



Integrated Country Strategy

Benin

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1. Chief of Mission Priorities

The U.S. Mission to Benin serves the American people by supporting the government and citizens of Benin in their aspirations for a stronger democracy; by joining forces to combat international threats affecting the security of Beninese and Americans alike; and by partnering for a healthier, more inclusive and prosperous Benin closely allied with the United States.

Beninese take pride in their reputation as a nation that reinvented itself into a pluralistic democracy after two decades of disastrous communist rule. They are united in their dedication to peaceful coexistence among all religious and ethnic groups, despite some underlying tensions. The Government of Benin views itself as committed to respect for human rights and religious tolerance, a progressive voting member of the United Nations, a proponent of African self-reliance, and a strong contributor to peacekeeping missions in Africa and elsewhere. On the economic front, however, Benin remains one of the world's least developed countries. The country is plagued by corrupt business practices, ineffective governance, weak infrastructure, and alarming health statistics. Trafficking in persons – particularly internal trafficking of young girls to work as domestics - is a serious problem. Tepid economic growth is offset by high population growth. Security threats include piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, high crime rates, transnational organized narcotics trafficking, and regional terrorism. Women and the large youth population have particularly dim economic prospects.

We have identified three Mission Goals that reflect our own capacity to influence the most pressing issues facing Benin:

- Increased transparency in governance and accountable institutions to better serve citizens.
- Strengthened rule of law that furthers internal and regional stability.
- Greater capacity to implement development initiatives that reduce poverty and expand opportunity.

Increased transparency in governance and more accountable institutions

In Benin, the primary challenges to effective and transparent governance are endemic corruption and limited institutional capacity within the Government of Benin and its civil society partners. To strengthen accountable institutions and transparent governance, we will work across agencies to ensure our financial and technical assistance programs incorporate anti-corruption measures and hold the host government accountable for instituting necessary

reforms.

We will expand judicial and law enforcement engagement in the fight against transnational organized crime and drug trafficking. Although fighting corruption and strengthening judicial capacity are stated goals of the Beninese government, a lack of transparency and a cumbersome bureaucracy undercut government efforts in these areas. We will seek to increase competence and professionalism in the judicial and law enforcement sectors to boost access to judicial services, ensure fair application of the law, and institutions' capacity and will to address public sector corruption, and combat transnational crime and drug trafficking. We will also work with civil society to increase public awareness of corruption and support for anti-corruption efforts.

Public affairs programming will help professionalize journalism in Benin and strengthen citizen oversight of government decision making. Currently, there are a small number of professional, independent, well-trained journalists in Benin, many of whom have benefited from Public Affairs-sponsored exchanges and training. Through increased focus on journalist training, building on our established alumni network and the experiences of neighboring missions, Mission Benin will seek to expand the cadre of journalists with effective knowledge of modern, research- and data-based methods of conducting effective oversight of the government, businesses, and other key institutions. We will also conduct training on critical skills such as development and protection of sources, maintaining productive relationships with government institutions, mentoring future generations of journalists, and developing sustainable business models.

Benin is committed to full respect for human rights and is responsive to U.S. government and international concerns, particularly with respect to women's rights. As an important element of democratic governance, we will support Benin's efforts to build a civil society and public sector institutions that embrace gender equality. Mission Cotonou's Gender and Inclusion Working Group will coordinate embassy efforts as we work with local partners to raise awareness about women's rights and to build the capacity of local NGOs and the Government of Benin to combat gender-based violence and assist victims. We will continue to build Benin's judicial and forensic capacity to combat gender-based violence and will prioritize efforts to increase women's political participation.

Strengthened rule of law that furthers internal and regional stability

Benin is an excellent partner in promoting stability in a region that is threatened by frequent violent political upheavals, piracy, transnational crime, and terrorist activity. We will support Benin's efforts to advance maritime security, peacekeeping, and conflict resolution through

Department of Defense (DoD), Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI), and embassy activities. To bolster Benin's efforts against transnational crime and terrorism, we will work with Diplomatic Security, DoD, and INL to support and train Benin's military and law enforcement. To support Benin's efforts to confront growing transnational crime, we will provide technical assistance and mentoring in support of law enforcement to detect and deter drug, wildlife, and other illicit trafficking.

Benin's new administration announced a renewed commitment to peacekeeping, especially on the African continent. They have historically deployed a very high percentage of its active-duty military as well as a significant number of police officers to United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKO) missions in Africa. We will continue to facilitate peacekeeping capacity building activities to ensure that Beninese forces are capable and deployable.

Given Benin's presence in a volatile region, we will ensure that our consular, regional security, and management sections are well-prepared to respond to local and regional crises. We will facilitate legitimate travel to the U.S. while protecting our borders through rigorous application of visa law and improving fraud prevention capabilities. We will also provide the best possible support to U.S. citizens in need of consular services or emergency assistance.

Greater capacity to implement development initiatives that reduce poverty and expand opportunity

Benin faces enormous challenges in reducing high levels of poverty and growing its economy. These include rapid population growth, low levels of literacy, high incidences of infectious diseases, weak public institutions, corruption, inadequate infrastructure, and poor education and health services. Our interagency approach to increasing Benin's capacity to implement development initiatives aimed at promoting increased prosperity for all Benin citizens will include reforming Benin's electricity sector through the second Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) compact to help grow the economy; helping Benin take advantage of trade opportunities under AGOA; expanding access to quality health services; and expanding youth, entrepreneurship, and English-language programs run by the economic and public affairs sections as well as USAID and Peace Corps.

