



Genie Capital

STRUCTURAL DIAGNOSIS REPORT

Gabonese Republic: Structural Diagnosis and Blueprint

Genie Capital Ltd · October 2026



About this report

PREPARED FOR

Government of the Gabonese Republic, Policymakers, Development Partners, the People

PREPARED BY

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FRAMEWORK

Ma'at Protocol, Strategic Foresight Protocol

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01

Executive Summary

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Gabon looks like a middle-income country. It is not a middle-income economy. It is an oil and mining royalty account with a state attached to it.

That distinction matters because the two things behave differently when revenue falls. A real economy generates income from the productive work of its people. When one sector declines, others can absorb the shock. A royalty account does not generate income. It receives income from assets that foreign companies extract and sell. When the assets run down, there is nothing underneath. The state cannot replace the revenue because it never learned how to produce anything. It only learned how to receive and distribute.

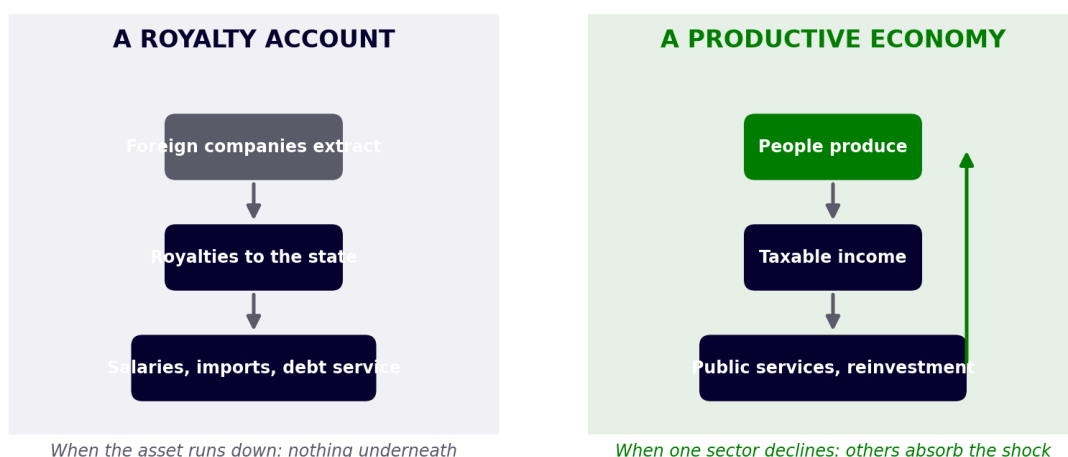


Figure 1. Two ways of living: a royalty account and a productive economy.

Gabon's oil output has fallen from more than 350,000 barrels a day in the 1990s to roughly 216,000 barrels a day in early 2026. The World Bank projects further declines of 2.1% in 2025, 5.8% in 2026 and 2.0% in 2027 as the fields age. Oil's share of nominal GDP has dropped from 28.2% in 2022 to 19.1% in 2025. Manganese will last longer but is also finite. The revenue that pays the salaries, services the debt, maintains the roads and keeps the army in barracks is shrinking. The window to build something underneath it is closing.

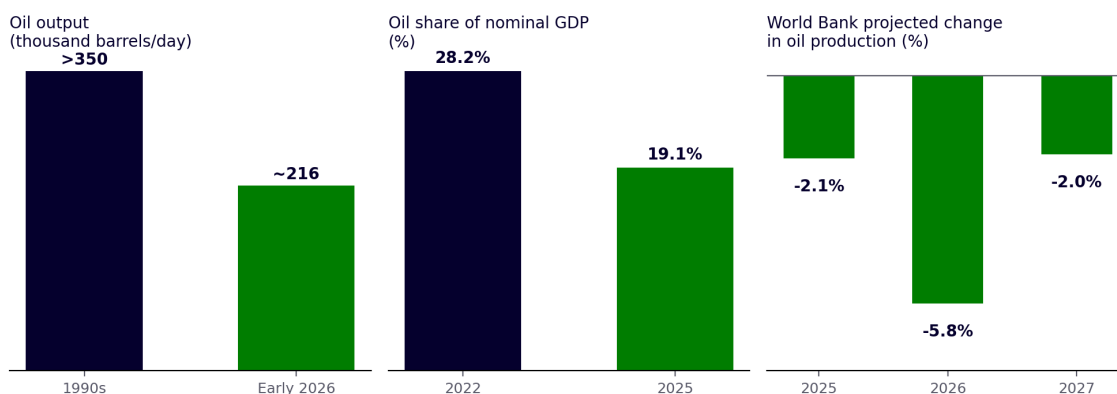


Figure 2. Declining oil output and its shrinking weight in the economy. Sources: Ecofin Agency (2025, 2026); World Bank projections as reported by Ecofin Agency.



The core problem is not that Gabon has failed to educate enough people. It has 23 universities. The problem is what kind of education, and what the country does with it. Gabon produces people who can operate systems designed elsewhere. It does not produce people who can design systems for Gabon. That is a different product, and no amount of additional schooling produces it automatically.

This report sets out three things. First, why Gabon's economy is structurally fragile in a way that standard indicators do not show. Second, why the standard tools that international institutions use to measure and advise countries like Gabon systematically miss the actual problem. Third, what a 25-year programme to fix it would look like, in sequence, with concrete steps.

The 25 years is not arbitrary. It is roughly the period in which oil and mining revenue still flows strongly enough to pay for a transition. It is also the minimum period in which new capability can be built, tested, handed over to the next group of people, and proven to survive that handover. Anything shorter produces trained individuals who leave. Anything longer assumes revenue that will not be there.

The short version of the diagnosis: Gabon has money and no productive capacity. It has infrastructure and no one who can maintain it without a foreign contractor. It has universities and no research output worth the name. It has a legal system, a statistical agency and a central bank, and it cannot solve a novel problem without flying someone in. When the money stops, the capacity does not remain, because the capacity was never there — it was rented along with the equipment.

The short version of the prescription: use the remaining revenue to build capability that outlasts the revenue. That means changing what the country buys with its money. Instead of buying finished answers from abroad, it must buy the process of learning to produce its own. Every contract, every training programme, every infrastructure project, every scholarship, every research grant must be judged by one question: after this money is spent, can Gabonese people do something they could not do before, without us?

That question is not currently asked. This report is about why, and what happens if it stays unasked.

02

Historical Background: How Gabon Became a Royalty Account



Before the Money

The peoples of what is now Gabon — Fang, Myene, Punu, Nzebi, Teke and others — were not waiting to be developed. They had built working systems: farming adapted to equatorial forest conditions, plant medicine, trade routes, systems for settling disputes, and a body of practical knowledge accumulated over generations by trial and correction. The Fang in particular developed an elaborate system of thought and initiation whose depth has been documented by Gabonese scholars.

Bonaventure Mvé Ondo's work on Fang mythology analyses a distinction between having and being that is a serious philosophical position, not folklore. The Byéri ancestral figures studied at the Institut de Recherche en Sciences Humaines encode a view of community in which the living and the dead hold obligations to each other. This was knowledge that worked. It had been paid for in generations of trial and error.

The Colonial Extraction Model

French colonisation from the mid-nineteenth century replaced that system with an extraction model. The colony produced rubber, ivory and timber for export. It did not develop processing, manufacturing or research. The education system was designed to produce clerks and interpreters — people who could operate the colonial administration, not people who could run their own. Local knowledge was classified as folklore. Local medicine was classified as superstition. Local philosophy was classified as ethnography.

The effect was not simply that Gabon was poor. It was that Gabon's own capability was devalued in the eyes of Gabonese people. The model to aspire to was French. The destination was Paris. The credential that mattered was a French one. This is the mechanism by which a country can be rich in knowledge and still believe it has none.

Independence and the Royalty State

Gabon became independent in 1960. Substantial oil reserves were discovered in the 1970s. From that point, the state's revenue came not from taxing the productive work of its citizens, but from royalties and production-sharing agreements with foreign oil companies. The state did not need to tax heavily because it did not need citizens' money. It therefore did not need to build the kind of economy that generates taxable income. It distributed what it received.

Omar Bongo Ondimba ruled from 1967 until 2009. His son Ali Bongo Ondimba ruled from 2009 until the military removed him on 30 August 2023. Across those 56 years, the pattern was consistent. Oil money paid for salaries, roads, airports, hospitals and prestige projects. Foreign companies extracted the oil. Foreign contractors built the infrastructure. Foreign consultants advised on policy. Foreign



universities trained the elite. The country consumed the outputs of other countries' productive systems, and never built its own.

