building designated as the headquarters for the new NSA. This included interior renovations, procurement of office furniture, and upgrades to electrical and IT systems. The project also aimed to finance the acquisition of essential equipment for data collection, processing, analysis, storage, and dissemination, such as vehicles, servers, computers, and web servers. Additionally, it aimed to support the establishment of a modern data center to manage IT systems, facilitate data dissemination and archiving, and support tablet-based data collection processes (PAD, p. 11).

During the first restructuring, component 2 was revised to support the purchase and renovation of a building for the DGS, replacing the initial renovation of an assigned office building.

Component 3: National Statistical System Institutional Reform and Project Management Capacity Building (appraisal: US\$3.57 million; actual: US\$4 million). This component aimed to support implementation of statistical institutional reform efforts and ensure that there was adequate capacity for project management. It was to support activities related to: (a) development of the next NSDS and TA to develop, implement, and monitor the agency's annual business plans; (b) recruitment of a senior statistics adviser to support the establishment of the NSA; (c) TA to develop a results-based management system;



and (d) statistical coordination activities through the National Commission for Statistical Information. The NSDS aimed to provide an action plan for producing better statistics to meet the needs of decision-makers and civil society. The senior statistics advisor, based at the Statistics Office, was to guide the Director General and senior management in implementing institutional reforms (PAD, p. 11).

The component was also to finance the National Commission for Public Infrastructure Works and Promotion of Small-Scale Enterprises (*Commission Nationale des Travaux d'Intérêt Public pour la Promotion de l'Entreprenariat et de l'Emploi*, CN-TIPPEE) to manage all non-technical aspects of the project. Furthermore, funding was to be provided to the DGS to organize user satisfaction surveys, aimed at strengthening dialogue with the users of statistics and assessing the impact of the project activities.

As part of Component 3, the project originally aimed to support the transformation of the DGS to an NSA based on the 2014 Statistics Law. It also emphasized developing the NSA's annual business plans, implementing an effective human resources management system, and strengthening the National Council for Statistical Information (PAD, p. 10). However, during project implementation, the government amended the statistics law to instead establish a National Statistical Institute (*Institut Nationale de la Statistique*, INSTAT). Therefore, the project supported the amendment of the 2014 Statistics Law to the 2022 Statistics Law (loi n°016/2022) and the transformation of the DGS to an INSTAT.

e. Comments on Project Cost, Financing, Borrower Contribution, and Dates

Project Cost: At appraisal in 2017, the total budgeted cost for the project was US\$ 50 million. The actual amount disbursed was US\$ 50.3 million.

Financing: The project was financed through an International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) loan. The Borrower did not contribute any funds to the project.

Dates: The project was approved on March 30, 2017, and the FA was signed on April 18, 2017. The project became effective on November 9, 2017. A Mid-term Review (MTR) was conducted in November 2020. The original project closing date was set for December 31, 2021. However, the project was restructured twice, with the first restructuring approved on October 23, 2021, extending the closing date to October 31, 2023. The second restructuring was approved on November 1, 2023, further extending the closing date to December 29, 2023, when the project officially closed. The project was restructured twice. Activities were planned sequentially but were disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic and, subsequently, by a political crisis.

- **Restructuring No 1:** The first restructuring was approved on October 23, 2021. During the project's first restructuring, several new activities were introduced under Component 1, while Component 2 was revised. Additionally, calculation methods for key performance indicators were revised, as outlined below:
 - For PDO indicator 1, the Statistical Capacity Index (SCI) score calculation was updated to include specific indicators like agriculture census, child malnutrition, and others, while keeping the rest constant. The indicator was revised to focus on project-specific attributes and make progress measurement more realistic, as some elements under the original composite indicator were not attributable to the project.
 - For PDO indicator 2, the focus was shifted to the timely dissemination of the CPI and other improvements in national accounts and price statistics. The reason for the change was to enable the measurement of various improvements in national accounts under a single



- indicator, rather than as separate yes/no measures, thus capturing overall progress more holistically.
- The target for PDO indicator 3, which tracked the number of welfare, agriculture, economic, and business surveys and censuses conducted, was increased from 10 to 15. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Gabon halted field work for statistical operations and established a call center to conduct high-frequency surveys on the impact of COVID-19 on households and businesses. These surveys, using Computer Aided Telephone Interviews (CATI), followed the same phases as traditional surveys and involved around 2,000 households. They aimed to strengthen the DGS's capacity to perform rapid surveys during crises, with each wave considered as significant as a traditional survey.
 - The restructuring also extended the project closing date by 22 months, moving it from December 31, 2021 to October 31, 2023. Under Component 1, the COVID-19 pandemic had caused significant delays in planned surveys essential for updating the national accounts system. The extension allowed the completion of these surveys, the update of the national accounts base year, and the transition from the 1993 System of National Accounts (SNA) to the 2008 SNA. Under Component 2, the project aimed to implement delayed capacity-building activities, resume international and regional training, and allow students to complete their courses, all of which were impacted by COVID-19 travel restrictions. The government requested purchasing a building for the DGS due to safety issues and occupancy conflicts with the initially planned buildings, requiring additional time for renovation. Under Component 3, the extension allowed the completion of ongoing activities to meet PDO indicators. The new Statistics Act, creating an INSTAT instead of the initially planned NSA, was adopted by parliament and awaited Senate approval before implementation.
 - **Restructuring No. 2:** The second restructuring was approved on November 1, 2023. During the second restructuring, the project's closing date was extended from October 31, 2023 to December 29, 2023. The purpose of the extension was to allow the government to finalize the rehabilitation of DGS facilities, disseminate statistical products, and enable the World Bank (WB) financial management team to review project expenses. The political context, including the presidential election campaign and a coup d'état on August 30, 2023 (that triggered WB OP 7.30 on Dealing with De Facto Governments) had led to a pause in project disbursement and client contact, necessitating the extension to ensure the completion of expedited activities.

