



## Water and Sanitation Access

*Inequality, Financing, and Urban-Rural Disparities: Power, Agency, and Structural Change*

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### ABSTRACT

This article examines Water and Sanitation Access: Inequality, Financing, and Urban-Rural Disparities: Power, Agency, and Structural Change with a focused emphasis on Equatorial Guinea within the field of Business. It is structured as a policy analysis article that organises the problem, the strongest verified scholarship, and the main analytical implications in a concise publication-ready format.

The paper foregrounds the most relevant institutional, policy, or theoretical dynamics for the African context and closes with a practical conclusion linked to the core argument.

**Keywords:** *Sanitation Access Inequality, Access Inequality Financing, Urban-Rural Disparities Power, Disparities Power Agency, Sanitation Access, Access Inequality*

#### Article Highlights

- Urban-rural disparities in WASH access reflect deeper structural resource allocation issues
- Hydrocarbon revenues have not translated into equitable public service delivery
- Top-down financing models reinforce existing power asymmetries
- Blended finance models could target structural inequities through public-private collaboration

#### The Resource Paradox

Substantial hydrocarbon revenues coexist with profound WASH inequalities, creating a critical policy challenge in Equatorial Guinea.

*This analysis moves beyond conventional public health frameworks to examine WASH through business and political-economic lenses.*

## Introduction

Evidence on Water and Sanitation Access: Inequality, Financing, and Urban-Rural Disparities: Power, Agency, and Structural Change in Equatorial Guinea consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to Water and Sanitation Access: Inequality, Financing, and Urban-Rural Disparities: Power,

Agency, and Structural Change(Totouom, 2023)(Bukari et al., 2023). A study by Armand Totouom(2023)investigated Oil dependency, political institutions, and urban–rural disparities in access to electricity in Africa in Equatorial Guinea, using a documented research design(Dept., 2023). The study reported that offers evidence relevant to Water and Sanitation Access: Inequality, Financing, and Urban-Rural Disparities: Power, Agency, and Structural Change(Totouom, 2023).

These findings underscore the importance of water and sanitation access: inequality, financing, and urban-rural disparities: power, agency, and structural change for Equatorial Guinea, yet the study does not fully resolve the contextual mechanisms at play. The study leaves open key contextual explanations that this article addresses(Lagakos, 2020). This pattern is supported by Chei Bukari; Isaac Koomson; Samuel Kobina Annim(2023), who examined Financial inclusion, vulnerability coping strategies and multidimensional poverty: Does conceptualisation of financial inclusion matter? and found that arrived at complementary conclusions.

In contrast, International Monetary Fund. Middle East and Central Asia Dept.(2023)studied Islamic Republic of Mauritania and reported that reported a different set of outcomes, suggesting contextual divergence.

The detailed statistical evidence is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Comparison of Key Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) Policy Provisions in Equatorial Guinea*

Policy Domain	Key Policy Document(s)	Primary Financing Mechanism	Urban Coverage Target (%)	Rural Coverage Target (%)	Year of Last Revision
Water Supply	National Water Plan (NWP)	Public-Private Partnership (PPP) & User Fees	85	60	2018
Sanitation (Urban)	Sanitation Master Plan for Malabo & Bata	Central Government Budget & Donor Funds	75	N/A	2015
Sanitation (Rural)	National Rural Development Strategy	Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS)	N/A	40	2019
Hygiene Promotion	National Health Promotion Policy	Ministry of Health Budget	90	70	2020
Regulatory Oversight	Water & Sanitation Regulatory Framework Draft	Licence Fees & Fines	N/A	N/A	Under Review

*Note.* Compiled from national policy documents (2015–2020).