This is not a story about corruption alone, though corruption was present. It is a story about incentives. A government that receives \$3 billion a year in royalties has no reason to build a tax base. A government with no tax base has no reason to build an economy that generates taxable income. The revenue was large enough to buy the appearance of development. The appearance was good enough to satisfy creditors, voters and foreign partners. Nobody had to ask what would happen when the oil ran down, because the people asking that question were not the people receiving the money.

The 2023 Coup and the Transition

On 30 August 2023, military officers removed President Ali Bongo Ondimba, ending more than five decades of Bongo family rule. The Committee for the Transition and Restoration of Institutions took power under General Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguema. Unlike several coups in the region, Gabon returned to constitutional rule. Presidential elections were held on 12 April 2025. Oligui Nguema won with 94.85% of the vote on turnout above 70%. He was invested in May 2025. A new government of 31 members was formed in January 2026.

The transition has been handled better than most. But the question that matters for this report is not whether the transition was orderly. It is whether it changed the underlying economics. So far, the evidence is mixed.

On the positive side, the new government has diversified its partnerships. It signed a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement with the UAE in February 2026 covering mining, digital and logistics. It has continued engagement with China. It renegotiated its defence relationship with France, signing a letter of intent on military cooperation in July 2026, with French troop numbers reduced from roughly 1,200 to around 100. It suspended state scholarships to the United States and Canada from 2026, on the stated grounds that the studies were expensive and recipients did not return, and in August 2026 announced restrictions on scholarships to certain European countries as well. It introduced a competency-based curriculum in the third year of secondary school from 2026–2027, harmonised subject weightings, introduced English from primary level, and began a curriculum reform that includes national languages.

Each of these moves touches the right nerve. Reducing the flow of students who never come back addresses capital flight in human form. Introducing national languages addresses the fact that technical knowledge locked in a foreign language is inaccessible to most of the workforce. Diversifying partners reduces single-point dependency. These are real steps.

On the other side, the structural position has not changed. The state still lives on royalties. It still imports expertise. It still produces almost no patents, no research of international standing, and no manufactured exports. It raised \$1 billion from Trafigura in April 2026 in an oil-backed pre-financing deal, repaid through crude deliveries over seven years — effectively borrowing against production



that is itself declining. It requested an IMF programme in March 2026, which brings external policy conditionality. The dependency has been diversified, not removed.

The honest summary: the transition changed the government and changed some of the rhetoric and some of the policy direction. It has not yet changed what the country produces. That is the test. And the test has a deadline attached, because the oil does not wait for politics.

03

Diagnosis

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The Core Problem in Plain Terms

Gabon receives a large annual income from assets it did not build and cannot replace. That income pays for the state. The state has not used the income to build the ability to generate income without the assets. Therefore the state's existence is contingent on the assets. When the assets decline, the state declines.

This is not a moral failure. It is an accounting reality. Consider what Gabon actually sells to the world. It sells crude oil, manganese, timber and a small amount of other primary commodities. It buys almost everything else: machinery, vehicles, pharmaceuticals, food, software, consulting, engineering services, higher education, financial services. The gap between what it sells and what it buys is bridged by oil and mining rent. Remove the rent and the country cannot pay for the imports it depends on.

Now consider who in Gabon can produce something the world wants to buy that is not a raw material. The answer is very few people, and the number is not growing fast. Gabon files roughly 9 patent applications a year, of which about 4 come from residents. It spends about 0.58% of GDP on research and development. It has roughly 8 active research mathematicians in its universities. It produces about 16 research articles a year that meet the Nature Index threshold, concentrated in biology, health and environmental science — and most of that work is defined, funded and published through international programmes, not Gabonese ones.

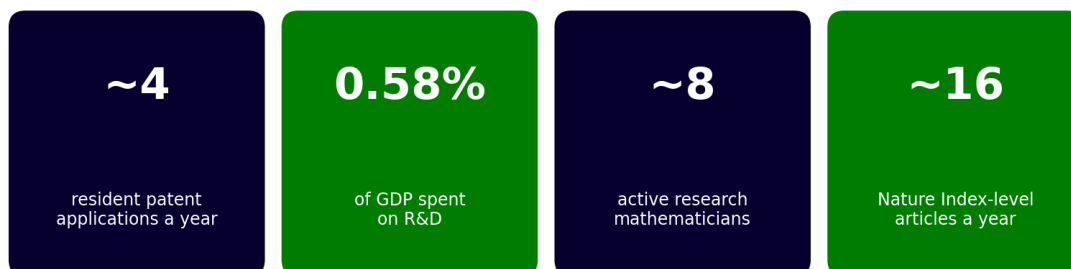


Figure 3. A country that consumes knowledge and does not yet produce it. Sources: WIPO country profile; World Bank; Nature Index.

These numbers describe a country that consumes knowledge and does not produce it. That is the diagnosis. Everything else follows.

What "Capability" Actually Means Here

It is worth being precise, because "capacity building" has become a phrase that means nothing. There are two different things a person can learn, and they behave very differently.



The first is **knowing how to operate something someone else designed**. A technician who can run a water treatment plant built by a French contractor, following the manual, has this. A civil servant who can administer an anti-corruption law copied from a template has this. A graduate who can apply an economic model taught in a French university has this. This kind of knowledge is real and useful. It is also fragile. It stops working the moment the situation changes in a way the manual does not cover. It also cannot be used to build anything new.

The second is **knowing how to figure out something nobody has figured out for you**. An engineer who can diagnose why the plant is failing when the manual does not cover the failure has this. A civil servant who can design an anti-corruption mechanism that fits how corruption actually works in her own country has this. An economist who can build a model of Gabon's own economy from Gabon's own data has this. This kind of knowledge is what allows a country to respond to new problems. Without it, every new problem requires importing someone.

Gabon produces mostly the first. The country needs far more of the second.

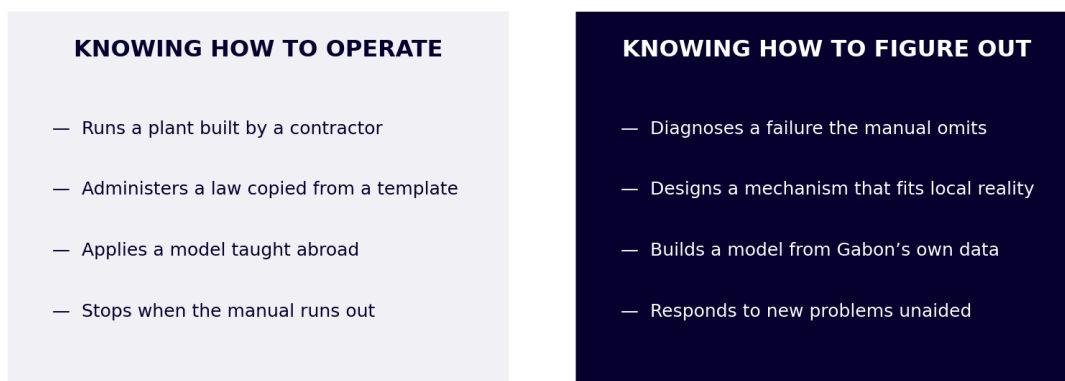


Figure 4. Two different things a person can learn.

Gabon's education system overwhelmingly produces the first kind. It is organised around transmitting existing knowledge: lectures, textbooks, examinations that test recall. Its research institutions are evaluated by international standards and funded by international grants, which means the research questions are set abroad. Its infrastructure is built by foreign firms on turnkey contracts, which means the local workforce watches rather than builds. Its policy is written by consultants, which means the analytical work happens elsewhere.

The result is a country with a great deal of the first kind of knowledge and very little of the second. That is a solvable problem, but only if it is named correctly. It is not a problem of school enrolment. Gabon's enrolment numbers are not the constraint. It is a problem of what happens after graduation.

Why This Is Worse Than It Looks

Three features of the situation make it more dangerous than the headline numbers suggest.



