Equatorial Guinea: “A Hispanic country with Bantu roots”

Javier Morillas
Professor of Economic Structure, CEU San Pablo University. Head of the MAPFRE-IdL-CEU San Pablo University Foundations' Research Group. CEO of ASPrivatBank in Spain. President of the Spanish Association of Foreign Banking Representatives (AERBE).

1. The 12th of October: A nation is born

The motto on the official crest of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea is “Unidad, Paz, Justicia” —Unity, Peace, and Justice. A united republic, which achieved independence peacefully, in a quest for greater justice. The country's capital is Malabo—formerly Santa Isabel—and it comprises a continental region, Río Muni, and an insular region comprising the islands of Bioko (formerly Fernando Pó), the Elobeys, Corisco, and Annobón. Spanish is the official language, although local continental and island languages survive, such as Bube, Fang, and Annobonese.

It has been called a country with “Hispanic and Bantu roots” by its leaders and presidents. The main public holiday and national day of celebration is 12 October. It was on this date that the country became independent in 1968, through a peaceful process after a four-year period of “pre-autonomy” during which it was led by Bonifacio Ondó, one of the nation's historical leaders.

Spanish is the language used in the education system, from village schools upwards, throughout the primary and secondary levels of education, and in further and higher education, vocational training, and continuing education. It is used at the National University of Equatorial Guinea (UNGE) and in courses and seminars given by the universities of Alcalá de Henares, CEU San Pablo, and other national and international institutions, especially from Hispano-American countries, and particularly Cuba, with which Equatorial Guinea has had particularly strong links since the early 19th century, as we will see later in its economic timeline.

Spanish is also the common language used in the country's administration, and in political and election campaigns, as shown in the accompanying images, from legislative election campaigns—“Ciudadano de Guinea Ecuatorial, acude a las urnas...” (Citizen of Equatorial Guinea, vote!)—posters announcing the “composición de las mesas electorales y el procedimiento de votación” (polling station officials and voting procedures), and voting slips for different candidates and parties, as well as election results by district, vote-counting records, and other election documents.

Since 2009, Equatorial Guinea has participated in the Ibero-American Summits as an associate State, due to its cultural and linguistic links with the countries of Hispano-America, and it has applied to become a full member. In fact, Equatorial Guinea has been a member of the Organization of Ibero-American States since 1979.

Guinea’s renowned writers and authors use Spanish: deceased historical figures such as Leoncio Evita, Daniel Jones, Marcelo Asistencia Ndongo, Constantino Ocháa, Ángel Nguema, Raquel Llombé, Rafael María Nze, Juan Balboa, and the former
Minister of Culture, Leandro Mbomio; and other prominent writers, such as Donato Ndongo, Francisco Zamora, Juan Ávila, and Anacleto Oló, and the contemporary authors Guillermina Mekuy and Justo Bolekia—whom some say deserve the Nobel Prize for Literature.

The Equatorial Guinean Academy of the Spanish Language was admitted to the Association of Academies of the Spanish Language in 2016. Public figures from academia, such as Trinidad Morgades, vice-rector of the UNGE, were already participating in the Association’s international congresses and meetings. Members include Agustín Nze, Julián Bibang, and Federico Edjoo.

Spanish is also the language used in the trade, financial, and business spheres. It is the language used by the National Bank of Equatorial Guinea (BANGE, see accompanying advertisement). And, naturally, Spanish is the language used by the various sectoral, social, and business organizations, and by the chambers of commerce in Malabo and Río Muni, as well as the International Hispano-Equatorial Guinean Official Chamber of Commerce and Industry (COCIHEG, see accompanying leaflet). The creation of the COCIHEG was one of the first bilateral cooperation projects and agreements between Spain and Equatorial Guinea following the so-called “Golpe de Libertad” (Freedom Coup) of 1979 carried out by President Teodoro Obiang, which brought an end to the rule of Francisco Macías, president-elect on the date independence was granted by Spain. In subsequent years, the then ambassador of Equatorial Guinea in Madrid, Alejandro Evuna Owono, rebuilt relations with the former metropolis in conjunction with Spanish President of the Government, Adolfo Suárez. It was agreed that the Spanish Ministry of Defence's Aviocar aircraft would remain, to guarantee transport between islands. In addition, education agreements were reached with the Ministry of Education through the Spanish Federation of Religious Orders in Education (FERE), which was to rebuild the network of schools in all of the country's towns, forming the basis of the current system. Due to more pressing matters, the mixed Chamber of Commerce was not finalized until 1998. Its most senior representatives included Juan José Pérez de Burgos, chairman of Ecuato Guinea de Aviación, the national airline, which broke Iberia's monopoly on the route between Madrid and Malabo, and Carmelo Nvono-Ncá—economist, member of the CEU San Pablo University “University as an Agent for Development Cooperation” research group, lecturer at Spain's International Studies Society, and current Ambassador of Equatorial Guinea to the European Union, Benelux, Finland and Turkey.

