

# Report on the exchange visit to Benin.

Cotonou, from 9 to 12 March 2009

## Background

Benin conducted in 2006-2007 a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) exercise which was analytically sound. The SEA was developed in a cross-cutting manner throughout the SCRP development process, covering critical issues of poverty reduction and environmental management, with projections on financial needs and policy measures.

As this exercise is generally seen as an example of successful PRSP greening process, PEI-Africa decided to organize an exchange visit to Benin for the Francophone PEI countries (Mali and Mauritania), to allow participants to exchange with different stakeholders who have been involved in the SEA development process in Benin. Eight (8) participants in total from Mali and Mauritania attended the visit. The two delegations wanted to capitalize from the Benin's experience to better conduct the SEA approaches & processes for PRSP review in their respective countries. The mission was therefore organized from 9 to 12 March 2009 in Cotonou for experience sharing and capacity development purposes.

## Objectives of the visit

The three main objectives of the visit were:

- Exchange with different stakeholders to understand how the whole SEA process has been successfully organized and the role played by key participating institutions.
- Gain familiarity with and learn from the application on the ground of some SEA tools such as the methodological guide for the Environment mainstreaming.
- Take stock of lessons learned and best practices emanating from the SEA process for the improvement of communication, coordination and development of synergy between actors in participating countries.

## Key findings

*1-Exchange with different stakeholders to understand how the whole SEA process has been organized and the role played by key participating institutions.*

The delegation visited the Ministry of Economy & Finances, the Ministry of Planning and Development, the Ministry in charge of Environment, some key national bodies, NGOs and key individual actors who have been involved in the process. UNDP and GTZ which have been the two important funding agencies of the greening process were also visited.

The Ministry of Economy & Finances team said that the PRSP greening process found its justification in article 27 of the Beninese Constitution (of December 11, 1990) which considers the Environment as a fundamental right and requires that the State protects it. Article 3c of the Main Law (*Loi Cadre*) requires that the protection of the Environment be integrated into the economic and social development plan as well as in the application of this plan. Article 74 says that the Head of State can be tried for disloyalty if he takes any decision or encourages any action that strongly affects Environment or compromises life to citizens. He can be severely judged for having broken his oath.

They also declared that the technical starting point was their attendance to Accra workshop in 2004. Delegates from involved institutions participated in a week-long workshop in Accra to learn from environmental mainstreaming experiences of Ghana, Tanzania and Uganda. The lessons from this international workshop

enabled them to start the first activity of the whole PRSP greening process which was the assessment of the first PRSP. In 2005, an ex-post Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of this first PRSP 2003-2005 was carried out by national consultants, under the guidance of a support committee composed by the Benin Agency for Environment (Agence Béninoise pour l'Environnement, ABE), the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) and UNDP. This ex-post SEA evaluation aimed, amongst other things, to i) synthesize existing information on the state of the Environment in Benin ii) analyse the ways in which the first PRSP took into account environmental factors related to poverty and iii) identify relevant effects of the first PRSP on prior environmental objectives in order to better prepare the SEA of the second PRSP for the following period 2007-2009.

The evaluation showed that the first PRSP has adopted contradictory approaches and measures for environmental management. It also concluded that the basis on which environmental strategies are to be used as strategies to reduce poverty was not well defined nor were indicators of effect and impact, targets and actions needed to reach the MDGs. It also showed that there was insufficient integration of environmental considerations into ministries plans, projects and programmes.

The Ministry of Economy & Finances team also explained that nine thematic groups were in charge of the formulation of different policies that formed the basis of the Strategy. One of these groups, called 'Environment and Quality of life' had representatives involved in all of the other eight thematic groups in order to ensure the integration of the environment in the thematic policies. The general public was consulted at different steps of the SCR process. For example, the national forum on the elaboration of the SCR involved more than one-hundred participants from ministerial departments, technical services, the private sector, the civil society and even the trade Union. The objective of this forum was to define key principles for the development of the SCR. Consultations going from central to local levels were also organised to contribute to a better understanding of the SCR issues.