First, the knowledge that exists is concentrated. Gabon's research mathematicians, competent engineers, experienced policy analysts and capable entrepreneurs are few in number and located mostly in Libreville and a handful of other centres. This concentration matters because a capability held by one person is destroyed when that person leaves. A capability held by twenty people survives the departure of one. Gabon's small professional class is a collection of single points of failure. When a senior engineer emigrates without a handover, what leaves with him is not in the files. It is the knowledge of which equipment fails under which conditions, which suppliers cut corners, why a policy failed twelve years ago and was never written up, and which local contractors can actually deliver. The documents he leaves behind are useless without the understanding that made them intelligible. This is not a metaphor. It is the standard experience of Gabonese institutions when senior staff depart.

Second, the country has been trained to believe its own knowledge is inferior. This is the deepest damage of the colonial and post-colonial period, and it is not sentimentality to say so. It is an economic fact. If a Gabonese engineer and a French engineer propose the same solution, the French one is more likely to be accepted. If a Gabonese researcher and a foreign researcher propose the same study, the foreign one is more likely to be funded. The result is that local capability is not just underdeveloped; it is systematically underused, which means it does not improve, which means it becomes genuinely inferior over time. This is a self-fulfilling cycle, and it is expensive.

Third, the revenue is being used to buy things that do not build anything. A road built by a foreign contractor on a turnkey contract is an asset, but it is not a capability. The country owns the road and does not own the ability to build another one. It has paid for the road and, in the same transaction, paid not to learn how to build roads. Repeat this across ports, power plants, hospitals, water systems and public buildings for fifty years and you get a country full of assets that require foreign maintenance and a workforce that has spent fifty years watching. This is not a side effect of the contracting model. It is the contracting model's central feature, because turnkey contracts are designed to minimise the client's involvement.

The Four Jobs of a State, and How Gabon Performs Them

A state that wants to survive without resource rent has to be able to do four things. It must be able to see its own problems clearly. It must be able to build and maintain its own systems. It must be able to solve problems it has not seen before. And it must be able to defend its own interests against actors who want to extract from it. Gabon's performance on each is weak for a specific reason.

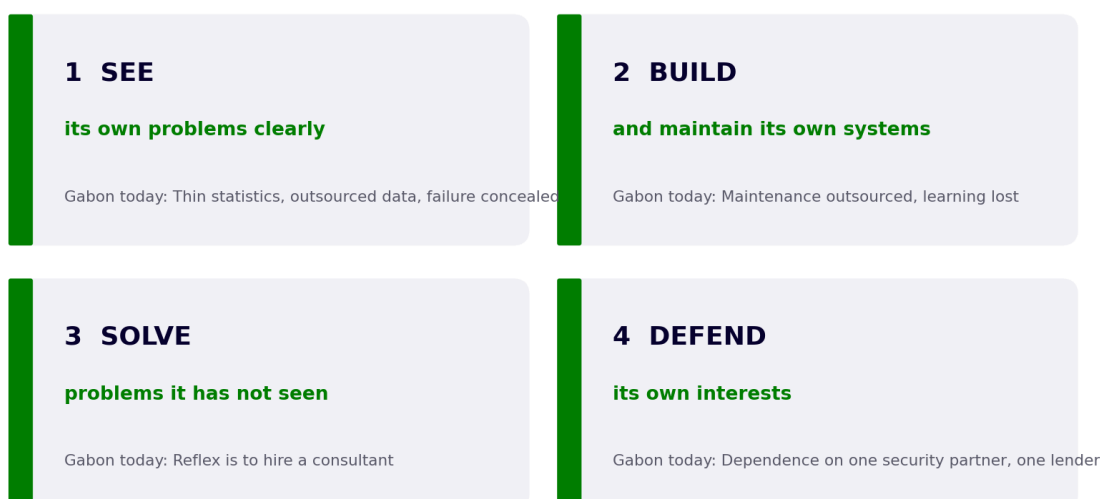


Figure 5. The four jobs of a state that must outlive its resource rent.

Seeing its own problems. Gabon's statistical capacity is thin. Core data collection is often outsourced to international organisations or NGOs. Where national data exists, the analysis is frequently done by foreign consultants who frame it in terms familiar to creditors rather than to Gabonese policymakers. There is no strong culture of public post-mortem on failed policy. Failure is concealed rather than examined, because the incentive structure punishes the official who reports it. The consequence is that Gabon does not reliably know its own condition. A country that does not know its own condition cannot act on it, and will not notice when it is deteriorating.

Building and maintaining systems. Gabon has roads, ports, a railway, power generation and water systems. It does not have a deep bench of people who can maintain them. This is where the loss is most continuous and most invisible. Every repair that is outsourced is a lost opportunity to learn. Over a decade, a country that maintains its own water pumps builds a workforce that understands water systems from the inside. A country that outsources the work builds a workforce that knows how to sign contracts. The first country can respond to a novel failure. The second country must call someone.

Solving new problems. Gabon's policy apparatus responds to novel problems by hiring a consultant. This is rational in the short term — consultants are available and the problem is urgent. It is destructive in the long term, because it means the analytical muscle is never exercised. There is no institutional habit of diagnosing a problem from first principles, testing several responses, measuring what happened, and adapting. There are no protected spaces in which a civil servant can try something, fail, write it up and keep her job. The result is an administration that can implement known solutions and cannot generate new ones, which is precisely the wrong profile for a country entering a period of structural change.

Defending national interests. Gabon's security and diplomatic posture has been organised around alignment with France. This provided protection for decades and prevented the development of independent capability. When the 2023 coup came, it came from inside the security forces that had



been trained and influenced by that relationship. The new government is now balancing France, China and the UAE. This is diversification of dependency, not independence. The country has not built the legal, financial and diplomatic capacity to negotiate the terms of its engagement with the world on its own terms — the capacity, for example, to say no to a loan with policy conditions attached, or to renegotiate a mining contract without external advice.

What This Means for the Money

The fiscal position illustrates the problem. Oil revenue is declining. The government has responded by borrowing against future production — the \$1 billion Trafigura deal is a forward sale of oil that has not been extracted. It has requested an IMF programme, which will bring conditionality. Neither of these is irrational, but both reduce the government's freedom of action at exactly the moment when it needs freedom of action to invest in a transition.

The deeper problem is what the money is spent on. A large share of state expenditure is recurrent: salaries, debt service, subsidies. This spending keeps the state running but builds nothing. Investment spending, where it occurs, tends to go to physical assets rather than to the people and institutions that would operate and improve them. And a substantial share of what is nominally investment spending goes to foreign firms for turnkey delivery, which means the money leaves the country and the capability does not arrive.

If the revenue were spent differently — if every major contract carried a mandatory training and documentation requirement, if a fixed share of resource revenue were ring-fenced for building domestic technical and analytical capability, if public sector failures were documented and published rather than buried — the same money would produce a different country. That is the entire argument of this report in one sentence: it is not the amount of money, it is what the money buys.

04

Why Conventional Toolkits Miss It

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International development institutions have been measuring, advising and lending to Gabon for decades. They have produced hundreds of reports. Almost none of them diagnose the problem described above. This is not because the institutions are incompetent. It is because their tools are built to measure something else. Seven specific blind spots explain the gap.

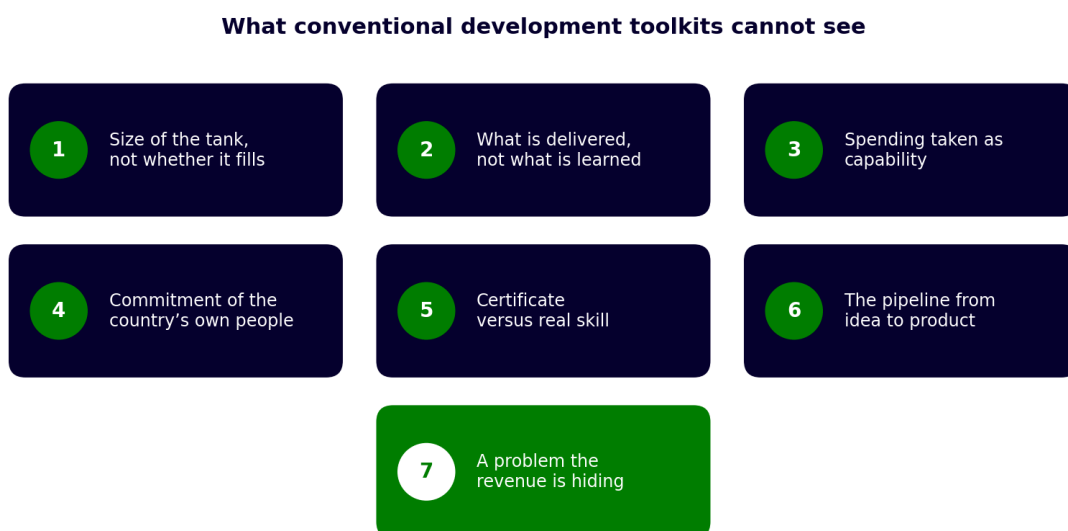


Figure 6. Seven blind spots of conventional toolkits.

