

TERMS OF REFERENCE

National consultant for the organization of the National Education Forum in Guinea-Bissau

CONTRACT MODALITY:	Individual Consultancy (National)
DUTY STATION:	Education Section, Bissau, Guinea-Bissau,
DURATION OF CONTRACT:	4 months (Remote)

Purpose of Assignment

Education is a cornerstone of human development, social cohesion and economic transformation in Guinea-Bissau. As a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and a partner committed to Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), the Government of Guinea-Bissau has committed to ensuring quality, inclusive and equitable education, as well as promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. However, evidence shows that the country faces a serious and multidimensional learning crisis, exacerbated by poverty, systemic weaknesses and recurring shocks.

Guinea-Bissau has a predominantly young population, with around 44% of the population aged between 0 and 17. This demographic profile presents both an opportunity and a risk: whilst adequate investment in education could generate a significant demographic dividend, current educational outcomes indicate that the system is failing to equip children and young people with the fundamental skills necessary for their development. Learning levels are alarmingly low (only 12% of children aged between 7 and 14 demonstrate basic reading skills and just 8% basic numeracy skills), reflecting a profound learning deficit across the country, with marked inequalities based on geographical location and wealth.

Access to education remains deeply unequal. The enrolment rate in pre-primary education is extremely low (14%), leaving most children ill-prepared for primary school. At the same time, the proportion of children and adolescents out of school remains high at all levels of the education system, particularly among children living in rural areas, those from poorer households, children with disabilities and older adolescents. It is estimated that approximately 28% of children of primary school age and over 30% of adolescents of secondary school age are out of school. Girls face additional barriers associated with early marriage, teenage pregnancy and domestic responsibilities, which significantly increase the risk of dropping out of school, particularly at post-primary levels.

Structural and systemic challenges continue to undermine the quality and equity of education in the country. Public funding for the education sector remains low, at around 3% of GDP, which is significantly below international benchmarks. Most expenditure on education is absorbed by salary costs, leaving insufficient resources for teacher training, the purchase of teaching materials, the improvement of school infrastructure and the promotion of inclusive education. The distribution of teaching staff is highly unequal, with excessively high pupil-teacher ratios in rural areas and a persistent shortage of qualified teachers. Recurring strikes limited pedagogical supervision, and the lack of a fully functional Education Management Information System (EMIS) undermine planning, accountability and the quality of educational service delivery.

Educational challenges are closely linked to the wider vulnerabilities facing the country. Multidimensional poverty affects over 64% of the population, with child poverty in rural areas more than double that recorded in urban areas. Frequent climate shocks (including floods, extreme heat and water shortages) regularly disrupt school operations and damage already fragile infrastructure, exacerbating absenteeism and school dropout rates. Children with disabilities remain among the most excluded groups, with more than half of school-age children with disabilities outside the education system.

In this context, the Government of Guinea-Bissau, through the Ministry of National Education, Higher Education and Scientific Research, in partnership with UNICEF and other technical and financial partners, intends to organize the National Education Forum. This strategic initiative aims to create an inclusive, high-level platform for national consultation, enabling a comprehensive analysis of the current state of the education system, the identification of structural challenges and the definition of clear guidelines for transformative reforms. The Forum is in line with the international commitments undertaken by the country, namely the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, with particular emphasis on SDG 4 – Quality Education.

The objective of this mission is to provide specialised technical assistance to support the preparation, coordination, design, organisation and delivery of the National Education Forum, which will bring together the sector's key stakeholders. The Forum should ensure a participatory and inclusive process geared towards concrete and actionable outcomes, recognising the severity of the learning crisis in Guinea-Bissau.

The consultant will support the organisation of an evidence-informed dialogue, as well as the co-creation of practical and priority actions that contribute to defining a shared vision and a clear path for the transformation of the education sector.