3. Relevance of Objectives

Rationale

Country Context: At the time of project appraisal, Gabon faced significant challenges in its NSS, including weak and declining statistical capacity, outdated data, and insufficient resources. The country's SCI score dropped from 47.8 in 2005 to 36.7 in 2016, far below the Sub-Saharan African average of 59.9 (including both low- and middle-income and both fast- and slow-growing economies) (PAD, p. 2). This decline was due to a lack of qualified staff, poor infrastructure, and an inadequate working environment. Only a handful of staff were able to use the statistical software tools used to compute and produce statistical outputs from raw household survey, census, and administrative data (PAD, p. 3).

The low and declining SCI for Gabon reflected deepening gaps in source data and the lagging, low volume, and poor quality of official statistical production. Key statistical activities, such as household expenditure



and poverty surveys, agricultural and enterprise censuses, and informal sector surveys, were not conducted. Since 1968, Gabon had not conducted agriculture census or annual agriculture surveys (PAD, p. 2). The latest gross domestic product (GDP) figures dated back to 2010, and the last poverty assessment survey was conducted in 2005.

At project appraisal, few statistical products were disseminated, and household survey microdata were not available. The annual statistical yearbook was last published in 2011. Until April 2015, the 2013 Population Census' provisional results were not released, and it took more than two years after that before the final results were disseminated. Administrative health data for 2008 and 2011 were collected and compiled but never disseminated. The health statistical yearbook was last published in 2005.

In 2010, the government launched the Emerging Gabon Strategic Plan (PSGE) Vision 2025, prioritizing the strengthening of the NSS to support evidence-based economic policy. The PSGE recognized frequent data collection and timely dissemination of statistics as essential for designing and implementing effective economic policies. It aimed to consolidate the legal and institutional framework of the NSS and strengthen its capacity to generate and disseminate high-quality, timely, and policy-relevant data and statistics.

A new Statistics Law was adopted in 2014, leading to the establishment of an autonomous NSA to coordinate the NSS and improve statistical production and dissemination. The law aligned with the African Statistics Charter and the African Union Strategy for the Harmonization of Statistics in Africa (SHaSA).

The project provided support to the government's NSDS reform plan with the objective of making the DGS more efficient in collecting, producing, and disseminating official statistics. By supporting national capacity in the production and dissemination of statistics, the project sought to enhance evidence-based decision-making, measure development impacts, and foster better governance. The demand for recent statistical information was consistently expressed by national and international users, including the government, private sector, civil society, academics, and development partners.

Alignment with WB Country Partnership Strategy (CPS) at appraisal: The project was fully aligned with the CPS FY2012–2016. The project aimed to generate missing data necessary to inform the WB's focus on eradicating extreme poverty and boosting shared prosperity. It was aligned with the WB's strategic priorities in the Africa region, including generating better-quality poverty and shared prosperity data, developing collaboration models with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and building capacity for greater use of statistics. Through CPS Objective 2, "Increased Access to Basic Services," the WB aimed to build a solid and flexible social protection system. In particular, the project sought to improve the robustness of the economically weak Gabonese economic registry (*Gabonais Economiquement Faibles*), which was the primary registry for targeting government social protection programs.

Alignment with the FY23-27 Country Partnership Framework (CPF): Although there was no CPS in place between FY18 and FY23 due to political instability and the pandemic, the project remained relevant to the FY23-27 CPF, which replaced the previous country strategy that ended in FY18. In particular, the project aligned with CPF Objective 2, "Increased Access to Basic Services," which supports initiatives such as the Digital Gabon project, aimed at enhancing statistical systems and digital registers to improve the targeting of social protection and safety nets. The FY23-27 CPF emphasizes strengthening public service delivery, improving public sector accountability and access to public digital platforms, making the project's focus on better targeting through improved data and statistical systems directly relevant to this framework.



Overall, the relevance of the project and its PDO is rated as high, given its strategic alignment with WB strategy, government reform initiatives, and the PSGE.

