

Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)

**Country Gender Profile
(Benin)**

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This report entitled “Country Gender Profile” has been drafted by Laurent Akobi Banouin and Josephine Kanakin for the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). The opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the JICA.

List of Acronyms

ARI:	Acute Respiratory Infection
APRM :	African Peer Review Mechanism
CARE:	Cooperative for American Relief Everywhere (CARE International)
CFA:	West African Franc (monetary unit, in December 2009, when the report is drafted, the exchange rate is 1 dollar US for 450 F FCA)
CLCAM:	Caisse Locale d'Epargne et de Crédit Agricole Mutuel (Local Agricultural Savings and Credit Banks)
CNHU:	Centre National Hospitalier et Universitaire (National Teaching Hospital)
CNPEEG:	Conseil National de Promotion de l'Équité et l'Égalité du Genre (National Council for the Promotion of Gender Equality and Equity)
CRS:	Catholic Relief Services
DDC:	Direction pour le développement et la Coopération du gouvernement Suisse (The Swiss Government Office for Development and Cooperation)
DPFG:	Direction de la Promotion de la Femme et du Genre (Division for the Promotion of Women and Gender)
EDS:	Enquête Démographique et de Santé (Demographic and Health Survey)
EDUCOM:	UNICEF-supported community education project
FAO:	Food and Agriculture Organization
FGM:	Female Genital Mutilation
FIDA:	Finnish International Development Agency
FNUAP:	French acronym for UNFPA (United Nations Fund for Population Activities)
GDP:	Gross Domestic Product
GER:	Gross Enrollment Rate
HIV/AIDS:	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

HOMEL:	Hôpital de la Mère et de l'Enfant (The Mother and Child Hospital)
ILO:	International Labor Organization
INSAE:	Institut National de la Statistique et de l'Analyse Economique (National Institute of Statistics and Economic Analysis)
JICA:	Japan International Cooperation Agency
MCA:	Millennium Challenge Account
MDG:	Millennium Development Goals
MEMP:	Ministère des Enseignements Maternel et Primaire (Ministry of Nursery and Primary Education)
MESFTP:	Ministère de l'Enseignement Secondaire, de la Formation Technique et Professionnelle (Ministry of Secondary Education, Vocational and Technical Training)
MFE :	Ministère des Finances et de l'Economie (Ministry of Economy and Finance)
MFSN:	Ministère de la Famille et de la Solidarité Nationale (Ministry of Family and National Solidarity)
MS:	Ministère de la Santé (Ministry of Health)
NGO:	Non Governmental Organization
RGHP3:	Troisième Recensement Général de la Population et de l'Habitat (Third General Population Census)
SNV:	Netherlands Development Organization
TBS:	Tableau de Bord Social (Social data table)
SWOT:	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
UAC:	University of Abomey-Calavi
UNDP:	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO:	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA:	United Nations Fund for Population Activities
UNICEF:	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UniPAR:	University of Parakou

USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
WFP:	World Food Program
WHO:	World Health Organization
WIDTECH:	Women in Development Technical Assistance Project

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Executive Summary

Overview of Socio-economic Profile

In 2008, the population of Benin was estimated¹ at 8,224,642 inhabitants. The number of women was 4, 203, 548 (51.10 percent) and 4,021,094 for men (48.9 percent). According to *Tableau de Bord Social 2007-TBS*², a report on socio-economic data, in 2007, life expectancy at birth was 60.8 years, which is slightly higher in women (62.9 percent) than in men (58.6 percent). According to the same report, since 1992, macroeconomic reforms have begun to take effect, and Benin has maintained its sustained economic growth. However, economic downturn occurred as from 2002 (4.4 percent). This downturn aggravated in 2005 (2.9 percent). But, since 2006, GDP growth has resumed and amounted to 4.6 percent in 2007 and 5 percent in 2008. Though there is some improvement in different socio-economic sectors, disparities persist between men and women; and they are detrimental to the latter.

General Situation of Women and how Government copes with it

Gender disparities associated with social and economic traditional roles of women hamper the attainment of development goals and constitute the major development-related concerns. Though the practices that are detrimental to women tend progressively to disappear, a lot of discrepancies still influence the relationship between men and women. Thus, the burden of poverty weighs heavily on women. Gender inequality is costly to Benin's economic and social development and to the pursuit of its growth and poverty reduction objectives. Disparities between men and women have been highlighted in a national study on gender, in areas including women's participation in decision-making process, marriage, access to education, access to the job market, access to economic activities, access to health care, access to land and access to credit and microcredit.

The Government is aware of these realities and takes measures to cope with them. It has adhered to various conventions and agreements for advancing rights pertaining to women and girls. Moreover, the government has set up an enabling environment for women to be

¹ According to the last General Population Census (RGPH 3) available at the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Analysis (INSAE).

² INSAE, *Tableau de Bord Social 2007-TBS*, Cotonou, Décembre 2008.

actors and beneficiaries of development by building their capacity through education, health and balanced access to employment and other sources of wealth. Several policies have been formulated and adopted. A new national mechanism for the promotion of gender has also been set up and presided over by the Head of State. This new mechanism, however, has its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT).

Women's situation by sector

Women's income is severely limited by their lack of access to land, technology, and credit. Women are heavily engaged in producing subsistence food crops, while men specialize in commercial crops. Although a few women traders have prospered, most women are at the lowest levels of the trade sector, and often lack the economic resources, information, and training to increase the profitability of their activities. These difficulties impact various socio-economic sectors.

In the education sector, important gender disparities exist. Throughout the country, girls' enrollment rates are consistently lower than boys'. The problem persists in all 5 levels of formal and informal education.

In the health sector, women face many problems, including, in reproductive health, in family planning, etc. Their health services attendance is low. Malaria which is a major health problem in the country and a leading cause of morbidity and mortality, affect vulnerable groups, including children less than 5 years of age, and pregnant women. According to the last Demographic and Health Survey (EDS III) published by INSAE³, HIV's prevalence rate in women aged between 15 and 49 is about 1.5 percent and is about twice the rate in men of the same age range (0.8). Moreover, women are still subject to Female Genital Mutilations.

In the agricultural sector, four factors are paramount for appreciating gender constraints, such as women's lack of control and limited access to land, labor and time constraints, sexual division of labor, the expansion of cash crops such as cotton which has important and often unexpected gender implications.

³ INSAE, *Enquête Démographique et de Santé 2006*, Cotonou, novembre 2007

There are also disparities in labor and economic participation. According to the last population census (RGPH 3)⁴, the public sector uses 0.4% women and 1.1% men and the private sector, 0.5% women and 1.2% men.

Women's situation in governance

Very often, women have more duties than rights and this hinders their contribution to public and political life. Gender-based inequalities are striking as far as participation in the decision-making process is concerned. Women's weak representation in the civil service, state institutions, as well as within the boards of political parties is a problem. The analysis of women's representation in decision-making bodies and their participation in the economy is conclusive with some findings. At state institutional level, the gap is as striking as in the public service; women suffer great hardship in order to integrate these decision-making bodies in spite of a great deal of lobbying and pressure being made over recent years.

Recent efforts for gender promotion

In an effort to better implement measures to promote gender, the government has put in place a new institutional framework, which is the National Council for the Promotion of Gender Equality and Equity (CNPEEG). The Head of State will preside over the CNPEEG. Besides, an Institute of Women was created and set up in March 2009 by the Head of State. To address the acute issue of gender disparities, the Government has initiated many projects and programs to promote gender equality. Education, health and economic sectors benefit from these programs which are supported by international donors, including UN agencies and cooperation bureaus as well as international, national NGOs and civil society. Some programs are gender-specific, while others use cross-cutting approach to ensure gender integration across programmes.

⁴

INSAE, *Recensement Général de la Population et de l'Habitat*, Cotonou, 2003.

Introduction

In the current context of the new management approach to development assistance brought about by the adoption of the Paris Declaration, gender mainstreaming will be critical in ensuring that gender equality issues do not disappear as a result of the new aid modalities. The focus by the Paris Declaration on national ownership and leadership further requires the use of gender mainstreaming approaches in all aspects of development assistance. The purpose of this assessment on Benin entitled “Country Gender Profile” is to provide the basis for the development of an integrated, cross-cutting strategy to strengthen attention to gender issues and to enhance the effectiveness and impact of donor’s development assistance programmes.

Methodology for the study

1. Study nature and framework

The study is essentially a desk research. It appears to be a tool of conception for JICA staff and as such, the working methodology will consist in exploring various places, institutions and people likely to provide information on gender policy implementation experiences in Benin. In compliance with the prescriptions of the Terms of Reference, this study, scheduled to last three (3) months, concerns the whole territory of Benin with a strong investigation in Cotonou where the headquarters of most of the international and government institutions are located.

