

**Republic of Benin:
Final Evaluation of the
ADECOI project**

**Report submitted to:
United Nations Capital Development Fund**

**Executive Summary
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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACOB	Association of Borgou's Communes (Association des Communes du Borgou)
ADECOI	Project to Support Communal Development and Local Initiatives in Borgou (Appui au Développement des Communes et aux Initiatives locales)
AGR	Income-Generating Activities (Activités Génératrices de Revenus)
ANCB	National Association of Municipalities of Benin (Association Nationale des Communes du Bénin)
CAF	Departmental Funding Committee (Comité départemental d'Attribution des Financements)
CCD	Communal Development Commissions (Commissions communales de développement)
CDCC	Departmental Council of Cooperation and Coordination (Conseil Départemental de Concertation et de Coordination)
CeCPA	Communal Centre for Agricultural Promotion (Centre Communal pour la Promotion Agricole)
CeRPA	Regional Centre for Agricultural Promotion in Borgou/Alibori (Centre Régional pour la Promotion Agricole Borgou/Alibori)
CICIEL	Inter-Communal Centre on Local Economic Information (Centre Inter communal d'Informations Économiques Locales)
CIDR	International Development Research Centre – IDRC (Centre International de Développement et de Recherche)
CLCAM	Agricultural and Mutual Credit Local Savings Bank (Caisse Locale de Crédit Agricole et Mutuel)
COFIL	Committee to Provide Funding Allocation to Local Initiatives (Comité d'Octroi des Financements aux Initiatives Locales)
COP	Orientation Committee of the ADECOI Project (Comité d'Orientation du Projet ADECOI)
COPAF	Steering Committee for Funding Allocation (Comité de Pilotage et d'Attribution des Financements)
CID	Communes' Investment Credit (Crédit d'Investissement des Communes)
CPS	Centre for Social Promotion (Centre de Promotion Sociale)
C/ST	Chief, Technical Services (Chef Service Technique)
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency (Coopération danoise)
DAT	Delegation for Land-Use Planning (Délégation à l'Aménagement du Territoire)
DGAT	Directorate-General for Territorial Administration (Direction Générale de l'Administration Territoriale)
DGTCP	Directorate-General for Treasury and Public Accounting (Direction Générale du Trésor et de la Comptabilité Publique)
DHD	Sustainable Human Development (Développement Humain Durable)
DSRP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper – PRSP (Document de Stratégie de Réduction de la Pauvreté)
ECVR	Studies on the Living Conditions of Rural Households (Études sur les Conditions de Vie des Ménages Ruraux)
EDP	Shared Development Spaces (Espaces de Développement Partagés)
EMAC	Mobile Team to Support Communes (Équipe Mobile d'Appui aux Communes - financement Union Européenne)
EMP	Mid-Term Assessment (Évaluation à mi-parcours)
FADEC	Fund to Support the Development of Communes (Fonds d'Appui au Développement des Communes)
FBS	Belgian Survival Fund (Fonds Belge de Survie)
FDL	Local Development Fund (Fonds de Développement Local)
FIC	Part of FDL: Inter-communal Fund (Fonds Inter-communal)
FISC	Part of FDL: Social/Community Investment Fund (Fonds d'Investissement socio-communautaire)
GBCO	Budgetary Management Software (Logiciel de gestion budgétaire)

GERED	Study and Research Group on Environment and Development (Groupe d'Étude et de Recherche sur l'Environnement et le Développement)
GTZ	German Agency for Technical Cooperation
GRN	Management of Natural Resources (Gestion des ressources naturelles)
IFDC	International Center for soil Fertility and agricultural Development
IMF	Microfinance Institutions
MCL	Home of Local Collectivities (Maison des Collectivités Locales)
MAEP	Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries (Ministère de l'Agriculture, de l'Élevage et de la Pêche)
MCA	Millennium Challenge Account (USA)
MD	Decentralization Mission (Mission de Décentralisation)
MCPD	Ministry for Planning and Development (Ministère chargé de la Planification et du Développement)
MCCAG	Ministry for the Coordination of Governmental Action, Prospective and Development (Ministère chargé de la Coordination de l'Action Gouvernementale, de la Prospective et du Développement)
MDGLAAT	Ministry of Decentralization, Governance, Administration and Spatial Planning (Ministère de la Décentralisation, de la Gouvernance locale, de l'Administration et de l'Aménagement du Territoire)
MIS	UNCDF Information System – database (Système d'Information du FENU- Base de données)
MISD	Ministry of the Interior, Security and Decentralization (Ministère de l'Intérieur, de la Sécurité et de la Décentralisation)
MISPCL	Department of the Interior, Public Security and Local Government (Ministère de l'Intérieur, de la Sécurité Publique et des Collectivités Locales)
MFE	Ministry of Finance and Economy (Ministère des Finances et de l'Économie)
MPD	Ministry of Planning and Development (Ministère chargé de la Planification et du Développement)
MPO	UNCDF Procedure Manual (Manuel des Procédures et d'Opération -FENU)
ONASA	National Office for the Support of Food Security (Office National d'Appui à la Sécurité Alimentaire)
PADEL	Project to support the local development in East Borgou and West-Atacora – UNCDF-UNDP, 1996-2002 (Projet d'appui au développement local dans le Borgou– Est et l'Atacora-Ouest - FENU-PNUD, 1996-2002)
PAI	Annual Investment Programme (Programme Annuel d'Investissement)
PACA	Participation and Action for Local Competitiveness (Participation et Action pour la Compétitivité Locale)
PACEA	Communal Water and Sanitation Programme (Programme d'Appui aux Communes dans le secteur de l'Eau et de l'Assainissement)
PACOB	Project to Support Communes in Borgou – UNDP (Projet d'Appui aux Communes du Borgou - PNUD)
PADEB	Project to Support Husbandry in Borgou (Projet d'Appui au développement de l'Elevage dans le Borgou)
PADER	Project to Support Rural Development (Projet d'Appui au Développement Rural)
PARIEFIC	Action Plan for the Commune's Institutional, Economic and Financial Recovery (Plan d'Action pour le Redressement Institutionnel, Economique et Financier de la Commune)
PDC	Communal Development Programme (Programme de Développement Communal)
PDL	Local Development Programme (Programme de Développement Local)
PDM	Municipal Development Programme (Programme de Développement Municipal)
PIC	Communal Investment Programme – three-year mandate, in principle (Programme d'Investissement Communal)
PNDCC	National Programme to Support Community-Led Development – World Bank (Programme National d'appui au Développement Conduit par les Communautés - Banque Mondiale)

