

# CONTRIBUTING TO GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT

A commitment to capacity building



BY MICHELLE SCHOPP

Imagine living in an environment where you lose power every time it rains. Imagine being delayed getting to work because you had to bail a foot of water out of your living room or because the dirt road access to where you work is now a lake. Of course, by lunch it will all have dried out so you will go about your business and prepare to repeat this routine tomorrow. Such is the way of life in Port Gentil, Gabon.



## Welcome to Central Africa

Gabon is located on the western coast of Africa, straddling the equator. It is bordered by Equatorial Guinea and Cameroon in the north, and the Republic of the Congo in the south.

Due to its location, Gabon experiences a year-round tropical climate with temperatures ranging from 68°F in the cooler months to 88°F in its hottest month of January. The rainy season approaches in October and continues through May, with an annual rainfall of approximately 100 to 150 inches. This lends itself to very humid conditions most of the year.

Gabon covers just over 250,000 square kilometers of land. The majority of the population can be found in the coastal cities and villages, while much of the remaining parts of the country are covered in rainforests and grasslands, which are home to Gabon's thriving biodiversity. In 2002, the President of Gabon designated

roughly 7.3 million acres of marine and land area for conservation, establishing the country's National Parks Service and 13 national parks.

## Utilities, Transportation, Oil and Gas

Gabon's abundance of natural resources has allowed for a profitable economy through the exportation of timber, manganese and crude oil. Natural gas is also extracted and produced in country, however, it is strictly for Gabonese consumption. Half of the installed energy in Gabon is supplied by fossil fuels while the remaining half is supplied through hydroelectric power from the large river systems that run through the country. Despite this, nearly 12 percent of the population still remains without access to electricity. The movement of these resources within the country is restricted to approximately 12,000 kilometers of roadways, railways and gas and oil pipelines. Remarkably, of the 9,170 km of roadways, only 1,097 km are paved.



A dirt road in a small fishing village in Cape Lopez, Gabon.



Oil exploration has shifted offshore to meet the economic demands for exportation in Port Gentil, Gabon.

## National Development

Most countries have a National Development Plan, which is a document that lays out a strategy for economic growth and stability. It is prepared by an appointed council and addresses anything from infrastructure development to initiatives for agricultural growth that will boost the local economy.

Gabon recently approved an Economic Revitalization Plan in which the government has committed to improvement projects that will grow and diversify their economy, stabilize their infrastructure and improve the lives of their citizens. The Gabonese government realizes that in order to continue being an attractive destination for foreign investors, they must show commitment to this plan. But how do they do this?

By committing to initiatives within these plans, countries have access to external resources that can provide the tools, training and expertise to ensure they meet their goals through a sustainable progress, known as “capacity building.”

## A Capacity Building Model

Earlier this year, I was deployed to Gabon where I was part of a United States Coast Guard team training the Gabonese Navy. This training evolution was part of a much larger initiative which falls under the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA), whose purpose is to “develop and execute innovative Security Cooperation solutions that support the United States and

partner interests.” The initiative focuses on these key themes: leadership, integrity, teamwork, innovation and efficiency.

We have a process for conducting exportable training that involves a sequence of three phases. When a country sees a gap or need, they request assistance and training. We identify which existing course curriculum might fit the request and select the appropriate personnel to deliver the training.

Phase I involves training personnel in basic skill sets for whatever the requested topic may be. Phase II is our “train the trainer” phase, which involves instruction in classroom management, development and delivery of the same topic content that was delivered in the previous training. And the third phase is the graduate level, where those personnel are delivering the content to their members under observation and evaluation from our teams.

In the case with Gabon, a team had previously conducted Phase I training with the group of Navy personnel. Our team arrived roughly a month later to deliver Phase II. The selected personnel were motivated, experienced and ready to take on the challenge of becoming the trainers. We were quickly impressed by their ability to effectively deliver the content to each other and our team.

They displayed the skills necessary to successfully develop, design and

deliver training, and they did so despite consistent power losses and heavy rain storms that delayed the training process. Their resilience further indicated the commitment and dedication to investing in sustainable training programs that will carry throughout their government.

## In Summary

Nelson Mandela once said, “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” Sharing resources through global capacity building directly contributes to diplomacy and national development. A strong and capable government empowers strong and capable citizens. This combination facilitates progress and presents stable platforms to carry out plans for improvement, revitalization and development. ✪



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