

Public administration lacks transparency



There remains much to be done to ensure the development of basic capacities. More than 60% of the rural population lives in poverty and one of every two girls does not attend school. Corruption is widespread and mechanisms are necessary that favour transparency in public administration.

Social Watch Benin

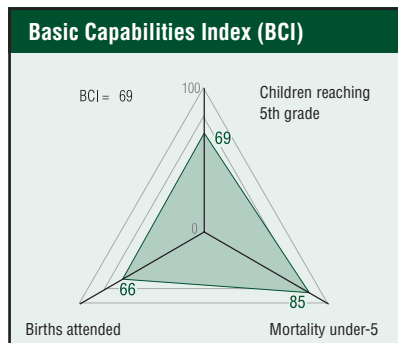
Financing for social development, gender equality and the eradication of poverty continue to be the greatest concerns for the Government. The objectives established in these areas have not been met and corruption is reaching unprecedented levels. Poverty has grown and efforts to improve the gender situation are barely perceptible. At the same time, the traditional means of resource redistribution have splintered again, while the culture of individualism grows.

Extreme poverty has installed itself across the length and breadth of our country. Since 2002, Benin's economic and financial situation has deteriorated substantially, without experiencing improvements. The rate of economic growth has been declining, from 3.9% in 2003 to 2.7% in 2004, a year when growth of 6.8% was expected. In 2004 poverty reached 36.3% in urban areas and 63.7% in rural areas.

The State budget, in addition to the contribution of partners in development, only obtains fiscal resources. In terms of redistributing public resources, appropriate methods exist such as salaries, subsidies and other social programmes (infrastructure, health, education and others) but, in general terms, only those who exercise some activity benefit from the redistribution of the lean income of the State.

Corruption associated with the lack of resources destined to the resolution of social problems limits satisfaction of basic necessities for the great majority of poor people. The rate of enjoyment of health care services is very low, around 39% in 2004.

The Government's economic and social policy is not based on a rigorously equitable distribution of the national income. In any case, efforts are made with the goal of improving the distribution of budget resources, for example the creation of a budget programme dedicated to prioritizing sectors such as education and health. Some budgetary reforms permit a better evaluation of the activities whose execution is subject to shortages that reduce its efficacy for reaching its target recipients. Poverty persists generally in rural areas and the periphery of cities, affecting in particular women and children.

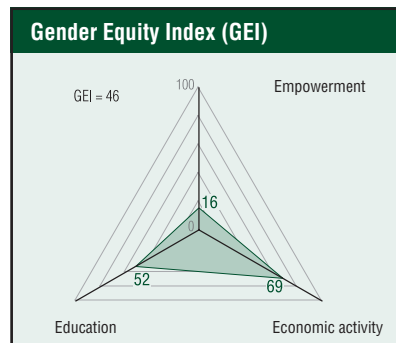


In terms of budget reforms, budgets are created by State bureaucrats without much citizen participation. The express desire of the Government is to make the budget process more and more participatory with the founding of a programme at the level of the competent authorities. The implementation experience of the public spending adjustment programme (PERAC, its initials in French) in 1998 and 1999 meant that some ministerial departments created their own budgets on the basis of a participatory process. The experience of writing budget programmes at the local level would begin in 2007. Due to the lack of trained public officials, citizen participation in the budget writing and public expense tracking processes continues to be very limited.

The need for a budget provision for gender equity

An examination of the measures and programmes capable of favouring women's access to education, health and credit does not show encouraging results. The same occurs at the level of the Ministry of Women, the Ministry of Social Protection and that of Solidarity. The general State budget for fiscal year 2006 does not include any new measure for the promotion of women. But the fight against poverty cannot be realized successfully if the disequilibrium and the inequities between men and women are not addressed.

It is necessary to consider women as a specific group, keeping in mind that they do not face the same obstacles or the same opportunities as men in access to the public services of education and health. Focusing programmes on women is rec-



ognized as an effective poverty reduction strategy given that women constitute a greater proportion of the poor.

Nevertheless, this emphasis on women is difficult to implement from the viewpoint of public spending without including criteria that take into account the gender dimension. For this data are needed on the proportion of public spending that has a differentiating effect on men and women, as well as the proportion of public expenditures destined specifically to women. Nevertheless, insofar as policies are neither conceived nor formulated to take the gender dimension into account, budgets will not either.