With the rise of the oil industry, there were problems in the financial sector, aggravated since the late 1990s by the limited presence of international banking. Efforts were made by companies from Equatorial Guinean, Spain, and other foreign companies to establish a Spanish bank, without success. Therefore, despite initial interest, Banco Sabadell reconsidered the idea, in view of its expansion underway in Asia. Although other Spanish banks, such as BBVA and Santander, also considered establishing branches in the country, and even though thought was given to opening some kind of joint branch to share operating and reputational costs, the project never took shape. Nor did the established French banking presence manage to seize on the proximity of Gabon and Cameroon to lay down roots, as the fact that their publications were in French made it difficult for the population of Equatorial Guinea to use their services. It is for these reasons that development and expansion followed the establishment of the aforementioned BANGE, established with national, and predominantly private, capital.
2. Economic and commercial timeline for Equatorial Guinea: A five-stage process of economic configuration

The following economic timeline reflects the link with the Hispanic world that has existed in Equatorial Guinea since the 15th century, as part of a process that we have called a “five-stage process of economic configuration”.

1st stage: Beginning of centre-periphery linkage

1471. Annobón as part of new trade routes: arrival of João de Santarém and Pedro Escobar.
1472. The country takes its place on the map of the world's major maritime trade routes when Fernão do Pó arrives at the island that would later bear his name. The spread of Christianity begins.
1556. Diego Hernández arrives on the caravel San Antón from the Canary Islands, as part of a trade mission.
1560. Pedro Hernández arrives on the ship San Antón, and continues the trade mission: oil, fruit, coconuts, yams…
1561. Diego Hernández returns on the caravel San Lázaro: bananas, feathers, ostrich eggs…
1571. Pedro Rodríguez arrives on the ship Candelaria to continue the trade mission. Ports of call in South Africa.
1579. Juan de Guzmán continues the trade: ivory and slaves “which are greatly appreciated for domestic service” are purchased through the Canary Islands, sold by local leaders. The continental inland Fang tribes start arriving in Muni.
1581. Philip II strengthens the Guinea-Canaries-Europe-Americas trade routes. Domingo de Cea, on the ship San Antonio trades in bark, tropical rope fibre…
17th century. Consolidation of Portuguese and Spanish trade under Philip III and Philip IV: trading posts, missionaries.
1771. Reign of Charles II: cultural action by Father Gregorio Martins das Neves in Fernando Pó and Annobón; Portuguese and Italian missionaries.
1772. Vicente Gómez Ferreira describes the economy of Fernando Pó.

2nd stage: The beginning of a long wave

1777. Treaty of San Ildefonso: Portugal cedes Equatorial Guinea “so that the vassals of the Spanish Crown may establish themselves therein and trade with opposing ports and coasts”. The slave trade begins to decline.
24-12-1778. The first Governor, the Count of Argelejos, establishes San Carlos, now known as Luba. The first smiths, carpenters, and builders arrive, as well as the surgeons José Martí and Miguel Martín. Research to boost trade and production of yams, coconuts, bananas, chickens, goats, and pigs. Guillermo Carbonell recognizes the Bay of Santa Isabel as a settlement: Copper and silver coins from 1774 are left, bearing the likeness of Charles III.
8-12-1779. The second governor, Joaquín Primo de Rivera, establishes the capital in Concepción, known now as Riaba. The first furnace, hospital, chapel,
warehouses and other buildings are constructed. Crews are decimated by illness and the Count of Argelejos is buried at sea.

1780. Primo de Rivera reiterates to the Minister of the Indies, Gálvez, the importance of the colony as the key to the Gulf and the Niger River; he recommends creating establishments on the continent and sending Caribbean labourers; he reports that it is not possible to use foreign wood for ships and paper, due to termites and local humidity.

1783. Corisco remains a trading post, and now leads the Portuguese and Spanish slave trade. France adheres to Article 17 of the Treaty of El Pardo; it would demand trade rights for the continental coast.

1785-1816. Reign of Charles IV: a succession of Spanish trading posts and projects, both public and private, from the Canaries, mainland Spain, Cuba, Venezuela, New Granada, and Río de la Plata; similar enterprises by the British, French, Dutch, and Portuguese.

1817. Reign of Ferdinand VII: Spain ends slave trade to the north of the Equator. Brazil and the Antilles are major sources of demand.

1819. Anglo-Spanish Mixed Commission in Freetown to judge ships suspected of trading in slaves.

1820. Spain ends slave trade south of the Equator; trade begins to decline in Corisco. Hispano-British treaties on visiting rights for ships, and mixed commissions against the slave trade in Sierra Leone, and later in Guinea and Cuba.

1827. William Fitzwilliam Owen officially establishes Port Clarence, later Santa Isabel, finding it “remarkably healthy”. The Mixed Commission-Slave Trade transfers from Freetown. The presence of labourers, workers, and freed slaves grows.

17-1-1828. The colony’s second hospital opens in Punta Fernanda. Labourers in Sierra Leone earn 6 pennies/day plus food.

