

The World Bank Urban Research Symposium

Urban development for Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction

December 15-17, 2003

Washington, D.C., USA

www.worldbank.org/urban/symposium2003

Subject: Access to land, secure land tenure, and urban poverty reduction: the Benin experiment

Author: Bachir OLOUDE
Expert in urban management and municipal development
International consultant
04 BP: 0997 Cotonou - Tel: (229) 95 07 32 / 90 41 59 / 36 08 51 Benin
E-mail: boloude @ hotmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Since the early 1990s, the Republic of Benin has implemented a country-wide poverty-reduction policy, focusing in particular on urban areas. The following measures, taken as part of the poverty-reduction approaches and strategic options targeting those areas, have produced tangible effects and are considered efficient. They include:

- **providing disadvantaged people with access to land and with secure land tenure ;**
- **drafting urban development plans and constructing public facilities in districts with a deficit in such installations, mainly inhabited by vulnerable population groups ; and**
- **encouraging social mobilization on issues of common concern.**

Activities planned and implemented under various urban programs and projects have improved the property development mechanisms by devolving greater responsibility to the very communities benefiting from housing projects in insalubrious areas. Such housing projects, which in the past lacked transparency and were run arbitrarily, are now aimed at establishing the land rights of the poor and providing them with secure land tenure. Access to basic services is enhanced by mobilizing the population and involving the community in spatial planning and in equipping the zones parceled out. Sustainable community management of these new social infrastructures and facilities is ensured by development committees set up in the pilot districts, selected because of their extreme poverty. Community initiative support units or SAICs have been set up in the major cities in order to extend this work beyond the pilot districts to encompass all other urban areas affected by poverty. The main role of the SAICs consists of offering technical support, paid for by the commune or the development partners, to any community initiative aimed at improved access to basic social services and poverty reduction.

URBAN PROJECTS:

the community approach as an effective mechanism for social mobilization

Since the early 1990s, Benin has launched two major urban projects: the Urban Renewal and Management Project (**PRGU, 1993-98**) and the Decentralized Urban Management Program (**PGUD, 1999-2003**).

The PRGU's main objectives were: urban infrastructure rehabilitation and environmental improvement in Cotonou and Porto-Novo, using approaches with an optimum impact on employment and on the development of local construction firms; urban management capacity building that could be sustained and replicated; the formulation of an urban development strategy for Benin; **and enhanced involvement of the local private sector and the urban population groups involved with the improvement of local environmental conditions**. Under the project, a draft land-management law and a draft urban planning code were prepared and new area-development methods and mechanisms were proposed. They took into consideration initial investment by the vulnerable population groups and provided them with secure land tenure. The new procedures were tested in the urban planning principles formulated for the Cotonou and Porto-Novo extension zones and in the urban planning study for the Abomey-Calavi plateau. The mobilization capacity of vulnerable people on community development issues was tested in the exercise of parceling out the Mènontin sub-district under the PRGU.

The PGUD's main objective is the sustainable improvement of the level and quality of services provided to the population of Benin's three main cities (Cotonou, Porto-Novo and Parakou), particularly to the inhabitants of disadvantaged and underserved districts, in the areas of transportation, drainage and urban-infrastructure maintenance. Under the project, this exercise in participatory and community management has been extended to other districts of those cities. The solutions proposed in response to the concerns of the population concerning the establishment of land rights and secure land tenure led to the creation of a viable environment through urban planning and building infrastructure in six districts, regarded as vulnerable, in the three cities. To ensure the sustainability of participatory and community management mechanisms, each city was provided with a SAIC. The organization of the population at the grassroots level, initially aimed at secure land tenure, has also enhanced access to basic social services, employment- and income-generating activities, etc.

<p style="text-align: center;">LAND RIGHTS AND SECURE LAND TENURE: instruments for the social mobilization of the poor</p>

Before the 1990s, an exercise of parceling out land had been launched in Benin as an operation of land consolidation and establishment of land rights. Such an operation comprises several stages, including preparation, traversing, taking stock of the existing situation, study and design, layout, and resettlement. The population concerned had been given little information and consideration in this process. As a result, the last stage, which consisted of the allocation and assignment of lots to the eligible parties, gave rise to so many disputes that most of the files regarding the allocation of lots were never closed. The disputes concerned the surface areas inventoried, the surface areas allocated after application of a reduction coefficient, and the condition of the lots allocated (in the end, the poorer people found themselves with swampy or otherwise unusable lots). The basic causes of the disputes were: lack of transparency of operations, unavailability of lot documents to the interested parties, and concomitant arbitrariness and insecure land tenure, often created by the administration and the real estate surveyors, sometimes even in complicity with pseudo-housing committees. The fact that the majority of lot assignments were disputed shows that the exercise had only ostensibly aimed at consolidating properties and confirming land rights: in reality, rampant injustice, unaccountability and uncertainty favored those who could afford to acquire a lot of land to the detriment of the rightful, but indigent, land owners. Insecure land tenure was compounded by the failure to take initial investment (constructions) into consideration in the study and design stage, an oversight that worked against the very victims of the arbitrary parceling

practices and resulted in the loss of prior investment. The end result was exacerbation of the abject poverty of the dispossessed.