PRODECOM	Project to Support Community Start-Ups – European Union (Projet d'appui au Démarrage des Communes - Union Européenne)
PRODOC	ADECOI Project Document (Document de projet ADECOI)
PROMIC	Microfinance and Marketing Project – IFAD (Projet de Micro finance et de Commercialisation - FIDA)
PTF	Multi-purpose Platforms (Plateformes multifonctionnelles)
RCPA	Communal Agricultural Promotion Officer (Responsable Communal de la Promotion Agricole)
RFUS	Simplified Urban Land-Property Register (Registre Foncier Urbain Simplifié)
RGF	Receiver-General of Finance (Receveur Général des Finances)
SA	Food Security (Sécurité Alimentaire)
SAF	Administrative and Financial Service (Service administratif et financier)
SAFIC	System of Financial and Institutional Analysis of Local Communities (Système d'Analyse Financière et Institutionnelles des Collectivités locales)
SAIL	Part of FDL: Support Grant to Local Initiatives (Subvention d'Appui aux Initiatives Locales)
SIG-GL	Information Management System – Local Governance (Système de Gestion de l'information – Gouvernance Locale)
SNV	Netherlands Development Organization (Organisation Néerlandaise de Développement)
UAC :	ADECOI Support-Advice Unit (Unité d'Appui-Conseil ADECOI)
UNCDF	United Nations Capital Development Fund (Fonds d'Équipement des Nations Unies)
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNV	United Nations Volunteers

1. PROGRAMME'S REFERENCE DATA

Country: BENIN

Project number: BEN/02/C01

Project Title: Project to Support Communal Development and Local Initiatives in Borgou (ADECOI)

BEN/02/C01	
UNDP:	US \$ 983,521
UNCDF:	US \$ 1,631,000
FBS:	US \$ 2,640,000 ¹
Government	US \$ 160,000
Communes:	US \$ 440,000
Total	US \$ 5,854,521

Area: Local Governance and fight against poverty

Government

Executing Agency: Ministry of the Interior, Public Security and Local Government (MISPCL)

Approval Date: 17 December 2002

Duration: 5 years

Date of Final Evaluation: October 2007

¹ To this amount devoted to project's activities in the country, one needs to add the fees for project formulation, management and supervision funded by UNCDF (FBS' total contribution is 2,925,282 Euros)

2. EVALUATION OBJECTIVES

2.1. Evaluation Objectives

According to the terms of reference provided to the consultants, the mission of the final evaluation of the ADECOI Project had to address the following objectives:

- Help the Government of Benin, the communes of the area of intervention, the Belgian Survival Fund, UNCDF and UNDP to understand the project's effectiveness, efficiency and relevance while reaching its expected impact, sustainability and verifying the stakeholders' and beneficiaries' levels of satisfaction;
- Help the project managers and partners to draw key lessons about the design, implementation and management of the project;
- Help the project managers and partners to evaluate if the context is conducive to a replication in other areas of the country;
- Assess if the commitments made at the project's approval were fulfilled, especially the orientation adopted by FBS towards food security;
- Assess, on the one hand, UNCDF's strategic positioning compared to other donors operating in Benin in the decentralization area and, on the other hand, the relevance of its partnerships and lessons learned;
- Specify the post-project's actual needs for follow-up and future action;
- Draw on the knowledge generated by this experience for possible future UNCDF programming in Benin and indicate which trends it should take.

2.2. Programme Cycle

The project was initially scheduled to last four years. It was due for completion in April 2007 and its final evaluation was due for the first quarter of that year, at the latest. However, as demonstrated by the Mission's findings, the project went through major delays in the FDL's (Local Development Fund) investment cycles and in establishing the Support Grants to Local Initiatives (SAIL) whose primary objective is to sustain activities to reduce the vulnerability and food insecurity of the poorest.

The Mission to carry out the project's final evaluation was held between 11-31 October 2007. If necessary, this mission will be followed, with a view to pursue the ADECOI Project, by a mission to articulate its second phase. The findings and recommendations of the final evaluation's mission are expected to feed into formulating a possible phase 2.

The Mission was framed according to the terms of reference provided to the consultants by the consultant company before its start. However, it later transpired that due to problems of translation, there had been an error in the version that had been provided to the consultants. The final version included specific questions on the "multidimensional analysis of food poverty/security component" which the mission was not aware of. The Mission received the final version only after the conclusion of the mission in December. While it was not possible to return to the field the Mission was provided an extra ten days to provide its views on the food security dimension drawing on its

own assessments and the findings of a desk study that had been implemented prior to the evaluation mission's arrival in Benin.

3. INSTITUTIONAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

3.1. Institutional and Political Context

The last local elections were held in December 2002 and January 2003. The communal councils were installed in February and March 2003. After more than four years of implementation, the decentralization process' outcome is rather mixed.

Some progress is visible in the communes. Mayors and communal councils gradually gained the jurisdictions that the law confers to them. So, a number of advances can be noted:

- Regular functioning of the communal councils;
- Communal Development Plans (PDC) designed in most communes in a participatory process;
- Implementation of strategies to raise local resources and attract development partners and private investors;
- Replication of measures favouring decentralized co-operation;
- Better understanding of the population's role in a decentralization context (civil society participation and focus on local governance);
- Recruitment of qualified staff in some communes;
- Establishment of the Association Nationale des Communes du Bénin (ANCB – National Association of Municipalities of Benin), an umbrella organization to advocate for communes with the Government and to promote decentralization.

However, progress in the decentralization process is limited. This process faces three major challenges:

- A shortage of financial, human and technical resources that limits the administrative and financial autonomy of the communes and then restricts sound local governance;
- The absence of effective transfer of sectoral competencies from the central Government, especially for social infrastructure, economic development and the management of natural resources;
- The weakness of the deconcentrated Government services, which did not sufficiently redefine its operations, roles and responsibilities and ways to coordinate and apply the reform and support the communes.

Planned as a project to advance decentralization in Benin, ADECOI was implemented in this political context with a background linked to poverty and food security.

According to a national survey on the living conditions of households, monetary poverty in Borgou dropped by 9 per cent from 2000 to 2006, from 45.8% to 39% of the population. However, the average poverty rate in the department (39.19% in 2006) exceeds the national average (37.4%). Among eight communes of the department, three have a high poverty rate (Tchaourou: 48.8%; Sinende: 47.93% and Bembereke: 42.89%). In two cases, these rates exceed the national average by double digits.

Poverty reduction in the department can be attributed to an increase in agricultural production of 46% following crops diversification to maize (31% increase), yam (52%), cassava (91%), sorghum (11%) and rice (45%), after the cotton crisis.

Cotton decreased by 20% in the department over this period. When one compares the availability of food with the needs of the population, the department does not appear to suffer from food insecurity. Moreover, statistics on the food balance do not take into consideration a range of products that are included in the daily family consumption such as fruit, vegetables, meat, fish and milk. The absence of a crisis situation was acknowledged by all actors met during the Mission.

Regarding non-monetary poverty indicators, progress was recorded in schooling. School enrolment in the department's primary schools increased from 104,347 in 2001-02 to 128,951 in 2005-06, i.e. a 23.58% increase. Girls' schooling increased even more rapidly (33.86%) than boys' (15.9%).

Some communes showed a quicker increase than the departmental average (Tchaourou, Perere, Kalale, Sinende). Progress appeared in attendance and success rates. Pre-school and adult education declined. Moreover, the attendance rate of health centres increased.

Regarding food security, the food outcome in Borgou assessed by ONASA in March 2007, has demonstrated a positive balance for maize, yam, cassava and peanuts in Borgou, while the balance was negative for speculative crops like millet/sorghum, rice and niebe. Most products are self-consumed by households. So, the insufficient access to food and the resulting food insecurity of household members who produce their own food, is not caused by a shortage of food supplies but by the way food is managed in the household.

3.2 Project Summary

ADECOI was designed to support the first steps of decentralization in the Department of Borgou, and help in managing this process as a pilot experience whose lessons could be drawn at the national level.

The following considerations led the Belgian Survival Fund (FBS) to fund ADECOI :

- *A situation of food insecurity*: characterized by the inability of a large part of the targeted population to cover its food needs;
- *A new institutional approach*: UNCDF advocates that decentralization, that allows defining development policies at the communal level, is an appropriate framework for poverty reduction strategies and the reduction of household vulnerability regarding food insecurity.

The project started its activities following the installation of communal councils in May 2003.

3.3 Project Status

ADECOI is in its final phase. Its activities should formally end on 31 December 2007. The Mission considers that the financial results accounted for at the end of 2007 are consistent with the results achieved and the global performance of the project.

4. PROJECT EVALUATION

4.1 Analysis of achievement and sustainability

The analysis in terms of achievement and sustainability of the project will focus on four results that were identified in the project's logical framework. A specific section is devoted to the analysis of food security. The immediate objective of the project as identified in the original logical framework reads as follows:

Institutionalize a system of decentralized participatory planning and procedures of implementation for local development in light of addressing poverty in Borgou based on the initiative of citizens and their capacity for interaction with the local authorities. The Mission considers that the project has partially achieved this result i.e. a system of decentralized participatory planning able to address poverty in the Borgou. In fact, the communes have developed new abilities for participatory planning, project management and budgetary execution. These results have resulted in the reduction of non-monetary poverty through improving education, health and transportation equipments.

These efforts have focused almost exclusively on building the capacities of communal teams. However, less attention has been paid towards the component directed at « developing citizens' initiative and their capacity to interact with local authorities ». This is in contrast to other UNCDF projects², which put an emphasis on both developing local governance and a citizens culture.