1831. Scientific and trade mission by Marcelino Andrés. The island, capital of the Gulf, welcomes ships flying other flags, which then explore the Niger or buy ivory, oil, and other products.

1833. During the minority of Isabella II, the Mixed Commission withdraws; its establishments are acquired by Dillon, Tenaut y Cía. The continuous coming and going of ships, loading and unloading, and traffic of people and animals break down the protective health shield of Fernando Pó offered by its being an island: Admiral Warren attributes this to not having used “negroes” in the clearing, and “not having taken sanitary measures to protect the health of Europeans”.

1835. The capital has 529 inhabitants. Mr King, first private doctor (of Beecroft). England recognizes Spain’s sovereignty over all of the islands.

1836. First scientific and trade mission by José de Moros y Morellón, who describes activity by Catalan, Valencian, Andalusian, and Antillean merchants.

1837. Bankruptcy of Dillon, Tenaut y Cía, whose assets are acquired by the West African Company.

1837-1839. José de Moros undertakes two more scientific and trade missions, describing the existing companies, the slave trade of Pedro Blanco, and Annobón.
1840. The Baptist missions acquire the assets of the West African Company, introduce mangos, avocados, and breadfruit. The British dismantle a Hispano-Portuguese trading post in Carisco used in the slave trade.

1841. The firm of Pedro de Zulueta in London is very active in triangular money order and trade transactions with Guinea. Failed Niger expedition by Trotter, from Fernando Pó.

1842. The Royal Economic Society of Madrid decides to dedicate its annual competition to an award for the “the author of the best report that proposes the means of colonizing and making useful (said possessions)” Known as the “white man's grave”, the survivors of the Trotter expedition return to the island: Lander, Allen and the renowned botanist Dr. Vogel, who are buried there. The first two Guineans to study in Spain depart. Lerena appointed as Royal Steward: new economic projects, focused on cotton, sugarcane, coffee, wood and fish.

1843. Queen Isabella II declared of age. Lerena transfers the capital from Concepción to the new Santa Isabel, establishes a militia, and prohibits unauthorized logging. Royalties on trade and ship tonnage. Corisco, which is restructured commercially, hires pilots for navigating rivers. Headquarters of the colony’s Deputy Governorship in Elobey Chico. Court of Justice, new urban map of the capital and grid-shaped enlargement: The obligation to maintain hygiene, to clean streets and sites, to erect enclosures, and other rules are reiterated to “punish those who undertake unjust trade [or] who take indecent liberties with the women of the country […] or to persuade [the latter] to live with them, leaving their husbands or fathers”. Garrisons left inland and on the islands. Beecroft appointed governor.

1844. Dominance of people originating from Fernando Pó—known as *Fernandinos* (mulattos)—in trade and in grants relating to towns and territories (Durro, Christian, Bull, Matthews, Attre, Simpson, William, Wilson, Scott, Brews, etc.): end of deforestation and urban construction, efforts to intermediate between Bubi producers and ships, coinciding with a period of high oil prices. Jerónimo Usera establishes his school on Fernando Pó; new schools in Cabo San Juan, Annobón, and Corisco.

1845. Mission by Nicolás Manterola and Guillermo de Aragón, who sail up the Muni River and sign agreements with local tribes. Traders from the Barcelona companies Montagut and Vidal y Rivas establish trading posts for ivory, coconuts, rubber, and palm kernels; the Menorcans Baltasar Simón and Francisco Vicente are notable pioneers of a growing business community and of the country's economic impetus. The population of the capital reaches 1,027. A coal facility is awarded to France on Fernando Pó.

1846. Foreign trade based on exchanges of yams, chickens, oil, wood, ivory, gold dust, hides, sheep, goats, and cows, for clothes, footwear, textiles, weapons, tobacco, spirits, furniture, and items made from iron and steel.

1852. Royal Decree on Free Ports issued by Prime Minister Bravo Murillo: trading routes between Guinea-Canaries-Europe strengthened.

1854. Mission by Rafael de Vargas. The Catalan resident in the country Domingo Mustrich is an active entrepreneur, and is committed to the government of the colony.

1857. Authorization to Establish the Society of Jesus (Royal Decree of 6 July). First visit by Manuel Iradier. Establishment of different societies to study and colonize Guinea.

1858. First Fundamental Statute. Census by Governor Chacón, with new data on the activities of the inhabitants of Santa Isabel, considered a “den of sin” by the Jesuits. The *Santa María* arrives with engineers, craftsmen, and other personnel to bolster the colony. Living quarters and a hospital are opened on 31 December 1858. Mission by Julián Pellón, exploring the continent from the Bight of Biafra to the mouth of the Muni River, drafting the first detailed map of Fernando Pó.

1858/59. The Tax on Imports and Exports is established, as is the Census of Licences in Use. New tobacco and sugarcane plantations are established.

1859. Settlement of 128 Valencians, who arrived on *La Ferrolana* (76) and the *Santa María*. Promotion of establishment by emancipated Afro-Cubans. The new governor, José de la Gándara, makes the geographic and trade missions official. Sea chart of the western coast of Africa, by J. Navarro.