2. Research targets

This research which focuses on the consideration of Gender relations in development programmes will involve the main stakeholders directly or indirectly working in every development sector. There are six groups of stakeholders, ministries, UN agencies, bilateral or multilateral cooperation bureaus, International NGOs, Civil Society and documentation centers.

3. Data collection methods and tools

In compliance with indications given in the terms of reference, literature review is the principal method of data collection that will be used to gather useful information for the achievement of the work.

4. *Data and information collection*

Data and information will consist mainly on reviewing of grey literature as well as reviewing, collation and compiling of various documents relating to gender in Benin

5. *Data processing and drafting of the report*

Data processing will be performed basing on the content of all the information collected from various written sources or from different groups of stakeholders. The data as gathered and analyzed will lead to a draft of the report in accordance with the terms of reference.

1- Basic Socio-economic Country Profile

1-1. Demographic and Economic Profile

In 2008, the population of Benin was estimated at 8,224,642 inhabitants⁵. The number of women was 4,203,548 (51.10 percent), that of men was put at 4,021,094 (48.9 percent). By 2007 estimate, according to *Tableau de Bord Social 2007-TBS*⁶, more than fifty percent (50%) of the population is under 18. The same report notes that life expectancy at birth was 60.8 years, which is slightly higher in women (62.9 percent) than in men (58.6 percent). The labor force (15-64 years old) accounted for 50 percent of the whole population. Approximately forty-two percent (42. 3%) of the population lived in rural areas.

TBS-2007 also notes that monetary poverty worsened during the period running from 2002 (28.4 percent) to 2006 (37.5 percent) before decreasing in 2007 (33.3 percent). In rural areas the index for monetary poverty shifted from 38.3 percent in 2006 to 36.1 percent in 2007, a decrease of 2.2 points. In urban areas, one can note a decrease of 8.2 percent during the period from 2006 to 2007, passing from 36.5 percent in 2006 to 28.3 percent in 2007.

Since 1992, macroeconomic reforms have begun to take effect, and Benin has maintained its sustained economic growth. After a period of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth running from 1995 to 2000 during which the rate stabilized around 5 percent, a performance in 2001 with 6.3 percent, economic downturn occurred as from 2002 (4.4 percent). This downturn aggravated in 2005 to about (2.9 percent). But, since 2006, GDP growth has resumed and amounted to 4.6 percent in 2007 and 5 percent in 2008⁷.

However, according to a report of the Mécanisme Africain d’Evaluation par les Pairs (the African Peer Review Mechanism -APRM), the vulnerability of Benin’s economy continues to be affected by many factors⁸ including commercial restrictions imposed by Nigeria, increased competition of the Lome’s Port following the deterioration of Cotonou’s Port performance, cotton production lower than expected (less than 200,000 tons against 600,000 tons projection), appreciation of the Euro over the American Dollar which affected economic activity, especially

⁵ INSAE, population forecast from the last census

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Last data from INSAE, Office of Social Statistics, 2009.

⁸ Mécanisme Africain d’Evaluation par les Pairs (MAEP), *Rapport d’évaluation de la République du Bénin*, janvier 2008.

cotton's exportation to Asian markets. Production is not very much diversified and cotton remains Benin's chief export product (44.8 percent of exports), followed by cashew nut, coconut (8 percent) and vegetable oil (7.7 percent)⁹.

Benin's first supplier is France that increasingly exports to Benin (17.1 percent of imports), followed by China (14 percent). Regarding exportation, Nigeria (20.5 percent), China (19.9 percent) and India (10.9 percent) are the main commercial partners of Benin¹⁰.

According to the last *Tableau de Bord Social*, The country has poor railways and roads networks, a low road density and only one airport meeting international standards. The national road network comprises 5,944 Km including 1,838 km of asphalted roads and 4,106 km of clay roads (as in December 2007)¹¹.

Regarding energy infrastructures, according to the above report, Benin currently suffers from energy crisis due to the fact that it buys power from other regional countries within the region. Power consumption rose from 576.05 MWh in 2002 to 634.15 in 2007. Power consumption recorded a 7.5 percent increase between 2006 and 2007¹².

More than 50 percent of the population does not benefit from water supply in spite of tremendous progress which has been achieved in the area of hydraulic infrastructures since 2000¹³.

Environmental management is a concern as 8 households in 10 dispose of household rubbish in public places while about 7 households in ten relieve themselves outdoors (2002 General Population Census). Kerosene is used for lightening (79.5 percent) while wood (80.3 percent) and charcoal (13.4 percent) are widely used for cooking food. These practices play a great part in deforestation¹⁴.

Though tourism infrastructures and sites have not significantly increased over the last couple of years, the rate of tourism activities in favor of Benin have considerably increased. Number of tourists reached 173,500 in 2004 and 185,000 in 2007¹⁵.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Available at INSAE, *Tableau de Bord Social, TBS-2007*, Cotonou, December 2008.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

1-2. Health profile

Health system is managed at the central or national level by the Ministry of Health which is responsible for implementing the health policies formulated by the Government. The Ministry of Health initiates health measures, plans implementation, coordinates and monitors defined tasks. At the Departmental level, Health Offices implement national health policy, ensuring that activities are consistent with the central government's policy. At the Communal level, there are local health facilities operating in defined zones located outside the main cities of Benin.

Health facilities include the National Teaching Hospital (Centre National, Hospitalier Universitaire- CNHU) and The Mother and Child Hospital (Hôpital de la Mère et de l'Enfant-HOMEL) at the national or central level. Departmental Health Centers operate at the second level while Zonal Hospitals operate at the third level.

Health coverage is poor. The number of inpatient per bed in hospitals stood at 923 in 2000, increasing to 5,901 in 2006¹⁶.

Several diseases called for medical attention in health centers. Almost half of the patients (62.2 percent in 2007 over 54 percent in 2000) visited health centers for malaria, Acute Respiratory Infections (ARI) and gastro enteric complaints respectively. In 2007, the population were mostly affected by malaria (40.50 percent) followed by Acute Respiratory Infections (15.2 percent). Only 6.5 percent of the patients suffered from gastro enteric complaints¹⁷.

The government lays special emphasis on the prevention of AIDS given its increasingly threatening character. The prevalence of HIV was 1.7 percent in 2007. The distribution by sex and age of AIDS reveals that the sex-ratio is 0.5 in a man for a woman in 2006. The rate of AIDS prevalence in pregnant women decreased from 4.1 percent in 2000 to 1.7 in 2007¹⁸.

Vaccination has been carefully addressed by the government through the implementation of the PEV (Extended Vaccination Program) during the last couple of years. The attendance rate for health facilities was 39 percent in 2004 and 45 percent in 2007.

The coverage rate for prenatal consultations rose from 76.5 percent in 2004 to 96

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

percent in 2007. The rate for postnatal consultations rose from 36.7 to 43 percent. The rate for assisted deliveries was 73 percent in 2002 and 82 percent in 2007. Maternal mortality rate remains high, though it has recently decreased. It was 498 deaths/100,000 in 1997¹⁹, 292 in 2002, and 179 per 100, 000 live births in 2007 according to the last *Tableau de Bord Social*²⁰.

In spite of the fact that the number of people using traditional medicine services is high, its activities and resources are still little known. Health authorities are not actually concerned about traditional medicine. Health workers and traditional healers do not trust each other in spite of initiatives that the government has taken in recent years to promote traditional medicine.

1-3. Education profile

Education receives a particular attention from the government. Very few are the villages that do not have a primary school. There are high schools and technical colleges almost everywhere in the country, most of which are state-owned; but there are more and more private schools competing side by side with government. Higher education boasts of two public universities, University of Abomey-Calavi and University of Parakou (UAC and UniPAR) respectively as well as some few private higher educational institutions. The formal educational system comprises 5 levels of education managed by three ministries including the Ministry of Nursery and Primary Education, the Ministry of Secondary Education, Technical and Vocational Training, and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research.

Children aged 3-5 attend Nursery Schools. According to the last *Tableau de Bord Social (TBS 2007)*, at the beginning of the school year 2006-2007, enrollment rate into Nurseries increased from 27,673, the previous school year to 39,136²¹.

Primary education accounts for the largest number of pupils and includes children aged between 6 and 11. In 2007, the total number of pupils in public and private schools was 1,474,206²².

¹⁹ Word Bank, *Strategic country gender assessment*, April 2002.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ INSAE, *Tableau de Bord Social TBS 2007*, Cotonou, Décembre 2008.

²² Ibid.

The TBS 2007 indicates that secondary education comprises two periods divided into two “cycles”. The first four years constitute the first cycle and the last three years, the second cycle. In 2007, 436,511 students attended secondary schools whereas the number of students for the previous year stood at 433,850²³.

The same report indicates that technical education and vocational training are considered second priority by the government next to primary education. Technical education and vocational trainings are organized into six areas which are divided into 30 special studies. In 2005, technical education and vocational training included 16 public colleges and schools and 215 private educational institutions.