Rating

High

4. Achievement of Objectives (Efficacy)

OBJECTIVE 1

Objective

Strengthen the capacity of the Borrower to fill key data gaps and improve statistical production

Rationale

The original project did not include a Theory of Change (TOC). A TOC was reconstructed subsequently. The TOC aimed to address key issues in Gabon's statistical system, specifically focusing on the disorganized structure, lack of political ownership, bureaucratic and complex decision-making processes, insufficient funding for statistical activities, low-quality data, limited public access to high-quality data, and inadequate human and institutional capacity at the DGS. To address these problems, the project planned to implement activities such as revising national accounts and real sector statistics, rebasing the CPI, conducting welfare monitoring statistics (EGEP II, III, and DHS III), and conducting agriculture censuses and agricultural production surveys. Additionally, the project focused on enhancing staff training and skills through training programs and scholarships for advanced degrees in statistics. These activities were designed to produce specific outputs such as updated national accounts, a rebased CPI measure, completed welfare and agricultural surveys, and enhanced staff training. These outputs, in turn, were expected to translate into higher-level objectives by improving the quality and coverage of national statistical data, enhancing the DGS's capacity to produce timely and reliable data, increasing public and policy access to high-quality data, strengthening institutional capacity and human resources, and improving data infrastructure and dissemination practices. By strengthening institutional capacity and human resources within the DGS and improving data infrastructure, the project aimed to bolster Gabon's ability to fill key data gaps and enhance statistical production. The TOC was based on several critical assumptions, including that CN-TIPPEE (the selected implementing agency) would implement the project efficiently and effectively and that there would be commitment at highest government levels for statistical reforms (ICR, p. 8).

Outputs and intermediate outcomes

- **Number of staff at the statistics office with improved skills.** The project supported the implementation of a training and skill enhancement program for existing staff. With the project's support, the DGS developed and partially executed a training plan for 2020–2023. Training included preparation of production surveys on livestock and animal production, economic data analysis, data trends (price indexes), database evaluation, urban area price determination surveys, and data production, cleaning, and analysis. The project achieved 162.5 percent of its target, with 130 staff members (target: 80) benefiting from capacity building (**Achieved**).



- **Number of women of the statistics office with improved skills.** In total, 56 women (350 percent of the target for women) were part of the capacity building efforts. The project exceeded its target (16 women) (**Achieved**).
- **Data collection for the next welfare survey was completed.** The project financed EGEP II for 2017 and the preparatory phase for EGEP III (2021–2025). The ICR (p. 9) explains that the target was for EGEP III to be completed during the project's lifetime, in keeping with international standards that household welfare surveys be conducted every three years. However, COVID-19 restrictions prevented data collection in 2020 and 2021, delaying EGEP III implementation. The target of EGEP III data collection being completed was therefore not reached. (**Not Achieved**).
- **Data collection for the next DHS was completed.** The project financed DHS III covering 2019–2021. The final report was disseminated in July 2023. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, data collection was conducted in two phases: (a) the first phase was officially launched on November 23, 2019, and (b) the second phase was conducted from June 7 to October 30, 2021 (**Achieved**). The updated DHS provided up-to-date statistics on fertility, mortality, domestic violence, diseases, and knowledge about HIV and hepatitis B, updating key indicator reports for 6 out of 12 sub-indicators.
- **Base year of the CPI was updated.** The previous CPI only covered the Libreville district (including Owendo and Akanda), and its base year of 2004 was outdated. The project improved CPI calculation by updating the base year to 2018 and expanding geographical coverage to include urban and rural areas nationwide (**Achieved**).
- **Increase in number of qualified technical staff working on national accounts at the statistics office.** The team now includes 14 technical staff, with 7 junior accountants gradually recruited by the project, exceeding the target of 8 (from a baseline of 2) by 175 percent (**Achieved**).
- **Other surveys and censuses:** Overall, the project supported the conducting of 23 surveys and censuses, including EGEP II, COVID-19 impact surveys, DHS III, two school censuses, RGA, and plant and animal production surveys (EPVA). In addition to those cited above:
 - **Agriculture Census (RGA):** Produced structural data on Gabon's agricultural sector in 2019, with eight volumes and leaflets published in collaboration with FAO.
 - **COVID-19 Impact Monitoring:** Conducted 10 waves of surveys analyzing the impact of COVID-19 on household living conditions and activities of production units.
 - **Census of Educational Provision (RGOE):** Published education statistical yearbooks for 2018–2019 and 2020–2021, and created an online education dashboard.
 - **National Accounts:** Published accounts from 2011 to 2018 under SNA 1993, with preliminary accounts for 2019 and 2020.