1861. Royal Order of 20 June 1861, establishing a penal colony on Fernando Pó; the first 33 deportees are sent from Loja, Málaga, to “be used in the work undertaken on the Island that is considered to be of use”. Zulueta y Cía guarantees the supply of rice from London.

1862. In August, 200 emancipated Cubans arrive. Insistence on: deforesting; enlarging and cleaning, to ventilate residential areas; building at moderate altitudes, on hillsides, never on beaches, establishing towns at altitudes above 1500 feet; high standards of hygiene, and a healthy diet. Clearing and establishment of settlements in Basilé, Granja Matilda (for livestock and meat) and Santa Cecilia (Granja Cecilia). Intense migration activity due to the annual hiring of Kru labourers, or “krumanes”, from Liberia. Stimulation of civil works and land grants for farming, according to conduct, diligence, and knowledge. Pay on Fernando Pó: emancipated slaves from Cuba, 4 pesos/month plus upkeep, as a *kruman*, in 1865; a carpenter earns 200 to 300 pounds sterling a year, and his assistants 4-5 shillings a day. At the end of the 19th century, a *kruman* earns 6 pesos or 20 pesetas, or in English currency at 40 pesetas/pound, with a premium on the rate. In the 1870s, he earns 30-40 reals.

6-3-1863. The Governor's Fountain (*Fuente del Gobernador*), the first to offer safe drinking water, starts operating in Kokorobe, near the mouth of the Cónsul River.

1864. Smallpox epidemic. Dr San Martín insists on the need to live in elevated housing, that is well ventilated; sleeping above ground level; better hygiene, more orderly streets and better constructed houses; a good diet, including fresh meat; immigrating in the dry season. Punta Fernanda and another 17 hectares are cleared, and sowed with cotton, coffee, cocoa and tobacco; 700 hectares owned by a company from the Americas are deforested, improving the circulation of air and distancing the capital from miasmic effects. Authorization is given for individuals to hire *krumanes*.

1865. The Governing Body of the colony approves the Contracts Regulation.

1866. New official support for growing tobacco in Banapa, Granja Matilde (Matilde Farm); 56 deportees arrive from Aragon. Enríquez Island becomes a penal colony for the 176 people from Cuba. The *Gaceta de Madrid* (Madrid Gazette), through Royal Order of 22 March, authorizes payments to hire Liberians.
1867. Last Royal Order (of 17 October) of Overseas Legislation relating to the exemption on imports of livestock and the promotion of agriculture.

1868. Change in the Statute (Royal Decree of 12 November) to Naval Station: establishes freedoms, exemptions, and awarding of 50 hectares for farming by Spaniards who so request. Cookron company established in Cocobeach, Muni.

1869. Arrival of 89 farmers and tradespeople (shoemakers, carpenters, builders): They settle in Carboneras to grow yams; work on land owned by Gazulla and López Trello. Arrival of 250 Cuban prisoners on the San Francisco de Borja. Inflation due to shortages of food and lodging: The Thompson Hotel in Santa Isabel costs 2 Spanish dollars a day. Census of the capital: 1,223 inhabitants. The Overseas Department requests “people suited for agricultural work”: The option of sending more colonists at the expenses of the State is ruled out.

1870. Anselmo Gazulla and Laureano Díaz da Cunha request authorization to enter into contracts with labourers from Cameroon and other places.

1871. Woermann, a German company, in Bata. The Thomas Holt company established in Elohey.

1872. Woermann established in Elohey Chico.

1874. Arrival of the Carlist deportees.

1875. Reign of Alfonso XII: The census of the capital records 1,207 inhabitants. Elohey Chico is the base for Manuel Iradier, who reports on the production of cocoa, coffee, cotton, sugar, mahogany and teak: “A lot of brandy is drunk, and it is called the milk of the country.”

1876. Census of 71 Carlist deportees, most of whom have already been pardoned and have adapted to the country.

1877. The annual flow of deportees from different locations continues.

1878. Gold Medal at the Amsterdam Exhibition for the tobacco grown on Fernando Pó.

1879. The Jantzen & Thorndahlen company established in Elohey.

1880. The Community Boards are created, with income from sales of land, municipal tax, and taxes on sailing ships, and loading and unloading of goods.

1881. The 267 Cuban political deportees arrive on the Almansa: They are allocated land, tools and seeds, and grow tobacco and corn, and farm chickens. The price of palm oil starts to fall, making traders on Fernando Pó turn to cocoa farming: Vivour, Barleycorn...

1882. The Claretian order replaces the Jesuits. New impetus for the still limited economic and educational activity.

1883. The Claretian procurator reports a census of 1,106 inhabitants. Jantzen & Thorndahlen opens a branch in Bata.

1884. The first ten families from the Canary Islands arrive, established by Montes de Oca, pursuant to the Royal Order of 21 October to promote insular immigration to the colony, ordering the construction of houses at medium altitude, on hillsides. Emilio Bonelli draws the first map of the region, published by Enrique D’Almonte.

