

BENIN- Promote Local Economic Development for Food Security

1 Summary

The government of Benin recently adopted its strategic plan to strengthen the agriculture sector, which also plays a central role in the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands' Multi-Annual Strategic Plan. Local governments in Benin have a role to play in the implementation of the national agriculture strategy, mainly by creating an enabling environment. At local government level in Benin, it is very important to have an effective organisational system to promote local economic development, more particularly through support for agricultural entrepreneurship for sustainable food security, land security and the development of rural roads. There is a need to invest in capacity development in local governments. The LGCP Benin Programme will strengthen the capacity of local governments (elected councillors and key staff) to contribute effectively to the promotion of local economic development. The aim is to develop capacities in six local governments and the local government association ANCB to have a better understanding of how to promote the local economy, and of their role as creator of favourable conditions, specified as promoting agricultural entrepreneurship, the Rural Land Plan (RLP) and rural roads. This will be done through a combination of interventions at the individual local governments level, at the level of several local governments in the same region, and at the national level in the form of support for lobbying and advocacy.

2 Context Analysis

2.1 Introduction

Benin's national economy relies on the agriculture sector (cotton, transit and re-exports trade), accounting for about 32% of GDP, and it is the source of livelihood for nearly 70% of the country's workforce.¹ However only 17% of agricultural land is currently used. Some 33% of the small-scale farm holders live below the poverty line. Small-scale farms cover an average of only 1.7 ha.² Food security is a challenge as poverty is prevalent, especially in rural areas. The number of undernourished people is increasing (23.1% of the population in 2006 and 26.5% in 2007).³ At the same time, agriculture remains the major driver of economic growth.

However, Benin's economy remains poorly diversified and competitive, which has an impact on food security. Food security for Benin's population can be improved through agricultural and economic development.

¹ World Bank, *Benin Country Brief* (2012).

² Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Cotonou, *Multi-Annual Strategic Plan 2012 – 2015* (2011).

³ République du Bénin, *Stratégie de Croissance pour la Réduction de la Pauvreté (SCRCP 2011 – 2015)* (2011) 29.

The recently adopted agriculture strategy of the national government (*Plan Stratégique de Relance du Secteur Agricole*, PSRSA) aims to professionalise the small-scale agriculture and to promote entrepreneurship, including the large companies. The Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands – closely engaged in the development of this plan – makes this strategy central to its Multi-Annual Strategic Plan 2012 – 2015.⁴

Local governments have a role to play in the implementation of the PSRSA, in the first place by creating an enabling environment. This can materialise in various ways. Securing land rights is important, as a condition for promoting investments in agriculture. The second is regarding feeder roads ('pistes rurales'). The road network will need to be expanded and improved for improved access to markets. A third way in which local governments can create an enabling environment is by promoting entrepreneurship. Local governments can bring local economy stakeholders around the table to learn their concerns and the potentials they see, and to discuss how these can be both solved and utilised.

However, the Beninese local governments are still struggling with several issues. The Growth Strategy for the Reduction of Poverty (2011-2015)⁵ cites that the design and implementation of policies is still limited at a decentralised level. This is related to a poor transfer of skills and resources (financial and human) to the local governments. The local economy remains underdeveloped due to a lack of decentralised management of the country and the weak exploitation of natural resources.

2.2 Analysis of local government challenges

Through devolved competences from the central to the local level, the Beninese local governments have an important role to play in achieving development results, especially in terms of economic investment. For local governments there is a role to play in securing land rights, in the construction and maintenance of roads to facilitate access to markets for agricultural products, and in promoting agricultural entrepreneurship.

In Benin large surfaces of land remain unused for agricultural production⁶ and economic benefits for the local governments. One of the reasons is that land rights have not been secured. Major efforts have thus been devoted to registering land rights in recent years. Rural Land Plans (Plans de Foncier Rural, or RLPs in the English abbreviation) have been made for about 10% of the country. However, the effects on agricultural development are not yet as one might hope. The land certificates are not enough to obtain a loan for investments, and land owners living in the city leave their land unused. Even negative effects or dilemmas can be observed: often men become the owners, leaving women landless in legal terms. Rich people can buy land from poor people, leaving them with less or no land to live from.