According to TBS 2007, in higher education, the number of students who enrolled in public schools in 2002 was 27,614. This number has been gradually increasing every year. The number of enrolled students was 42,054 in 2006 and 49,178 in 2007²⁴.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

2- General Situation of Women and Government's Gender Policy

2-1. Women's general situation

The National Policy for Gender Promotion paper²⁵ shows that gender disparities associated with social and economic traditional roles has hampered the attainment of development goals and constitutes the major gender and development-related concerns in the country. Though those practices are progressively disappearing, a lot of discrepancies still affect the relations between men and women, often to the detriment of women. Thus, the burden of poverty weighs heavily on women²⁶. A World Bank report indicates that gender disparities persist and that gender inequality is costly to Benin's economic and social development and to the realization of its growth and poverty reduction objectives²⁷. These disparities have been highlighted in a national study on gender²⁸, which has identified disparities between men and women in areas including women's participation in decision-making process, marriages, access to education, access to the job market, access to economic activities, access to health care, access to land and access to credit and microcredit.

2-1.1. Poor participation in decision-making process²⁹

Social and cultural factors confer decision-making power to men. This situation of men's domination over women affects almost all aspects of the social life and decision-making. All decisions related to education, children's health, sexuality and family planning are the exclusive prerogative of men. Women's involvement in any activities, whether social, economic or cultural is subject to men's decision. As stated by a USAID report, household decisions in Benin, particularly those involving spending and use of resources, are within the province³⁰ of the male heads of families. This reality is entrenched in people's attitudes, beliefs and perceptions. Today, this transpires at the macro level through a poor representation of women in

²⁵ Available at the Ministry of Family and National Solidarity, Cotonou, 19 March 2009.

²⁶ Patricia Martin and Erinna Adotevi-Dia, *Benin gender assessment and strategy*, October 2001.

²⁷ World Bank, *Benin Data Profile*, <http://devdata.worldbank.org>.

²⁸ As reported by the Office of Women and Gender Promotion in the Ministry of Family and National Solidarity.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ USAID, *Benin Gender Assessment and Strategy*, October 2001.

government institutions and at key political and administrative positions. The percentage of women serving in government from 1991 to 2007 has fluctuated between 10 and 23 percent. The number of women sitting in the National Assembly is very insignificant. The highest percentage of women (12-19 percent) in the National Assembly has been recorded during the second legislative term (1995-1999). The same reality can be observed in the other government's institutions.

2-1.2. Discriminations related to marriage and married life

Significant disparities are observed with regard to marriage. The practices of forced marriage or precocious marriage are persistent. Discriminatory treatments are inflicted upon widows. The practice of *lévirat*, whereby a widow is forced to marry a brother or close relative of her deceased husband still exists in a number of areas and involves relatively young widows.

2-1.3. Limited access to education

Disparities are observed in the area of education and are linked to unequal access to education reflected by gaps between girls' and boys' school registration rate, and school-aged children who fail to register. Since Benin embraced democracy, while girls' education rate has been fairly increasing, figures are still detrimental to them. In 1990, the education rate was 36 percent for girls and 62 percent for boys. In 1996, the rate was 52 percent for girls and 85 percent for boys, 78 percent for girls and 110 percent for boys in 2002, 82 percent for girls and 114 percent for boys in 2003, 84 percent for girls and 108 percent for boys in 2004, 84 percent for girls and 104 percent for boys in 2005³¹. In 2007³², the gross education rate countrywide amounted to 98.48 and 104 percent for boys and 92 percent for girls.

2-1.4. Poor access to earning and employment

Women's access to earning and employment is limited. By weighing heavily on women's and children's health, social factors hamper women's access to paid jobs, to administrative,

³¹ National Policy for Gender Promotion, 19 March 2009, available at the Ministry of Family and National Solidarity.

³² INSAE, *Tableau de Bord Social TBS 2007*, décembre 2008.

economic and political responsibilities; hence they limit women's access to a stable and lasting job. In 2007, job gender-disaggregated data show that the civil service is dominated by men (73.23 percent of men and 26.77 percent of women)³³.

A 1997 civil servants survey indicates that 26.8 percent of civil servants were women (in social ministries), of which 65.9 were categories C or D whereas male civil servants in the same categories accounted for 47.3 percent. On the other hand, 31.3 percent of women were in categories A³⁴ and B whereas men in the same categories were 44.3 percent. Only 20 percent of workers in category A were women. Most women are in category D (35.43 percent) and lack access to highly paid jobs.

2-1.5. Limited access to health services

Due to their precarious financial situation, women lack access to health services compared to their male counterparts. Poor educational level, failure to participate in decision making process regarding health, children's education, sexuality and use of contraceptives, expose many women to successive non-planned pregnancies which affect not only their health but that of children, hindering equal participation in collective development tasks. According to the last demographic and health survey³⁵, different situations, including, malnutrition, the quality and availability of health services in rural areas, result in higher mother mortality rate (around 397 per 100,000 live births in 2007) and infant mortality rate (125 per 100,000 live births for the same period under review).

2-1.6. Limited access to land³⁶

Inheritance is one of the means by which people have access to land resources in Benin, especially in the South and in the Centre of the country. From a traditional point of view, this

³³ National Policy for Gender Promotion, available at the Ministry of Family and National Solidarity, Cotonou, march 2009.

³⁴ Civil servants in category A are senior civil servants and the most qualified in the civil service (they own 3 to 5 -year- university degree); those on category B follow in the ranking (diploma: Baccalaureat, a 6 to 7 - year-secondary school certificate), then those of category C (diploma: BEPC, a 4- year- secondary school certificate). The civil servants in category D are the low-ranking in the civil service.

³⁵ INSAE, Enquête Démographique et de Santé 2006, Cotonou, novembre 2007.

³⁶ National Policy for Gender Promotion, available at the Ministry of Family and National Solidarity, Cotonou, March 2009.

mode of access to land has been discriminatory against women. In principle, only men can inherit land. This practice that excludes women persists in many families, in spite of the recent promulgation of the Family Code. Gender-disaggregated agricultural statistics show that women benefit from only 13 percent of the plots of land obtained through secured means (heritage, sale or customs-based donation) while the percentage for men is 87. Besides, the average plots of land belonging to women are smaller than those belonging to men (0.90 *hectares* for women and 1.26 *hectares* for men which is 2. 223 acres for women and 3.112 for men).

2-1.7. Difficult access to credits³⁷

Staple products sale is women's leading economic activities (88 percent according to the 2002 General Population Census). Women are active in the distribution channel of food crops, manufactured goods, catering and clothing. This situation results in alarming increase in the number of women that run business enterprises (78.20 percent) and restaurants (92.26 percent). These women have access to microcredit facilities; however much still needs to be done to enable women living in rural areas to increase their access to manpower, equipment, inputs, technology, and credits. Women have difficulty accessing agricultural credits. This situation is due to difficulty in having access to land.

2-2. Government's gender policy

2-2.1. Legal and institutional framework

The legal framework that provides for basic human rights characterized by the principle of gender equality is made up of international³⁸ and national³⁹ instruments. Besides, the

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ International legislation and agreements include : the 1945 United Nation Charter that established the principle of equality between men and women ; the December 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights ; the September 1995 Beijing Conference whose platform of action covers twelve areas; the Convention on the elimination of all forms of discriminations against women which was adopted by the United Nation and ratified by Benin in 1992, the additional protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights related to women's rights which Benin ratified in 2003 ; the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) to which Benin adhered in

country has adhered to various conventions and agreements for advancing rights pertaining to women and girls. An Institutional mechanism to ensure the enforcement of legislation regarding women advancement has also been put in place.

From 1993 onward, within the institutional framework to promote women, the government steadily set up some mechanisms: In 1993, a national committee for the integration of women in development; in 1995, a focal point for women in the ministry of agriculture and livestock; in 1998, a Ministry in charge of family and the promotion of; in 2002, a national committee for the promotion of women; in 2003, the departmental committees for the promotion of women, at the decentralized level; in 2008, a ministry in charge of the promotion of youth and women labor; in 2009, a national council for the promotion of gender equality and equity chaired by the Head of State.

2-2.2. Government's policies and strategies to advance gender

Apart from the legal and institutional framework, the government has set up an environment that enables women to be actors and beneficiaries of development by building their capacity through education, health and balanced access to employment and other sources of wealth. Several policies have been formulated and adopted. Those include the National Policy for Women adopted on January 31, 2001 (a sector-based action plan has been adopted to implement this policy); the National Policy for Gender Promotion, adopted on March 18,

September 2000 ; the 1976 Mexico Declaration on Women's equality and contribution to peace development ; the 2004 Heads of African State's Declaration on equality between Men and Women ; the 2002 ACP- EU Declaration of Cotonou.