1. They Measure the Size of the Tank, Not Whether It Is Filling

The standard indicators — GDP, GDP per capita, the Human Development Index, infrastructure stock, school enrolment — are snapshots. They tell you what a country has at a point in time. They do not tell you whether the country is gaining or losing the ability to produce more.

This distinction is not academic. A country can have high GDP and be losing productive capability. It can have good roads, hospitals and schools and be losing the ability to build, staff and maintain them. The indicators will show a middle-income country. The reality is a country in decline.

Gabon is exactly this case. Its GDP per capita is among the higher figures in sub-Saharan Africa. Its HDI is respectable for the region. It has 23 universities. Every headline number says middle income. None of those numbers tells you whether the country is accumulating or consuming its productive base. In fact it is consuming it. The oil is being depleted. The professionals are leaving. The institutions are not renewing. But the indicators read the stock, and the stock is still large enough to look like success.

The consequence is that international institutions have consistently described Gabon as a country with good fundamentals and management challenges. The accurate description is a country with a large balance sheet and no income statement.



2. They Count What Is Delivered, Not What Is Learned

A road built is an output. A training workshop held is an output. A report submitted is an output. Monitoring and evaluation frameworks count these and record them as progress.

The question they do not ask is whether anything was learned that will outlast the programme. Was the road built by local firms with local crews, or by a foreign contractor with a local audience? Was the training workshop a transfer of a method the participants can now apply to new problems, or a presentation of a solution that only works for the case described? Was the report written by the ministry's own analysts or by a consultant?

These distinctions are the difference between a country that is developing and a country that is being developed. Standard frameworks cannot see them because both cases produce the same outputs. The road exists either way. The certificate is issued either way. The report is filed either way. What differs is whether the capability exists after the money is spent, and that is not measured.

The consequence in Gabon is an accumulation of training certificates, workshop records and capacity-building reports that do not correspond to capability. The documentation exists. The skill does not. This is not unique to Gabon, but Gabon's dependence on external delivery makes it especially severe.

3. They Treat Government Spending as Evidence of Government Capability

Budget support, expenditure tracking, fiscal indicators — these measure money in and money out. They assume that spending on education produces learning, spending on health produces health and spending on infrastructure produces maintenance capability.

They assume wrong. A government can spend a large share of GDP on education and produce graduates who cannot solve novel problems. A government can spend heavily on infrastructure and produce assets that require foreign maintenance. A government can spend on health and produce a system that depends on imported pharmaceuticals and expatriate doctors.

The question that matters is whether the spending builds capability that survives the end of the spending. Standard fiscal analysis cannot answer that question because it does not ask it. It records the expenditure and assumes the outcome. This is why decades of development spending can coincide with flat or declining productive capability, and why the institutions involved are consistently surprised when the capability turns out not to be there.



4. They Do Not Measure Whether the Country's Own People Are Committed to Building It

There is no standard indicator for whether a country's educated class intends to stay and build, or intends to leave. There is no measure of capital flight as a share of national wealth. There is no measure of how many senior officials' children are educated at home versus abroad. These are treated as social or cultural matters, outside the scope of economic analysis.

They are not. They are the single most important determinant of whether development investment produces anything. A country that trains engineers and exports them has not developed; it has subsidised another country's workforce. A country whose elite keeps its money abroad has a smaller domestic capital pool, higher borrowing costs and weaker institutions. A country where the most capable people do not believe it is worth staying has a structural ceiling on what any policy can achieve.

Gabon's situation on this dimension is poor. Elite emigration is significant. Wealth is held abroad. Foreign credentials carry more prestige than domestic ones. The most capable Gabonese are oriented, structurally, toward exit — not out of disloyalty but because the rewards are structured that way. Standard economic analysis of Gabon does not measure this, and therefore does not account for it.

5. They Cannot Distinguish a Real Qualification from a Certificate

A training programme is delivered. Participants receive certificates. The programme is recorded as having built capacity. Nobody tests whether the participants can now do something they could not do before.

There is a straightforward test that almost nobody applies: can a different group of people, who did not attend the original training, solve a new version of the problem using only what was documented, without calling the original trainer? If yes, the capability is real. If no, the capability was never built and the certificate is paper.

Gabon's public sector, donor programmes and corporate training all produce large volumes of paper. Very little of it would pass that test. The reason this is not noticed is that nobody runs the test. Monitoring and evaluation counts attendance and satisfaction. It does not test capability, and it certainly does not test it with different people six months later.



6. They Cannot See Whether the Country Has a Working Pipeline from Ideas to Products

Every country that has escaped resource dependence has a functioning chain from defining a problem, to analysing it, to testing a solution, to building it, to selling it, and back again into new problems. This chain is what produces patents, new firms, new industries and new jobs. Standard development frameworks treat it as a black box labelled "innovation" and measure it by spending on research and development.

Spending is not the chain. A country can spend on research and produce papers that nobody uses. A country can spend on industrial policy and produce factories that need imported inputs and imported engineers. A country can have universities, research institutes and technology parks and still be unable to take an idea from a laboratory to a market. What matters is whether the links connect.

Gabon's links do not connect. Its universities do not feed its industry, because its industry is extractive and does not need them. Its research institutes do not feed its policy, because policy is written by consultants. Its entrepreneurs do not feed its banks, because banks lend against collateral rather than against capability. Each part exists; the chain does not. Standard tools measure the parts and miss the chain.

7. They Cannot See a Problem That the Revenue Is Hiding

This is the blind spot specific to resource-rich countries. Oil revenue creates the appearance of a functioning economy. GDP grows. Salaries are paid. Infrastructure is built. Debt is serviced. Every standard indicator improves or holds steady.

Beneath the surface, the productive base is shrinking: fewer people who can do skilled work without supervision, fewer firms that can operate without foreign partners, fewer institutions that can function without external support. The revenue conceals the erosion because it can substitute for the missing capability by purchasing it abroad. A country with \$3 billion a year in oil revenue can buy engineering, medicine, education, security and policy advice. It does not need to produce them. So it does not notice that it cannot.

When the revenue declines, the concealment stops. The country discovers, with some surprise, that the capability it thought it had was rented and the lease has expired. This is the point at which standard analysis becomes useless, because it has spent fifty years measuring the revenue's effects rather than the capability's absence.



The Common Thread

All seven blind spots share one feature: they measure what the rent buys, not what the rent prevents. The rent buys roads, schools, hospitals and salaries. The rent prevents the development of the ability to produce roads, schools, hospitals and salaries without it. Standard tools see the first. None of them sees the second.

This is why the advice Gabon has received for decades has been broadly sensible in its own terms and broadly ineffective in practice. Diversify the economy. Improve the business environment. Invest in education. Strengthen institutions. Every one of these is correct and none of them addresses the actual constraint, which is that Gabon has no mechanism for converting money into durable productive capability. It has a mechanism for converting money into consumption, and it has used it very efficiently for fifty years.

05

The Blueprint to Capability

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The Constraint That Sets the Timeline

Gabon has roughly 25 years of meaningful oil and mining revenue left. That figure is not a forecast; it is the rough horizon within which the current revenue base is strong enough to fund a transition without severe disruption. After that, the arithmetic becomes much harder, because the state will be trying to build capability with declining resources while also paying for the consequences of not having built it earlier.

Twenty-five years is also the shortest period in which a new capability can be built, tested with different people, handed over, and proven to survive the handover. This is the crucial point and it is worth stating carefully, because it is what makes most development programmes fail.

Building a capability takes five to seven years. That is the time required to identify a problem, attempt a solution, fail, analyse the failure, adapt, and succeed. At the end of that period you have a capability that is real but fragile. It is held by a small number of people, it is tied to the specific conditions in which it was learned, and it is vulnerable to their departure.