Outcomes

Progress toward the PDO was monitored through the following PDO indicators:

- **Increase in Gabon's Statistical Capacity Index score.** The SCI value increased from 36.7 (baseline) in 2017 to 58.9 in 2023. The end target of 65.0 was not met (**Substantially Achieved, Achievement: 58.9 (90.6 percent of target)**).
 - Furthermore, the transition from the SCI to the Statistical Performance Indicator (SPI) by the WB highlights broader improvement, with Gabon's SPI score increasing significantly from 28 in 2017 to 42.82 in 2022.
- **Number of welfare, agriculture, economic and business surveys, and censuses conducted:** The project significantly exceeded its target for conducting welfare, agriculture, economic, and business surveys and censuses. With a baseline of 2 and an end target of 15, the achievement reached 23,



equating to 153 percent of the target. The project carried out several surveys and censuses, including EGEP II, ten waves of COVID-19 impact surveys on households, DHS III, two rounds of school censuses (2019 and 2020–2021), ongoing RGEF and census mapping, RGA, EPVA, two surveys on the impact of COVID-19 on informal production units, one on formal production units, RGOE, and the Survey on Trade and Transport Margins (**Achieved**).

- **Improved national accounts and price statistics:** The project achieved 40 percent of its target, with the indicator formulated as follows: updated CPI year base (30 percent), timely dissemination of CPI (10 percent), improvement of national accounts timeliness (10 percent), updated GDP year base (30 percent), and use of the 2008 SNA (20 percent). Key accomplishments include updating the CPI year base to 2018, conducting the CPI survey across Libreville and nine provinces with AFRISTAT's assistance, and achieving timely dissemination of the monthly CPI series from December 2017 to September 2023. However, improvement in national accounts timeliness was not achieved, with the national accounts series from 2010 to 2018 produced but not released, and accounts from 2019 to 2022 not finalized. The GDP base year update is pending completion of essential surveys and censuses, such as the General Enterprise Census (RGE), EPVA, EGEP III, and the population and housing census. The use of the 2008 SNA remains incomplete, as it is tied to ongoing GDP rebasing efforts (**Not Achieved**).

Overall, based on improvements in the DGS's ability to collect, produce, and disseminate data for evidence-based policy making, achievement of Objective 1 is assessed as Substantial. The significant improvements in statistical capacity, the successful conduct of numerous surveys and censuses, and the enhancement of staff skills and institutional capacity demonstrate substantial progress. Out of the three PDO indicators, two were achieved or partially achieved. The third PDO indicator, improved national accounts and price statistics, was not fully met, achieving only 40 percent of its target. Additionally, five out of six IRIs were achieved, with significant gains in staff training and skill enhancement, especially among women. Despite some targets, particularly those related to national accounts timeliness and GDP rebasing, not being fully met, the overall progress made in enhancing Gabon's statistical capacity and production is noteworthy.

Rating

Substantial

OBJECTIVE 2

Objective

Strengthen the capacity of the Borrower to enhance statistical dissemination practices

Rationale

The TOC for this objective focused on the development of a national data dissemination policy and the establishment of a national data portal to disseminate socioeconomic data. Efforts were concentrated on developing a comprehensive strategy for data dissemination, which included creating detailed guidelines and a concrete action plan aimed at upgrading the Gabonese statistical information system. Additionally, the formulation and adoption of data dissemination and microdata access policies, capacity building to roll out an "Accelerated Data Program" initiative, and provision of free online access to anonymized census and household survey microdata were integral parts of the strategy. These activities were to lead to improvement



in the capacity of the NSS to disseminate high-quality, timely, frequent, and policy-relevant data and statistics.

Outputs

- The DGS website and its open data portal were modernized to host all recent and past survey results and their microdata.
- A data dissemination strategy was developed as part of the NSDS, including guidelines and action plans.
- Online publications on the DGS website now include the Bulletin and Foreign Trade Indices, the Wholesale Price Index for Building Materials, and demographic projections.
- Results of key surveys (RGA, RGOE I, EGEP II, and DHS III) were distributed to relevant ministries, published in local newspapers, and discussed on Gabonese television.
- Seminars were organized with Gabonese employers and civil societies to disseminate survey and census results.
- Regular statistics dissemination events were held, including several on African Statistics Day and a first Gabon statistical dissemination event in December 2023.

Outcomes

Achievement of the objective was measured by the following PDO indicators:

- **Number of survey and census microdata files freely available online.** The project exceeded its target for publishing survey and census microdata files online. With a baseline of 0 and an end target of 8, the achievement reached 10, equating to 125 percent of the target. The project financed and published microdata for various surveys and censuses, including RGA, price statistics, EGEP II, COVID-19, RGE, school censuses, international trade data, food balance surveys, DHS III, and vital statistics. These datasets are available at the following link: <https://gabon.opendataforafrica.org/data/#menu=topic> (**Achieved**).

The project exceeded its target for publishing survey and census microdata files online. This is likely to improve sustained access to vital data, facilitating transparency and more informed decision-making. Despite limitations in the results framework (RF) (discussed further in Section 9), the overall impact on improving data dissemination as measured by the PDO indicator was significant and aligned with the project's higher-level objectives. The ICR noted that the statistical products disseminated under the project are being used by the government, development partners, and researchers/students (ICR, p. 20).