1885. Information sent to the Spanish Society for Commercial Geography regarding 1,284 inhabitants in the capital. End of Fang migration from the African inland to Muni; craft and hunting skills.
1886. Vivour is the most important farmer on the island in the 1880s. General Villacampa deported to Fernando Pó.

1887. Census records 1,193 inhabitants. Bonelli establishes a trading post in Elobey Chico. Estate of Lieutenant Romera in Bococo. The new Sajoux trading post in Muni is dismantled due to failure to pay tax. The Claretians establish presence in Elobey Chico, and travel from this base around Muni and Munda.

1888. Demand for agricultural work grows, and labourers’ pay rises. The deputy governor in Elobey, José Ibarra, demands taxes from the Sajone firm. German trading companies on the Utamboni threatened by the Fang. Pierre Sajoux’s firm established on Muni River.

1889. The Alfonso XIII Sanatorium is built in Musola, with an iron framework. The portos, who have arrived from Portuguese colonies, prove to be active farmers.

1890. The Compañía Transatlántica (the Spanish Line) establishes maritime connections, with branches on the island of Elobey Chico, and in N’Gonde, Ybyn, Ybay, Uela, Cabo San Juan, Membale, and Bolondo; the company also has 20 traders and depots on the Muni River: Dote, Nume and Ylale. Bonelli, as representative of the Spanish Line, along with Valero, travel around the continent with a view to establishing new trading posts. Construction begins on posts in Bolondo, Membale (Benito River), and Cabo San Juan. Valero, Luis Huici, Gentil, Delahet, Lespierre, and Marot improve the nautical charts for Bata; Rouvier and Delastate do the same for Benito.

1891. Of the 3,048 hectares granted for plantations since 1862, 620 are being used, of which 120 belong to whites, 140 to blacks, above all from São Tomé, and 360 to Sierra Leoneans. The Society for Colonization of Fernando Pó is established in Algiers, led by Victoriano Calatayud, with new proposals for development of the colony using Spanish farmers from Algeria who have been requesting such an initiative since 1885. The Jantzen firm pays 5,000 pesetas a year to Spain in tax on its trading post in Elobey and 10 other posts in Muni; it also has two more trading posts in Benito and Bata. Woermann, with 13 trading posts in Muni and 3 in Elobey, Bata and Benito, pays the same amount; Holt, with 10 trading posts in Muni, 3 in Elobey, Bata, and Benito, and Cookron, with 16 in Muni and 2 in Bata and Benito, pay the same amounts. Sajoux, with a trading post in Muni, and several in Bata and Benito, does not pay. The Ambas Bay Trading Company has several branches and is also present in Bata. Dumas Perot firm in Bata and Benito.

1892. The first nine eastern Spanish families arrive from Algiers, totalling 50 people: the Calatayud, Cholvi, Castell, Cayuela, Mayor, Rives, and Aracil families and the Alsina brothers; they are granted two hectares for cocoa farming in densely wooded land (not cleared and with no housing prepared). Crops are first obtained in the fourth year. The Bubi population continues to urbanize—26 are hired by the Government, and 40 by individuals.

1893. First telephone, connecting Santa Isabel and Basilé. First lighthouse at Bata. New protectionist trade law that unites local economic actors.

1895. More eastern Spanish families arrive, from Algiers. Joaquín Costa criticizes the “armchair, hothouse” colonization by the Government, followed by economic action from individuals, emboldened by the Spanish Line, which attracts people and capital.
1896. Arrival of 151 political deportees from the Philippines, six of whom are women (the 12 October 1896 edition of Diario de Manila mentions Flavia Federzo and six more), and more from Cuba. Presence of Chinese labourers.

1897. Economic dynamism on Fernando Pó: Lolin, Jones, Kinson, Knox and others request a Chamber of Commerce in Santa Isabel. Prohibition of hiring labourers in Sierra Leone. Fall and collapse of coffee exports due to competition from Brazil: Liberia, faced with a drop in revenues from customs duties, imposes mandatory labour services on its population, charging a royalty per labourer, alleviating the scarcity in Guinea. Reina Cristina Hospital—with ironwork—in Santa Isabel. Sack of Spanish trading posts and the trading posts of the German firm Luders on N’Gonde island. In Bata, the Spanish Line and the landowner Isabel Blana promote the transfer of Fang labourers to the island.

1898. Arrival of 70 Fang from Muni to serve as soldiers in Santa Isabel. The Francisco Pérez e Hijo (FRAPEJO) trading post is established.

1900. Romera, the most noteworthy Spanish plantation owner, earns 40,000 pesos a year from his estate, and the foremost plantation owner on Fernando Pó, Amelia Barleycorn, earns more than 100,000 pesos a year from her Boloco estate.

1901. The Eco de Fernando Poo newspaper is founded: considerable informative work in the spheres of agriculture, economics, and health. Ibarra begins boarding 27 labourers from the Muni river, starting the path to Fang migration to the island. Creation of the Curaduría Colonial (Colonial Trusteeship). Monthly route of Spanish Line steamships.