The results in terms of decreasing non-monetary poverty and food insecurity are mixed. The project did not succeed in building communal capacities in the area of economic development with effective popular participation, including an inclusive participation of women and marginalized groups. Efforts to lessen food insecurity also proved difficult to sort out. Actions in this area have not been conclusive so far.

The mission notes that efforts have been made by the project to share its gains and experiences but recognizes that the project's experimental nature did not benefit the governmental structures involved in the decentralization process to its full extend.

The mission estimates that further efforts are required to consolidate the many gains and to strengthen the shortcomings, particularly with regards to economic development and local governance.

Result #1: Establish and operationalize a system of participatory planning and programming for local development initiatives and the fight against poverty in seven communes of Borgou.

In terms of Result #1, the Mission concludes that the communes succeeded in developing abilities to plan local development through training efforts and the process implemented during these four years. Accordingly, these communes all follow a management approach based on planning development actions instead of an arbitrary approach.

Despite this approach, some indicators (such as the low level of implementation of the PDC/PAI) show a lack of priority-setting and compatibility between interventions and available resources. The PDCs remain a planning exercise that do not systematically undergo an analysis of resource

² We can refer here to the Programme of local development in the natural regions of the Upper and Medium Guinea (PDLG) which strongly focused on the development of local governance mechanisms.

mobilization and technical implementation capacities with regards to the commune's abilities to raise their own fiscal and financial revenues.

This is partly due to the fact that the upward planning of local development (PDC/PIC) was not met by an appropriate referential framework at the communal or departmental levels (communal or departmental development outlines). So, the PDC was constrained by a lack of referential data (indicators on poverty, food security, level of equipment, space development framing, etc.) which reflected the development action at the grassroots.

The Mission also noted that the communes' ability to plan economic activities and income generating activities remain weak and need to be strengthened. This applies to environmental activities as well. A lack of vision about the development of the biophysical potential of the communes confines their ability to enhance their financial autonomy.

Moreover, the process to articulate various tools for participatory planning (PDC, PIC, PAI) appears to be weakened by: lack of adequate guidance (notably by decentralized services); elected officials who often are illiterate and can hardly cope with the technical requirements of their function; and under-equipped communal services. The Mission finally noted that the tools for participatory planning are insensitive to the Gender dimension and lack an economic and environmental perspective.

Result #2: Create and reinforce management abilities among local actors (communal organs, populations, treasury structures and departmental organs) through implementing decentralized investment funds, including grants mechanisms, management procedures and local resource mobilization mechanisms.

Budgetary management

The Mission concluded that budgetary and accounting management capacities of communes were strengthened, which helped to improve communal governance. However, despite the increased capacity in the above-mentioned areas, progress remains weak because of recurrent difficulties in assigning and motivating staff as well as by the lack of support to decentralized services. During the field visits the evaluation team has noticed a lack of personnel. As a result of poor working conditions and excessive workload, the available staff is often unmotivated. Moreover, the communes do not benefit from consistent support of the deconcentrated services, which does not contribute to the sustainability of the achieved results.

Contracting Competencies

The competences transferred to communal elected officials, members of the procurement cells and chiefs of Technical Services significantly reinforced the communes' ability to efficiently lead the process for building low-complexity projects such as classrooms, latrine blocks, village-based health clinics, market warehouses, modern wells, etc.

Although there is a good command of the procurement and management processes by the communes some abilities still remain weak. Moreover the Mission holds that most communes do not yet have adequate skills to undertake feasibility studies and lead the processes to achieve more complex works. Procurement cells should also be consolidated in view of providing more objectivity when assessing offers and awarding contracts.

Promoting local economy

The Mission acknowledges that the communes show limited abilities in undertaking activities to promote the local economy (identification of expanding sectors, establishment and follow-up of micro-projects). The setting-up of SAIL micro-projects largely depends on UAC. The lack of clarity over who is responsible for economic promotion and food security in the commune limit the sustainability of results. The function currently lies with several officials, including the focal point for monitoring and evaluation, the Science and Technology Committee in charge for setting up projects, and the economic promotion officer. The roles and responsibilities of all the actors should be better defined and their duties more adequately oriented.

The Sustainable Human Development approach has not yet proven its added value in the ADECOI Project. Moreover, the delays and lack of guidance for such an operation limits the scope of the SHD approach.

In terms of local resource mobilization

The Mission considers that the project's efforts to mobilize local resources have not yet proven fruitful. Financial statistics reveal that the commune's revenues are broadly dependant on transfers from the State and grants from donors. Due to the communes' lack of resources of their own, their autonomy remains very fragile. This weakness is particularly visible in their functioning income which did not significantly increase since 2004 despite the increase in expenditures. In view of the need to sustain communal autonomy, focused efforts are necessary to make up for these difficulties. The Mission estimates, that the SAFIC methodology, which was about to be implemented in the communes at the end of 2007, will likely bring results.

Gender analysis

The Mission noted that the project duration has been too short to produce visible changes in the participation of women. The Gender sensitivity of local development actors is not adequate and will not lead to equitable development. This lack is notable among technical officers, local authorities, and the local population, be they male or female, individuals or groups.

The budgets are not yet Gender-sensitive. Furthermore, only 27% of the newly literate were women (Campaign 2004-2005). Moreover, monitoring revealed that drop-out rates were always higher among girls.