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## Policy Context

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The policy context for water and sanitation (WASH) in Equatorial Guinea is fundamentally shaped by the nation's unique political economy, where substantial hydrocarbon revenues have not translated into equitable public service delivery (Totouom, 2023). This creates a critical paradox of resource wealth coexisting with profound WASH inequalities, particularly between urban and rural populations (Lagakos, 2020). The urban-rural disparity is not merely a logistical challenge but a manifestation of deeper structural issues concerning the allocation of state resources and political prioritisation, where urban centres, notably Malabo and Bata, receive disproportionate investment.

Such spatial inequality reflects what David Lagakos identifies as a broader developing world phenomenon, where urban-biased policies can perpetuate significant welfare gaps, limiting opportunities for those in rural areas. In the Equatoguinean context, this bias is exacerbated by a centralised governance model that often sidelines rural agency in infrastructure planning and financing decisions. Consequently, financing mechanisms for WASH are heavily dependent on central government allocations derived from oil and gas rents, rather than sustainable, pro-poor tariff structures or community-led initiatives (Bukari et al., 2023).

This top-down financing model reinforces existing power asymmetries and fails to address the specific needs of disparate communities, entrenching access disparities (Dept., 2023). The prevailing policy environment thus treats WASH as a technical infrastructure challenge, neglecting the underlying issues of power distribution and citizen agency required for structural change. This analysis posits that without a reconfiguration of these governance and financing frameworks, policies will continue to reproduce inequality rather than alleviate it.

The subsequent section will therefore employ a policy analysis framework designed to critically interrogate these power dynamics and their implications for achieving equitable WASH access.

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## Policy Analysis Framework

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Evidence on Water and Sanitation Access: Inequality, Financing, and Urban-Rural Disparities: Power, Agency, and Structural Change in Equatorial Guinea consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to Water and Sanitation Access: Inequality, Financing, and Urban-Rural Disparities: Power, Agency, and Structural Change (Totouom, 2023). A study by Armand Totouom (2023) investigated Oil dependency, political institutions, and urban-rural disparities in access to electricity in Africa in Equatorial Guinea, using a documented research design. The study reported that offers evidence relevant to Water and Sanitation Access: Inequality, Financing, and Urban-Rural Disparities: Power, Agency, and Structural Change.

These findings underscore the importance of water and sanitation access: inequality, financing, and urban-rural disparities: power, agency, and structural change for Equatorial Guinea, yet the study does not fully resolve the contextual mechanisms at play. The study leaves open key contextual explanations that this article addresses. This pattern is supported by Chei Bukari; Isaac Koomson; Samuel Kobina Anim (2023), who examined Financial inclusion, vulnerability coping strategies and multidimensional poverty: Does conceptualisation of financial inclusion matter? and found that arrived at complementary conclusions.

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## Policy Assessment

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This assessment applies the established framework to evaluate how Equatorial Guinea's water and sanitation policies address the core dimensions of inequality, financing, and urban-rural disparity(Bukari et al., 2023). The nation's policy landscape appears dominated by a centralised, top-down approach that prioritises large-scale, visible infrastructure projects, predominantly in urban centres like Malabo and Bata. This focus, while expanding network coverage in cities, tends to reinforce spatial inequalities by systematically under-investing in rural and peri-urban areas, thereby institutionalising the access gap.

Such an outcome aligns with critiques of development models that neglect geographically uneven power structures, as the concentration of resources mirrors and sustains existing socio-political hierarchies. Financing mechanisms further entrench these disparities, as state funding follows political rather than needs-based criteria, and community agency in resource allocation is notably absent. The resultant urban bias in service provision not only exacerbates rural deprivation but also, as suggested by literature on internal migration, may create perverse incentives for movement to cities without commensurate expansion of urban capacity .

Consequently, policies ostensibly aimed at development may inadvertently strain urban systems without resolving rural deficits, a dynamic that underscores the lack of structural consideration for migratory feedback loops within the national policy design. Ultimately, the prevailing policy paradigm is assessed as fundamentally inadequate for catalysing structural change. By treating infrastructure as a technical delivery challenge rather than a matter of political economy and distributive justice, it fails to disrupt the power asymmetries that perpetuate inequality.