And there is the tension between pastoralists and farmers, which only becomes greater when land is registered as owned by the farmers. Accompanying measures are therefore needed to let the RLPs really contribute to increased agricultural productivity. Some of these can be taken at the local level, others require action at the national level. In the latter case, local governments can help to signal the need for such action and can engage in joint action with their national association ANCB.

⁴ Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Cotonou, *Multi-Annual Strategic Plan 2012 – 2015* (2011).

⁵ République du Benin, *Stratégie de Croissance pour la Réduction de la Pauvreté (SCR 2011 – 2015)* (2011) 38.

⁶ Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Cotonou, *Multi-Annual Strategic Plan 2012 – 2015* (2011).

Local governments are also competent to construct and maintain rural roads to ensure the opening up of production areas, increase rural mobility, and above all providing easy access to markets. A national strategy for rural transport (SNT) is available that clarifies the role of local governments. However, local governments do not have complete project ownership nor the appropriate resources in terms of funding and expertise. Local governments choose the routes that need to be constructed or maintained, and the national government gets the work completed. The consequence is that the management and maintenance of completed works are poorly insured.

Another local government challenge needing to be discussed concerns governance. The commitment of local councillors to serve the community as a whole is a concern. True leadership of elected officials to encourage and assist citizens in their entrepreneurial spirit and increase revenue for the local government is often lacking. And too often, revenue collection goes without creating the conditions for the promotion of business that may in turn generate a stronger tax base. Transparency and accountability also need to be improved.

Yet there is potential for improvement. All local governments have been working – or are working – on the formulation of renewed integrated local development plans (Plan de développement local de la commune, PDC, or LDP in the English abbreviation). The previous LDPs were basically no more than a list of projects the local government was hoping to realise, often in terms of extra health clinics, new school buildings etc. Often, the local government would only realise such projects if external financing could be found. Some were more successful in that respect than others, leading to huge differences in the degree of LDP realisation. Ideally, the new or so-called ‘second generation’ LDPs are more like integrated development plans for a five-year period, also including chapters on how the local government wants to improve local economic development and agricultural productivity, as well as the corresponding infrastructure like slaughter houses, market places, shops and workshops for craftsmanship. An interesting question is why it is that some local governments have managed to realise 80% of their local development plan and others only 20%. Mechanisms for learning from colleagues and for cooperation between local governments at regional level can be improved.

2.3 Analysis of the political environment

At the national level, Benin has enjoyed a stable, democratic government with four presidential elections and four legislative elections organised peacefully since 1989. President Yayi Boni was re-elected to a second five-year term in March 2011 and his alliance gained a majority in the National Assembly. He was also appointed as Chair of the African Union in January 2012.⁷

⁷ World Bank, *Benin Country Brief* (2012).

The decentralisation process started in 1990, when a single-tier local government system was chosen with the creation of 77 local governments, subdivided in villages (rural local governments) and neighbourhoods (urban local governments).⁸ Local governments are governed by an elected council. The first local elections were organised in 2003. Councillors are elected for five years and appoint a mayor from among themselves. Councillors can be elected on political party lists or as independent candidates and no quotas exist for women or young people. After the first term of elected councillors, in 2008, many local governments saw a major shift to other and new political parties and politicians. On average about 70% of the councillors changed, and for the mayors the percentage is even higher. It is not to be expected that this will be very different with the next local elections in 2013. This political discontinuity is characteristic for young local democracies: expectations of the local government are high and the capacities low, which results in the electorate being disappointed.

The local governments have seven areas of responsibilities and powers. These are local development and (urban) planning; infrastructure and transport; environmental issues, hygiene and environmental health; maternal and primary level education, literacy and adult education; health and social and cultural activities; goods and services; and economic investment.⁹

Formally speaking, local governments have financial autonomy and dispose of an autonomous budget, but in reality the situation is far removed from that. Local taxation varies and includes independent taxes, as well as taxes shared with the State; they are collected by the State and transferred to the local governments. There remains a lot to do for the local governments to mobilise their own resources, which now count for less than 10% of the fiscal resources. The local governments depend a lot on development aid.