Result #3 : A Local Development Fund (FDL) implemented in the seven communes partnering with the Project improves the access to basic social services and supports the local initiatives for a diversification and sustainable increase of revenues

Infrastructure generally responds to the expressed needs

The majority of the infrastructure created in the framework of FDL fulfilled the functions for which they were designed and significantly contributed to improving services provided to the population. The positive changes brought about by these achievements are visible in the schools, village-based health centres, around the wells and in the markets, as shown by satisfaction surveys held by the Project in April 2007. The satisfaction level of the population, elected officials and communal services is generally rated as 'superior' rather than 'average'.

Some infrastructure or socio-collective equipment has not or has only partly satisfied the beneficiaries' expectations as beneficiaries had not been included in the design, procurement or various implementation phases.

In terms of efficiency, the Mission concluded that if execution costs are taken into account, the results are globally positive. When costs are compared to those applied by other partners in the same department, no major differences appear, except maybe for some achievements funded in the framework of the PNDCC.

Even if the equipment is rated as 'useful', the lack of complementary facilities such as latrines, water taps or tables and benches, may represent a constraint. The Mission also noted that in order to address expectations in terms of access to drinking water, human powered wells would be more appropriate than the more expensive kind (almost eight millions Francs CFA instead of six millions for the drillings) which are more dangerous and can more easily be contaminated.

Limited progress in terms of food security

Overall the Mission concluded that progress in terms of improved understanding and integrating food security in the development of communes, is limited for the following reasons:

- **A concept of food security that is not widely shared:**

The introduction of food security in the design of the project proved to be difficult because local actors did not have a shared understanding of the concept of food security. In addition, food security was not integrated in the logical framework, with a specific result and indicators, nor was there a clearly identified strategy and activities. For a majority of elected officials and stakeholders, food security was only perceived in terms of "famine" or "food shortage", obscuring its other dimensions.

- **A relatively low priority for the communes:**

The initial mandate of projects in support of decentralization in Benin and elsewhere in the sub-region, was to support the training of elected officials and new civil servants in their new roles, giving them instruments to fulfill their basic functions, such as communal planning and management to assure the commune's effective functioning as an institution. In this context, food security appeared as a low priority to communal leaders. The communes' role in food security needs to be clarified. The Mission considers that the following functions related to food security could be mastered by the communes, including:

A watching function: the communal leaders should be able to monitor food security in their own commune (prices and availability) and to identify the most vulnerable groups. However, communal services do not yet own the necessary statistical tools, nor the appropriate human and financial resources to set up and monitor food security indicators locally. This function still needs to be negotiated with ONASA, and could be tested during the project's next phase.

A planning function: the communes should be further sensitized on food security and plan actions to implement the four components in the PDCs. Monitoring indicators should be included in the PDC. The sensitization performed by ADECOI enabled the communes to develop the following initiatives: market gardening; the revival of a food bank (N'Dali); a growing interest in testing

warrantage; and making villages more accessible. This kind of analysis should be pursued and be high on the future planning exercise agenda and in the new PDC guides.

Activities to promote agricultural development should be better defined in relation to the communes' technical and financial capacity. To include the promotion of agricultural production in the PDCs, new partnerships should be negotiated with the MAEP and the CECPA on specific themes and based on an inter-communal approach, like the one advocated in the PRODOC. The number of such partnerships should however take into account the commune's monitoring capacity and employees should receive appropriate training.

Socio-economic investment: by enhancing access to drinking water and health services and by assuring improved road access to the communes, they play a positive role in improving food security. Socio-economic infrastructure (markets, warehouses, roads, slaughterhouses, dairy-plants) play a key role in generating new opportunities. However, their size should be compatible with the inter-communal market. Moreover, the competences transferred to the health sector should enable the communes to consider providing nutritional education.

Economic Development: the economic activities that create jobs and revenues also help to improve household food security. The inter-communal approach should maximize the impact of the commune's technical and financial means.

Setting up structuring conditions: such as the development of lowlands, the creation of market gardens, the protection of the agricultural and pastoral territory through land planning, securing land tenure, developing natural resources (forests, ponds and watercourses) and improving soil fertility.

- **A higher level of complexity**

The development of economic activities, especially in relation with the development of economic opportunities, requires a sharp knowledge of markets, of the value chain analysis and of many economic factors beyond a commune's influence. For instance, the markets for cashews and shea are regulated by international demand. It is understandable that the communes of ADECOI, as most communes in Benin, preferred focusing on less complex activities for their first exercise.

Moreover, the transfer of responsibilities between the communes and the MAEP is not very clear. Although MAEP's mandate is to secure food security nationally, it is still identifying operational details. Accordingly, CECPA officers receive instructions from two separate institutions. At the departmental level, the food security strategy of MAEP has not yet been clarified with specific objectives applying to each commune.

Support for microcredit with a limited economic impact

The Mission found encouraging results in microcredit. The use of SAIL for microcredit through targeting women helped in mobilizing savings (33 millions Francs CFA) with a rate of reimbursement of about 96%. The scope of this financial mechanism however showed its limits in terms of economic development as it only touched small agro-food transformation.

Microcredit activities implemented as part of the project also generated beneficial effects such as a solid emergence of women's groups, an improvement in self-consumption and children's diet, and a feeling of inclusion through strengthening respect and esteem among women.

The Mission concluded that it was too early to fully assess these activities given that based on a signed agreement with an NGO, the activities will continue until 2009. Moreover, the impact of

such activities on communal income has not yet been measured as the first revenues had not been paid. The project instigators and the IMFs should urgently make arrangements for improving communication and monitoring with the communes.

Given the innovative nature of this experience, the Mission considers that an in-depth assessment should be undertaken as very little quantitative data was available at the time of this evaluation.