Rating

Substantial

OVERALL EFFICACY



Rationale

Overall, efficacy is rated as Substantial. The project supported relevant activities to improve the statistical capacity of the Borrower. Achievement of objective 1 is rated Substantial, with some minor shortcomings. The project significantly improved the statistical capacity of the DGS, evidenced by an increase in the SCI score (from 36.7 in 2017 to 58.9) in 2023. Key activities such as revising national accounts, rebasing the CPI, and conducting various welfare and agricultural surveys were successfully implemented. Furthermore, the project enhanced staff training and skills, with a notable increase in the number of qualified technical staff. However, there were some shortcomings, particularly in the timeliness and finalization of national accounts and GDP rebasing efforts, which were not fully completed. Achievement of Objective 2 is likewise rated Substantial, despite limitations in the RF. The modernization of the DGS website and the successful publication of 10 survey and census microdata files demonstrated substantial progress.

Overall Efficacy Rating

Substantial

5. Efficiency

Efficiency is rated Modest. Official statistics and data production are public goods typically funded by government revenue and contributions from development partners, without direct financial returns, and therefore a conventional economic analysis is not possible or appropriate. However, the project's absence would have left Gabon's NSS with significant data gaps, particularly in poverty, employment, and agricultural statistics. Even if the country had managed to conduct these surveys independently, data quality would have been low, and reliance on external consultants would have remained high, limiting the government's capacity for informed decision-making.

The cost per household survey in Gabon was higher compared to regional counterparts—US\$822 per household in Gabon versus US\$203 in the Republic of Congo and similar figures in Benin, Niger, and Mali. However, this higher cost can be partly attributed to necessary investments in modernizing the NSS, including the transition from paper-based questionnaires to digital data collection (CAPI), as well as the purchase of vehicles and other equipment critical for conducting the surveys. These investments, while increasing initial costs, were essential for long-term improvements in data quality and timeliness; the ICR (p. 19) notes that they “helped avoid the use of paper questionnaires and reduced long delays for data entry after field work and data processing.”

The project supported the implementation of 10 waves of surveys on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on households, which were conducted via high-frequency phone surveys. (ICR, p.21). These surveys provided critical data on household conditions during the pandemic. However, in terms of broader household welfare surveys, while the project financed EGEP II (which informed the 2020 poverty assessment) and supported the preparatory phase of EGEP III, the full implementation of EGEP III was delayed due to the pandemic and remains ongoing.

Several factors contributed to project inefficiencies and delays. The absence of a Project Steering Committee, which was supposed to supervise, control, monitor, and evaluate the project, hampered effective oversight. Additionally, the lack of a dedicated project management team at CN-TIPPEE, which was established four years



after project effectiveness, further complicated project execution. (ICR, p. 20). High turnover of technical directors and general directors within the DGS disrupted continuity and delayed census and survey activities. For instance, from 2021 to 2023, the DGS saw the appointment of three different director generals, each transition causing significant delays. (ICR, p. 23). The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these challenges, causing significant delays due to travel restrictions and other related disruptions. Moreover, the project faced bureaucratic hurdles, such as slow decision-making processes at the government level, which delayed crucial activities like the EPVA survey by six months. This was due to ministerial decisions that postponed all DGS data collection activities except for census mapping, despite the fact that field workers were already deployed. (ICR, p. 24).

Additionally, a prolonged decision-making process regarding the DGS premises significantly delayed rehabilitation activities. Initially, the project aimed to refurbish the existing DGS facilities, but concerns about asbestos contamination led to a three-year delay as the government debated alternative solutions, resulting in the allocation of a different building that was partially occupied and inadequate for the DGS's needs.

Procurement inefficiencies also impacted implementation, including weak procurement performance and a lack of planning and coordination between CN-TIPPEE and DGS. Financial management issues, coupled with ineffective use of the WB's procurement system (Systematic Tracking of Exchanges in Procurement), led to significant delays and administrative burdens, negatively impacting critical service delivery. (ICR, p. 27; see also Sections 8a and 10b).

Despite these setbacks, the project managed to make considerable progress towards its objectives, particularly after the political crisis in August 2023. Although WB disbursements were halted for six months due to the crisis, efforts to accelerate project activities were successful once disbursements resumed, with 20 percent of the total funds being disbursed after the lifting of WB OP 7.30.

The cumulative impact of these significant inefficiencies justifies a Modest rating for the project's overall efficiency.

Efficiency Rating

Modest

a. If available, enter the Economic Rate of Return (ERR) and/or Financial Rate of Return (FRR) at appraisal and the re-estimated value at evaluation:

	Rate Available?	Point value (%)	*Coverage/Scope (%)
Appraisal		0	0 <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable
ICR Estimate		0	0 <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable

* Refers to percent of total project cost for which ERR/FRR was calculated.