Under the Democratic Renewal [*Renouveau Démocratique*] in the early 1990s, disputes were lodged over the entire range of parceling operations that had been carried out by the authorities. Against this backdrop, as part of the preparation of the PRGU, integrated urban planning was launched as a pilot operation in the Mènontin district, in western Cotonou. Mènontin is one of the poorest districts of the city and the area where the results of the parceling exercise were most contested. Several district development and lot-verification associations were set up. For the first time, the authorities gave such associations a free hand to identify property distortions, irregularities and injustices that had been committed; and allowed the population to participate effectively in the management of the parceling process.

**MÈNONTIN:
an experiment in integrated and coordinated improvement of social and health
conditions**

Mènontin is in western Cotonou. Its town plan covers a surface area of 180 hectares, more than half of which is located in a marshy zone susceptible to floods. In 1994, its population was about 25,000. Parceling of the district began in 1987 but was halted until 1994 as a result of disputes. Several associations were set up under the Democratic Renewal, the most significant of which are: the "Mènontin development association", the "Kidonou development association" (Kidonou is a sub-district of Mènontin), the "Parceling dispute committee", and the "Parceling verification committee". In a conflictual setting that was not conducive to dialogue, which pit inhabitants of the district against each other and against the local authorities, the idea was born to build a health center in order to make primary health care accessible to the district's poor population.

The population was primarily interested in clarifying the demarcation of land parcels and redressing grievances with a view to ensuring secure land tenure. This was achieved through a participatory and coordinated process based on a program of community meetings organized by SERHAU/SEM. Secure land tenure was granted on a priority basis to the residents and areas of public infrastructure (roads and other social-communal facilities specifically enumerated) were identified and generally accepted. Parceling resumed under the direction of population groups organized for that purpose, and most of the existing investment was taken into account, reducing social and economic costs that usually characterized earlier parceling proposals.

In addition to land lot demarcation and assignment, and ensuring secure land tenure to eligible parties, a series of coordination, discussion, and awareness-raising meetings gave rise to constructive dialogue that made it possible to identify and formulate a participatory project whose main lines of action are:

- improving the living conditions of the population through "integrated health and sanitation" activities;
- promoting the involvement of the community in problem identification, environment-improvement program financing and implementation, and infrastructure maintenance;
- supporting grassroots initiatives; and
- promoting a model for the coordinated upgrading of living conditions at district level, which will be replicated in other populous districts of the main Beninese cities.

The results achieved under these experimental activities in the period 1994-98 were very positive. The following community program was carried out:

- Construction of a health center offering affordable services to disadvantaged people and managed by the " Mènontin medical-social association" on the basis of a contract concluded between the Ministry of Health and the association.
- Construction of dirt roads, paving of main roads and roads of access to the health center, and construction of rain water drainage facilities.
- Extension of the drinking water, power and public lighting networks and enhancing network access through reduced-cost connection schemes.
- Construction and layout of a public park and planting of sidewalk trees.
- Creation of the "Drainage and refuge management brigade" (BAGOM), responsible for managing the public park and collecting household waste in the district.
- Construction of public latrines in public areas and in the schools.
- Construction of classrooms and school libraries in the schools and in the junior high-school.
- Construction of the Mènontin market: planned but not carried out on schedule because of a lack of funds.
- Construction of a lagoon station for transportation to Abomey-Calavi, the lake-shore village of Ganvié and the International Market of Dantokpa.

This experimental program, implemented in Mènontin:

- confirmed the land rights of disadvantaged population groups;
- improved their living conditions through the building of basic socio-communal infrastructure facilities;
- provided them with access to affordable basic social services;
- ensured the education of children at a reduced cost; and
- contributed substantially to poverty reduction through inhabitant-friendly land-consolidation and town-planning procedures.

In view of the results achieved by this experiment and the lessons learned from it, the Government generalized the approach through similar operations to be launched in the other populous urban districts of Benin. A PGUD component was devoted to integrated living-environment improvement and to urban planning activities in the deprived districts inhabited by the poor of the country's three main cities.

<p>URBAN PLANNING AND REHABILITATION OF MARGINALIZED DISTRICTS: keys to poverty reduction</p>

As a result of the successful work in the Mènontin district and the conclusion that the promotion of secure land tenure among vulnerable population groups is essential to poverty reduction in urban areas, the Government has plans to implement similar projects in all three cities. This new approach has been built into the "Community participation and integration" component of PGUD.