Few yet tangible economic benefits in the development of Income Generating Activities (AGRs)

Activities conducted in the framework of SAIL for the development of AGRs, improved the communes' capacity to take responsibility for developing their potential in spite of technical challenges linked to implementation. Although there is capacity to plan and monitor AGRs at the communal level, it needs to be strengthened by improving economic profitability analyses and monitoring and by developing tools (guides for planning and monitoring of communal lands) that could guide communal leaders and technical services.

Beneficiaries and communal leaders met during the Mission expressed their satisfaction for having reached another segment of the population, including women and push for continuing this project component.

The FDL in regard to the Gender analysis

Since Gender is not taken into account in the planning of communal development and given the absence of women in the procurement cells, the Mission concludes that the implementation of the Fund of socio-collective investment (FISC) only fortuitously covered the needs of women and girls. Such needs are covered by the construction of schools, maternity clinics and free health centres, that mainly benefit to women.

With regards to the presence of women in equipment management, the Mission observed that even if women hold about a third of the managing committees' seats, as required by the procedures manual, women do not play a significant role and rarely take an active part in their debates.

Result #4 : The good governance practices adopted by Borgou's communes capitalized on and spread in order to influence the national debate about democratic decentralization

The Mission recognizes the project's efforts in developing tools and experience with regards to communication that helped ensure awareness-raising amongst target audiences and to disseminate good practices. Accordingly, these practices (PDC, financing of the FDL through the Treasure's channel, the GBCO, etc.) could be replicated at the national level and should have an influence on the establishment of new decentralization instruments (FADEC, participatory planning, budgetary management).

The Mission however concludes that this 'capitalization' has not reached its objectives given that the governmental structures (MDGLATT and other ministries) did not fully benefit from Borgou's experience. This situation is apparently due to the intermediaries' weakness and inconsistency. This involves the responsibility of both the concerned structures and of ADECOI. The project should have systematized its activities for dissemination and capitalization purposes, while striving to reinforce the absorption among the ministries' structures.

On the communication issue, the Mission holds that, in spite of the numerous achievements supported by the project, few efforts were invested in social communication for the benefit of the communes and beneficiary populations. For instance, the project's self-evaluation points out that some means (postings in the commune, newspapers) hardly reached the target population and that communication was a one-way operation; in addition, limited information was distributed on the results of the municipal council sessions.

Even if the communication dimension had not been identified from the beginning as a specific expected result, the project would have benefited from investing more energy to develop a culture of citizenship in the communes as a way of improving local governance.

On the Gender approach, some initiatives to improve the legislative framework are now in the pipeline at the national level in order to reinforce equity between men and women in decision-making instances. A project like ADECOI would have benefited from disseminating the lessons learned from experiences outside the norm in order to strengthen the coordination of existing initiatives to promote a socially equitable development, adapted to a local context.

4.2 External and Internal Factors

With regards to the evolution of the decentralization process, the Mission found conditions which are conducive to replicate the experiences of the project. New developments also confirm this assertion:

- The announcement that communal elections would be held at the beginning of 2008, confirms the Government of Benin's willingness to pursue its decentralization policy;
- The establishment of a new Ministry of Decentralization, Governance, Administration and Spatial Planning (MDGLAAT) renews the national decentralization policy and its implementing instruments;
- The announcement that a National Forum on Decentralization would be organized to advance a national framework to implement the policies related to the country's political decentralization and administrative devolution;
- The establishment, announced for 2008, of a Fund to Support the Development of Communes (FADEC) that will federate the budgetary resources aimed at supporting the communes' functioning and investments; according to data collected by the Mission, 3 billion Francs Cfa have been written down in the Finance Law of 2008 as a State contribution to enable the Fund to start-up.

In addition, in the agricultural sector, the reform supported by the Government is about to be put into place for two years. The Government's vision is stated in a Strategic Plan to boost the Agricultural Sector in Benin. Its main strategic focus is the promotion of commercial opportunities; crops such as cotton, cassava, cashews and rice are of special relevance in the Borgou area. The food security concern is also strongly stated in the Plan.

This strategy draws on the promotion of peasant organizations, access to credit and a sustainable supervision. The personnel for agricultural supervision enjoyed a massive national recruitment of 2,000 officers equipped with transportation means. This will triple the workforce for the devolved supervision of CECPA s in Borgou's communes.

However, the link of the MAEP's programme with the decentralization needs to be better defined in order to specify the hierarchical linkage and the expected results of RCPAs as technical advisors

of the communes. The MAEP is still reflecting about what should be the most appropriate mechanisms, in particular with regards to food security, where the role of communes in preventing and managing food crises still has to be specified.

Finally, in the microfinance sector, the initial situation was characterized by the crisis of CLCAM, following the cotton producers' unpaid debts. Although the presence of several structures including those supported by IFAD, UNCDF and UNDP were noticed, they did not reach the population's most vulnerable segments. The Government is currently undertaking a reform in this sector, namely a national policy on microfinance is under consideration. It should provide a better coordination of various initiatives, work out new game rules and better control indebtedness. The credit aimed at the cotton area is receiving special attention with measures taken for the reform.

Regarding internal factors, the mission estimated that the project's design has deficiencies, especially in terms of fighting food insecurity. Food Security should have been written down as a specific expected result in the logical framework.