6. Outcome

Based on the assigned rating for the three criteria (Relevance of Objectives, Efficacy, and Efficiency), the Outcome of the project is rated Moderately Satisfactory. Although the objectives were highly relevant to country context, government strategy, and WB strategy, and substantial progress was made in improving the statistical capacity of the Borrower and enhancing statistical dissemination practices, efficiency was rated Modest, resulting in an overall Moderately Satisfactory rating.

a. Outcome Rating

Moderately Satisfactory

7. Risk to Development Outcome

The project faces several critical risks that could impact its development outcomes. One major concern is the potential lack of sustained funding for ongoing statistical capacity building. Additionally, there could be delays in executing planned institutional reforms, and the project might struggle with a shortage of qualified personnel. Various political risks also pose potential challenges.

To further bolster the DGS's capabilities in statistical production, new staff recruitment through the project is underway. The project provided scholarships to 18 statisticians, with 16 successfully completing their studies in regional statistical schools. While one has already been hired into the civil service, 15 are in the process of being hired. However, the DGS faces difficulties in attracting and retaining these individuals due to low salaries and poor working conditions.

The WB has developed a new regional statistics project, Additional Financing of the Harmonizing and Improving Statistics in West and Central Africa - Series of Projects Two (HISWACA - SOP 2). Gabon is one of the project beneficiaries. Approved in March 2024, the parent project includes Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, and the Central African Economic and Monetary Community. The project aims to improve the countries' statistical performance, regional harmonization, and data access and use, and to enhance the modernization of the statistical system in participating countries. For Gabon, the financing amount allocated is an IBRD loan of US\$90 million, with a project closing date of December 31, 2029. The project aims to strengthen investments made under the previous project to structurally transform the statistical system, guided by lessons learned from the earlier project. Specifically, the follow-on project aims to complete the 2024 population census and EGEP III, strengthen routine data collection in key sectors such as education and employment, develop a national data dissemination policy, and establish a national data portal for socioeconomic data. It also plans to modernize data collection systems and implement human resource management reforms, including annual training for young Gabonese statisticians. Additionally, following the approval of regulations and decrees establishing the INSTAT, annual business plans and a new human resources management system will be implemented. This system will consider personnel qualifications and career plans to better retain competent staff. The project also includes the establishment of statistical training programs in a university or national school in the country, and the construction of a building for the DGS (future INSTAT) with modernized IT and statistical infrastructure.



8. Assessment of Bank Performance

a. Quality-at-Entry

The project preparation phase identified several constraints facing NSS, as highlighted in Gabon's first NSDS for 2011-2015. An evaluation of the NSDS conducted by the WB in 2016 identified significant statistical deficiencies in the country, which the project aimed to address. Project design incorporated lessons learned from similar statistical capacity-building initiatives and considered ongoing efforts by development partners to ensure complementarity. Extensive consultations were held with key stakeholders, including the DGS, members of the NSS, and relevant ministries such as education, health, agriculture, and the economy, to identify priority activities and collaboration opportunities. Additionally, the project sought input from development partners like FAO, UNESCO, and the United Nations Population Fund. As a result, the project was well aligned with overall country development objectives, as well as international conventions and frameworks such as the African Statistics Charter and ShaSA.

Despite these efforts, project design appears to have been ambitious, but achievable before the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the pandemic's impact in 2020-2021 significantly disrupted project activities, leading to the first restructuring, which reduced the scope of the SCI to focus on a more limited set of metrics. This suggests that the initial ambition of the indicator became overly ambitious in the context of the pandemic, as the project faced significant capacity constraints due to COVID-19-related delays.

The project's challenges were further exacerbated by overestimation of existing implementation capacity, particularly in M&E. The Project Implementation Unit (PIU) within the CN-TIPPEE was responsible for the M&E function. Here, the project's assessment of the CN-TIPPEE's fiduciary capacity was overly optimistic. During implementation, the project faced significant financial management (FM) and procurement challenges. These included difficulties in managing small expenditures, issues with selecting service providers, specifying equipment, and adhering to bidding procedures. Furthermore, contract management for survey operations was inefficient, leading to delays in payments and the identification of ineligible expenses, which required reimbursement to the WB.

Additionally, the institutional setup of the CN-TIPPEE proved inadequate for managing the project's fiduciary responsibilities independently. All project activities required approval from the central FM and procurement heads, leading to administrative bottlenecks. The CN-TIPPEE was also responsible for managing multiple large WB-financed projects, which further strained its capacity and led to disagreements among fiduciary staff. These issues, along with contract management challenges for large statistical operations and building rehabilitation activities, contributed to significant delays and complications during project implementation.

Given these challenges, the project's quality at entry is assessed as Moderately Satisfactory. The project's ambitions at appraisal were not matched by the on-the-ground capacity, leading to implementation difficulties and necessary adjustments that reflected a more realistic assessment of what could be achieved.