³⁹ The national legislation include : Act No 98-004 of January 27, 1998 relating to the Labor Code in Benin ; Act No 2003-03 of March 3, 2003 relating to repression of the practice of female genital mutilation in Benin ; Act No 2003-04 of March 3, 2003 dealing with Sexual and reproductive health ; Act No 2002-07 of August 4, 2004 on the Code of Persons and Family which highlighted equal principles to reduce gender-based discriminations by bringing new reforms to existing legislation pertaining to persons and family ; the Act on HIV prevention, treatment and control adopted on August 18, 2005 ; Act No 2007-03 of October 16, 2007 on rural land scheme in Benin, which explicitly grants women the right to inherit land from their parents or their husbands in rural areas.

2009 which aims to reduce gender-based disparities by the end of 2025; Adult Literacy and Education Policy adopted in March 2005 to reduce women and girls' illiteracy by 50% from 2001 to 2010; Women Promotion Policy in the agricultural and rural sectors to improve living conditions for women living in rural areas and give them equal chances to participate in the development processes; Youth National Policy adopted in December 2002; the Declaration on the Benin Population's Policy; National Policy for Girls Education and Training adopted on April 11, 2007 which aims at eliminating gender disparities in the educational sector; the Millennium Development Goals to which Benin subscribed to in September 2000, and which third objective seeks to advance gender equality and women's empowerment; the Strategic Development Orientations 2006-2011 which seeks to improve human resources to increase economic productivity through fostering gender equality and women's empowerment; the Growth strategy for Poverty Reduction 2007-2009 which seeks to strengthen social protection through encouraging gender equality and women's empowerment.

2-2.3. *Efficiency* of the measures taken

The 2005 assessment⁴⁰ of the action plan for the National Women's Promotion Policy has showed that there are several obstacles connected with a poor coordination of the follow up and the evaluation of the activities' funding and the perception that this policy is an approach that focuses too much on women.

As a result, many gender disparities persist in various sectors. According to a report published by the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM)⁴¹, women's condition is precarious in spite of the government's efforts and progress achieved in advancing women. The report shows that women's enjoyment of their human and legal rights, women's protection against violence, women's access to justice, women's absence in decision-making process are still a problem. The review team has also noted difficulty regarding consideration of women's status and gender mainstreaming by women's promotion institutions.

⁴⁰ Available at the Office for the promotion of women and gender, Ministry of Family and National Solidarity

⁴¹ Mécanisme Africain d'Evaluation par les Pairs (MAEP), *Rapport d'évaluation de la République du Bénin*, janvier 2008.

The sector-based analysis indicates that the main activities geared towards advancing gender-related issues are limited to awareness campaigns and education. Very few programs have been evaluated following the gender-based approach. The National African Gender and Development Index in Africa⁴² has highlighted the challenges, problems and areas that need to be addressed. It has also indicated that low budgets are allocated to addressing gender issues. The government has not yet succeeded in committing substantial funding to gender-related issues⁴³. However, the government of Benin is concerned about gender-related issues and has provided training for the Ministry of Economy and Finance's officials on gender budgeting⁴⁴.

2-3 National Mechanism for Gender Promotion

2-3.1. National Mechanism for the Promotion of Gender

2-3.1.1. Period prior to the adoption of the National Policy for gender promotion

Before the adoption on March 18, 2009 of the National Policy for the Promotion of Gender by the government, the national structure responsible for gender-related issues was headed by a department of the Ministry of Family. This department's mission was to coordinate women-oriented policies and gender as part of the implementation of the national action plan for women's promotion. It served as a platform for government's policy to promote women and reduce disparities.

2-3.1.2. Period after the adoption of the National Policy for gender promotion.

The adoption on March 18, 2009 of the National Plan for gender promotion has strengthened the mechanism to advance gender. In an effort to better implement measures to promote gender, the government has put in place a new institutional framework, which is the National Council for the Promotion of Gender Equality and Equity (CNPEEG), under the chairmanship of the Head of State. The CNPEEG include: a Steering Committee, a Technical

⁴² Available at the Ministry of Economy and Finance.

⁴³ The focal points on gender and development of each ministry have a meager funding. The budget of the Ministry of Family and National solidarity in charge of the promotion of gender amounted 4,716,165,000 F CFA (see page 2 of the report for the exchange rate dollar/F CFA) in 2008 while its Division for gender promotion is devoted a meager funding of 8,964,000 F CFA and its focal point on gender is devoted a budget of 5,000,000 FCFA. Information available at the Ministry of Finance.

⁴⁴ The final report of the seminar available at the Ministry of Finance and Economy

Committee, a Family, Women and Children Watchdog, Technical and Financial Partners, Research and Training Institutes, Universities, the Media, Trade Unions, and Political Parties, Sector-Based Ministries, Civil Society Organizations, Parliamentarians, Communication Specialists. Besides, an Institute of Women was created and set up in March 2009 by the Head of State. The government is expected to issue a Decree defining the structures, tasks and functioning of the CNPEEG to permit the implementation of the National Plan for Gender Promotion. Pending the Decree, the Ministry of Family and National Solidarity continues to manage issues related to gender. The elaboration of the report on the Action Plan for the implementation of the National Policy for the Promotion of Gender is on the way⁴⁵.

2-3.2. Budget, strengths and weaknesses of the mechanism

In spite of the mechanism put in place, other internal factors (strengths and weaknesses) and external factors (opportunities and threats) (SWOT), exist which can determine gender promotion in Benin.

Strengths for gender promotion include: political will, legislation adoption, civil society commitment. Weaknesses include social and cultural practices which are detrimental to women and hamper efforts to reverse trends in the economic and social sectors. Other weaknesses include lack of funding for gender promotion, lack of qualified manpower, poor functioning of the mechanism for gender promotion. Besides, most of the legislation which has been adopted does not have the enabling Decree to facilitate their implementation.

As far as opportunities are concerned, there is an international legal environment that is favorable to gender promotion and the increased interest raised by issues related to human rights. A certain number of threats, however impact gender promotion, especially the macroeconomic vision of development which does not encourage gender promotion and shrinking of technical and financial partners support.

⁴⁵

The report will be available in January 2010 at the Ministry of Family and National Solidarity.

3- Current Situation of Women by Sector

3-1 Women in the education sector

3-1.1. Government policy

Education receives particular attention from the government. Many policies have been set up to address the acute problem of gender disparities in the education sector. The latest on which Benin government is still working is the Adult Literacy and Education Policy adopted in March 2005 to reduce by 50% women and girls' illiteracy between 2001 and 2010. Still, important gender disparities exist in all 5 levels of formal and informal education.

3-1.2. Disparities in all levels of formal and informal education

3-1.2.1. Nursery and Primary Education

Friedrich Ebert Foundation⁴⁶ released in 2008, statistics regarding nursery education. The survey indicates that in 2003 the total number of pupils in private and public schools nationwide stood at 18,969 of which 9,202 were girls and 9,767 were boys. According to the last *Tableau de Bord Social TBS 2007*⁴⁷, at the beginning of the school year 2006-2007, enrollment rate into Nurseries increased from 27,673, the previous school year to 39,136 (19,764 boys and 19,372 girls, with a 0.98 percent sex-ratio). In 2007, very low gross enrollment rate in nurseries was 4.47 percent nationwide, with 4.44 percent for boys and 4.50 percent for girls. Though this gross enrollment rate in nursery education is somehow even, unequal access to preschool education to the detriment of girls is still noticed.

In the primary education sector, in 2007, the total number of pupils in public and private schools was 1,474,206, with 810,643 boys and 663,553 girls respectively. The education gap between girls and boys stood at 9.98 percent. The gross enrollment rate nationwide was 98.48 percent, of which 104 percent were boys and 92 percent girls. The gross gap between girls and boys education is favorable to boys.

⁴⁶ Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, *Femmes du Bénin au Coeur de la dynamique du changement social*, Cotonou, 2008.

⁴⁷ INSAE, *Tableau de Bord Social TBS 2007*, Cotonou, décembre 2008.

3-1.2.2. Secondary education⁴⁸

For the secondary education sector, in 2005, the gross enrollment rate was 31.23 percent, with 39.8 percent for boys and 24.98 percent for girls. While there was an overall improvement of girls' situation from 2005 to 2006, the gross educational gap was favorable to boys. Total school enrollment rate for girls was lower. In 2004, girls represented 34 percent of the total number of enrollment in the first cycle of secondary education and 25 percent in the second cycle. Though one notices an increase in the number of children's registration, enrollment gap is still detrimental to girls.