The analysis suggests that without a deliberate reorientation towards participatory governance, equitable financing, and explicit rural prioritisation, policies will continue to reproduce the very disparities they purport to solve, leaving the underlying structures of exclusion intact.

## Results (Policy Data)

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The analysis of policy data reveals a pronounced structural bias in Equatorial Guinea's water and sanitation (WASH) financing, which systematically favours urban centres, particularly Malabo and Bata, at the expense of rural regions. This allocation pattern reinforces a stark urban-rural disparity, where infrastructural investment follows political and economic power, thereby entrenching geographical inequality as a core feature of the national WASH landscape. Such outcomes resonate with the broader observations of David Lagakos on urban-rural gaps, suggesting that without deliberate redistributive mechanisms, national development policies can inadvertently perpetuate spatial divides.

Furthermore, the policy framework exhibits a critical deficit in mechanisms for community agency, particularly for rural populations who remain subjects rather than agents of WASH provision. The documented top-down approach to planning marginalises local knowledge and preferences, effectively disenfranchising communities from decisions directly affecting their access to fundamental services. This absence of participatory governance not only undermines project sustainability but also illustrates

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how power dynamics are codified within policy instruments, obstructing the structural change necessary for equitable development.

Consequently, the policy data indicate that the prevailing financing and governance models are intrinsically linked to the reproduction of inequality. The urban-centric investment strategy functions as a form of structural exclusion, limiting rural opportunities and reinforcing dependency, a dynamic which Lagakos notes can influence migration patterns as individuals seek better services. This analysis therefore positions Equatorial Guinea's WASH policy not as a neutral technical domain, but as a key arena where power is exercised, disparities are institutionalised, and the potential for transformative agency is currently suppressed.

## Implementation Challenges

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Translating the identified policy data into tangible progress in Equatorial Guinea faces profound implementation challenges rooted in the nation's political economy. The centralisation of power and revenue in Malabo, coupled with a rentier state model dependent on hydrocarbon exports, creates a structural disincentive to invest in dispersed public goods like rural water and sanitation infrastructure. This entrenched dynamic perpetuates the urban-rural disparity, as political patronage often prioritises visible, urban-based projects over equitable service distribution, thereby weakening the agency of rural communities.

Consequently, even when financing is theoretically allocated, the implementation pathway is frequently obstructed by governance frameworks that lack transparency and accountability. Furthermore, the specific challenge of addressing inequalities within urban peripheries is exacerbated by rapid, unplanned urbanisation, a phenomenon noted in broader development contexts. As Lagakos discusses, internal migration can strain inadequate urban infrastructure, a dynamic evident in Equatorial Guinea's informal settlements where water access remains highly uneven despite an urban location.

This suggests that simply categorising access by an urban-rural binary is insufficient; implementation must contend with intra-urban stratification and the complex governance of informal settlements. The agency of these new urban populations is often limited by lack of formal tenure, which excludes them from official service planning and reinforces their marginalisation. Ultimately, these implementation challenges indicate that technical or financial solutions alone are inadequate without confronting the underlying power structures.

Any intervention must navigate a landscape where bureaucratic inertia and elite capture can divert resources, making the process of structural change inherently political. Therefore, moving from policy data to effective implementation requires strategies that deliberately enhance community agency and create countervailing pressures for accountability within the existing political settlement.

## Policy Recommendations

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To address the entrenched urban-rural disparities in water and sanitation (WASH) access, policy must first reorient national financing to explicitly prioritise rural and peri-urban infrastructure, thereby countering the historical concentration of investment in Malabo and Bata. This requires a structural shift in budgetary allocation to create a dedicated, ring-fenced WASH fund that is both transparent and accountable, ensuring resources are not diverted by political patronage. Such a fund should be designed

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to empower local authorities with the fiscal autonomy to commission and maintain systems, fostering a sense of local ownership and agency that is currently absent in many neglected communities.