Proving that the capability is durable takes a second cycle of the same length. In the second cycle, different people — who were not part of the original effort — must apply the capability to a new version of the problem, without help from the original team. If they can, the capability is real and can be passed on. If they cannot, what was built in the first cycle was a personal skill, not an institutional one, and it will leave with the person who holds it.

So the minimum period for building something that lasts is ten to fifteen years, and the minimum period for building something that lasts and is widely distributed is twenty-five years. That is the timeline. It cannot be compressed by spending more money. It is a function of how long learning takes.



Figure 7. The programme at a glance: three phases over twenty-five years.

The Sequence, and Why It Cannot Be Reordered

There are three conditions that have to be in place, in order, for any of this to work.

First: the country's capable people have to be committed to building at home. If they are not, nothing else matters. You can build world-class universities and watch the graduates leave. You can fund research and watch it be published abroad and applied abroad. You can build infrastructure and watch it be maintained by foreigners. The commitment of capable people to stay, invest and build is not a soft issue. It is the precondition for everything else.

Second: the government has to be honest about what is working and what is not. If failure cannot be reported, it cannot be analysed, and if it cannot be analysed it cannot be learned from. A government that conceals its failures is a government that cannot improve, no matter how much money it spends. This is not a moral point. It is a functional one. Learning requires feedback, and feedback requires that bad news is allowed to travel.

Third: the government has to control its own money. If revenue comes with policy conditions attached, the government cannot invest in the things that take a generation to pay off, because those investments look bad in a three-year lending cycle. It cannot tolerate failure, because failure is a breach of conditionality. It cannot prioritise its own problems, because the priorities are set in the lending institution's capital. Control of money is not about nationalism. It is about having the freedom to make long-term investments with uncertain outcomes, which is what building capability requires.

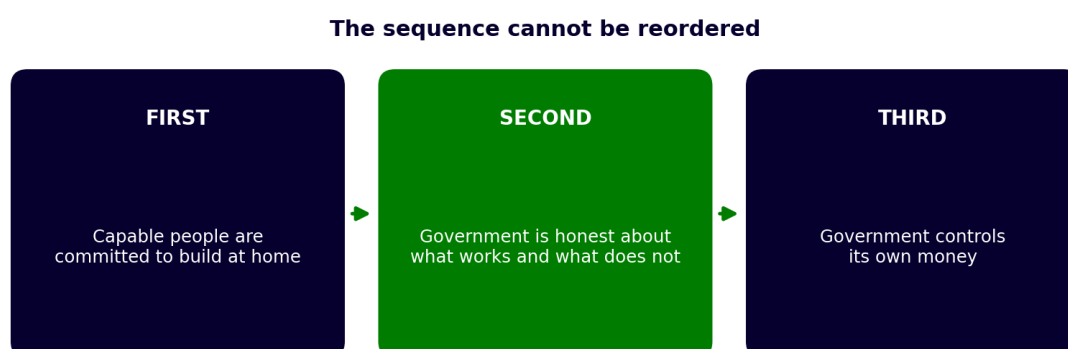


Figure 8. Three conditions, in order.

These three conditions are not independent. The third is weakened without the second, because a government that cannot report failure cannot manage money well. The second is weakened without the first, because honest reporting is a waste of time if the capable people who would act on it have left. And the first is weakened without the third and second, because nobody stays to build in a country where the government lies about its results and the money is controlled from abroad.

The sequencing of the programme follows from this. The commitment of capable people comes first, and it is built through specific decisions about education, language, elite behaviour and capital. Honest reporting comes alongside it, through specific institutional changes. Control of money comes



after both, because a government that has neither commitment nor honesty cannot be trusted with unrestricted funds, and its own creditors will not trust it either.

Phase Zero: Establish the Facts (Months 0–18)

No programme should start before the country has an honest picture of its own situation. Gabon does not currently have one.

The commitment audit. An independent body, established by statute and required to publish in full, measures three things. How much of the national curriculum is concerned with Gabon itself — its history, its institutions, its problems, its successes? How much of the country's wealth is held abroad, and by whom? How many of the children of senior officials are educated in Gabon? How many skilled Gabonese leave each year, and how many return? These are uncomfortable questions. They are also the questions that determine whether anything else will work.

The purpose is not to shame anyone. It is to identify the binding constraint. If the problem is that the elite is oriented toward exit, then a programme that focuses on curriculum reform will fail, because it is addressing the wrong constraint. The arithmetic matters: if investment in national identity is high but the exit rate is also high, the exit rate dominates. It is the weakest factor that determines the outcome, and the audit exists to find it.

The honesty audit. In parallel, measure whether the government can currently learn from its own experience. Are failed policies written up and published? Is there a functioning archive of past decisions? Can a civil servant report a mistake without losing her job? Does the statistical agency produce data independently of the people who fund it? Is there any mechanism by which a citizen can report a service failure and get a response?

The measurement bootstrap. Here is a genuine problem: to measure whether Gabon is building capability, you need institutions capable of measuring it, and those institutions are themselves part of what has to be built. The solution is to start simple. For the first three years, use rough proxies: how often are policies revised, what share of infrastructure maintenance is done by local crews, how many public projects include documented training. From years three to eight, move to process measures: are post-mortems produced, do handover briefings exist, do cross-ministry reviews happen. From year eight onward, move to direct measurement: test people's actual ability to solve problems, audit archives to see whether they are used, run surveys of skills.

Building the measurement system is not a preliminary to the programme. It is the programme's first output. A country that can accurately measure its own capability has already built something significant.



Years 1–12: Build the First Cycle

The first twelve years are not about results. They are about proving that the cycle can be completed at all. Expect the capability built in this period to be fragile, held by few people and vulnerable to departure. That is normal. The purpose is to have something real to test in the second cycle.

Building Commitment

Change what children learn. The 2026 curriculum reform is a start, but it must go much further. At primary and secondary level, at least 70% of content should concern Gabon: its history, its institutions, its industries, its problems, its thinkers, its successes and failures. This is not sentimentality. It is how a country produces adults who believe their own society is worth understanding and improving. A curriculum that teaches Gabonese children French history and Gabonese folklore teaches them that the real world is elsewhere.

Change what the elite signals. Require that the children of senior officials be educated in Gabon. This is the single most visible statement a government can make about whether staying is a serious option. If the people running the country send their children abroad, everyone understands the message. Botswana's elite stayed and built. South Korea's elite stayed and built. This is not a coincidence.

Change who pays for foreign education. The suspension of scholarships to the United States and Canada, and the later restrictions on certain European destinations, are correct in direction but incomplete. Reducing the outflow of students without building domestic institutions that can absorb and employ them is not a solution; it reduces the quality of training without creating the alternative. The suspension must be paired with serious investment in Gabonese universities, and with a requirement that any state-funded education abroad carries a binding obligation to return and work.

Change what the culture rewards. Fund Gabonese film, music, literature and media. Subsidise content in Fang, Myene, Punu and other national languages. Name institutions after Gabonese figures. The goal is to make building a career at home culturally legitimate, not merely economically rational. At present it is neither.

Change how capital is treated. Register capital flows. Impose progressive taxes on assets held abroad by residents. Provide constitutional protections against arrangements in which a small group holds national assets on behalf of foreign interests. Wealth flight is not just an accounting problem; it is the mechanism by which the domestic capital pool stays too small to fund domestic investment.

Reduce dependence on a single security partner. Build domestic intelligence capacity that is not trained by, and does not report to, a foreign power. Enter regional mutual defence arrangements within CEMAC. Distribute constitutional power so that a coup is harder to execute successfully. The 2023 coup succeeded in part because the regime's legitimacy rested on external support rather than internal capability. That is a structural vulnerability and it can be reduced.



Diversify creditors. Build reserves. Negotiate regional arrangements that reduce exposure to a single lender's conditions. Refuse loan conditions that constrain the ability to invest in long-term capability. This is the hardest of these measures, because it requires the reserves and the alternatives to be in place before it can be exercised. It is also the one that most directly determines whether the rest of the programme is possible.

Building Honesty

Publish outcomes, including bad ones. Every ministry, agency and public investment should be required to publish what happened. The current practice of reporting only successes makes it impossible for the system to learn. Failure is the most informative event a government can experience, and Gabon currently destroys that information at exactly the moment it is most valuable.

Protect people who report problems. Whistleblower protection, a functioning free press, and academic freedom are not luxuries. They are the channels through which information about failure reaches the people who can act on it. A government that punishes the messenger is a government that has chosen not to learn.