3-1.2.3. Technical, vocational and secondary education

According to a report of the Ministry of Secondary Education, Technical and Vocational Training⁴⁹, the situation of girls in education is far from encouraging, even though the government set this sector of education as its second priority after primary education during its Education Review Seminar. In the year 2005, 32,165 pupils enrolled in technical and vocational schools, with 41 percent of girls. The education gap reached 18 percent to the detriment of girls. In 2004, girls represented 42 percent for this sector of education, 41 percent in 2005 and 2006 and 25 percent in 2008. The above report states that a study which was commissioned by the government in December 2008 to find out the main causes of this sharp drop from 2007 to 2008, is still on the way. The report is yet to be released⁵⁰.

3-1.2.4. Higher Education

In the year 2002, 27,614 students enrolled in public universities. This number has gradually increased every year⁵¹. It rose to 42,054 in 2006 and to 49,178 in 2007. Private universities registered a total of 12,602 students. In the year 2007, 42,741 students attended the University of Abomey-Calavi (public university) and 6,437 for the University of Parakou (Public University). Sex ratio in public universities was 0.32, approximately 3 girls for 10 boys,

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ministère de l'enseignement secondaire, de la formation technique et professionnelle, *Rapport d'étude sur l'accès des filles dans les filières de formation technique et professionnelle*, Cotonou, 2009.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ INSAE, *Tableau de Bord Social TBS 2007*, Cotonou, décembre 2008.

while sex ratio was 0.67 in private universities. Girls' enrollment percentage in public universities passed from 18.9 percent in 1997 to 22.7 in 2005. The rate has remained low in recent years. Besides, one can note a relatively low number of girls registered in universities for scientific and technical colleges.

3-1.2.5 Informal education (literacy and practical training programs)

Informal education is separate from the formal education system. Practical training lasts two to four years in structured centers, depending on the age and capacity of the trainee and the focus of the training. According to the Friedrich Ebert survey⁵², illiteracy is one of the main causes of poverty in Benin. Poverty involves 67.4 of the population, with 78.1 percent of illiterate women and 44 percent of men. Since a few years, the literacy rate has increased nationwide, from 23.3 percent in 1979 to 37.7 percent in 2002. The literacy gap between men and women is alarming. In 1979, 46 percent women were literate for 100 percent men. In 2002, 58 women were literate for 100 percent men. Men account nationwide for 61.3 percent of literacy rate and 38.7 percent for women, a literacy gap is detrimental to women by 22.6 relative points.

3-2. Women in the health sector

3-2.1. Government's policy

The government health policies cover women and girls' needs and rights pertaining to the health sector. In this regard, the national and international legislation provides ground for these policies. Legislation include the 2001 Bamako Declaration which aims at reducing maternal mortality; the National Development Policy and Strategy Paper for the Health sector (2002-2006); Act No 2003-03 of March 3, 2003 to repress the practice of Female Genital Mutilation in Benin, Act No 2003-4 of March 3, 2003 on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Reproduction, Act on HIV/AIDS Control and Prevention in Benin, adopted on August 18, 2005; the Millennium Development Goals (objectives 5 and 6 related to reproduction); the National Development Policy Paper for the health sector (2009-2018). According to the latter released by

⁵² Ibid.

the Ministry of Health in 2009⁵³, the government of Benin is supported by several technical and financial partners as part of multilateral and bilateral cooperation to attain its health objectives. But, in spite of these policies, a USAID report states that access to health services by women and children is limited by several factors, including, husbands' unwillingness to spend money on health services, as well as their opposition to family planning; women's lack of decision-making and spending authority to obtain health services for themselves or their children; and far distances to travel to obtain services and medicine, as well as their relatively high cost.

3-2-2. Health situation⁵⁴

3-2.2.1. Reproductive health

The 2006 Population and Health Survey (EDS 2006) indicates that 9 women out of 10 (88 percent) followed pre-birth care given by health personnel including mainly nurses or midwives. This rate had slightly increased above the 2001 figure. According to the 2001 Population and Health Survey, 87 percent of women had access to pre-birth care provided by health personnel.

3-2.2.2. Fertility and Family Planning⁵⁵

The 2006 Population and Health Survey indicate that with an average of 5.7 children per woman, Benin has a high fertility rate. Fertility pattern appears also to be precocious since 21 percent of young girls aged less than 20 have once delivered a live birth. Besides, this fertility rate has remained stable since the 2001 survey as the average number of baby per woman has shifted from 5.6 in 2001 to 5.7 in 2006. This rate varies according to women's educational level and the financial capacity of the household.

The 2006 Survey indicates that almost all the women and men are aware of family planning methods. Male condom, contraceptives shots and pills constitute the widely used method. A little over 2 women living as part of a couple out of 5 (45 percent) declared that they had used at least one contraceptive method. During the survey, however, only 17 percent had

⁵³ Ministère de la Santé, *Plan national de développement sanitaire 2009-2018*, Cotonou, 2009.

⁵⁴ From the latest Population and Health Survey carried out by INSAE, *Enquête Démographique et de Santé 2006*, novembre 2007.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

used other contraceptive methods of which 6 percent were modern methods and 11 percent traditional ones. The level of awareness on the use of contraceptive method is positively connected with the level of education.

3-2.2.3. Children's health⁵⁶

The 2006 Survey indicates that less than one child aged between 12 and 23 months out of 2 (47 percent) received all the vaccines of the Extended Vaccination Program. Variations highlight poor vaccination coverage in rural area as compared to urban area (43 percent and 55 percent). There is no gap between girls and boys as regard thorough vaccination. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the number of children who has been thoroughly vaccinated has increased owing to the educational level of their mothers (43 percent of children whose mothers are illiterate and 80 percent of children whose mothers attended secondary schools).

The 2006 survey outlines that children's diseases include Acute Respiratory Infections (ARI), fever and diarrhea. There is no significant sex difference regarding these diseases. The ratio of boys and girls suffering from ARI is 10 percent-9 percent respectively, fever 29 percent-28 percent, and diarrhea 10 percent and 9 percent. Living in rural area and educational level of mothers affect these indicators.

3-2.2.6. Maternal and infant mortality⁵⁷

Maternal mortality has decreased over the recent years. The survey shows that maternal mortality is estimated at 397 per 100,000 live births in 2006. But it was 498 per 100,000 live births, in 2001.

Within a recent period of time (2001-2006), per 1000 living births, 67 children died before the age of 1, 32 between 0 to 1 month and 35 between 1 and 12 months. 62 one-year-old children died before the age of five per 1000 living births. Generally between birth and the age of 5, the mortality rate has drastically decreased over the last fifteen years, shifting from 151 per 1000 living births in 1991- 1996 to 125 per 1000 living births in 2001-2006.

During the first month of life, mortality rate for boys is higher than that of girls (41

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

percent for boys and 34 percent for girls). On the other hand, during post-neonatal period, gaps between boys and girls mortality are meaningless. Globally, during the first year of life, the mortality rate for boys is higher than that of girls (80 percent and 72 percent). Between age 1 and 5, there is little difference between girls and boys (64 percent and 65 percent, respectively)

3-2.2.7. Health services attendance⁵⁸

More than three-quarters of women (76 percent) live 5 kilometers away from a Health Center. In rural areas, 70 percent of women have access to health centers located at less than 5 kilometers away whereas in urban areas, 80 percent of women have access to health facilities. It takes at least 31 minutes to reach the nearest Health Center in urban areas. Access to various health services is better in urban areas (especially in Cotonou) than in rural areas.

3-2.2.8. Sex-based difference in malaria and HIV/AIDS⁵⁹

According to the 2006 health survey, malaria is a major health problem in Benin and a leading cause of morbidity and mortality among vulnerable groups including children aged less than 5 years and pregnant women. In spite of progress accomplished to prevent and treat malaria, national health statistics have shown that malaria is the leading infection which accounts for 36 percent of the reasons bringing the general population to the hospital and 45 percent of children aged less than 5. Malaria also constitutes the first cause of hospitalization for the general population and for children as well, with 18 percent and 29 percent respectively. Children and pregnant women are the most vulnerable groups.

According to the 2006 health survey, about eight people out of ten (79 percent) were surveyed and provided blood to determine HIV prevalence. The Coverage rate of the survey was higher in women (83 percent) than in men (75 percent). HIV prevalence among the general population is 1.2 percent according to the survey. Seroprevalence rate in women aged between 15 and 49 is about 1.5 percent; twice the rate in men of the same age range (0.8). This results in

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

an infection ratio of 1.88 between men and women. In other words, 188 women are infected⁶⁰ for 100 men. Seroprevalence rate in urban areas is about twice that of rural areas (2.2 percent against 1.0 percent).

3-2.2.10. Female Genital Mutilation⁶¹

According to the EDS 3, a little more than one out of 10 women (13 percent) said that they had been circumcised. The practice of female circumcision varies significantly depending on geographic areas and ethnic groups of victims. It is widespread among the Bariba ethnic group (74 percent of women undergo female circumcision), the Fulfulde ethnic group-Peulh (72 percent), the Yoa and the Lokpa ethnic groups (53 percent). Female circumcision rate is very low among the Adja and Fon ethnic groups.

