



COUNTRY PROFILE



J. AHOUANSOU, USAID/BENIN

Beninese citizens participate in the March 2006 elections. USAID technical assistance promotes decentralization and devolution of authority to local communities. Community participation helps ensure that the government responds to the needs and interests of its citizens.

OVERVIEW

In a region with notable cases of failed or failing states, Benin established a government that largely respects basic rights and freedoms. It has a recent history of credible elections with a peaceful change of power. The March 2006 presidential elections resulted in the fourth peaceful turnover since democracy was reestablished in the early 1990s. President Thomas Boni Yayi has pledged to fight corruption and ineffective management and to promote economic growth. However, low levels of education and health are the most dramatic constraints to Benin's long-term development and growth.



PROGRAMS

INVESTING IN PEOPLE: EDUCATION

Education is critical to sustained economic growth, improved health, and continued democratization. Literacy rates in Benin are low, especially among young people. And girls are particularly affected. Since 1990 Benin has made significant inroads in reforming its education system and broadening access to education. USAID focuses on promoting quality teaching, increasing girls' enrolment and completion of primary education, promoting greater community involvement, and increasing HIV/AIDS awareness. With USAID funding, a new curriculum has been developed and introduced in all six primary school grades. Thousands of teachers, supervisors, and school inspectors have been trained on how to teach the new curriculum. USAID also financed the printing and distribution of more than a million textbooks. Since 1998, net enrolment rates for boys increased from 65 to 81 percent, while girls' enrolment rose from 32 percent to 58 percent. There is still a significant gap between boys' and girls' enrolment rates and successful completion of primary school, so USAID works in communities with low enrolment rates for girls to remove obstacles to their education. Scholarships were provided to more than 1,000 girls who would otherwise be unable to continue their education. Mothers are specifically targeted with training that not only encourages them to send their daughters to school but also equips them with skills that will encourage them to increase their participation in school management. Four hundred disadvantaged boys have also received scholarships from the program.

INVESTING IN PEOPLE: HEALTH

A life expectancy of 53 years and high rates of maternal and child mortality reflect the reality that access to quality health care for many

BENIN SNAPSHOT

Date of independence: 1960
Population: 7.9 million (2007)
GDP per person: \$749 (yr)

Source: U.S. Department of State

USAID IN BENIN

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COUNTRY PROFILE CONTINUED

Beninese is limited. USAID interventions over the past decade have focused on disadvantaged areas in central and northern Benin and have led to improved health service delivery and increased use of family health services. USAID is also implementing the President's Malaria Initiative, a three-year program that aims to reduce malaria-related deaths by half in children and pregnant women. Health workers are being trained to design and disseminate prevention messages for groups most at risk of becoming infected with HIV/AIDS, especially young adults. To prevent and mitigate childhood illnesses, USAID promotes immunization, breastfeeding, the use of mosquito nets, and the use of oral rehydration salts to treat diarrhea. USAID also trains health workers to prevent post-partum hemorrhage and manage obstetric emergencies—both major causes of maternal deaths. Health workers also learn to care for newborns, to correctly treat childhood illnesses and to diagnose and treat sexually transmitted infections.

Benin is one of four African countries which benefits from the presidential Women's Justice and Empowerment Initiative, a three-year initiative that seeks to reduce violence against women. USAID is working to raise awareness of gender-based violence and improve the capacity of Beninese public and nongovernmental organizations to meet the needs of victims.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Benin Mission Director
Rudolph Thomas
01 B.P. 2012
Cotonou
Benin
Tel: 229-21-300500