Specifically, technical assistance will include the following responsibilities:

- Develop the Forum's methodological and conceptual framework.
- Support the structuring of thematic content.
- Systematize the conclusions and formulate strategic recommendations.
- Draft the Forum's final report and a roadmap of priority reforms for the education sector

Scope of Work

Under the supervision of UNICEF Guinea-Bissau, and in close coordination with technical and financial partners, relevant government counterparts and the UNICEF Centre of Excellence (COE), the consultant will be responsible for supporting the design, preparation and delivery of the National Education Forum.

The scope of the work will include, amongst other things, the following components:

- **Design and Structure of the Forum:**

- To draft a detailed concept note for the Forum, including the agenda and facilitation approach, in line with the objectives of acknowledging the learning crisis and promoting a dialogue focused on concrete solutions.
- Support the identification of priority thematic areas based on available evidence (e.g. fundamental learning, outof-school children, teaching staff, education funding, inclusion and resilience).
- Propose participatory formats that promote the sharing of experiences, co-creation and consensus-building (such as panels, working groups, round tables and interactive sessions).

- **Stakeholder Engagement and Coordination:**

- Support the identification and engagement of key stakeholders, including government institutions, civil society organizations, youth and student representatives, the private sector, development partners and United Nations agencies.
- Provide guidance to ensure inclusive and representative participation, with a particular focus on the inclusion of young people, women and marginalized groups.

- **Technical Content and Facilitation Support:**

- Contribute to the preparation of background materials, presentations and discussion guides, based on existing analyses and data.
- Provide technical input to ensure that discussions are evidence-based, focused on learning outcomes and geared towards feasible policy and programme actions.
- Ensure methodological consistency across the Forum's different thematic areas.

- Support the real-time systematization of key emerging conclusions and proposals.

• **Documentation and Monitoring :**

- Document the main discussions, conclusions and emerging priorities from the Forum.
- Produce a concise post-Forum report summarizing the key messages, agreed priorities and recommended next steps, in order to inform advocacy, policy dialogue and programming.
- Consolidate the strategic recommendations resulting from the Forum.
- Draft the final report of the National Education Forum.
- Develop an Action Plan (roadmap) with priorities, indicators and deadlines.
- Support the preparation of the necessary documents for validation by the Government and partners.

Expected Results

The mission is expected to contribute to the following outcomes:

- The successful organization of a National Education Forum, led by the Ministry of National Education, Higher Education and Scientific Research (MENESIC), bringing together a diverse range of stakeholders around a shared understanding of the learning crisis in Guinea-Bissau.
- The production of a final report from the Forum, containing clear, actionable recommendations and strategic priorities, designed to inform policy dialogue, sectoral planning, advocacy and future investments in the education sector.
- Strengthening coordination and alignment among partners, donors, government counterparts and United Nations agencies around national education and learning priorities, under the leadership of MENESIC.
- The development of an operational roadmap for education sector reforms, strengthening consensus and commitment among the Government (in particular the Ministries of Finance and Public Service), development partners and other stakeholders regarding the main challenges, solutions and priority areas. The provision of a summary report of the Forum, consolidating the main outcomes and serving as a reference for followup, monitoring and accountability.

Work Assignments Overview	Deliverables/Outputs	Delivery deadline to complete the deliverable
<p>Phase 1 – Inception and Design Inception and Design: Kick-off meetings with UNICEF, MENESIC and other stakeholders; Review of existing policies, diagnostics and evidence (including SitAn, education sector plan and commitments related to SDG 4); Definition of the Forum's methodology and theory of change</p>	<p>Inception Report, with work plan, methodology, schedule and risks presented</p>	<p>June 25, 2026</p>
<p>Phase 2 – Conceptual Design and Preparation: Elaboration of the detailed Concept Note of the Forum; Definition of priority thematic areas and expected results; Design of participatory formats (plenary sessions, working groups, panels)</p> <p>Phase 3 – Stakeholder Engagement and Coordination: Stakeholder Mapping; Coordination with UN agencies, partners and Government; Orientation towards inclusive participation (youth, women, marginalized groups).</p>	<p>Final Concept Note of the Forum, Provisional Agenda, Facilitation Framework, Proposed List of Thematic Sessions and their finalized and validated formats</p>	<p>August 31, 2026</p>
<p>Phase 4 – Technical Content and Facilitation Support: Preparation of background documents and discussion notes; Development of key messages and evidence-based syntheses; Technical support to ensure learning-oriented debates and concrete actions</p>	<p>Technical Notes / Discussion Documents by thematic axis consolidated and available. Guides for Facilitators and Rapporteurs available.</p>	<p>August 31, 2026</p>