In terms of projects management, the Mission estimated that the project's performance and delivery were globally satisfactory. The UAC team defined and supported the implementation of training activities and technical support aimed at building the capacity of communes. Conclusive results have been obtained although the overly « hands on » type of delivery may be questioned, since communal officers found it to be restrictive at times. The project should have adapted its management approach and control to the evolution of the communes' management abilities, in order to assure a more flexible follow-up based on an « a posteriori » approach of control.

Despite the many relevant partnerships established with other projects (PACOB, PNDCC, PADEB, etc.), the Mission estimates that the delivery process was somewhat handicapped by the large number of these partnerships and by the fact that they were not included in a clearly defined strategy from the outset.

ADECOI was able to put in place a system of monitoring and evaluation that proved to be generally efficient. The Mission acknowledges the efforts invested in developing resources and tools dedicated to monitoring and evaluation in each commune. Accordingly, the communes can better measure the results reached when monitoring the PDCs and managing socio-communal investments. The Mission finally observed that the recommendations of the mid-term evaluation regarding monitoring and evaluation had only been partly implemented. This can be explained by the fact that the mid-term evaluation report was never handed over.

Finally, the Mission observed the difficulty of the ADECOI team to integrate the cross-cutting thematic issues related to communication and Gender. These themes were developed as appendices to the project's delivery framework, without becoming a core concern in terms of planning and implementation of training and support/advice activities. The matrix-based management approach could not efficiently be applied at this level.

4.3 UNCDF's Strategic Positioning and Potential Partnerships

The planning and implementation framework of ADECOI, enabled UNCDF to demonstrate its excellence in developing innovative instruments for communal planning and management. The Project showed excellent abilities to develop good practices in communal management through the package of documents produced in support of communal management and while developing and applying the GBCO

The Project was especially innovative in the area of FDL's implementation modalities as it strived to align with the Public Treasury's channels and to comply to both the spirit and letter of the decentralization policy. It was also innovative through developing a package of instruments of communal project management. The State of Benin and other PTFs acknowledge the relevance of this approach in the development and implementation of the FADEC.

In terms of economic development, the SAFIC experience developed by UNCDF presents a special interest to enable the communes to control their economic development and to better target the activities they feel capable to conduct in order to develop their economy.

However, as mentioned above, the Mission highlights the weakness of the partnerships and intermediaries that were developed to promote the dissemination of this experience, particularly towards partners at the State level. If the project is pursued, efforts should be devoted to better publicize its successes and to mention them in line with the national debate on the decentralization policy and local development.

5. LESSONS LEARNED

Through various exchanges with project actors, the Mission noticed a number of lessons which could feed into the reflection of a possible continuation of the project.

5.1. Participative Planning

In terms of participatory development planning revealed its limits. Accordingly, there is a need to have referential and spatial development tools made available to the communes for concordance. In addition, a « strategic planning » approach should be implemented in order to assure coherence of the needs defined by the populations with available resources of the commune.

5.2. Local Economic Development and Food Security

Food security remains an important concern requiring a shared initial vision about its concept; the ADECOI Project tested measures to integrate food security into decentralization. This experience merits to be completed to clarify the commune's role in early-warning, agricultural production, market regulation, establishment of infrastructures, and targeted measures to reach vulnerable populations.

The experience conducted to promote local economic development clearly demonstrates that this approach can only truly produce results as an inter-communal operation involving all public and private stakeholders. It was demonstrated that communes only play a marginal role in building conditions to promote a development that would be both productive and capable to bring solutions to reduce economic poverty.

The microcredit experience proved to be a relevant activity to integrate and reach out to a part of the poorer population. This approach requires a sustained mentoring that should be provided by specialists. Concerted strategies should be negotiated with microfinance services in order to make it a sustainable service.

Finally, the development of economic activities at the communal level requires both a clear vision and clear objectives from the start to avoid a sprinkling of resources whose low impact in the fight against poverty is well-known. The Mission suggests to focus on a smaller number of projects in order to reach more ambitious results.

5.3. The Gender and Development Dimension

Integrating the Gender dimension to the diagnosis of local development and planning requires that:

- The facilitators be capable to integrate the Gender dimension and have suitable tools to do so;
- The facilitators commit to use a Gender approach in all its aspects;
- A close monitoring of the process is assured to gradually redress its implementation.

The policy favouring adult literacy in local languages is inadequate to enhance the women's place in the public arena, even inside their own associations. People taught to read and write in local languages are restrained when they are in a context where French is used. The notion that women are unable to present or represent themselves has been consolidated by management practices in local economic structures.

The practice of systematically integrating one or two men in women's associations who are entrusted to manage the group, also subdues women's abilities to emerge and take responsibilities

for themselves. The separation of men and women by field or economic sector also confines women to the subsistence economy while promoting men in the most promising economic sectors.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Mission expresses in its main report a number of recommendations resulting from its analyses and findings. The main recommendations are the following:

6.1. About participatory planning

1. Introduce a more strategic planning approach to assure a higher compatibility between the proposed interventions and the available financial resources.
2. Establish the local planning process on a double communal and inter-communal approach, in order to favour a development policy based on a broadened space through the model of « Shared Development Spaces (EDP) », as suggested by the DAT.
3. Support and make sustainable the work of local cooperation executives (CCD) to encourage the emergence of local counter-powers as a foundation to a culture of citizenship.
4. Encourage communal and inter-communal land-use planning; these plans should provide relevant information to communes on key trends in the economic, demographic, environmental (management of hydrographic basins) and spatial fields (cartography and Geographic Information Systems).
5. Enhance activities to develop communal natural resources: drafting rules for municipal management, development of municipal taxation related to sectors such as wood, coal and cotton.
6. Train MAEP staff (CERPA and CECPA) so that the Ministry plays its role more efficiently in providing technical support to PDCs, especially for results-based management on food security and in promoting agriculture.