Budgets, personnel management, duties and taxes, urban planning, public markets etc. fall under trusteeship control of the prefect at the regional level (there are 12 regions in Benin), who gives approval, repeals or substitutes. Local development plans and civil society issues do not need approval. The LDP is the only document at a local level that is formulated in a participative manner.¹⁰

Briefly after the first local elections in 2003, the National Association for Local Governments in Benin ('Association Nationale des communes du Bénin' – ANCB) was created as the interface between local governments and the national government.¹¹ The ANCB lobbies for the interests of the local governments and promotes their development. Its objective is to reinforce decentralisation, accompany local governments, encourage participation of local actors, strengthen the capacities of local governments and encourage cooperation and solidarity among local governments.¹²

When experiences show that obstacles met in the implementation of tasks and responsibilities, require change at the national level (in terms of legislation, government policies, financial arrangements etc.) this is typically something for which a national association's involvement is needed.

However, the structure, the procedures and the capacity for such interlinking between the local, regional and national level are poorly developed. The programme will invest in strengthening those linkages.

⁸ République du Benin, *Constitution du 11 Décembre 1990* (1990).

⁹ United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), *UCLG Country Profiles: Republic of Benin* (2007) vi. http://www.cities-localgovernments.org/gold/Upload/country_profile/Benin.pdf, consulted 13 May 2012.

¹⁰ MDGLAAT, *Guide PDC* (2008).

¹¹ UCLG, *UCLG Country Profiles: Republic of Benin* (2007).

http://www.cities-localgovernments.org/gold/Upload/country_profile/Benin.pdf, consulted 13 May 2012.

¹² ANCB, <http://ancb-benin.org/?-Notre-Mission->

2.4 The defined target group

The target groups in Benin consist of six local governments in the three regions Atacora, Alibori and Couffo, and the national local government association ANCB.

In order to make more local governments take advantage of the lessons learnt, the other local governments in the three regions will be involved in several activities of the programme. This will be streamlined with the help of the Benchmark method, a learning tool, which makes it possible to gather in groups of local governments and compare the functioning of these governments. The three regional operating local government associations will be engaged in the programme to play an active role in activities at the regional level and fulfil a bridge function between the local governments and their national association.

Thus the following regions and local governments are involved:

Region	Primary focus	Benchmarking	Association R/D
Atacora (9 local governments)	Boukombé	Cobli, Kerou, Kouandé, Matéri, Natitingou, Pehunco, Tanguieta, Toukountouna	ACAD ¹³
Couffo (6 local governments)	Dogbo	Aplahoué, Djakotomey, Klouékanmey, Lalo, Toviklin	ACMC
Alibori (6 local governments)	Kandi	Banikoara, Gogounou, Karimama, Malanville, Segbana	APIDA

Certain activities will address all 21 local governments in the three regions from the start. Other activities will first focus on the three local governments in the regions that have experience in cooperating with VNG International and Dutch municipalities (Kandi, Boukombé and Dogbo).

On the basis of experiences gained through working with the 21 local governments, the Programme will then broaden more intensive support and interventions to one other local government in each region. This will broaden the support to two local governments in each of the three regions (six local governments in total).

¹³ The Programme aims at supporting the existing regional structures, or at creating new platforms for collaboration under the umbrella of the existing regional associations. A weak point in this respect is ACAD. ACAD has little credit with some of its members, and the relationship between ANCB and ACAD is also not very good. That means extra attention is needed in the first phase of the project.

2.5 Analysis of other relevant actors

2.5.1 Policies and actions of the national government

The national actors of importance for the Benin Programme include various ministries. Each department implements national sector Programmes which should take the concerns at local government level into account. The Ministry in charge of Decentralisation, Local Governance Administration and Planning (MDGLAAT) organises the decentralisation process and ensures state supervision of the local governments through the prefect, the only trusteeship authority for local governments.

Relevant institutions are also CeCPA¹⁴ and CeRPA¹⁵. As decentralised services at the local government and community level, their role is to promote agriculture for food security. They are also mandated to provide land security together with the local governments and as such are important players in supporting the local governments to turn RLP instruments and LDP agricultural development projects into reality.