Regarding the role played by each key institution, they explained that at the beginning the Ministry of planning hosted the Permanent Secretariat of the National Commission for Development and Fight Against Poverty (*Secrétariat Permanent de la Commission Nationale pour le Développement et la Lutte contre la Pauvreté*) which led the whole PRSP elaboration process. They have accepted that the greening process took place, despite the risk that this latter could generate in making the PRSP elaboration process heavy.

The Ministry of Economy and Finances played a sensitization role at different levels. First, the Unit in charge of the PRSP elaboration process within the Ministry of Economy and Finances tried to convince the whole Ministry of the important role of Environment in Economy. The Unit organized strategic meetings with key decision makers of the whole Ministry and prepared them to recognize the importance of the greening process and to then advocate for it. Then the Ministry of Economy and Finance went on sensitisation of the Ministry of Planning to make them accept the greening process in the whole PRSP formulation frame. The Head of State, very aware of the importance of the greening process, has even taken - eight months after the starting of the greening process - the decision to transfer the Permanent Secretariat of the National Commission for Development and Fight Against Poverty to the Ministry of Economy and Finances which finally led the whole process.

During the stage of budgetary planning, they played an important role in advocating for the environmental sector, and in bringing the CDMT committee (the Unit in charge of the resources allocation exercise) to allocate more resources for Environment in comparison to the previous PRSP.

The Ministry of Environment through ABE played a technical role in focusing on factors that could secure the technical success of the greening process. They explained how some key donors have played an instrumental role. They were the Netherlands Commission for Environmental Impact Assessment (NCEIA), the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ Benin, GTZ Rio plus Germany) and UNDP (UNDP Headquarters, UNDP Office in Benin and UNDP Dryland Development Center).

*2-Become familiar with SEA tools such as the methodological guide for Environmental mainstreaming.*

The different tools used for or those emanating from the greening process have been presented. They are mainly:

-The simplified methodological guide for the environmental mainstreaming. The document is written in French and describes in detail the key steps to be followed for the SEA approach. The tool is being disseminated for forthcoming greening processes.

-The use of an International Advisory Committee(IAC). The IAC assisted directly each of the nine greening groups and in doing voluntary works. The involvement of international experts has also the advantage of securing a good quality of work, and of considering global challenges.

-The negotiation tools, used in training environmental experts located within the PRSP thematic groups. These latter acquired capacity and skills to negotiate with and to obtain from thematic group members their agreement for greening sector-based policies.

-The strategic studies realised, which are among others the MDG7 cost analysis, and an environmental cost study showing the cost of environmental degradation. These studies made possible the formulation of different scenarios of the CMDT.

-The information & communication note, disseminated to explain the different methodologies developed, the key actors involved and the mistakes or wrong actions & decisions to avoid in future exercises.

*3- Take stock of lessons learned and best practices emanating from the SEA process for the improvement of communication, coordination and development of synergy between actors in participating countries.*

Participants have been informed of key lessons learnt which are, among others:

- *Identify key entry points, and recognize and use windows of opportunity effectively:* Implementing SEA at the beginning of the SCRCP process, elaborating SEA concomitantly to the SCRCP and integrating environment in a cross-cutting manner in other sectors have led to good environmental mainstreaming results. So the identification of the green options has been conducted during the same phase of policy formulation by mixed groups made of policy formulation consultants equipped with environmental experts.

- *Broad and effective participation:* participation of all key stakeholders is necessary for local ownership, resolution of conflicts and innovation in the SEA process. It is also important to promote equitable access to information. In the SCRCP for example, involving departmental representatives in the greening process and assisting local authorities to know more about the SEA approach are essential.

- *Need of political support:* the SEA process is a very practical approach. However, progress can be hard to be made if there is lack of political support, resources availability and training assets.

- *Development of dialogue:* The extent of coherence, cooperation and collaboration between the stakeholders is essential for ensuring good SEA outcomes.

- *Ensure economic and financial analyses are part of the process:* It is important that SEA integrates economic and financial analysis for a complete needs assessment. There is need to estimate the cost and benefits of policy measures and to cost the proposed interventions as part of the PRSP.

- *Key principles required:* to make the SEA succeed, the Beninese case showed that some principles are key such as openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and coherence.