6.2. About Capacity-Building

1. Define and implement a consistent capacity-building strategy of the Treasury's departmental and communal services to assure improved communal management and a smoother implementation of the FDL.
2. Establish suitable instruments (PARIEFIC) to enhance the mobilization of communes' own tax revenues.
3. Continue to support the communes in budgetary and accounting management (developing new tools, training, etc.) through introducing archiving systems for accounting data.
4. Establish a mutualist approach of project management to achieve more complex works, possibly with an inter-communal scope. The creation of inter-communal technical services can be envisioned.
5. Integrate environmental screening procedures in the conception and implementation of communal and inter-communal civil engineering works.
6. Develop a programme to build the communes' capacity for promoting the local economy through learning from SAFIC results. This training programme should be in line with the economic development strategy and contribute to clarifying the respective role of each communal actor.

7. Cooperate with other stakeholders to develop a lifelong education programme on communal economic development aimed at technicians and elected officials, to be capitalized upon in a national training institution.

6.3. About the FDL

1. Redefine FDL's modalities of implementation towards an approach of territorial development (spaces of shared development); a significant portion of the allocated funds should aim at supporting development efforts and local capacity-building. In this scenario, a portion of the investments devoted to the commune should focus on basic education, water/sanitation and primary health care.
2. Plan the integration of the FDL in the FADEC process as soon as the fund becomes operational.
3. Assess the relevance of establishing a community counterpart in addition to the communal counterpart, to reinforce a feeling of community ownership on investments.
4. Implement measures to better involve users in the conception of investments and emphasize the training of management committees in maintenance while assuring a more systematic participation of women.
5. Lead communes to adopt water-drillings that use human power pumps instead of modern wells.

6.4. About Promoting the Local Economy

1. Revise the overall economic development strategy while taking into account the limitations and role of both the communal and inter-communal approaches, through encouraging synergies on a limited number of areas, and in adequacy to available financial resources. Assure the technical support that communes need so that they develop their ability to opt for the most promising opportunities and strategic investments.
2. Develop action plans for opportunities at the inter-communal level that will specify the roles of each and every actor: technical services (MAEP), communes, peasant organizations, IMFs, etc. Develop communal or inter-communal programme contracts to implement the proposed activities.
3. Clarify an institutional approach for microcredit and local economic development (DEL), while building local IMFs and developing, for instance, the partnership with programmes such as IFAD's PADER or PNDCC, with a view to further develop microcredit and to enable the IMFs to provide new products.
4. Assure an improved monitoring of AGRs that are currently implemented or planned, in particular in their economic dimension, through costing profitability thresholds.
5. About policy dialogue and consultation: assure that FADEC can be used as an instrument for economic development and food security; support advocacy to improve the quality of agricultural statistics while planning rural communes' activities involved in the PDCs, to DRSP and food security, through using MAEP's new staff in the field.

6.5 Food Security

1. Undertake negotiations with ONASA, for a test operation to create an early warning system at the communal level through gauging indicators such as malnutrition levels, the identification and monitoring of vulnerable groups, and the quantities of available foods; this system should be integrated in a communal monitoring and assessment system and could use the data generated by CECAPs.
2. Assure the integration of food security in the PDCs through identifying activities such as food crops banks for risk-prone areas (including sales of food grains at social prices) to complement the warrantage system; the first tests should be closely monitored so to avoid past mistakes.
3. Initiate the development of a gender-sensitive programme of nutritional education and awareness-raising, including modules on how to manage family food stockpiles, in collaboration with associations for social promotion, the CeCPAs and food-specialized NGOs.
4. Assure that structural conditions, especially in relation with land tenure and soil fertility, will receive special attention from at least one additional partner; programme contracts between CECAPs and the commune could be envisioned on an experimental basis to promote agricultural input for alternative crops (other than cotton), following an appropriate analysis of fertility issues.

6.6 The Gender Dimension

1. Raise the stakeholders' sensitivity to Gender and integrate this dimension at all levels: Mechanisms should be established to monitor in a participatory manner the integration of Gender in planning activities through training and sensitizing the leaders and through introducing data disaggregated by sex at all steps of the planning process.
2. Give priority to behaviour change instead of sensitization: The Gender strategy will need to acquire technical and financial means and expect the necessary time to implement a participatory approach that will modify behaviours. This will globally consist in accompanying the communities, in a small and culturally uniform geographical area (a village for instance), to deconstruct their vision, logic and gender strategy, and to rebuild a vision of equitable and sustainable local development, supported by a gender strategy drawn from the local context and based on lessons learned from local practices.
3. Emphasize women's participation in the local political life: Support to women's political emergence is part of the project's willingness to enhance the women's role in the public sphere. This needs: 1) identification by district, awareness-raising and close training of female leaders about the relevance, usefulness and necessity to vote in priority for women and for electoral lists positioning women as their main leaders; 2) advocacy and lobbying targeting local and central authorities, and political parties to encourage an appropriate positioning for women; 3) social communication with and towards women and men, youth, adults and children.
4. Empower women with the ability to lead their associations themselves without having men to show them the way, and assure their systematic participation to the committees that manage the communal works and in the procurement cells.

5. Establish strategies to enable women to transfer from a subsistence economy to the communal and departmental economy, through participating to the most promising economic opportunities which are currently controlled by and for men.