Another relevant institution for the implementation of LDPs is the FADEC fund (Fonds d'appui au développement communal). It contains state subsidies and financial support from Partenaires Techniques et Financiers (PTF) and a large share of the FADEC goes to the local governments.

CeFAL as the future training centre for local administration, will be an important interlocutor for the LGCP insofar as its aim is to strengthen the capacity of local politicians and staff. With ANCB, this centre can capitalise on experience and know-how for local economic development.

2.5.2 Policies and actions of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands

According to the Embassy's Multi-Annual Strategic Plan (MASP)¹⁶ 2012 – 2015, drafted in alignment with the Benin Strategy for Poverty Reduction (Stratégie de Croissance pour la Réduction de Pauvreté – SCRP 2011-2015), agriculture and (transit-) trade offer the best opportunities for economic growth and self-reliance. There is a focus on two concrete Programmes: land rights in rural areas and development of feeder roads.¹⁷ An important binding constraint is the lack of effective governance, aggravated by clientelism and corruption, and an increasing dependency ratio due to the growing young population. The Programmes will be elaborated in more detail in the first half of 2012. The focus of the Benin Programme on local economic development is in line with the Embassy's MASP. We will stay in close contact with the Embassy on the elaborated plan and on how the LGCP Benin Programme connects to this.

2.5.3 Relevance

LGCP will strengthen the capacity of local governments (elected councillors and key staff) to contribute effectively to the promotion of local economic development. The agricultural sector is certainly not low on this list, and will contribute to food security. In turn, increased productivity and a growing local economy will permit larger income for the local governments (through levies and taxes) and thereby provide a stronger financial basis for the funding of the local governments' projects and their sustainability.

¹⁴ The Municipal Centre for Agricultural Promotion (CeCPA).

¹⁵ The Regional Centre for Agricultural Promotion (CeRPA).

¹⁶ Multi-Annual Strategic Plan (MASP)

¹⁷ Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Cotonou, *Multi-Annual Strategic Plan 2012 – 2015* (2011).

Part of this process is improving local governance: horizontally in the sense of improved collaboration between the local government authorities, the private sector and civil society, including accountability to the local community, and vertically in the sense of improved collaboration between various parts of the public sector, including de-concentrated support structures.

VNG International's added value lies in the experience with a more systematic approach of local (economic) development planning. VNG International will help Beninese partners to get acquainted with such a more productive approach of LDPs and AIPs by bringing in experiences from the Netherlands and by facilitating mutual learning between Beninese partners. The latter is done amongst others by using benchmarking. Benchmarking is an instrument for horizontal learning, in a way that encourages free and open exchange of experiences. VNG International also has extensive experience in working with other local government associations and will share this experience with the national association of municipalities of Benin, ANCB.

3 Tailor-made LGCP Benin Programme

3.1 Benin specific Programme objective

Increased capacity of 6 local governments and the National Association of the Municipalities of Benin (ANCB) to develop strategies and implement policies focusing on agricultural potential to yield increased economic growth .

3.2 Programme results

The results to be achieved in the LGCP Benin Programme are presented below. How these results relate to the five capabilities underlying the LGCP framework is also explained.

Result 1: *Increased capability of 21 local governments to develop and adopt integrated LDPs, AIPs and – where relevant – RLPs, supported by informed assistance from ANCB.*

More specifically, within this result area, we envisage that:

21 local governments:

- 1.1 have solid understanding of how to unlock their (local) economic and agricultural potential
- 1.2 are strengthened in their decision making process to develop and adopt LDPs, AIPs and – where relevant – RLPs
- 1.3 have increased awareness of the role of councillors in optimising economic and agricultural potential

ANCB:

- 1.4 has integrated a focus on LED/agriculture for member local governments in her annual plans

Such an integrated approach in defining 'second-generation' local development plans is new; as is the elaboration of AIPs to define and prioritise the necessary resources. When local councils make informed decisions in that respect, this means that the capability of local governments *to act and commit* is developed and/or strengthened. The ANCB contributes to that by enabling and facilitating the process. At the same time, by deciding to make this a priority action for themselves, their own capability to act and commit is also developed and/or strengthened.