Require institutional memory. By law, incoming administrations must review and preserve the lessons of their predecessors. The current pattern — where a change of government means the destruction of institutional knowledge — is expensive and unnecessary. Botswana's traditional kgotla system served this function before anyone gave it a name. Gabon's equivalent institutions — community councils, customary authorities — should be recognised as legitimate channels for accountability and integrated into national governance rather than bypassed.

Create a public problem register. Citizens report failures — a broken pump, a non-functioning clinic, a road that was built wrong. Officials are evaluated on how they respond. This does two things. It generates information the government would not otherwise have. And it distributes the ability to identify problems across the population instead of concentrating it in a ministry.

The Four Jobs, Years 1–12

Seeing problems. Conduct the national census using Gabonese statisticians, not subcontracted NGOs. Stand up the public problem register by year three. Fund investigative journalism and protect journalists who report infrastructure failures. Establish the habit that every failed policy produces a published analysis. This habit is the single most important cultural change in the programme, because without it the system cannot correct itself.

Building and maintaining. This is where the highest returns are available, and where the current model does the most damage.

Require that all publicly funded infrastructure include local apprenticeship and complete technical documentation as contract deliverables. Prohibit turnkey contracts with no local participation. The effect is that every construction project becomes simultaneously a training project and an archive project. This costs more up front and produces dramatically more over time.



Shift the budget from new construction toward maintenance and repair performed by Gabonese crews. A country that builds new roads while letting existing ones decay is destroying its own capability, because maintenance is where the learning happens. Every repair cycle teaches the technician something the original contractor never had to explain. A thousand repair cycles produce a workforce that understands the system from the inside.

Require that joint ventures with foreign contractors include documented training with a measurable handover. The test is not whether the local staff were present. The test is whether, two years later, a different group of Gabonese technicians can solve a new version of the problem without the foreign contractor. If they cannot, the training did not happen.

Focus on water treatment, power distribution, road maintenance, port operations and the railway. These are the systems whose failure would be catastrophic and whose maintenance generates continuous learning.

Solving new problems. Establish a national fund that makes small grants for risky local experiments, with a written account of what happened — including failures — as a required deliverable. This is the mechanism that makes it possible to try things. Currently, a Gabonese civil servant who wants to test an idea has no funding route and no protection if it fails.

Run multiple policy pilots at once, with mandatory public reporting of results including failures. Move from serial to parallel experimentation. The current approach — one big programme, evaluated after it is too late to change — is slow and produces little information.

Pay teams to document what went wrong. The information contained in a recent failure is the most valuable information a government can have, and it is currently discarded. A "failure fellowship" that pays people to write up what did not work is one of the cheapest interventions available.

Award academic credit for well-documented attempts to solve real local problems, not only for correct answers. This is the single most important change in the education system, because it changes what students are trying to do. At present they are trying to reproduce correct answers, which is exactly the skill the country does not need more of.

Require annual failure reports from each ministry to be shared across ministries. This creates the connections through which one part of government learns from another, which is where a great deal of the value is.

Defending interests. Prevention is dramatically cheaper than recovery. Build local peace committees and require written reviews of every mediation attempt. Develop legal capacity in intellectual property, trade law and financial regulation so that the country can negotiate its own agreements rather than accepting drafts. Reduce single-point dependence on any one security partner. Gabon's current position — dependent on one external power for security, one for finance, and a small number for markets — leaves it with very little room to negotiate.



The Education and Research Chain

This is the core of the programme, and it is where Gabon currently has the least. The chain has four links, and all four must be present and connected.

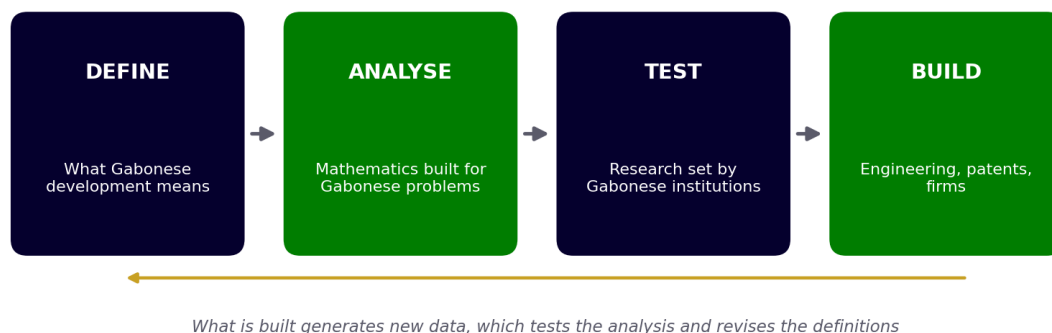


Figure 9. The four-link chain from idea to product.

Defining. Gabon needs an institution whose job is to work out what Gabonese development actually means: what counts as value, what counts as a good life, what obligations people have to each other and to the land, what the country is trying to become. This sounds abstract. It is not. If the country's concepts are imported, every decision downstream will be made in someone else's framework. The existing scholars at IRSH working on Fang thought, on the Byéri, on African ethics, are the seed of this. They need to become the foundation, not a department.

Analysing. Gabon has roughly eight active research mathematicians. It needs fifty. The Gabon Mathematical Society, the existing postgraduate programme, and the work of scholars like Philibert Nang and Guy Martial Nkiet are the starting point. The critical requirement is that the mathematics be built for Gabonese problems — resource revenue dynamics, customary land tenure, forest ecology, the actual structure of Gabonese society — rather than borrowed wholesale from French academia. Borrowed analysis of an undefined subject produces precise results about nothing. Target fifty active researchers by year twelve.

Testing. Gabon produces around sixteen research articles a year that meet international thresholds, and the research questions are mostly set abroad. The change required is that Gabonese institutions define the agenda. Malaria, forest ecology, mangrove dynamics, oil pollution and health systems are real objects of study. They should be studied by Gabonese institutions, using Gabonese protocols, so that the results feed back into Gabonese decisions. Increase research spending from 0.58% of GDP to 1.5% by year twelve and 3% by year twenty-five. Reform CENAREST so that it coordinates a national research effort rather than hosting institutes that depend on foreign grants.

Building. The polytechnic at Masuku, the mining school at Moanda, the petroleum and gas institute, and the African computer science institute are the construction layer. They must be connected to the analysis and testing layers, because engineering that builds without measurement is construction without foundation. The target: 100 resident patent applications a year by year twelve, 500 by year twenty-five, up from 4. Establish a specialised intellectual property court, because the current



arrangement — IP cases heard by a general civil court — is not adequate for a country that wants to build a technology sector.

The four links must connect. Within each cycle, defining informs analysis, analysis informs testing, testing informs building. Across cycles, what is built generates new data, which tests the analysis, which revises the definitions. This is the chain. Gabon does not have it. Years 1–12 build it.

Turning Operators into Problem-Solvers

The single most important number in this programme is the share of the workforce that can solve a new problem without being told how. Gabon's is low. The education system produces people who can operate systems designed elsewhere.

The national service placement. From year three, every graduate enters a two-year placement in which they are required to solve a real problem without external help. No trainer. No manual. No foreign consultant. This is the specific condition that converts an operator into a problem-solver: being placed in a situation that requires original thinking, with no route back to the instructions, and completing it. The current system prevents this condition from ever arising, because help is always available before local capability is tested.

Written output. Every placement produces a written account, including failures, which feeds the public problem register and the cross-ministry reviews.

The successor test. After the first cohort, a different group must solve a new version of the problem using only the written record, without the original solver present. If they can, the capability is real. If they cannot, it was never there.

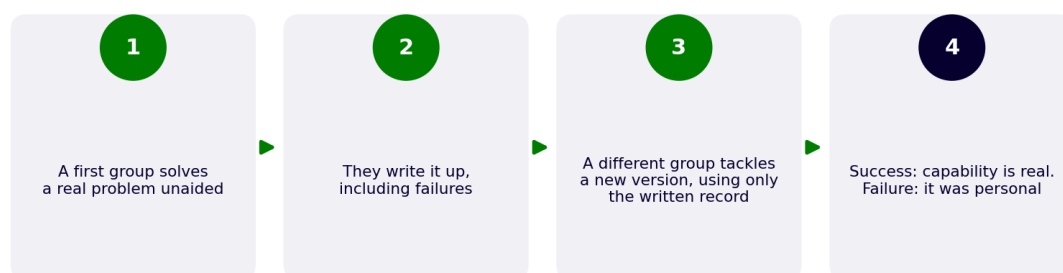


Figure 10. The successor test.