3-2.2.11. Nutritional status of women⁶²

The nutritional status of women aged between 15 and 49 is one of the determinants of maternal mortality, smooth pregnancies and their outcome. It also affects morbidity and mortality of young children. According to DHS III⁶³, nearly three-quarters of women have a BMI⁶⁴ of between 18.5 and 24.9. 9% of women have a BMI below 18.5, indicating a state of chronic energy deficiency: 7% have a slight thinness and 2% had moderate or severe emaciation. The proportion of women who are below the critical threshold of 18.5 varies significantly according to socio-demographic characteristics. It is among the youngest women (15-19 years) that the level of chronic energy deficiency is higher (14%). Similarly, in rural areas, the

⁶⁰ According to the European Union report on Benin gender profile later quoted in this report, these two main factors among others explain the fact that infection rate is higher in women than in men:

- In urban areas, due to their precarious financial situation, 15 to 19- year-old girls experience precocious sexuality with older and wealthy men. In most situations, they have no choice than consenting to have sex without condom with their sexual partners;
- In rural areas, because of social practices and beliefs, most women do not participate in decision making regarding sexuality. Due to this situation of men's domination over women, the latter cannot impose the use of condom on their husbands who usually have multiple sexual partners.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ INSAE defines BMI as the body mass index of the Quételet index. To indicate a chronic energy deficiency in women, the value 18.5 is generally used as a threshold.

proportion of malnourished women is twice higher than in Cotonou (10% against 5%). In the departments, there are significant differences, the most critical situation occurs in the Department of Atacora with 16%. In contrast, nearly one in five women (19%) had a higher BMI, greater than or equal to 25.

3-3. Women in agriculture, livestock, forestry and fisheries

3-3.1. Government's policies

The central mechanism of the agricultural sector is the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, responsible for developing and implementing programs related to agriculture and mainly community development with a strong component including outreach education program in rural areas, soil conservation and plant protection. The Ministry of Environment and NGOs also carry out actions in this sector. Agricultural policy aims at consolidating the gains both in terms of food sufficiency and export earnings⁶⁵.

This policy is based on strategies for increased farmers' empowerment, diversification of agricultural production and protection of domestic produce. In September 2001, government adopted the policy of promoting women in agriculture and rural development which aims primarily at reducing gender inequalities existing in the sector. Apart from this policy specifically orientated towards women, government had previously designed other programs which, by their nature, have implications for women. These include: rural education and food security programs, agricultural popularization project, nutritional education project, and agricultural and community micro-projects fund. Denmark embassy and FIDA are the main financial partners that support the sector with many programs.

One of the most important funds for gender promotion is devoted to the agricultural sector by the government. In 2008, a budget of 133,585,760 FCFA (see page 2 of this report for the exchange rate dollars/ FCFA) was allocated to the focal point on gender and development out of 61,911,667,000 FCFA for the Ministry. This amount is significant when compared to the one for the Ministry of Youth (8,000,000 FCFA out of 6,576,916,000 FCFA).

⁶⁵

Multi-sector action plan for the implementation of women promotion policy, available at the Ministry of Family and National solidarity,

3-3.2. Women's situation in these sectors⁶⁶

3-3.2.1. The large majority of women are in agriculture

According to a report of Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2001)⁶⁷, the agricultural sector provides 40% of the GDP and employs 70% of the population. Seventy percent of the female population live in rural areas where they carry out between 60 to 80% of the agricultural work and furnish up to 44% of the work necessary for household subsistence. Work in fields takes up approximately 200 days/year with women devoting 10-12 hours/day to agriculture-related tasks (UNICEF, 1998)⁶⁸. In this sector, women engage in many types of work such as plowing, land clearing, planting, weeding, fertilizing, harvesting and transportation.

In the field of livestock, women always hold the lead regarding poultry, pig and small scale breeding. The same situation applies to fish production where men are concerned only with catching fish. As a result, women outnumber men in the agricultural sector. They constitute the backbone of peasant organizations: in 2000 the number of women's organizations was 1,808 and they account for 70% membership of all farmers' organizations.⁶⁹ But they still face significant problems.

3-3.2.2. Limited access to land and agricultural credit

The unavailability of land is one of the major difficulties facing women. They are landless farmers. But the Rural Land Code adopted in 2007 is a response that explicitly guarantees women the right to inherit lands from their parents or husbands. Legacy is one of the main means of access to land in Benin, particularly in the South and Central regions of the country. Traditionally, only men are entitled to land inheritance. This can be explained by the tradition which confers leadership role to men. Agricultural gender-disaggregated statistics show that of all the lands acquired through a secured procedure, 13% belongs to women.

It is now accepted that the poor performance of agriculture in Benin (extension of

⁶⁶ According to a World Bank report, four factors are paramount for appreciating gender constraints in the agricultural sector, including women lack control of and limited access to land, labor and time constraints, sexual division of labor, the expansion of cash crops such as cotton which has important and often unexpected gender implications locally, Ibid.

⁶⁷ www.ruralpovertyportal.org

⁶⁸ The year 1998 UNICEF report on Benin

⁶⁹ Ibid.

cultivation, introduction of new varieties, etc.) results from constraints related to land issues⁷⁰. It must be noted that this practice of exclusion of women still exists in some families, despite the promulgation of the Family Code. To this end, the Government has proposed in its new national gender promotion policy to establish mechanisms that may allow intervening on behalf of women in rural land tenure. Other tools developed for securing rural land includes the access to land project of the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) funded by the U.S. government.

Women also have poor access to agricultural credit. Because agricultural credit granting is contingent, among other things, upon ownership of available land, women are often marginalized in this sector. According to the last *Tableau de Bord*, in 2003, women have 26 percent of bank credits allocated to the sector (74 percent for men). However, the same report indicates that women benefit from micro finance credits (60 percent) more than men (40 percent).

The national policy for Women's promotion in agriculture and farms (PPFR), which is a response to this problem, seeks to make the selection criteria for granting credit to rural women more flexible and to encourage medium and long term loans.

3-3.2. Women in the forestry and water sector

According to a report released by the European Union in September 2006, overexploitation and depletion of land due to the population growth highlight the disparities and inequalities between women and men in forestry resources management⁷¹. But in this area, statistics are scanty at the INSAE. However, in terms of division of labor, men are engaged in cutting timber and providing service. Women are more predominant in the cutting and transportation of firewood, and in charcoal production. The collection, processing and trading of non fossil products are also female-dominated⁷². Yet, their opinion matters little in decision making and in managing forest resources.

⁷⁰ Mécanisme Africain d'Évaluation par les Pairs, Rapport d'évaluation de la République du Bénin, janvier 2008.

⁷¹ Union Européenne, *Profil genre du Bénin*, Cotonou, 2006.

⁷² Ibid.

Though drinking water is mostly accessible to urban women, the rate of drinking water supply in rural areas remains low. According to the latest population census, the proportion of households with access to drinking water in rural areas is 50.20 percent. The proportion has reached less than 50% in recent years (44 percent in 2006 against 46.5 percent in 2007). But by their traditional role as housewives, rural women are responsible for water supply. They are therefore forced to travel long distances (5 to 10 km) during the dry season to have access to water whose quality is also questionable.

3-3.3. Women in fishing Division of labor by sex is observed in this sector. Men take care of catching fishes. But other fishing-related activities are varied and are performed by women. These include fish and shrimp processing, fresh or processed fishery products in local markets.

3-4. Women in economic activities

3-4.1. Government policies⁷³

Benin subscribed to the Millennium Development Goals in 2000. The third goal aims at gender equality and women's empowerment. It has also adopted the 2006-2011 Strategic Development Orientations. One of these orientations seeks "to increase human capital so as to improve the productivity of the national economy" and which implementation goes through "promoting gender equality and women's empowerment".

Besides, Benin government adopted the 2007-2009 Growth Strategy for Poverty Reduction which aims at "strengthening social protection", by "promoting gender equality and women's empowerment".

A European Union report on Gender profile⁷⁴ notes the establishment of local mutual agricultural savings and credit banks (CLCAM) in all municipalities. On February 27, 2007, the President of the Republic of Benin, Dr. Boni Yayi, launched a micro credit project for the poor to make the poor, especially women become economically active. Beneficiaries receive 30,000F CFA with a 2% interest per annum and a 3% discount as contribution.

Regarding women's employment in Benin, there are many legislations for the

⁷³

National Policy for the Promotion of Gender, available at the Ministry of Family and National Solidarity

⁷⁴

Ibid.

advancement of women. The government of Benin has ratified a number of instruments proposed by the International Labor Office (ILO) to defend women's labor rights⁷⁵.

