



# MINORITY RIGHTS IN GUINEA BISSAU

## UPR INFO PRE-SESSIONS PRESENTATION

**Presented by:** Youth Association for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (AJPDH) and International Communities Organisation (ICO)

UPR Info Pre-sessions

# Introduction



Guinea-Bissau underwent its third Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in January 2020 during the 35th session, receiving 197 recommendations and supporting 193. While progress has been made in certain areas, significant challenges remain, **particularly concerning the rights of minority groups.**

This presentation, prepared by the **Youth Association for the Promotion and Defence of Human Rights (AJPDH) and International Communities Organisation (ICO)**, highlights critical human rights issues affecting marginalized communities in Guinea-Bissau. It provides recommendations to address these concerns, ensuring that Guinea-Bissau upholds its international commitments.

## Key Themes Covered in This Presentation:

- **Minority Rights** – Discrimination and exclusion faced by ethnic groups such as the Fulani and Bijagós.
- **Poverty and Economic Marginalisation** – The disproportionate impact of poverty on minority communities and barriers to economic participation.
- **Environmental and Land Rights** – Threats posed by climate change, land exploitation, and lack of community consultation.
- **Right to Education** – The challenges of limited educational access, particularly for rural and marginalized groups.
- **Social and Gender Inequality** – The prevalence of gender-based discrimination, child rights violations, and harmful practices like FGM.

The presentation concludes with recommendations for strengthening human rights protections, ensuring greater inclusion for minority communities, and promoting equitable socio-economic development.

# Minority groups in Guinea Bissau



Guinea-Bissau has a population of approximately two million people. Among the dominant ethnic groups are the Balanta, Fula, Manjaco, and Mandinga. The society in the country is diverse in religion, culture and language.

- **Population:** ~2 million with diverse ethnic groups (e.g., Balanta, Fula, Manjaco, Mandinga).

## Challenges:

- Strong legal safeguards exist, but de facto implementation lags.
- **Marginalized Groups:** Fulani and Bijagós face discrimination in land ownership, political participation, and social integration.
- Cultural diversity includes significant differences in language and traditions, often leading to prejudice and exclusion.

## Key Recommendations:

1. Officially recognize minority groups and secure their land rights.
2. Enhance CSO capacity to advocate for minority rights, particularly for the Fulani and Bijagós.
3. Allocate funding for NGOs to research minority group needs and implement support programs.
4. Advocate for government compliance with international human rights treaties and standards.

# Environmental Rights and Land Rights



Global warming affects rising sea levels, saline water intrusion, rainfall patterns and pollution, which threatens fisheries, a primary source of livelihood for the Bijagós people. The Bijagós people have been stewards of their islands' for centuries, a key reason for the UNESCO biosphere reserve status, making them essential to the continued ecological preservation of the area.

## Challenges:

- **Climate Impacts:** Rising sea levels, saline water intrusion, and pollution are critical threats to livelihoods and biodiversity.
- **Bijagós Contribution:** The Bijagós people, as stewards of the UNESCO biosphere reserve, play a crucial role in ecological preservation.
  - However, they face forced land disruptions from tourism, oil exploration, and cashew expansion.
- Lack of consultation with local communities exacerbates these challenges.

## Key Recommendations:

1. Invest in microcredit and skills development programs for women, especially in rural and traditional areas where they often face limitations in accessing the labor market.
2. Include marginalized communities, such as the Bijagós, in national decision-making processes on land and environmental policies.
3. Ensure Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) for all development projects affecting local communities.
4. Collaborate with Bijagós inhabitants to mitigate ecological and livelihood impacts of commercial activities.

# Right to Education



Literacy rates in Guinea-Bissau are low, particularly in rural areas, with marginalized communities like the Bijagós Islands facing limited educational access due to resource shortages and unqualified staff, prompting migration to the mainland..

## Challenges:

### Literacy Rates:

- Men: 52.3%
- Women: 32.6%
- Rural women: 16.3%
- **Barriers:** Marginalized communities, such as the Bijagós, face limited access to resources, qualified teachers, and infrastructure.
  - Cultural and linguistic differences further marginalize these communities in the education system.

## Key Recommendations:

1. Develop public policies for educational inclusion that meet the needs of ethnic communities, as well as the creation of schools in rural areas to facilitate access to quality education.
2. Fully implement the “6-6 Programme” to ensure youth in rural areas complete primary and secondary education.
3. Expand access to education for linguistic and ethnic minorities through bilingual teaching initiatives.
4. Enforce the 2018 ordinance exempting tuition fees for students with disabilities and ensure widespread awareness.
5. Provide additional resources and training for teachers working in marginalized areas.

# Social and Gender Inequality and Rights of the Child



Whilst the government of Guinea Bissau has worked to enhance laws and implement National Action Plans to protect the rights of women and children, a number of significant concerns are still present.

## Challenges:

- **FGM Rates:** 52% nationally, with alarming rates of 96% in Gabú.
- **Gender Disparities:** Women face pay gaps, limited land ownership rights, and underrepresentation in politics.
- **Child Trafficking:** Boys from Guinea-Bissau are at high risk of forced labor exploitation.

## Key Recommendations:

1. Strictly enforce laws criminalizing FGM, particularly in high-prevalence regions such as Gabú and Bafatá.
2. Implement targeted initiatives to improve land ownership rights and economic opportunities for women.
3. Equip law enforcement agencies with resources to combat child trafficking effectively.
4. Increase female political representation to meet the 36% quota mandated by the 2018 law.

# Conclusion



Based on key thematic issues affecting minority groups, AJPDH and ICO has made a number of critical recommendations to the central government.

## Priority Actions:

- 1.Promote equal access to education, public services, and political participation.
- 2.Criminalize and enforce prohibitions on harmful practices like FGM.
- 3.Recognize and protect minority communities.
- 4.Train government forces on human rights standards.
- 5.Uphold freedom of expression and press freedoms.

**Next Steps:** AJPDH and ICO will collaborate with international organizations, UN bodies, and the Guinea-Bissau government to implement these

# Thank you



## Contact us:

- **Biro Embaló:** Youth Association for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (AJPDH) | [biroembalo@gmail.com](mailto:biroembalo@gmail.com)
- **Charlie Grant:** Senior Programmes Manager, ICO | [charlie.grant@internationalcommunities.org](mailto:charlie.grant@internationalcommunities.org)