Community Support Platform

United Nations Development Programme
Guinea Bissau

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I. SITUATION ANALYSIS

Since its independence in 1974, Guinea-Bissau has experienced chronic political fragility and insecurity, in part due to several coup d'états, frequent changes of government, interference of the defence and security forces in politics and the judicial sphere, and violations of human rights. This has contributed to **poor governance, endemic impunity, a lack of civilian oversight, widespread corruption and the inability of state institutions to deliver basic public services**.

Divisions within the largest political party led to five changes of government since mid-2015 and Parliament has not been sitting regularly since late 2015. In mid-2015, the political context deteriorated as a result of deepening discord between the President José Mário Vaz and the then Prime Minister, and current leader of the PAIGC. This resulted in the dismissal of the Prime Minister and the Government on several occasions and parallel governments. Since then, the country has continued to tumble between the political tensions within the PAIGC and between the organs of national sovereignty - Presidency, Government, Judiciary and the National People's Assembly (National Assembly) of Guinea Bissau. The result of this prolonged crisis has been the absence of effective government since August 2015, no approved budget since January 2016 and the compromising of progress on key reforms in sensitive areas.

These challenges have been exacerbated by the **recent post-electoral political crisis**, with the establishment in March 2020 of a *de-facto* Government. The President has only been recently recognised by the international community, pending on the creation of a new government by the end of May 2020 as outlined by the latest ECOWAS communique and reinforced by both the EU and the UN.

In the midst of this political crisis, **the socio-economic conditions of the population continue to be extremely difficult and we forecast they will deteriorate further**. Guinea-Bissau is ranked 178 out of 189 countries and territories on the 2019 UNDP's Human Development Index. Although, Guinea-Bissau, showed an improvement in its HDI from 0.393 to 0.461 between 2005 and in 2018, mainly due to improvements in life expectancy at birth of 10.9 years, poverty levels remain high, especially in rural areas. Furthermore, the positive figure hides poorly performing individuals and households in comparison with the average of countries in the low development group (0.507) and in sub-Saharan Africa (0.541). This progress also hides a broad range of inequalities variables, including gender, age and geographic disparities.

The country is highly centralized and there are no local governments headed by elected officials. The country is divided in 37 sectors, which are constitutionally enshrined in articles 105 and 106 of the Constitution – stating that "the organization of the political power of the State comprises the existence of local autarchies, which enjoy administrative and financial autonomy". However, in reality, there is a lack of state presence at territorial/local level. There is a de-concentration of basic functions to appointed authorities. **The absence of local governments showcases the weak relationship between the state and citizens.**

With the appearance of the first COVID-19 cases in the country at the beginning of March 2020, the situation has deteriorated even further. **The pandemic, which accentuates the fragility of the public service provision to the citizens, is intertwined with the political crisis**.

Currently, Guinea-Bissau counts over two hundred and fifty confirmed cases of COVID-19. The curve has spiked in the past days and the state structure has been largely affected. The state of emergency declared due to the pandemic opens the possibility to further weakening the only nascent rule of law; it is also putting pressure on state institutions and it could jeopardize even further their normal functioning, especially in the relation between powers of government. Additionally, the state administration also risks being highly affected by the measures in place, thus depriving citizens of essential services during an extended period, for example in terms of education, health care and even basic administrative offices, and thus having a negative impact on the Bissau-Guinean social fabric with a strain on social cohesion.

In this context, **the socio-economic consequences may be devastating**. The outbreak has the potential to quickly overwhelm the scarce national health and law enforcement institutions that lack basic infrastructure, personnel, supplies and operational capacities.

Being highly dependent on the export of a single crop (cashew) and importing the most basic necessities, border closures, quarantines, and market, supply chain and trade disruptions will restrict people's access to sufficient and diverse sources of food and basic needs.

In this context, UNDP has developed **a response to mitigate the negative effects of COVID-19 that considers strategic local action, while focusing on the furthest left behind and keeping in mind national development goals and long-term recovery scenarios**. The response pays special attention to (i) strengthening health systems to respond to COVID-19; (ii) provide an inclusive and multi-sectoral crisis management and response to COVID-19 and (iii) provide the country with a socio-economic impact assessment and an action plan for recovery from COVID-19. Importantly, UNDP is

working hand in hand with the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) under the leadership of the World Health Organization (WHO) and partnering in the National Contingency Plan.

We further believe that it is now the time to start a conversation around the path of the future development of the country. The pandemic exposes as no other event in the past the failures of development of the past decades, both on the side of the domestic political elite as well as their development partners. Therefore, **new platforms and spaces for both deliberation, inclusion and action are needed to jumpstart a new path to the mounting challenges that the Bissau-Guinean society faces**.

In the next few pages, we will be presenting our strategy to better plan and develop a response to communities' needs and priorities in a coordinated way.

II.   STRATEGY

The political instability, coupled with the spread of the virus, has exposed deep inequality and the impossibility by many to meet basic needs. The social impact of the outbreak and the state of emergency is expected to be much more devastating than the medical aspects in Guinea-Bissau.

In this context, it is essential to consider how social cohesion, embedded in actors, communities and institution, holds the society together and it is critical to ensure that the COVID-19 response is sensitive to community needs and supports cohesive strategies.