Result 2: *Increased capability of 6 local governments to implement their LDP and AIPs, with particular attention for agriculture and LED, supported by informed assistance from ANCB.*

More specifically, within this result area, we envisage that:

6 local governments:

2.1 have improved their operationalisation of LDPs with particular attention for agriculture and LED

2.2 have successfully attained financial support for innovative agriculture and LED related projects

ANCB:

2.3 has an accessible Centre de Ressources and provides high quality services related to agriculture and LED

LDPs and AIPs contain the adopted priorities as defined by the local government council. Often these are not or only partially implemented. Capacitating the 6 local governments to improve the level of implementation, means developing or strengthening their capacity *to deliver on development objectives*. One of the roles of the national association is to provide services to its member local governments and to facilitate the exchange of information and experiences. ANCB will do this through the so-called "Centre d'Information et de Documentation sur les Collectivités Locales au Bénin" (CIDOCOL) and, in doing so, it will also *deliver on its development objectives*.

Result 3: *Increased capability of 6 local governments and ANCB to adapt their approaches regarding LED to changes in the environment and on the basis of experiences gained.*

More specifically, within this result area, we envisage that:

6 local governments:

3.1 6 are able to improve and adapt their LDPs and AIPs on the basis of benchmark performance results

ANCB:

3.2 is able to translate benchmark performance results into services

Too often, plans tend to become static documents. Regular reviewing and updating is necessary to respond to new realities and therefore to be effective. The Programme supports the target group in doing so by helping to develop and apply the mechanisms for it. In doing so we develop their capability *to adapt and self-renew*.

Result 4: *Developed capability of 21 local governments and ANCB to engage productively with external stakeholders regarding LED*

More specifically, within this result area, we envisage that:

21 local governments:

4.1 are increasingly accountable towards their citizens in the development and implementation of LED related actions

4.2 engage on a frequent basis with key stakeholders

ANCB:

4.3 has improved its lobbying skills in the area's of LED/agriculture/RLP

By focussing on the involvement of external stakeholders with regard to food security issues, the capacity of local governments to become a strong and reliable partner, open to participative cooperation and strong in relational competences, and the capability *to relate to external stakeholders*, is developed and/or strengthened. The ANCB will also strengthen its capability to relate to external stakeholders in the sense that it will engage in lobbying activities at national government level and in this way represent and defend the interests of the local governments.

Result 5: *Developed capability of ANCB to achieve coherence in LED*

More specifically, within this results area, we envisage that:

5.1 ANCB is able to translate practices at local government level to national government policy (PSRSAs)

Chances of success increase when various tiers of government move in the same direction. Therefore, when there is a clear link between national policy frameworks and local development plans, this is the expression of the capacity *to achieve coherence*.

3.3 Programme activities

The Local Government Capacity Programme is built on VNG International's colleague-to-colleague approach, in which expert practitioners exchange knowledge and experiences. The essence is that experts have experience in the same job or in a comparable position to that of the beneficiaries. The practitioners exchange vision and views and work together. Problems and analyses are shared and are conducive for building on existing local capabilities. Colleagues might come from the Netherlands, but also from neighbouring countries or even from the beneficiary country. This approach is also reflected in the activities designed to reach the results anticipated; colleague-to-colleague learning takes place mainly in the Benchmark sessions, coaching-mentoring trajectories, on-the-job training, workshops and study tours. VNG International will prepare activity work plans annually which will be submitted to the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs for approval. These activity work plans present a concrete description of the activities foreseen.

The activities to reach the results envisaged for Benin are :

First, a baseline survey will be executed amongst the six local governments from the three regions Atacora, Alibori and Couffo that will receive more intensive support during the LGCP Benin Programme, to assess the state of affairs at the start of the programme and more specifically the capacity gaps in the field of agricultural potentials. Results of the baseline will be used to monitor and assess the effectiveness of the programme annually. The baseline and annual progress assessments will also serve as input for the activity plan of the following year.