1902. Alfonso XIII declared of age. The Madrid Gazette publishes the first competitive exams for positions as doctors (Tomás Ramos and Guillermo Rocafort) and in other professions.

1903. The Guinea Española magazine is founded, with considerable informative work on farming, disinfection, footwear, and clothing: “the bodies of unclothed children and semi-clothed adults are exposed to insect bites…”


1905. Regulation on Indigenous Work and treaty with Liberia to hire labourers.

1906. Establishment of the Chamber of Agriculture on Fernando Pó, as well as Community Boards, and the Reina Victoria Hospital in San Carlos.

1907. Health regulations regarding construction of towns: “Streets 16 metres wide and houses 12 metres apart; rubbish dumps leeward; houses whitewashed and disinfected; separate neighbourhoods for ladies of light virtue, subject to medical examinations.” Vaccine against smallpox mandatory or recommended for the population. Recommended working hours for Europeans: 6 a.m. to 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. Bubi shantytowns established. The Spanish Line ranch is established in Moka, and later Gaesa. The offices of Alimana, Lampert, las Vascas and CAIFER are built.

1908. Decree to prevent “sleeping sickness, by clearing thoroughfares and paths at water crossings and near boggy areas, where the tsetse fly is found; area of influence: 150 m from breeding location; rewards offered for capture of specimens for further study; clearing of at least 100 m of woodland around towns and estates; not rearing pigs, which are prone to incubating the sickness.”
1909. Report by Dr Jorge Ramón, with a view to establishing a Colonial Hygiene Laboratory, published in 1910 with a prologue by his father, Dr Ramón y Cajal, so that “Spanish Africa may prosper”.

1910. Exploitation of medicinal waters from Mioco, which missionaries bottle and distribute by mule to Concepción, and by sea. Mineral water discovered in Oloita, Balacha de Concepción, Musola, and Kopapua. Beginning of cultivation of country-tea: a fragrant form of lemongrass with diuretic and anti-hematurial properties, whose toasted seeds can be used as a coffee substitute. Recommendation to plant eucalyptus trees, to keep away mosquitos.

1912. The radiotelegraphy service between Spain and Equatorial Guinea is launched.

1915. The colony has an estimated 62,000 inhabitants (12,000 on the island). Colonial Guard: 2,000 Guineans.

1916. The Sociedad Ligero Hermanos company is established, for farming cocoa.

1917. On Fernando Pó, 15,000 hectares are in use. Koch obtains Atoxyl and the prize offered by Leopold of Belgium. Dr González, responsible for German soldiers in confinement.

1919. Integration of Germans into the colony following World War One.


1923. Santa Isabel-San Carlos railway under construction, with branch line to Basilé, which already reaches Basupu. Bayer 205 is applied. Establishment of the Unión de Agricultores de la Guinea Española (Union of Farmers of Spanish Guinea).

1924. Captured tsetse flies are paid at 0.10 pesetas. Creation of the Health Card and Farmers' Union by Armando Ligero García de Araoz. Rules for construction of hospitals: located at the centre of each region of 30 km of coastline and 1 km of land running inland, approximately 3,000 hectares and an average of 3,000 inhabitants: obligatory service of Bubis on the island used for construction and for construction of health stations.

1925. Dr Rocafort, member of the International Commission that travels around Equatorial Africa to better study health conditions. Canary Islands farmers arrive to grow bananas.

1926. Census of 932 Europeans: 610 Spaniards, 107 Germans, 33 English, 147 Portuguese, and 35 others who are Russian, Lebanese, Syrian, or Indians.

1927. Father Leoncio Fernández discovers the first hot spring on the continent, in Mabavoelo. First female doctor.

1928. Statue of the Patronato de Indígenas (Natives Trust), deferred since 1904. Since the facilities on Eloíbo Chico are isolated by streams of water and have no tsetse flies, they are adapted, in view of their healthiness, as a sanatorium. Constructora Colonial, which is building the road between Santa Isabel and San Carlos, begins work on the hospital at Río Benito. New fumigation campaigns and campaign to eradicate endemic diseases: “A dead fly is a dead foe”. Decline in draught horses on estates. Establishment of the Farming Union for the territories in the Gulf of Guinea.
1929. Establishment of the Farming and Forestry Chamber of Continental Spanish Guinea. The companies Compañía Agrícola Industrial de Fernando Poo (CAIFER) and Ligero Hermanos represent Guinean farming at the exhibitions in Seville and Barcelona.

1930. End of transport of labourers from Liberia: problems with agricultural development. The Royal Order, of 23 May, establishes a deposit that guarantees the return ticket or employment contract of anyone who wishes to join the colony, to prevent indigent immigrants.

1931. Prohibition of extraction of palm wine, or topé. 30 doctors in Fernando Pó.

1932. 121 unionists from Barcelona deported to Annobón. Morrocans are brought as labour for civil works.