Quality-at-Entry Rating
Moderately Satisfactory



b. Quality of supervision

Implementation support was conducted adequately, with the WB's supervisory role facilitating effective project implementation and ensuring transparency and accountability. The WB team conducted regular supervision missions and worked to resolve issues as they arose, as evidenced by the series of project Implementation Status and Results Reports. Regular project updates and check-in meetings with the PIU and DGS were crucial in achieving the project's objectives. Throughout the project's life cycle (2017–2023), there were at least two supervision missions per year, several technical missions, an MTR mission, and a virtual project closing mission. In addition to task team leaders, technical experts based in Libreville, Yaoundé, and Washington DC provided ongoing training and advice. TA was provided on survey design, questionnaire design, sampling design, real-time monitoring systems, poverty measurement and data analysis, and inflation analysis and projection.

Quality of Supervision Rating

Satisfactory

Overall Bank Performance Rating

Moderately Satisfactory

9. M&E Design, Implementation, & Utilization

a. M&E Design

The M&E system was grounded in a logical and well-structured RF that clearly aligned project activities with intended outcomes and overall objectives. The RF featured a balanced set of PDOs and intermediate indicators, with predefined baselines and targets. This design ensured that project components were well linked, each contributing effectively to the overall achievement of the PDO.

However, while the RF successfully captured key aspects of data production and dissemination, it had some limitations in reflecting the full scope of the project's achievements. The project had achievements beyond what was captured by the RF. For example: (a) additional surveys and censuses were conducted (e.g., the project helped conduct the Census of Educational Provision [RGOE] focused on the enumeration of all the structures of the education system in the nine provinces of Gabon, with two editions carried out in 2019 and 2021); (b) human resources capacity for producing and disseminating statistics was enhanced (e.g., the project financed scholarships and preparatory sessions for Gabonese candidates to study abroad in regional statistics schools); (c) institutional reform activities were carried out (e.g., the project provided TA to help the DGS prepare for the migration to an INSTAT by reviewing and validating several draft texts, such as decrees on the attributes, organization, and functioning of INSTAT and the NSS); (d) the dissemination of statistics was enhanced (e.g., the project supported the modernization of the DGS website and its open data portal, development of a data dissemination strategy, and regular organization of statistics dissemination events); and (e) the existing DGS premises were rehabilitated (e.g., the project financed the modernization and equipment of three DGS buildings, addressing immediate needs for safe



and up-to-standard offices). Additionally, the project supported the development of the NSDS for 2023–2025, enhancing the overall statistical system in Gabon.

Finally, the PDO indicator for national accounts, which aggregated various elements into percentage points, lacked the granularity needed to track specific activities' progress. A more detailed approach, using simple 'yes' or 'no' indicators for each activity, could have provided a clearer and more accurate picture of the project's status at each stage (ICR, p. 25).

Overall, while the M&E framework was well designed and cogent, some additional adjustments were needed to fully capture some of the project's broader contributions, such as capacity building, institutional reforms, and infrastructure upgrades. Nevertheless, the framework in place was effective in tracking key outputs and aligning the project's components with its primary objectives.

b. M&E Implementation

M&E implementation benefited from ongoing oversight by the WB, which ensured that, despite challenges, there was a structured approach to M&E throughout the project's lifecycle. The PIU, despite initial limitations, produced quarterly and annual progress reports, providing valuable overviews of project activities and identifying key challenges.

However, M&E implementation faced some shortcomings, as noted earlier in this Review (see Section 8a). Notably, the recruitment of a dedicated M&E specialist was significantly delayed, occurring only in April 2021, more than three years into the project. This delay meant that for a substantial period, the project lacked specialized oversight in monitoring and evaluation. Additionally, the initial staffing of the PIU within the CN-TIPPEE was inadequate, with only a procurement specialist, an accountant, and a management assistant.

These limitations, however, were addressed over time, with the recruitment of a project coordinator in September 2020, following external audit feedback and recommendations from the WB.

c. M&E Utilization

M&E reports provided evidence of the project's achievement of intended outcomes. Progress indicators were documented in ISRs. Implementation support missions consistently included a list of recommended activities for upcoming periods and status updates on previously suggested actions. The M&E system was fully implemented as designed, despite some limitations in the RF, as noted above.

M&E Quality Rating

Substantial

10. Other Issues

a. Safeguards



Environmental Safeguards. The project's environmental performance was rated satisfactory at project closure. The project was classified as category B due to low to moderate risks. A health, safety, and environment (HSE) specialist were recruited to manage associated risks, primarily centered on Components 1 and 2. A Safety Management Plan was developed for Component 1 to address travel risks and potential conflicts, with awareness campaigns and protective equipment provided. Accidents were monitored according to WB procedures, and quarterly reports tracked HSE statistics. For Component 2, only asbestos-free buildings were selected for rehabilitation, with an Environmental and Social Management Plan prepared to meet fire safety requirements. At project closure, all sites were cleaned and rehabilitated, with no non-compliance issues or accidents reported.