3-4.2. *The current situation of working women*

According to a UNDP report on human development in Benin, domestic activities represent 13.5% of the women's workday in towns and 13.6% in rural areas and 4.3% and 4.5% for men⁷⁶. According to the report, if one takes into account domestic activities, women's man-hour input is 43% higher than men's in both urban and rural areas. When the activity of women as domestic employee is paid for, their activity is recognized as an economic one. A report commissioned by the World Bank suggests that UN agencies should invest in ensuring a better integration of unpaid work into economic policy⁷⁷.

According to the 2002 population census, working women serve mostly as housewives (over 50%). Paid work, especially in the private sector is affected by gender disparities.

The overall participation rate in economy (63.8%) identified by the 2002 general population census underlines a gap rather favorable to men. This gap which is 9% shows the difference between men participation rate, 68.3% and women participation rate, 59.7%. According to these statistics, men contribute more to the economy than women.

A sex-disaggregated survey in 2007 of the Ministry of Civil Service shows a male-dominated civil service, 73.23% male and 26.77% female⁷⁸. The 1997 civil servants census indicates that 26.8% of female civil servants were concentrated in social ministries and 65.9% were in categories C or D. Thus, of five senior staff (category A), there was only one female.

This picture has been confirmed by the findings of the assessment made by the African Peer Review Mechanism in 2008 which reveals that "26.6% of public sector workforce and 41% of formal private sector are women and that women are less promoted to managerial positions⁷⁹.

⁷⁵ These include: (i) Recommendation No. 13 on night work for women, adopted in 1921, (ii) Convention No. 100 on Equal Remuneration, Convention of 1951 concerning equal remuneration for men and women for equal work.

⁷⁶ PNUD, *Rapport sur le développement humain au Bénin*, Cotonou, 1998.

⁷⁷ Gabriel Brunnich and Danielle Simone Vacarr, *The challenges in integrating unpaid work into economic policy in lower and middle-income countries*, 2004.

⁷⁸ Ministère de la Fonction Publique et du Travail, *Fichier Unique de Référence (FUR) 2007*, Cotonou, 2007.

⁷⁹ Mécanisme Africain d'Evaluation par les Pairs, *Rapport d'évaluation de la République du Bénin*, janvier 2008.

3.4.2. Women and Entrepreneurial Development (Microfinance)

The majority of women are involved in trade activities, either formally or informally. They are in the distribution channels of food products and manufactured goods, food services and clothing; this leads to a high rate of trade business executive among them (78.2%) and food business executives (92.6%). In carrying out their activities, women were often confronted with difficult access to credit because of limited access to banking; hence the increasing number of microfinance institutions designed to meet the demands of women. Several development partners and even the government of Benin have supported various micro-finance initiatives in order to promote women's trading activities.

3-5. Women's situation in other sectors⁸⁰

3-5.1. Gender and political governance

3-5.1.1 At the central level

Very often in Benin, women have more duties than rights and this hinders their contribution to public and political life. Gender inequalities are striking as far as participation in the decision-making process is concerned. Women's weak representation in the civil service, state institutions, as well as within the boards of political parties is a problem.

The analysis of women representation in decision-making bodies and their participation in the economy is conclusive with some findings. At state institutional level, the gap is as striking as in the public service; women suffer great hardship in order to integrate these decision-making bodies in spite of a great deal of lobbying and pressure being made over recent years.

At executive level, the percentage of women members of government fluctuated between 10 and 23% from 1991 to 2008. These figures varied from one government to another (from 23.08% in 2007, there was a drop to 13.33% in 2008, that is 4 women out of 30 ministries). Apart from their small number, when they happen to be represented, they are trusted with departments which seemingly are exclusively gender oriented (Ministry of Health, Ministries of Education, Ministry of Commerce, Ministry in charge of Family and Childhood, etc).

At the level of Parliament, the situation is not better. From 1995 to 2008, women's

⁸⁰ From the report of Friedrich Ebert Foundation, *ibid.*

representation was poor. It varied from 6.25% to 12.19%. The main cause for this poor level of representation of women in the parliament can be accounted for by the fact that in spite of their true involvement in movements and political parties activities, very few of them occupy leadership positions. During the making of electoral lists, they are poorly taken into account, and therefore, they have very little chance to be elected.

At the level of the Constitutional Court, which is the highest jurisdiction in constitutional matters, and which is in charge of checking of every law's conformity with the constitution, women's representation is poor: it varies from 14.28% to 28.57%. Nonetheless, two women successfully presided over the institution in succession over three mandates in total.

At the High Court of Justice, there is poor women representation with only one woman over 13 members, i.e. 7.69% for either of the two terms of office of that institution.

At the Social and Economic Counsel, women's representation rates are the worst of all state institutions: the rates are 1 woman out of 30 members, i.e. 3.33% for first and third term of office and two women out of 30, i.e. 6.66% for second term of office. Women have not featured on the boards of the last two mandates.

At the Presidential Mediation Body (Organe Présidentiel de Médiation- OPM), there is a 33.33% women representation rate.

At the Administrative Permanent Secretariat of the National Electoral Commission (SAP-CENA), the representation rate is 25 %; that is 1 woman for every 4 members.

3-5.1.1 At the local level

Within the framework of the first local elections organized in 2002, women representation within local councils was only 3.75%; that is 45 elected women out of a total of 1,200 town councilors. At the second local elections, there was a 0.43% slight increase in women representation, which corresponds to 60 elected women out of 1,435 town and local councilors.

3.5-2 Gender and legal issues

Although Benin has ratified several conventions, conferences, international agreements and passed internal laws to correct inequalities between men and women, discrimination still prevails due to the coexistence of modern law, *Coutumier du Dahomey* (1931)⁸¹ and socio cultural beliefs. As a matter of fact, the *Coutumier du Dahomey*⁸² grants little rights to women and concedes to her nothing else but servitude.⁸³ With the adoption of the Family Code⁸⁴, the Legislature integrated gender equality principles contained in the 11th December 1990 Constitution and Benin international commitments. The passing of that law stands for an exceptional legal revolution with regard to the promotion of women, but socio cultural beliefs still favor resistance to change.

3-5.3. Gender, arts, culture and tourism

According to a European Union report⁸⁵, women generally come tops as far as promoting local cultural resources is concerned (the art of cooking, dressing, pottery, basket making, etc). These activities are close to those traditionally practiced at home, including handicraft. Nevertheless, women's poor level of education does not allow them to join the circle of trained artists. Some women emerge nowadays in drama and traditional songs. An Arts and Trades Centre for Women has been created in Parakou (CAMFP) under the initiative of the city of Parakou, with the financial support of the UNFPA and the UNDP; its activities were launched on 17 December 2008. Moreover, women take active part in the growth of the tourism and hotel trade sub sector. They contribute to feeding, housing, and are employed as tourists' guides.

⁸¹ The Coutumier du Dahomey provides in its 127 article that: " a woman has no legal power"...She is part and parcel of her husband's properties and inheritance.

⁸² The Constitutional Court (decision of the Constitutional Court N° DCC 96-063 dated September 26, 1996) declared that the Coutumier, as defined in its preamble, is a mere collection of customs of different Beninese ethnic groups, and it cannot be considered as a binding legal instrument. Even though the provisions of this document are not legally binding, they continue to be followed in Benin.

⁸³ European Union *Profile genre du Bénin*, Ibid.

⁸⁴ Act 2004-07 of August 24, 2004 serving as Family Code.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

4- List of gender- related projects

Several programs and projects have been initiated under the framework of gender promotion and supported by financial partners and International NGO (See section 5). But very few of them will be catalogued due to the limited space allocated for this.

4-1. Projects implemented by the Ministry of Family, other sector-based ministries and NGOs

- Gender Promotion Project (funded by Public Investment Program) with a 25 million F CFA⁸⁶ financial input;
- Support Program for Gender Approach Application in Poverty Reduction strategies (PARAG) co-funded by Swiss Cooperation, Denmark Embassy and the UNDP, with a 70.580 million FCFA budget;
- Support Program for democracy and gender equality funded by Denmark embassy with approximately 3 billion FCFA
- Women legal statute and socio economic capacities reinforcement project funded by the UNFPA, to the tune of 93.5 million FCFA.
- Local structures capacity reinforcement support project for fighting violence against women funded by the UNFPA;
- Gender promotion strategies reinforcement support project, funded with CFA F 110 million by the UNDP;
- Support project for the implementation of a law against Female Genital Mutilations, with 225 million FCFA;
- Selective support project against Female Genital Mutilations for workshops organizations funded by UNICEF by the sum of 8 million FCFA;
- The Policy implementation for Women's Rights-Empower project, initiated by the United States President for women's justice and empowerment initiative

⁸⁶ For the exchange rate dollar/ FCFA, see page 2 of this report.