Target. Raise the share of the workforce capable of independent problem-solving to 15% by year twelve and 35% by year twenty-five. This is the number that determines whether the economy can generate its own income.

Avoiding Single Points of Failure

No critical capability should be held by only one person. Within 90 days of identifying a critical skill, a second person must be trained in it. The reason is arithmetic. A skill held by one person is destroyed



entirely when that person leaves. A skill held by three people survives the loss of one. Gabon's professional class is small enough that this is an acute vulnerability: the loss of a handful of individuals can remove capabilities that took a decade to build. Cross-training is not bureaucracy. It is the difference between a capability that lasts and one that leaves with its owner.

The Three Audits

Three audits, conducted annually, form the accountability system.

The documentation audit. Are the archives being used, or are they cemeteries? A document that nobody reads has no value. The test is whether a different group of people can act on what is written down.

The single-person risk audit. Which critical skills are held by only one person? What is the exposure if that person leaves? This is conducted quarterly.

The commitment audit. The measures from phase zero, repeated annually and published. Is the exit rate falling? Is capital returning? Are officials' children being educated at home? This is the number that determines whether the rest of the programme is working.

Years 13–25: Prove It and Spread It

The first period produced fragile capabilities held by few people. The second period tests whether they hold, and spreads them.

The Successor Test, Applied Everywhere

Every capability built in the first period is tested by asking whether a different group can use it on a new problem without help. Where the answer is yes, the capability is real and the investment is validated. Where the answer is no, the capability was personal rather than institutional and the work must be redone. This is not a one-off exercise. It becomes the standard way the government evaluates whether its own investments worked.

Spreading the Capability

A capability concentrated in a few hundred people in Libreville is fragile and politically destabilising. It is fragile because if those people leave, it is gone. It is destabilising because a small educated elite with high incomes and a large uneducated majority is a recipe for instability, which then destroys the capability.

Invest disproportionately in primary and secondary education in regions that have been excluded. Reduce the geographic concentration of skills.

Require apprenticeship in professional licensing and employment contracts. This transfers practical knowledge from credentialed professionals to people who learn by doing, across the income distribution.



Teach technical subjects in national languages. At present, technical knowledge is locked in French, which means most of the workforce cannot access it. This is a direct and unnecessary constraint on who can acquire skills.

Support women's networks and women-led businesses. This is the single most consistent source of untapped capability everywhere in the world.

Devolve authority and budget to local government, with a requirement that local government also build the capacity to evaluate its own results. This prevents capability from concentrating in the capital and the export enclaves, and it means more of the country is learning.

Target. Halve the concentration of skills by year twenty-five.

Making Skills Last

Skills decay. The rate of decay depends on how often the skill is used on something new. A skill that is applied to new problems every year stays sharp for a long time. A skill that is documented but not practised dies, regardless of how good the documentation is.

The canonical example: Roman writers documented how to make concrete, yet the practice was largely lost for centuries. The documents survived. The ability died with the last people who had it, and rebuilding even part of it has taken modern researchers years of experiment.

Target. Every critical skill should be applied to a new problem at least once a year, and should have a working life of at least one generation — ten to fifteen years — so that it survives long enough to be passed on. This is the specific condition under which a country's skills outlast the people who first acquired them.

Crossing the Threshold

There is a point at which an economy starts generating new capability faster than it uses it up. Below that point, every advance is offset by decay and every gain requires external input. Above it, the process becomes self-sustaining: skilled people teach each other, firms learn from their suppliers, research feeds industry which feeds research.

Nobody can specify the threshold in advance. What can be specified is the signs of approaching it:

- Patent applications start rising faster than linearly. In a country that is merely accumulating skills, patent filings rise in proportion to the number of trained people. In a country that has crossed the threshold, they rise faster, because trained people are producing ideas that other trained people develop further.
- Research output per researcher rises, for the same reason.
- Solutions developed in one placement get adapted by other people without the original solver's involvement.
- Cross-ministry reviews start producing policies that are adopted in more than one ministry.



- Analysis, testing and construction start happening within the same cycle rather than sequentially and disconnectedly.

Target. Reach the threshold by year twenty-five.

The Twenty-Five-Year Test

At year twenty-five, three conditions should hold, and should have held for two consecutive generations.

Condition	Plain meaning	Target
The country is gaining capability faster than it is losing it	Net accumulation of productive skill, sustained across both periods	Positive
The share of people who can solve new problems is not falling	The productive base is stable or growing	≥ 35%
Skills last at least one generation	What is learned today survives long enough to be taught to the next cohort	≥ 10 years

If all three hold for two generations, Gabon is no longer living off royalties. It is generating income from the work of its people. That is the definition of success in this programme.

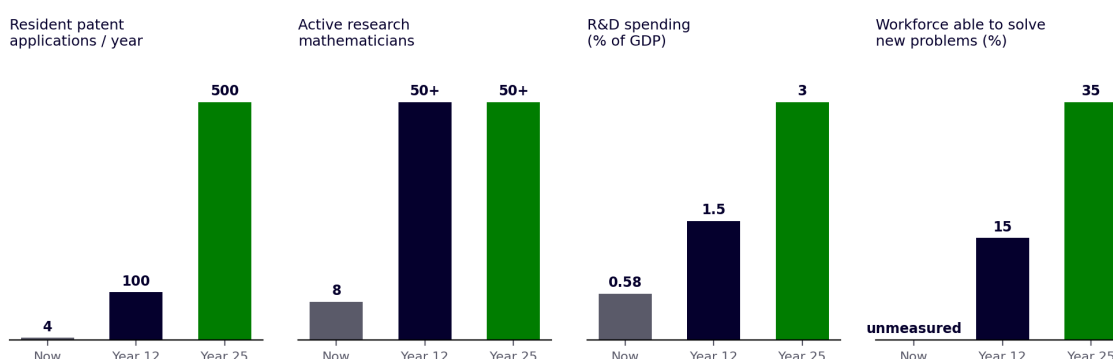


Figure 11. Milestones for the first cycle (year 12) and the full programme (year 25). The problem-solver share is currently unmeasured.

Paying for It

The programme requires money and the money must be spent differently, not just spent more.

Ring-fence a fixed share of resource revenue. Fifteen percent in years one to five, rising to twenty-five percent by year twelve, reserved for building domestic technical and analytical capability: the mathematics programme, the research institutions, the engineering schools, the national service placements, the experimental fund, and the measurement system. This is not a savings fund. It is not held abroad. It is spent at home on building capability. The distinction is the entire point.



Share of resource revenue ring-fenced for domestic capability

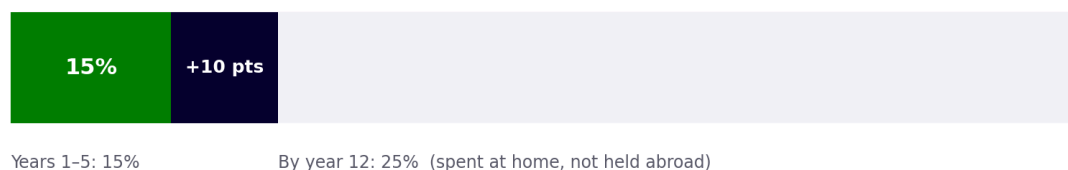


Figure 12. The capability ring-fence.

Build reserves before attempting to refuse conditions. The ability to refuse a loan condition depends on having an alternative. Reserves are what make that alternative exist.

Assess extraction terms against benchmarks. Botswana negotiated a 50/50 revenue split with De Beers and used the proceeds to build institutions. Gabon's terms should be assessed against that standard. This is not about hostility to investors. It is about whether the country is capturing a fair share of value that is being permanently depleted.

Refuse conditions that constrain long-term investment. This is the hardest rule and the most important. External finance that prevents the government from funding experiments that might fail, or from sustaining budgets over a period of years, or from prioritising local problems, is financing that prevents capability from being built. It is sometimes necessary, and it always has a cost, and the cost should be counted.

The race. This programme is a race between declining revenue and accumulating capability. If capability accumulates faster than revenue declines, the country crosses the threshold before the money runs out. If not, it reaches the end of the oil without the ability to replace it, and the state cannot perform its basic functions. That outcome is not a prediction. It is what happens if the race is lost, and the race is real.