The PRGU (1993-98) was limited to a single pilot district. The PGUD (1999-2003) addresses five urban districts: Ahouansori and Yenawa in Cotonou, Tokpota and Djegan-Daho in Porto-Novo,

and Alaga/Camp Adagbe in Parakou. The activities target more than 250,000 persons living in these districts, which are considered vulnerable. They are characterized by:

- inadequacy or lack of basic urban services (schools, health centers, drinking water, and power);
- difficult access to the city center (impassable, flooded or extremely eroded roads, lack of drainage, and accumulation of household refuse); and
- precarious state of living quarters, which are susceptible to floods every year.

The results achieved during the implementation phase of the program (1999-2003) are:

- ensuring secure land tenure to the disadvantaged people living in these districts through the participatory and community approach developed by a local NGO for all component activities;
- setting up, in each district, development committees that involved the disadvantaged population in formulating a district development plan and a priority equipment and infrastructure program;
- creating, through the participatory approach, basic collective facilities and constructing such infrastructure as paved and dirt roads, and rain-water drainage systems, to facilitate transportation to and from the districts and access to urban services;
- identifying and meeting, through a coordinated approach, social and economic infrastructure needs of the districts, promoting for instance socio-communal micro-projects that provide such services or facilities as primary schools, stand pipes, community development centers, primary health centers, and small markets;
- carrying out spatial planning in zones susceptible to floods; planting trees and creating green spaces; collecting, removing, and treating household waste; building public latrines; building playgrounds, recreation areas, and sports grounds;
- supporting all initiatives aimed at health, hygiene, and environmental protection; helping to create associations ensuring the continuous maintenance of infrastructure and the management of district waste and of the socio-communal facilities constructed; and
- encouraging and supporting all social mobilization initiatives; income- and employment-generating communal activities; household waste collection and gardening activities; school and educational activities, etc.

Socio-communal micro-projects provided for in district development plans are carried out under the so-called "district agreements", concluded between the development committees and the city concerned. Their funding often has three sources: the development committee, the city, and the program.

<p style="text-align: center;">THE SAICs: an efficient tool for integrating disadvantaged people</p>

The program has encouraged the creation, in each city concerned, of community initiative support units or SAICs with a view to ensuring the sustainability and exploitation of the outcomes of program activities.

A SAIC has a two-person staff responsible for:

- supporting and monitoring the programs developed in the various pilot districts;
- assisting and supporting grassroots initiatives and helping them to materialize in other districts considered to be underserved;
- helping grassroots associations and organizations to organize micro-projects and raising the necessary funds from the community budget, the development partners, and other interested independent bodies; and

- ensuring the development and promotion of project design and execution in the urban districts by the development committees, as well as contractual arrangements related to this work through district agreements concluded between associations and the city.

SAIC staff is helped under training, support and counseling programs conducted by the local NGOs, and receives equipment and material support. In three years, the SAICs have become operational, and are sought after by grassroots associations to help them to establish micro-projects and raise the necessary funds. These micro-projects aim at fulfilling needs identified by the population. Participatory and community management amplifies their positive impact on the population's living conditions and, generally speaking, contributes to poverty reduction in the cities.

CONCLUSION

Poverty reduction in urban areas is a major challenge of the twenty-first century, which has been declared the "City Century " by the United Nations Commission for Human Settlements (UNCHS). Access to land and secure land tenure constitute major stakes. The experiment carried out in Benin shows that secure land tenure can contribute to poverty reduction through community participation and integration programs. Such highly innovative experimental activities, based on the participatory approach, have led to the following outcomes:

- Parceling out districts at a reduced social and economic cost to the beneficiaries through an inhabitant-friendly process (adapting secondary and tertiary roads taking into account initial constructions investments).
- Through district development committees, mobilization at grassroots level on priority issues of common concern with a view to improving the district integration and access, and upgrading basic urban facilities and services.
- Improvement of the physical environment in the districts inhabited by vulnerable population groups.
- Poverty reduction and bridging the spatial and social divide by setting up community initiative support units.

The results achieved are fairly satisfactory. Inhabitant-friendly land consolidation and parceling have made it possible to free space for roads that service the district and for socio-communal facilities. The roads have been appropriately constructed and as a result the appearance of the districts has changed. The new main roads facilitate commuting and access to the city center. The district development committees that have been set up provide a forum for discussing and drawing up district development plans, which are then implemented under "district agreements" concluded between the city and the individual development committees.

The city, together with the beneficiary population or the development partners, co-finances the construction of basic socio-communal infrastructure and facilities on the basis of the "district agreements". The development committees ensure the management and sustainability of these works.

Decentralization and the designation of elected municipal officers, including the mayor, are expected to encourage the municipalities to take ownership of the results achieved and the participatory and community management approach, with a view to providing basic services to all urban population groups and reducing the inequalities that are often evident in the supply of urban amenities. That approach can contribute to a sustainable victory over urban poverty.