1933. New measures to combat sexually transmitted diseases and other illnesses.

1934. The General Inspectorate for Colonies is authorized to rule on any problems with land grants. Colonial Healthcare Congress. Dr Miguel Martín becomes a private doctor for ALENA, a timber company with a hospital in Río Aye, Ongoneso, and then for the hospital belonging to another timber company, Socogui.

1935. Government of the civil engineer Sánchez Guerra, which begins work on the Port of Bata. A Forest Monitoring Service is created, which curbs abusive logging and designs a repopulation system.

1936. The census records 157,881 natives.

1937. Dr Del Val installs X-ray equipment in his home. A company of riflemen from Ifni arrives in Musola. Collections of money and cocoa for the Franco Government.

1938. Dr Faustino Pérez becomes a grower.

1939. Budget of 14,158,750 pesetas. Cocoa imports into mainland Spain and the Balearic Islands are subject to a duty of 25 gold pesetas for every 100 kg of the annual quota set by Madrid, and 150 gold pesetas for imports exceeding the quota; a duty of 80 gold pesetas is paid every 100 kg of coffee. Other duties apply to timber.


1941. Report by the economist Román Perpiñá on the economic importance of eliminating African trypanosomiasis, which Dr Víctor Fernández considers exemplary.

1943. Treaty with Nigeria on labourers, boosting cocoa production and the Guinean economy.

1944. Decree on civil rights for “emancipated and unemancipated” natives.

1945. Creation of the Colonial School of Paediatrics. Trypanosomiasis being eradicated.


1948. Laws granting 4 and 20 hectares and commercial forest plots to settled families, with an obligation to repopulate the allocated land.

1950. 40 doctors in Guinea.

1954. First Manila hemp factory on Fernando Pó. End of the Community Childhood Health Clinic in Santa Isabel, built with the estate of Antonia Llorens, the widow of Mora.

1955. Establishment of the Bata Agricultural Training School and the Santa Isabel School of Arts and Trades. The company Barinco opens a private hospital with 32 beds.

1959. Equatorial Guinea produces 2.15% of the world’s cocoa. The two Spanish provinces of Fernando Pó and Río Muni are created, as well as the General Workers’ Union of Equatorial Guinea, in exile. An epidemic of Asian flu spreads from Gabon.

1960. Record production of coffee (9,428 tonnes) and bananas. Production of alcoholic beverages prohibited, including *malamba*, made from sugarcane. Elections to Municipal Councils, Residents Assemblies and County Councils.

1962. Record number of livestock, 237,984, and record yield per head.

1963. Record production of palm oil (5,400 tonnes), palm kernels (3,190), and Manila hemp (870).


1966. Record production of timber: 375,645 tonnes. Besora, S.L. established. Begins loading and unloading boats and timber at Bata, then at Santa Isabel and San Carlos. This remains its principal activity until the first oil tankers arrive.

1967. Record number of goats (17,568) and pigs (8,731). Record yields in meat per head from livestock (156.1 kg).

3rd stage: Independence

1968. 12 October: Constitutional consensus and independence. Francisco Macías is President. Record production of cocoa (39,161 tonnes) and record catch of fish (5,600 tonnes). Record consumption of fish (20.9 kg per capita). New record production of coffee (8,522.6 tonnes) and timber (360,985 tonnes). Televisión de Guinea Ecuatorial (Television of Equatorial Guinea) opens. Endemic diseases eliminated. Income per capita: 332 dollars, second highest in Sub-Saharan Africa, behind South Africa. Census: 290,000 people: 8,000 Europeans; 25,000 Bubis; and 180,000 Fang, Kombe, Fernandinos and other races. Record expansion of the tourism industry.


1972. Private banks withdraw completely from the country. Fishing agreement with the USSR, and Soviet naval base for action in Africa. The Guinean peseta is replaced.


1976. The last WHO staff member leaves Equatorial Guinea.

4th stage: From the “Freedom Coup” to oil

1979. The “Freedom Coup”. Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo is the new President. The economy hits record lows. Production of cocoa and coffee: 5,408 and 150,000 kg, respectively. Bilateral accords between Spain and Equatorial Guinea. Reconstruction begins. Juan Velarde’s team in Guinea. Guinextebank and Banco de Crédito y Desarrollo (BCD) banks are established.


1984. The joint venture GEPSA (Guineano Española de Petróleos) of which Repsol forms part, discovers gas and oil reserves in Campo Alba, with high extraction costs. First International Hispano-African Cultural Congress, which defines Equatorial Guinea as “a Hispanic country with Bantu roots”. Fishing agreement with the EEC. Powers and financial autonomy transferred to the French Treasury. Technical and scientific cooperation agreements with the French government.

1985. Entry into the Bank of Central African States (BEAC), and the Central African CFA franc: abolition of price controls, liberalization of the system of duties, plan for privatization of state plantations and companies. New credit from the IMF and debt rescheduling with the Paris Club. Elf in dominant position as regards potential of oil reserves.

1986. GEPSA (Repsol) hampered, after discovering oil reserves. The annual session of the ECCAS Conference is held in Bata.