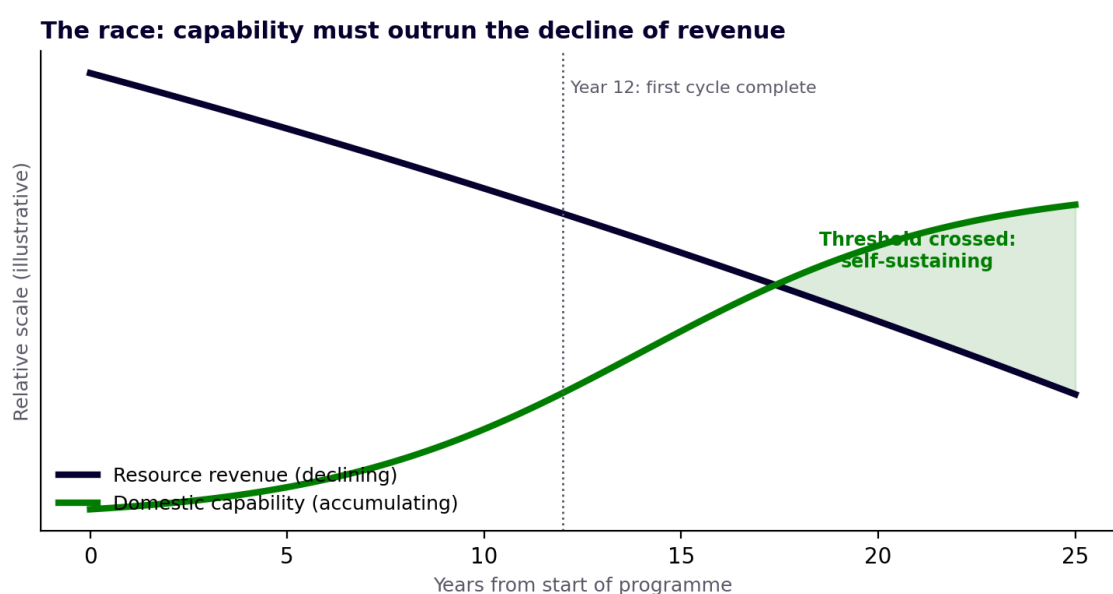


Figure 13. The race between declining revenue and accumulating capability (illustrative, not a forecast).



What Success and Failure Look Like

Success at year twenty-five.

Measure	Now	Target
Share of workforce able to solve new problems	Low, unmeasured	≥ 35%
Commitment of capable people to build at home	Weak	Strong
Resident patent applications per year	4	500
Active research mathematicians	8	50+
Research spending as share of GDP	0.58%	3%
Concentration of skills	High	Halved
Working life of a critical skill	Short	≥ one generation
Net capability accumulation	Negative	Positive, sustained across two generations

Failure at year twenty-five. Revenue falls faster than capability accumulates. The capability fund is raided to pay salaries. The national service programme is defunded. The mathematics programme produces graduates who leave. Research remains a foreign-funded activity. The share of people who can solve new problems does not rise. The country reaches the end of the oil without anything underneath it. The state cannot pay its bills, cannot maintain its infrastructure, and cannot defend itself. The collapse scenario becomes the actual scenario.

Nobody can predict which outcome will occur. What can be said is that the outcome depends on the decisions described in this report, and that those decisions are being made now, by default as much as by intention. A government that does not ring-fence capability spending has decided not to. A government that does not require training and documentation in its contracts has decided to keep importing expertise. A government that does not protect people who report failure has decided not to learn. These are decisions whether or not they are made consciously.

The Specific Measures, by Purpose

To build capability.

Area	Measure	What it does
Contracting	Require local apprenticeship and full technical documentation in every publicly funded infrastructure contract	Turns every project into a training and archive project



Area	Measure	What it does
Finance	Fund small risky experiments, with written reports including failures as required deliverables	Makes it possible to try things and to learn from trying
Education	Award credit for well-documented attempts to solve real local problems	Changes what students are trying to do
Government	Public problem register; officials assessed on response	Spreads the ability to identify problems
Security	Local peace committees with written reviews of every mediation	Builds prevention capability, which is far cheaper than recovery

To keep capability.

Area	Measure	What it does
Departure	Exit interviews; tax incentives for returnees who teach	Captures knowledge before it leaves
Records	Public searchable archives of decisions, evaluations and post-mortems	Reduces institutional forgetting
Handover	Six months of documented knowledge transfer before senior staff depart, with demonstrated teaching	Converts personal knowledge into institutional knowledge
Government transitions	Legal requirement for incoming administrations to preserve and review predecessors' lessons	Stops the periodic destruction of institutional memory at every change of government
Language	Technical subjects taught in national languages	Stops knowledge being locked away from most of the workforce

To accelerate.

Measure	What it does
Publish quarterly evaluations immediately	Shortens the feedback loop
Require annual failure reports shared across ministries	Creates connections between parts of government
Run multiple pilots simultaneously; scale the winners fast, kill the losers fast	Increases the number of things tried per year
Legally protect civil servants who document honest mistakes	Removes the reason to hide failure
Structured exchange with other developing countries, with documented local adaptation	Allows learning from others without simply importing their answers



To spread capability. As set out in years 13–25: disproportionate investment in excluded regions, mandatory apprenticeship, technical teaching in national languages, support for women-led enterprise, devolution with local evaluation capacity.

To protect commitment. As set out in years 1–12: curriculum reform, public recognition of national figures, local-language media, elite signalling, binding return obligations, capital registration and taxation, cultural funding, domestic intelligence capacity, diversified security and credit relationships. Throughout, the rule is to fix the weakest link first, because a chain fails at its weakest point regardless of the strength of the rest.

06

Conclusion

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Gabon's income comes from assets it did not build and cannot replace. That income pays for the state. The state has not used the income to build the ability to generate income without the assets. Therefore the state's survival depends on the assets, and the assets are running down.

This is not a moral judgment. It is an accounting fact, and it has a timeline attached. Oil production has fallen from over 350,000 barrels a day in the 1990s to around 216,000 today. The World Bank expects further declines. Oil's share of GDP has fallen from 28.2% to 19.1% in three years. The state borrowed \$1 billion against future oil deliveries in April 2026 and requested an IMF programme in March 2026. The revenue that funds everything is shrinking, and the borrowing is against revenue that is itself shrinking.

The 25-year programme set out in this report is not a wish list. It is the shortest period in which the country can build capabilities that survive the departure of the people who build them. A capability takes five to seven years to acquire and another five to seven to prove it can be handed over. Ten to fifteen years is the minimum for something durable. Twenty-five years is the minimum for something durable and widely distributed. The timeline is set by how long learning takes, not by how much money is available.

What the programme requires is a change in what the money buys. At present, Gabon's resource revenue buys finished answers from abroad: roads built by foreign contractors, policies written by foreign consultants, systems operated by foreign technicians, elites trained in foreign universities. Each of these purchases is individually sensible and collectively destructive, because each one substitutes for the development of local capability rather than contributing to it.

The alternative is to spend the same money on capability: contracts that require training and documentation, so that the road is built twice — once in concrete and once in skill. Funds for experiments that are allowed to fail, so that the country learns what works in its own conditions. Schools that teach Gabonese children about Gabon, so that they believe their own society is worth building. Universities that define their own research questions, so that the knowledge produced is relevant to the country that paid for it. Protections for people who report failure, so that the government can learn from its own experience. Control of the country's own finances, so that long-term investment is possible.

None of these measures is exotic. Each has been used successfully by countries that escaped resource dependence — Botswana, South Korea, Costa Rica, and others. What they have in common is that they treated revenue as an opportunity to build capability rather than as a substitute for it.

Gabon has perhaps twenty-five years in which the revenue is still large enough to fund the transition. During those years, the country will either build the ability to generate its own income or it will not. There is no third option, and there is no way to defer the choice. A government that spends its revenue on consumption has chosen. A government that spends it on capability has chosen differently. Both are decisions, and both are being made now.



The country's long-run position depends on a single question: after the money is spent, can Gabonese people do something they could not do before, without us?

If the answer is increasingly yes, the country survives the end of the oil. If the answer is no, the state's ability to function ends with the revenue, because the ability was rented and the lease will expire.

That is the whole of it. Gabon has money and no productive capacity. It has a window in which to convert one into the other. What it does with that window is the only question that matters.

07

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