

General

Gabon's GDP per capita is the highest in Africa apart from Libya, due to its petroleum resources. Dense tropical forests cover 76 per cent of the land. A quarter of the world's manganese ore reserves outside of the Soviet bloc is found in Gabon. Only 5 per cent of the land is estimated to be under cultivation. The country is heavily urbanized, with around 50 per cent of the population living in cities. Population growth is low due to the high infertility rate of the Gabonese. Many foreigners reside in the country.

Political and Economic Situation

Gabon became independent on August 17, 1960. The current president, Omar Bongo, succeeded President M'Ba on his death in November 1967. After winning presidential elections in 1974 and 1980, Bongo was re-elected in November 1986 for a seven-year term. In October 1990, President Bongo introduced reforms that led to a multi-party election, where the party in power, the PDG, was elected. He reserved a role above the parties to allow him to influence Gabon's political activities. He recently married Edith Sassou-Nguesso, daughter of President Sassou-Nguesso of the Congo.

Petroleum is the backbone of the country, accounting for 45 per cent of its GDP, 70 per cent of export earnings, and 65 per cent of government revenue. It is expected that oil will remain the main engine of growth in 1990, and that it will underpin the country's recovery in the medium and long term. Gabon possesses large fishery resources as well as huge forests (timber is the second most important export) and important mineral reserves. Agricultural production is low and inefficient.

Foreign Relations

French interests in Gabon, especially in the mining and energy sectors, are very important. Gabon is conscious of the influence of France and is proceeding to develop and diversify relations with other Western countries, African states and China to achieve a better balance in its foreign relations.