Social Safeguards. After the first restructuring, OP/BP 4.10 was triggered due to the presence of Indigenous peoples in the project area. Furthermore, data collection, including surveys, posed risks like inappropriate behavior and potential sexual exploitation and abuse/harassment. To ensure social compliance, the Borrower implemented several key measures. These included COVID-19 safety protocols, a grievance redress mechanism, a plan to prevent gender-based violence and sexual exploitation/harassment, a labor management protocol with a worker Code of Conduct, and a protocol for engaging with Indigenous peoples in a culturally appropriate manner. At project closure, the project's performance was rated satisfactory.

b. Fiduciary Compliance

The CN-TIPPEE was responsible for financial management (FM) and procurement. While FM and monitoring reports were regularly submitted on time with overall acceptable quality, the project experienced ineligible expenditures due to inadequate or poor-quality supporting documentation. An institutional and organizational audit of CN-TIPPEE in 2023 identified several weaknesses affecting the project's financial performance.

The institutional setup of the CN-TIPPEE did not allow for stand-alone fiduciary management of the project, with all activities having to go through the main FM or procurement head, introducing administrative complexity (see Section 5). There were also disagreements among fiduciary colleagues, and CN-TIPPEE had limited contract management capacity for handling large statistical operations. These issues contributed to project management challenges and delays. Furthermore, the entity's inexperience with complex operations involving numerous small expenses led to significant difficulties in effective FM and documentation archiving. Moreover, project procurement execution and management suffered from a lack of planning and coordination between the CN-TIPPEE and DGS, integrity issues, and administrative burdens, all of which negatively impacted critical service delivery. In response, corrective measures were implemented to strengthen the documentation process and enhance compliance with audit requirements. These actions, alongside improvements in survey management, aimed to reduce FM risks and bolster the project's overall performance (ICR, p. 27). A subsequent fiduciary review in April 2024 observed notable progress in the documentation of project expenditures.

To address project procurement issues, the project refined its procurement strategy, including the adoption of automated solutions to streamline processes and ensure timely payments to data collectors and consultants (ICR, p. 27). Additionally, ongoing training and capacity-building initiatives were emphasized.



The WB provided regular training in FM, procurement, and environmental and social risk management, which was crucial in mitigating bottlenecks and enhancing project implementation (ICR, p. 25).

c. Unintended impacts (Positive or Negative)

The project enabled DGS to collaborate successfully with AFRISTAT (Economic and Statistical Observatory of Sub-Saharan Africa), ISSEA (Institute of Statistics and Economics), ICF Macro, and UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), standardizing its partnerships with these institutions.

d. Other

n/a

11. Ratings

Ratings	ICR	IEG	Reason for Disagreements/Comment
Outcome	Moderately Satisfactory	Moderately Satisfactory	
Bank Performance	Satisfactory	Moderately Satisfactory	Overly ambitious project design, given implementation capacity constraints
Quality of M&E	Substantial	Substantial	
Quality of ICR	---	High	

12. Lessons

IEG agrees with the lessons set out in the ICR (pp. 29-31). IEG adds the following:

- Periodical revisions the RF are important for ensuring that all significant aspects of a project's impact are assessed and documented.** Revisions to the RF allow for a more thorough evaluation of a project's effectiveness and contribution to development goals. Revisions help projects to better reflect their impact and address any gaps that might exist in the original RF. For example, in the Gabon project specifically, monitoring the number of scholarships provided would help assess the enhancement of human resources capacity. Other indicators could have included the number of decrees and policies developed and implemented, such as the establishment of the INSTAT and new regulations for the NSS. Additionally, tracking the time taken from data collection to publication for various surveys and censuses would have helped assess improvements in data dissemination.



- **Strengthening the institutional capacity of statistical agencies is foundational for long-term project success.** Such programs should encompass technical training, management development, and infrastructure improvement, tailored to meet the specific needs of the institution. Additionally, ongoing TA and mentorship should be provided to support continuous development. By building a robust institutional framework, the project can sustain its benefits, allowing institutions to independently enhance their capabilities.
- **Investment in modern data technologies for data collection, processing, and dissemination can significantly improve the accuracy, efficiency, and timeliness of statistical outputs.** The project incorporated some technological advancements like the CATI system for data collection, which enhanced the capabilities of DGS staff. While constituting an initial investment that increases cost in the short-term, advanced data technologies are in the long-term important for streamlining operations and providing real-time data insights, which are inputs for timely decision-making and project adjustments.

13. Assessment Recommended?

No

14. Comments on Quality of ICR

The ICR was candid and well written, providing an excellent discussion of the assumptions underlying the project's TOC. Furthermore, the ICR effectively set the background context for the project and outlined its objectives clearly. The report offered a comprehensive evaluation of the project's achievements and shortcomings, highlighting both successes and areas needing improvement. By presenting a thorough analysis of the project's implementation and outcomes, the ICR effectively conveyed what worked well and what did not, thereby offering practical recommendations for similar initiatives in the future. To this end, the ICR set out several valuable lessons for future projects. The lessons drawn from this report are not only relevant to the Gabon project but also provide insights applicable to a broader range of development projects.

a. Quality of ICR Rating

High