1988. GEPSA (Repsol) prepares to withdraw from Equatorial Guinea in response to the government boycott. Structural Adjustment Program with IMF, and renegotiation of debt.
1989. GEPSA (Repsol) agrees to sell the rights relating to Campo Alba and neighboring sectors to the Walter-Nomeco-Samedan Oil consortium. Negotiation of new cooperation agreements with third countries, and general elections.

1990. GEPSA wound up. New investments in the oil industry.

1991. Oil prices rise; significant investment in the oil industry. Extraction begins in December. The public sector employs 2,800 people.

5th stage: The oil era


1993. United Meridian Corp. takes part in prospecting.

1994. The CFA franc is devalued on 11 January by 50%. Treaty whereby the Customs and Economic Union of Central Africa (UDEAC) becomes the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC), with Cameroon, Congo, Chad, Gabon, and the Central African Republic.

1995. Exports of crude oil continue to grow. Mining Act. Delays with payments and differences with the IMF, which suspends relations with Guinea with the exception of consultations. CCI Bank, from Cameroon, enters Guinea, together with Société Générale, the only retail banks.

1996. The Zafiro oil well opens (ExxonMobil). Fishing agreement with the EU.

1997. Oil production: 56,600 barrels per day. The Topacio oil field opens (Total Fina, Yucong). Recovery in cocoa (6,500 tonnes) and in coffee (7,000 tonnes), as a result of devaluation. Human Development Index (HDI) rises to 0.465.

1998. Oil production: 83,000 barrels per day. Renegotiation of extraction royalties, which rise from 13% to 22.5% for the Guinean treasury. Census records 431,966 inhabitants. Summit of heads of state from Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC), in Malabo. Flights operated by Ecuato Guineana de Aviación and new investments in hotels, as well as investments by Mobil, Total, Poncal Maquinaria, Besora, Consortium Hispania Lines, and other companies. The HDI rises to 0.549. The Official Hispano-Equatorial Guinean Chamber of Commerce and Industry (COCHIEG) is re-established.

1999. Triton Energy begins extraction from the Ceiba oil field. Currency pegged to the euro: 1 € = 656.34 CFA francs. ECCAS Summit in Malabo. The World Bank reclassifies Equatorial Guinea in its ranking of countries, moving it into category B. Numerous SMEs in Guinea: Ecuato Guineana de Aviación, Poncal Servicios, APRA, Mayo, IPV Vehículos, Kalema, Riesa, Martínez Hnos., Consortium, Getra, Promoport, Mayer, Segami, MulcomService, Simer, EGICO, Guinebeka, etc.

2000. GDP per capita: $2,930, according to the World Bank. Agreement with Nigeria on delimitation of waters, for extraction of crude oil. Signing of the Fifth Lomé Convention between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP).
2001. Equatorial Guinea participates for the first time as an observer in the OPEC Summit and in the International Tourism Trade Fair (FITUR) in Madrid.


2006. Creation of the National Bank of Equatorial Guinea (BANGE), the first bank with Guinean capital, which is predominantly private.

2007-2018. Consolidation of growth, with rises in production and exports of hydrocarbons. In 2018, Malabo, the capital of Equatorial Guinea, is selected by the Committee of Ambassadors of the 79 countries of the African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States (ACP) as the headquarters of the Office for International South-South and Triangular Cooperation, and an information hub for development.

3. Spanish in Angola, Mozambique, Sao Tome and Principe, and Guinea-Bissau

The spread of Spanish in these four Portuguese-speaking countries of Sub-Saharan Africa has undoubtedly been influenced by the well-established and uninterrupted presence of Cuba since the 1970s, through Cuban books, publications and instructors and personnel. They are present in the military, in education, in healthcare and in the administration. Similarly, exchange programmes, and travel to Cuba by leaders and young people from these countries to train or study, have also been a determining factor, spreading the Spanish language, or the mix of Spanish and Portuguese (known as portoñol) that is so widely understood in these nations. Added to this is the influence and reach of the Spanish and Latin American audio-visual sectors and general-interest media, which explain the Spanish language’s general position of functional bilingualism among inhabitants of these countries in the international trade and business spheres. Furthermore, the Spanish language is an official language of the United Nations, alongside English, French, Chinese, Russian, and Arabic.

Another factor that influences the commercial and economic reach of Spanish in these countries is their recognition of the Saharawi Republic, and reception and exchanges between these nations and the Republic, through writers such as Bahia Mahmud. This is a republic that is recognized by more than 60 countries around the world, and by the African Union, of which it is part and of which it has held the Deputy Chair. In addition, 12 October has been a national holiday since 1976, and Spanish is recognized as an official language in its Constitution, together with Hassānīya Arabic.

Moreover, as part of its strategic and diplomatic rapprochement with France and with the French-speaking world, Equatorial Guinea decided to take the symbolic step of adding French as an official language. As late as 2014, as part of this drive to extend its international bonds and links—in this case with Portuguese-speaking countries—the nation also symbolically added Portuguese as an official language.