<p>Phase 5 – Holding of the National Education Forum: Coordination of the facilitation; Real-time systematization of emerging debates and consensuses</p> <p>Phase 6 – Documentation and Strategic Products: Consolidation of conclusions and recommendations; Defining and prioritizing education sector reforms</p> <p>Phase 7 – Validation and Finalization</p>	<p>National Education Forum successfully organized. Real-time synthesis notes and validated session results.</p> <p>Preliminary report of the Forum available. Draft Education Sector Reform Roadmap (priorities, timelines, indicators) prepared.</p> <p>Final Report of the Forum, including the Executive Summary, validated. Operational Roadmap for Reforms finalized.</p>	<p>October 8, 2026</p>
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Payment Schedule:

Payment will be made on submission and acceptance of deliverables. UNICEF reserves the right to withhold payment in case the deliverables submitted are not up to the required standard or in case of delays in submitting the deliverables on the part of the consultant.

Important Notes

- Individuals engaged under a consultancy or individual contract will not be considered “staff members” under the Staff Regulations and Rules of the United Nations and UNICEF’s policies and procedures and will not be entitled to benefits provided therein (such as leave entitlements and medical insurance coverage). Their conditions of service will be governed by their contract and the General Conditions of Contracts for the Services of Consultants and Individual Contractors. Consultants and individual contractors are responsible for determining their tax liabilities and for the payment of any taxes and/or duties, in accordance with local or other applicable laws.
- The selected candidate is solely responsible for ensuring that the health insurance (and visa if applicable) required to perform the duties of the contract are valid for the entire period of the contract. Selected candidates are subject to confirmation of fully-vaccinated status against SARS-CoV-2 (Covid-19) with a World Health Organization (WHO)-endorsed vaccine, which must be met prior to taking up the assignment. It does not apply to consultants who will work remotely and are not expected to work on or visit UNICEF premises, programme delivery locations or directly interact with communities UNICEF works with, nor to travel to perform functions for UNICEF for the duration of their consultancy contracts.
- UNICEF offers reasonable accommodation for consultants with disabilities. This may include, for example, accessible software, travel assistance for missions or personal attendants. We encourage you to disclose your disability during your application in case you need reasonable accommodation during the selection process and afterwards in your assignment.

QUALIFICATIONS / SPECIALIZED KNOWLEDGE / EXPERIENCE/ COMPETENCIES (CORE/TECHNICAL/FUNCTIONAL) / LANGUAGE SKILLS REQUIRED FOR THE ASSIGNMENT

Education:

- Advanced university degree in Education, Economics, Social Sciences, Public Policy, International Development or Fields or other relevant areas..

Work Experience:

- At least 10 years’ experience in the development and/or implementation of programmes in the education sector.
- At least eight (8) years’ experience working in a development context.
- Relevant experience in sectoral coordination (preferably in the education sector) in Guinea-Bissau.
- Proven experience in organizing national/international forums;
- Experience and capacity for sectoral coordination to engage and work with a diverse range of stakeholders (Government, development partners, civil society, the private sector, direct beneficiaries of programmes/projects) in Guinea-Bissau.

- Experience of working in a United Nations organization or similar international organization is desirable. UNICEF.

Language Requirements:

- Fluency in Portuguese.
- Working knowledge of English or French is an asset.

Knowledge/Expertise/Skills:

- Knowledge of education systems in fragile contexts or developing countries

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