***The strengths & weaknesses of the process in Benin as presented during the visit.***

Participants to the visit have been briefed about the strengths and the weaknesses of the process in Benin.

The strengths:

- The merit of bringing a whole Government to recognize the importance of the Environment and to accept to apply the greening process. For the first time, Benin elaborated a real policy document fitted with strategies aiming at foreseeing environmental side effects.
- The use of an international advisory committee. This has enriched the process and aligned it with international standards & norms.
- The use of the new PRSP greening approach. It is well known now that the SEA exercise is the integration of environmental assessment into a planning process. In the old approach, the two exercises were conducted separately: the planning activity is first finalized and is then followed by the Environmental assessment. This generally leads to two different documents which are not finally easy to use at the implementation phase.
- The alignment process, conducted after the greening exercise and which aimed at bringing ministries to align their policies on those adopted in the PRSP document has been a very good initiative even if it has been summarily done, owing to the tight time frame of this process.
- The deep involvement of the press actors. They have been involved to ensure the good development of information on the process and the link between local elected people and national authorities.
- The strong learning dimension of the process. Participants to the visit have been told that the greening process is very instructive and can therefore open many professional doors. For the Beninese case, all those who have been strongly involved in the exercise or who have led different aspects of the process got a particular expertise and have moved to a higher professional position at national or international level.

*The weaknesses:*

Some weaknesses have been highlighted during the visit. They are mainly :

- At local level, the involvement of district stakeholders has been large, but not total. District actors from isolated areas have been less involved.
- The low capacity of the Environmental Units within key ministries has been also a weakness which has been highlighted as they have not really been able to fully play their roles in facilitating the alignment process.
- The Monitoring/Evaluation system put in place is also weak as it only focuses on impact indicators, instead of foreseeing SMART indicators for the whole logical frame at national level (outputs, outcomes and impacts).

### **Direct applications and perspectives**

- **Visitors' appreciation**

At the end of the visit and during the closing session, the two delegations have been invited to review the three days visit and to speak about the way forwards.

They all recognized that :

- 1) Through direct contact, they gained deep understanding of the SEA approach that they can now use for work in their respective countries.
- 2) They have gathered strategic information and tools & documents that they will use for their forthcoming PRSP reviews.
- 3) The knowledge from the visit will help them put in place Environmental Units in sectoral ministries in Mali and in Mauritania.
- 4) They are now more equipped to better implement CSLP activities.
- 5) They recognized that the technical, organizational and logistical coordination of the visit have been very successful and thanked PEI-Africa and the Beninese authorities for having organized the visit. They said that the visit confirmed the adage that says that "seeing one time is better than reading one thousand times".

- Activities to start

*In Mali*

1)The PEI-Mali delegates said they will organize some review sessions once they are back in Mali and will elaborate informative targeted menus towards each key ministry to obtain their full involvement in a greening process during the forthcoming PRSP elaboration works. This review will be the beginning of the sensitization of national authorities to raise their motivation for the PRSP greening process and for PEI activities in general.

2)They were also pleased to announce that they will start the preparation of their next PRSP review planned for 2011. Based on what they learnt from Benin, they said they will be able to create an enabling environment for a greening process.

3)Working with the CSLP Unit to sharpen P-E indicators: the PEI team of Mali promised to use the learning from Benin to better prepare the forthcoming training session on P-E indicators, planned with an international consultant.

4)Participants from Mali declared that the visit could be of interest for the current national assizes underway in Mali. They have a thematic group working on environmental mainstreaming and delegates from Mali thought that knowledge and learning won from the visit can be used in support to these assizes.

*In Mauritania*

1)They also are planning some review meetings within the UNDP office, and with national Authorities, mainly the Ministry of Economy.

2) They have now a sector-based technical committee for Environment. They are planning to organize a deep restitution to the committee members.

3)The 2009 work plan has initially planned SEA works for four sectors which are health, agriculture, animal breeding, and water. These SEA activities are in direct line with what the delegates from Mauritania have learnt in Benin. They said they are now well equipped to conduct these activities and to well coordinate them.

4)They are also working on indicators management issues. They said the visit will facilitate the implementation of these activities and related tasks.