While several development partners have been using networks to provide support to communities, with the overall aim of responding to local needs and strengthening social cohesion, the efforts are often scattered and uncoordinated.

In this context, **UNDP is proposing to set up a virtual community support platform that can provide an online infrastructure to better plan and develop a response to communities' needs and priorities in a more coordinated way**. The platform aims to connect communities with all territorial and development actors that are supporting local development in the territories in order to identify solutions, replicate innovation and ensure the interventions benefit the most vulnerable groups.

The platform will serve as a critical online infrastructure to connect Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), community members but also private sector associations and development partners in order to identify and share innovation and solutions, facilitate the sharing of good practices, but also creating a space for dialogue and reflection. **Ultimately,**

the platform should serve as a space for encouraging a dialogue about civic issues, policies, or decisions of consequence to people's lives, communities and society.

In the short term, this virtual community support platform will offer the opportunity to develop and coordinate a **COVID-19 response** in the communities; however, the platform will be developed **considering longer term development objectives**. The overall aim will be of strengthening collective approaches for addressing issues identified by the communities. The set-up of the virtual platform will aim at gathering all territorial actors that need to cooperate and play a role in the definition of a local development process that responds to local needs and priorities.

In line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development's principle of **leaving no-one behind**, the community support platform will be designed to strengthen the voice of the most vulnerable and marginalized members of the communities and to provide inputs into local and national development processes. In this regards, targeted efforts will be made to facilitate the participation and connection of communities that are often isolated or hard to reach, including through raising awareness activities.

The local level is a natural arena within which to rebuild bonds and links among groups, combat exclusion and rebuild state-society relations in fragile contexts such as Guinea-Bissau. Aware of the importance of working at community level, this exercise will also be accompanied by the collection of data on the most marginalized communities as a precursor to a vulnerability map for future, more targeted interventions at local level.

Moreover, the platform is expected to link participation and dialogue to the identification and activation of concrete local actions for the support of communities in the COVID-19 response and recovery plan.

As stated above, **the platform wants to contribute to a larger conversation about the future of development for the country** while giving a voice to those that need to be included with the aim of strengthening a different path towards community resilience, economic and social progress as well as building up trust between citizens, communities and the state.

This will ultimately provide an enabling framework for building transformative partnerships in support of local development processes. The platform will support a network of communities, while fostering multi-actor initiatives to address local development challenges. This will offer an entry point to interested development partners to better harmonise and align their interventions at the local level towards catalytic territorial development opportunities.

III. OBJECTIVE

The main objective of the initiative is to:

Provide direct support to the communities through an online virtual site that facilitates the identification of solutions according to community needs, the exchange of good practices and successful interventions, fostering new partnerships and a more longer-term civic dialogue on the future of development for Guinea-Bissau.

The project outputs and activities are:

Output 1: Community networks and solutions mapped and involved

    Activity 1.1: Map existing networks;

    Activity 1.2: Identify local innovation and solutions that can be replicated and scaled up;

    Activity 1.3: Raise awareness and support the local infrastructure for community participation;

    Activity 1.4: Collect data on the most marginalized communities as a precursor to a vulnerability map for future, more targeted interventions at local level, providing the basis for geospatial mapping of solutions at community level.

Output 2: A virtual community support platform for dialogue and participation across various actors and groups developed and functioning

    Activity 2.1: Develop an online infrastructure for information sharing, dialogue and participation across various actors and groups;

    Activity 2.2: Encourage the creation of a civic space with a focus on the most vulnerable people;

    Activity 2.3: Link participation and dialogue to concrete local actions for the support of communities.

IV. WORK PLAN

Year: 2020

EXPECTED OUTPUTS *And baseline, indicators including annual targets*	PLANNED ACTIVITIES *List activity results and associated actions*	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Budget Description	Gov.t of Italy Amount (USD)	UNDP Guinea-Bissau Amount (USD)
Output 1: Community networks and solutions mapped and involved *Baseline: 0 community networks and solutions identified* *Indicators:* *# number of networks identified and involved* *# number of communities involved* *Targets:* *At least 15 community networks involved* *At least 20 communities informed*	1.1 Map other existing networks and platforms					Consultations	1,500	
	1.2 Identify local innovation and solutions that can be replicated and scaled up					Consultations	1,500	
	1.3 Raise awareness and support the local infrastructure for community participation					Micro-grants Contract	25,000	
	1.4 Collect data on the most marginalized communities as a precursor to a vulnerability map for future, more targeted interventions at local level.					Contract Consultations	15,000	20,000
Output 2: A virtual community support platform for dialogue and participation across various actors and groups developed and functioning *Baseline: No virtual community support platform* *Indicators:* *# number of visitors of the platform* *# number of exchanges on the platform* *# number of local actions supported* *Targets:* *At least 5,000 platform's visitors* *At least 10 external contributions to the platform in the first trimester* *At least 5 solutions identified and supported*	2.1 Develop an online infrastructure for information sharing, dialogue and participation across various actors and groups					Contract	12,000	12,000
	2.2 Encourage the creation of a civic space with a focus on the most vulnerable people					Contract Consultations	15,000	13,000
	2.3 Link participation and dialogue to concrete local actions for the support of communities					Consultations/ workshops Micro-grants	30,000	55,000
SUB-TOTAL							100,000	100,000
TOTAL							**200,000**	