4-2. Projects and programs implemented by the Ministries in charge of Education and the NGOs

- Girls' technical and vocational education promotion project;
- Girls' general secondary education promotion program;
- The CAEF -Communities Acting for Girls 'Education project (February 2008 - February 2012) funded by the USAID and implemented by the World Education NGO;
- The Batonga Girls' Education program funded by the United States Government and implemented by World Education;
- The Netherland Development Organization (SNV) Strategic Direction Program for contributing to increase girls' access and their retention in schools;
- The CARE International program for Communities Promotion and Participation to Basic Education for all;
- The Right to Play Program for girls' education;
- Benin – FNUAP 7th cooperation program (2009-2013) of which some activities are gender-centered;
- FAWE-Benin programs, a Pan-African organization for gender promotion;
- The Plan Benin NGO Basic Education Program that takes into account girls' access and their retention in schools;
- The CRS American NGO Food for Education Program which aims at improving rural areas, especially girls' access to education;
- The EUCOM program for enhancing girls' education funded by the Netherlands Embassy (with the collaboration of UNICEF);
- The Benin Education Sector Support Program for Girls' Education, funded by the Danish Cooperation and implemented by the government of Benin with the support of national NGOs;
- Benin - UNICEF cooperation program (2009-2013) of which some activities are girls' education-centered;
- The Swiss Support Program to Girls' Education Promotion (ASPEF) that reinforces girls' education at nursery, primary, secondary and university levels.

5- Gender Information Sources

5-1. List of International Organizations and NGOs

These are multilateral, bilateral partners, international and local NGOs. One should note that the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) which takes an active part in development assistance in Benin is so far absent in gender issues.

5-1.1. Multilateral partners

- United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) has provided support for the promotion of women and gender in various activities with the Government of Benin, including incorporation in training supported by UNFPA for the Ministry of Health, and support for the Ministry of Family and National Solidarity. It participates in the UN theme group on gender.
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have taken gender issues into consideration and have integrated them in all its sectors (environment, health, governance, and information technology).
- United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), in the context of its cooperative agreement with the Government of Benin, UNICEF has engaged in various activities to protect and promote children and women in the country.
- Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and Finnish International Development Agency (FIDA) work in the agricultural sector through the support they give to projects and programs initiated by the Ministry of Agriculture.
- The World Bank also functions in different fields, one of which is poverty reduction. It has supported a project on the implementation of law against Female Genital Mutilations.
- World Health Organization (WHO) supports the Ministry of Health in the framework of the Extended Vaccination Program and in the struggle against violence against women.
- International Labor Organization (ILO) also supports the Government of Benin, especially on girls' rights issues.
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is also a partner of the Office for the Promotion of Women and Gender in the Ministry of Family.
- European Union is a partner of that Office as well.

5-1.2. Bilateral partners

- The Swiss Government Direction for Development and Cooperation (DDC) is making a very active intervention in gender-related issues in Benin.
- Royal Danish Embassy provides support for a wide range of gender-related activities. It is a key partner in gender issues. From 1998, it has supported more than 18 gender-specific projects. It also supports important programs in different sectors that take into account gender considerations.
- US Agency for International Development (USAID) contributes to gender promotion. It focuses on issues related to education and violence against women.
- Netherlands Development Organization (SNV) has been integrating, since 1995, gender as a cross-cutting issue in its programming.
- The Belgian Cooperation is a partner of the Office for the promotion of Women and Gender in the Ministry of Family.
- The German Cooperation, through GTZ, contributes to gender promotion
- The Canadian Cooperation is also a partner of the Office for the promotion of Women and Gender in the Ministry of Family.

5-1.3. International NGOs

- Oxfam Québec contributes in the field of gender promotion
- Plan-Bénin contributes in the field of gender promotion and supports gender promotion actions
- Care international **is** currently implementing the project Empower funded by the U.S.A
- The American NGO CRS which contributes to the education of children and mainly of girls in rural areas
- The NGO « Right To Play » which implements a project for girls' education
- The NGO Word Education which implements projects and programs for girls' education
- FAWE- Bénin, a Pan-African organization for gender promotion.

5-1.4. National NGOs and Civil Society

Several national NGOs act for gender promotion in various sectors. The Friedrich Ebert Foundation report accounts for a survey on 150 NGOs⁸⁷ across the country. But this report only takes into account the list⁸⁸ provided by the Ministry of Family, in charge of gender promotion:

- Association des Femmes Juristes du Bénin (AFJB)
- Comité-Inter Africain section du Bénin (CI/AF Bénin)
- Réseau des Femmes Africaines Ministres et Parlementaires (REFAMP/Bénin)
- Réseau d'Intégration des Femmes des ONGs et Associations Africaines (RIFONGA-Bénin)
- Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF-Bénin)
- Sœurs Unies à l'œuvre (SUO)
- Dignité Féminine
- Association Béninoise pour la Promotion de la Femme (ABPF)
- Réseau des Femmes Elues Locales (REFEL)
- Réseau des femmes Elues Conseillères (REFEC)
- Fédération Nationales des Associations des Femmes du Bénin
- Women Legal Rights (WLR)
- Section Féminine du Conseil Inter Religieux du Bénin (CIRB)
- Réseau National pour la Parité (RNAP)
- Réseau des Femmes Leaders (RéFel)
- Fondation Regard d'Amour
- Donga Women Micro finance
- Réseau des Associations et ONG islamiques du Bénin (RAI-Bénin)
- Réseau National des ONG pour la Protection de l'Enfant et de la Femme (RÉNOPEF)

⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 184

⁸⁸ Elle est loin d'être exhaustive. Elle regroupe en majorité les ONGs les plus actives à Cotonou

5-2. List of reports and references

5-2.1. Documents Reviewed

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- www.unesco.org/wef/country-report/benin
- <http://siteresources.worldbank.org>
- www.ruralpovertyportal.org

5-2.3. Some of the people interviewed that work on Gender issues

- Madame Deen Alidou Aïchatou, Focal Point on Gender and Development, Ministry of Agriculture. Tel. (229) 2130 02 89, Mobile: 90 92 64 26, E-mail: cdpadsa2@intnet.bj.
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- Catherine Agossouvo, Head of the Office for the Promotion of Women and Gender, Ministry of Family. Tel. 21 31 09 71, E-mail: dpfgmfe@yahoo.fr.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Gender inequality is costly to Benin's economic and social development and to the realization of its growth and poverty reduction objectives. Throughout this report, the disparities have been highlighted in many areas including women's participation in decision-making process, marriage, access to education, access to the job market, access to economic activities and labor, access to health care, access to land and access to credit and microcredit.

To cope with the situation, the Government has taken appropriate actions. It has adhered to various conventions and agreements for advancing rights pertaining to women and girls. It has also set up an enabling environment for women to be actors and beneficiaries of development by building their capacity through education, health and balanced access to employment and other sources of wealth. Over the recent years, several policies have been formulated and adopted. Subsequently, many projects and programmes have been carried out to promote gender equality. A new national mechanism for the promotion of gender has also been set up and presided over by the Head of State. However, this new mechanism has its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) and many factors still hamper the promotion of women. In the recommendations below, JICA can find the way to better its assistance strategy to Benin's people, especially by taking into account gender issues in its programmes and projects.

Recommendations for a Cross-cutting Approach to Gender Integration

- Adopt a cross-cutting approach. Most important, because gender issues affect all development sectors, a strategic approach to reducing gender barriers and enhancing developmental impact must cut across all existing programmes objectives, and should cut across any new objectives developed.
- Strengthen the current programmes of JICA. Although current objectives and activities cannot be greatly modified, some steps can be taken to address gender issues within the current programmes and activities and, especially, to measure and report impact more effectively by taking gender into account.
- Develop policies, structures, and procedures that favor gender-integrated, synergistic programming.

- Develop local capacity to promote and implement gender-sensitive programmes. Effective implementation of JICA's programmes, and achievement of the development objectives set forth by JICA and other donors and, especially, by the Government of Benin as set forth in the National Policy for Gender Promotion, depends on developing sustainable local capacity to identify, address, and undertake effective advocacy and action on development issues, including the substantial gender gap in access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making. Local NGOs constitute a substantial and valuable resource for advocating and implementing development programmes. Many local NGOs are working to improve the situation of women or include attention to gender issues among their activities. However, most are new, small, and lack access to institutional-development, technical, and financial resources.
- Develop guidelines for new programming. Develop and disseminate guidelines to ensure adequate attention to gender and adherence to the cross-sectoral gender strategy by all new objectives and activities.

Recommendations for Linkages with Other Donors

- Liaise with other donors such as Denmark Embassy which is very active in gender issues.
- Encourage other donors to provide support to the technical support entity for local NGOs.
- Encourage other donors to make use of these local NGOs in implementing gender-related programmes.
- Coordinate with other donors gender-related activities in support of the gender strategy, and seek greater collaboration for developing integrated projects.