

**The Health Of Guinea**

Sid Simpson

Clemson University Health Sciences

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Dr. Micky Ward

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Along Africa's western coast lies the Republic of Guinea, an emergent nation known for its rich natural resources, biodiversity, and agricultural economy. Despite the country's assets, the United Nations considers the republic to be one of the world's least developed nations. For over 100 years Guinea was colonized and exploited by France for labor, resources, and expansion of French culture (United Nations, 2018). In 1958, when Guinea was finally granted independence from France, the republic had to start fresh politically and economically, leaving the public health of Guinea's people on the back burner. Although the Ministry of Health and Hygiene located in Conakry, Guinea's capital, was founded in 1958 immediately following independence, the department has seen little growth and improvement since this time. Furthermore, through the mid 1900s to the present, Guinea and its neighboring countries have faced massive political unrest and upheaval, which has additionally hindered the country's progress regarding citizen health. Following the 2014-2016 Ebola outbreak which plagued the republic, ending in approximately 11,300 deaths and over 30,000 infected, Guinea, alongside the United Nations, created "Une Vision d'une Guinee Emergente a l'Horizon 2040," or Vision of an Emerging Guinea by 2040, made up of steps that focus on achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (Sarukhan, 2016).

Vision of an Emerging Guinea by 2040 is composed of two pillars: Promoting good governance for sustainable development and promoting economic transformation and sustainable management of natural capital. Pillar 1 focuses primarily on SDGs 10 (reduced inequalities) and 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions). Unification of the fractured governmental bodies and strengthening of public institutions are at the forefront of this pillar, as they are both necessary to improving the quality of life for Guinea's citizens (Global Partnership for Effective Development

and Co-operation, 2020). There is an immense lack of trust between the people of Guinea and their government which prevents development and participation in community based services, which are essential to building the public health sector from the ground up. Pillar 2 more broadly consists of methods for reaching SDGs 1, 6, 7, 8, 11, 13, and 15 by, “promoting inclusive growth through value chains in high economic potential zones, job creation to sustain local, emerging growth, improving community resilience to shocks, and reducing youth migration,” (Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme, 2017). This pillar also strongly centers women, youth, and individuals with disabilities throughout its procedures. Visions of an Emerging Guinea works at the national level, in partnership with a multitude of organizations and nonprofits including, but not limited to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Green Climate Fund, and the World Bank. Since the country is starting at such a low standard according to the United Nations, this specialized plan is crucial for improving the Republic of Guinea.

Even now, as the country struggles with a novel Ebola outbreak in 2021, the focus on Vision of an Emerging Guinea by 2040 and ameliorating public health has remained strong. Currently, one of the major strategic priorities lies around infectious disease control. In Guinea, life expectancy at birth is only 59.6 years old, with less than 5% of the total population over 60, as opposed to the global average of 72.6 years old (Bail, 2020). Much of this disparity in expectancies can be attributed to communicable illnesses. Lower respiratory infections, like pneumonia and tuberculosis, and malaria are the two greatest causes of death for the country. HIV/AIDS, diarrheal diseases, and the aforementioned Ebola are also rampant in Guinea. These diseases are widely preventable and rarely seen among individuals in the developed world, making their elimination a prime concern for epidemiologists and public health workers. Prevention and surveillance are at the vanguard of policy and action surrounding infectious

disease control. The World Health Organization's Country Cooperation Strategy wants to specifically strengthen immunization numbers among children and adults to prevent diseases when possible and implement management programs for pregnant women and children with infectious disease to improve outcomes (World Health Organization, 2015).

Additionally, malnutrition is at the top of Visions of an Emerging Guinea's workflow. The World Food Programme states that chronic malnutrition has hovered around 26% since 2015, and over 200,000 children in Guinea under the age of 5 die as a result of malnutrition yearly ( $\frac{1}{3}$  of all childhood deaths). These rates coincide directly with high poverty, high unemployment, and low education rates, which are vast across the republic (World Food Program, 2021). Growth stunting among Guinea's youth is also incredibly common in the region because of the excessive food insecurity and undernutrition. Stunting has a massive amount of negative effects including, but not limited to, poor immune function, lower brain function, and improper organ development. These effects often act in conjunction with the uncontrolled infectious disease spread, making negative outcomes, especially in children who are often more capable of recovering from illness, even more likely. Many factors contribute to the incredibly high malnutrition rates, but the political instability of neighboring countries Sierra Leone and Liberia is one of the most often overlooked. With 100s and 1000s of refugees entering the country each year, the already limited ability to access nutritious foods becomes even more meager. The constant influx of refugees adds to the country's economic instability as well, hindering changes in food distribution among Guineans and causing prices to rise. The malnutrition, particularly undernutrition, of the republic only escalates the effects of the pervasive infectious diseases. UNICEF, Action Against Hunger, and many other organizations are working on the frontlines primarily to distribute therapeutic foods and vitamins through

feeding centers. Children and breastfeeding mothers are most at risk of undernutrition, and thus are primarily serviced in these centers.

While lots of work is being done to reach many of the SDGs, women's rights and health issues are majorly overlooked by officials in the country. Guinea has the second highest rate for Female Genital Mutilation among adult women in the world (96%), the lowest female literacy rate in all of Africa (18.1%), and laws allowing arranged childhood marriages (UNICEF DATA, 2021). The law also grants most power in marriage to the husband, allowing him to choose where to live, how many children to have, and the profession of his wife. Rape and domestic violence are illegal by law, but very rarely prosecuted, and marital rape is not considered an illegal offence. Gynecological and obstetric care is nearly non-existent, giving Guinea one of the highest rates of maternal mortality in all of Africa with 980 deaths per 100,000 births. Family planning services exist, but birth control must be agreed upon by a woman and her partner. SDG 5, Gender Equality is one of the most behind out of all 17 in the country. Unfortunately, the Republic of Guinea has yet to create a national action plan accepted by the United Nations, and has not made progress on ratification of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa since December of 2003.

Overall, the Republic of Guinea has a great amount of work to do before reaching the Sustainable Development Goals. Visions of an Emerging Guinea by 2040. Guinea Africa is one of the most underdeveloped and neglected countries when it comes to citizen health and quality of life. It is absolutely essential that developed countries continue advocating for and working to help the people of Guinea.

## Resources

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