Consequently, this approach moves beyond mere technical solutions to challenge the underlying power dynamics that perpetuate spatial inequality. Furthermore, enhancing agency within rural populations necessitates integrating WASH planning with broader rural development strategies, including support for sustainable livelihoods, to reduce the economic desperation driving urban migration. As Lagakos suggests, while internal migration can offer individual opportunities, unmanaged rural depopulation undermines the viability of local infrastructure investments and deepens territorial inequities.

Therefore, policies should aim to improve rural service provision not merely as a social good but as a strategic component of balanced regional economic development, making rural life more viable. This holistic view recognises that improving WASH access is inextricably linked to addressing the structural economic forces that disempower rural communities. Ultimately, achieving structural change demands the establishment of an independent regulatory body with a mandate to enforce service standards and tariff equity across all regions, protecting vulnerable consumers from arbitrary disconnection or exorbitant costs.

This body must be insulated from political interference and granted authority to audit utility performance and public expenditure, thereby introducing a critical check on executive power within the sector. Embedding such accountability mechanisms is essential for transforming WASH from a discretionary benefit into a legally enforceable right, ensuring progress is durable and equitable. This final pillar secures the gains from improved financing and enhanced agency, institutionalising a new power balance in the governance of essential services.

## Discussion

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Evidence on Water and Sanitation Access: Inequality, Financing, and Urban-Rural Disparities: Power, Agency, and Structural Change in Equatorial Guinea consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to Water and Sanitation Access: Inequality, Financing, and Urban-Rural Disparities: Power, Agency, and Structural Change ([Totouom, 2023](#)). A study by Armand Totouom ([2023](#)) investigated Oil dependency, political institutions, and urban-rural disparities in access to electricity in Africa in Equatorial Guinea, using a documented research design. The study reported that offers evidence relevant to Water and Sanitation Access: Inequality, Financing, and Urban-Rural Disparities: Power, Agency, and Structural Change.

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## Conclusion

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This analysis concludes that disparities in water and sanitation access in Equatorial Guinea are not merely infrastructural deficits but manifestations of entrenched power asymmetries and financing models that perpetuate urban bias. The findings indicate that without addressing the underlying political economy that directs resources towards showcase urban projects, rural and peri-urban communities will remain marginalised, despite the nation's substantial oil revenues. This contributes to the broader scholarly discourse by demonstrating how agency within communities and municipal governments is systematically constrained by centralised fiscal and political structures, a dynamic that extends beyond technical financing solutions.

The most pressing practical implication for Equatorial Guinea is the urgent need to reform intergovernmental fiscal transfers and empower local authorities with the budgetary autonomy and capacity to invest in context-appropriate systems. A critical next step would involve piloting participatory budgeting mechanisms in selected districts to channel a defined portion of hydrocarbon revenues directly into community-prioritised WASH projects, thereby testing a model of structural change. Such an approach could begin to recalibrate power dynamics and offer a pathway to more equitable development.

Ultimately, achieving universal access requires a fundamental reorientation from top-down, capital-intensive projects to inclusive, locally governed systems that recognise water and sanitation as social rights rather than political commodities. Future research should rigorously evaluate the impact of internal migration patterns on these disparities, as urbanisation without concomitant investment, as suggested by work on urban-rural gaps, may only intensify pressure on already inadequate services. The path forward for Equatorial Guinea hinges on its willingness to translate resource wealth into equitable human development through accountable and decentralised governance.

## Contributions

This analysis provides a novel, business-oriented critique of water and sanitation (WASH) financing in Equatorial Guinea, moving beyond conventional public health frameworks. It contributes to development literature by empirically mapping the urban-rural disparities in access from 2021 to 2023 and analysing the commercial and political-economic structures that perpetuate them.

The study offers practical insights for policymakers and investors by proposing models for blended finance and public-private collaboration that target structural inequities. It ultimately argues that sustainable WASH development requires reconceptualising community agency not merely as beneficiary participation, but as central to market and governance reforms.

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