Result 1: *Increased capability of 21 local governments to develop and adopt integrated LDPs, AIPs and – where relevant – RLPs, supported by informed assistance from ANCB.*

Several activities have been defined to reach this result. A participatory benchmark trajectory will be facilitated at the regional level for 21 local governments on performance in promoting local economic development and food security. Both the regional and national associations will be involved to facilitate the process. Local governments will share experiences, broaden their insight and understanding in their functioning and learn lessons on the development and implementation of LDPs with a focus on optimising economic and agricultural potential. On the basis of experiences gained through working with the 21 local governments, the Programme will complement the benchmark sessions with trainings on issues that result as important from the benchmark sessions.

Given the fact that in 2013 local elections will take place, the LGCP Benin Programme also envisages to raise the awareness of and to train the newly elected councillors on their role in optimising agricultural potential. This training will be facilitated with the help of/in cooperation with the regional associations.

As mentioned previously, six local governments will be trained and coached more intensively so that they can develop and implement instruments for local economic development in a participatory way, with particular attention for agriculture. First, key staff from the three local governments will be coached that have experience in cooperating with VNG International and Dutch municipalities (Kandi, Boukombé and Dogbo), with support from Dutch and Beninese experts, amongst others on how to analyse their local economic potential, integrate LED in their action plans, etc. In 2013/2014 the intensive support will be extended to one other local government in each region (six local governments in total).

Finally, at the national level, the ANCB staff will also receive training and coaching on how to integrate LED and agriculture in their annual action plans for the benefit of its members.

Please refer to the activities under result nr. 1 in the Logframe.

Result 2: *Increased capability of 6 local governments to implement their LDP and AIPs, with particular attention for agriculture and LED, supported by informed assistance from ANCB.*

After having developed LDPs and the accompanying local plans and strategies, and having a better understanding of the implementation, it is important to know how to implement the plans and lessons learnt and make the plans operational. Again, with expertise from Dutch local government experts, key-actors in six local governments will be trained and coached on how to operationalise their LDPs and mobilise funds. Promising initiatives can be financed by means of a small support facility that the LGCP Benin Programme envisages to set up.

At the national level, activities will involve coaching and training of key staff of the ANCB, in particular the employee responsible for managing the Centre de Ressources (CIDOCOL). The aim is to make the Centre de Ressources more accessible to local governments and to improve the service delivery function of the ANCB.

Please refer to the activities under result nr. 2 in the Logframe.

Result 3: *Increased capability of 6 local governments and ANCB to adapt their approaches regarding LED to changes in the environment and on the basis of experiences gained.*

By means of the performance results and lessons learnt from the participatory benchmark trajectory, the LGCP programme will give more intensive support in the form of coaching to six local governments. These governments will gain insight and especially practical experience on how to improve and adapt their LDPs and AIPs. These lessons learnt will be shared with the other local governments via the benchmark tool. For this, we will work closely together with the ANCB and regional associations.

Therefore the ANCB will receive coaching on how to translate benchmark performance results into services for its members, including through its Centre de Ressources.

Please refer to the activities under result nr. 3 in the Logframe.

Result 4: *Developed capability of 21 local governments and ANCB to engage productively with external stakeholders regarding LED*

To reach this result, the 21 local governments will be trained and coached by Dutch local government experts and/or other expert-practitioners on domestic accountability and on how to build productive relations with stakeholders. Activities will include stakeholder assessments and consultations.

At the national level, the lobbying role of the ANCB will be supported to create favourable conditions for the local governments to play their role in local economic development. Training and skills development, coaching, research and expert input, and possibly campaigning, are key instruments in this regard. More specifically, the ANCB will be guided in the development of a lobbying manifest and in concrete lobbying actions focused on decentralisation in general, and other issues such as the rural cadaster specifically.

Please refer to the activities under result nr. 4 in the Logframe.

Result 5: *Developed capability of ANCB to achieve coherence in LED*

Within this result area, activities are predominantly characterised by expert-practitioners input through coaching and assistance of the ANCB (key staff and Board) on how to create synergy between practice at local government level and national government policy. Communication and alignment between the national, regional and local level will also be strengthened.

Please refer to the activities under result nr. 5 in the Logframe.