Meanwhile, the participation and decision-making power of women in the economy compared to those of men have remained stagnant. At the level of political representation, the female presence in the parliament in 2004 was 7.2%.

One of every two girls does not attend school

An advance in the area of education is an initiative approved by the Government for the education of girls. Monitoring this initiative is difficult, if one takes into account the lack of gender awareness and training of public officials to deal with this difficult area.

Education rates reveal inequity between women and men. According to the World Bank, the gross enrolment rate for primary school increased from 94% in 2003 to 99% in 2004, with a difference of 24 points between boys and girls. The status of girls is worrying, as one of every two school age girls is not attending class, indicated by a net enrolment rate of 47% in the 2000-2004 period.

Corruption and lack of transparency

In terms of the fight against corruption, the experience of accountability to vote on the regulatory law is recent. From 2000, some measures have been taken in financial laws to make public business more transparent and to permit a better following of public spending. These laws continue to be insufficient to fight effectively against corruption, which has already profoundly penetrated into the society. Actions taken to combat corruption focus without success on the sectors of high incidence of corruption such as the customs administration, tax collection, the treasury and public finance. The institutional framework is not entirely favourable to the fight against corruption. Reform measures, and a better application of existing laws, are necessary. Immunity is the rule and no controlling body exists that is capable of exercising coercion against the poor administration of the State, while the Parliament does nothing more than issue recommendations which are generally ignored.

In regards to a strategy of providing information to the citizens about State administration, this is nearly nonexistent. The State does not say a word about its administration and no body can obligate it to do so. Recently a sporadically-published news magazine has begun to publish the results of the mismanagement of public finances. The institutional and informational weaknesses amply favour corruption.

The rare formal occasions in which citizens are informed about government management are provided for by:

- Article 72 of the Constitution, that obliges the President of the Republic to give an annual speech to the National Assembly regarding the State of the Union;
- Article 113, that establishes that the Government must give the National Assembly all explanations asked of it regarding its management and activities;
- written or oral questions directed at the Government and the parliamentary investigating commissions thanks to which representatives of the citizenry gain some information from government ministers about public management or individual questions of national interest.

Besides these constitutional mechanisms, the government ministries sporadically put out press releases that reflect the official viewpoint on public administration.

It is notable that the sources of information related to State management are true taboo themes in the Republic of Benin. With or without reason, this information bears a secret or confidential seal of the State, meaning that the citizens cannot gain

TABLE 1

Public investments by sector of activity (in millions of FCFA) – 2005-2006			
Sector	Total 2005	Total 2006	Variation %
Rural	21,412	28,191	+31.66
Industry, artisanship	5,009	5,079	+1.40
Water, electricity	8,513	12,808	+50.45
Infrastructure	67,067	68,495	+2.13
Commerce, services and tourism	2,977	2,095	-29.63
Total for productive sectors	104,978	116,668	+11.14
Health	18,244	20,043	9.86
Education	25,793	19,012	-26.29
Housing	1,869	1,304	-30.23
Other social sectors	6,724	7,695	+7.00
Total for social sectors	52,630	47,554	-9.64
Administration	2,651	32,193	+20.79
Total for all sectors	184,259	196,415	+6.60

Source: Presentation Report of the Public Investment Programme 2005 and 2006. (FCFA 1,000,000 = USD 1,870.)

TABLE 2

Comparison of social measures contained in budget proposals (millions of FCFA) – 2005-2006			
Areas of intervention	2005	2006	% Variation
Health	7,284	9,708	+33.27
Education	13,113	6,615	-49.55
Hydraulics and energy	8,339	13,594	+63.01
Rural development	3,339	19,226	473.80
Security	-	2,119	-
Decentralization	19,044	21,532	13.06
Other social measures	8,062	-	-
Total	59,225	72,794	22.91

Source: Presentation Report of the Public Investment Programme 2005 and 2006. (FCFA 1,000,000 = USD 1,870.)

access to it. The reports of the governmental investigating commissions created with great media support are never made public.

The new Government has brought forward perceptible efforts for better informing the population. With the objective of informed management, all the Ministries and public services will be interconnected thanks to information and communication technologies.

Conclusion

To sum up, some laudable efforts at development do exist, but there remains much to be done to meet the real needs of the citizens and to ensure transparency in State administration. The actions of the focal point of Social Watch in Benin are oriented toward this end. ■