MCC's five-year, \$375 million Compact focuses on electric power, a key constraint to economic growth in Benin and a top priority of the Talon administration. Far-reaching policy reforms were built into the Compact first as conditions for entry into force on June 22, 2017, and also for the release of \$100 million in funding for infrastructure. The Compact has incentivized the Government of Benin to make substantial progress on reforms, including

establishment of an independent electricity regulator with the authority to regulate tariffs and reduction of arrears to the power utility. Other planned reforms include strengthening the management of Benin's utility, reforming tariffs, supporting private investment in power generation, and creating an enabling environment for off-grid electrification. Once the Government of Benin adopts and implements these reforms, MCC will release funding for the construction of major power infrastructure works.

To contribute to economic growth and attain prosperity, the Beninese must have access to adequate health services, education, and nutrition. The Global Health Initiative (GHI) is a major USG initiative that brings together disease-specific programs to ensure an integrated approach to addressing global health. USAID implements the GHI in Benin with resources that support the President's Malaria Initiative (PMI), maternal and child health, family planning, HIV/AIDS, and Ebola preparedness. Through these resources, USAID will strengthen Benin's capacity to improve the health status of its citizens by expanding the availability of health services, increasing citizen use of those services, strengthening key health sector systems, and increasing citizen participation in decision-making of health sector resources. Support also promotes broader good governance objectives as they pertain to strengthening the health sector. For example, the influx of counterfeit medications poses threats to security and public health, and therefore activities work to build strong coordination among the health, interior, and justice ministries. Furthermore, programs support national efforts to become a part of the Open Government Partnership and improve audit and oversight functions with pilots projects in the health sector. These efforts are expected to have direct impacts on the health sector while also contributing to stronger national commitments to democratic principles.

We will support entrepreneurship development, especially among women and youth, via PAS programming, USAID training and credit authorities, Peace Corps engagement, and Special Self Help funding. To increase bilateral trade with Benin, we will promote improvements to Benin's business climate, greater U.S. commercial outreach, and more active Beninese use of AGOA.

The political section will continue to support the Department of Defense HIV/AIDS Prevention Program (DHAPP) in Benin, through which the Beninese Armed Forces' medical unit and patients benefit from U.S.-funded medical supplies and equipment, professional development, and public awareness campaigns.

USAID, Peace Corps, and USDA projects will improve gender equality, health, and food security, including through the pursuit of Food for Peace funding. USAID and PAS will partner with civil society and NGOs to promote English language and educational opportunities for at-risk youth.

2. Mission Strategic Framework

Mission Goal 1: Benin increases transparency in governance and develops more accountable and responsive institutions to better serve citizens.

Mission Objective 1.1: Benin strengthens the public sector institutions to fight corruption, promote information sharing, and increase public participation in policymaking.

Mission Objective 1.2: Benin's civil society strengthens its ability to hold government accountable and advance gender equity.

Mission Goal 2: Benin's institutions reinforce the rule of law and further internal and regional stability.

Mission Objective 2.1: Benin's security and justice actors turn knowledge into action by operationalizing skills provided through training, in order to combat illicit trafficking and improve criminal justice administration.

Mission Objective 2.2: Benin builds upon its efforts to prevent and counter violent extremist elements and respond to regional crises by cooperating with U.S.-led efforts.

Mission Objective 2.3: Improved fraud prevention strategies and an expanded emergency response network better protect American citizens at home and in Benin.

Mission Goal 3: Benin is better able to expand opportunity, reduce poverty, and implement effective and transparent development initiatives.

Mission Objective 3.1: Benin capitalizes on U.S. assistance and trade-preference programs in order to attain broad-based, sustainable economic growth and closer trade linkages with the United States.

Mission Objective 3.2: A healthier and more inclusive society is fostered by expanding the delivery of health services and strengthening the governance of health sector resources.

Management Objective 1: Improve the Mission's effectiveness in attaining ICS goals with an enhanced diplomatic platform.

Management Objective 2: Build a more effective workforce through competitive recruitment and effective personnel development practices.

3. Mission Goals and Objectives

Mission Goal 1: Benin increases transparency in governance and develops more accountable and responsive institutions to better serve citizens.

Description and Linkages: Working with partners to promote effective governance and develop institutions that are accountable and responsive to citizens is a priority action for U.S. engagement in Africa as laid out in the President's National Security Strategy (NSS). USAID will support the Ministry of Health and other Government of Benin institutions with technical, managerial, and financial capacity building, to achieve a sustainable transition to local implementers with strong local governance, in line with Administrator Green's goal of transitioning assistance recipients to self-reliant partners, and the Africa Joint Regional Strategy's (JRS') emphasis on inclusive, country-led development and the transformation of African health systems to accelerate reductions in mortality. Strengthening core Beninese institutions will also ensure Benin's preparedness for possible future epidemics, such as Lassa fever or Ebola, protecting against global threats. Increased public engagements and exchange opportunities will advance American influence in Benin, pillar IV of the NSS.

Mission Objective 1.1 Benin strengthens public sector institutions to fight corruption, promote information sharing, and increase public participation in policymaking.

Justification: Benin has made progress in recent years on anti-corruption reform through the passage of legislation, creation and funding for a new national, quasi-independent anti-corruption body, and growth of civil society platforms engaged in monitoring the work of the public sector. These measures create a stronger framework to continue USG anti-corruption investments. President Talon was elected in 2016 on an anti-corruption agenda, demonstrating broad public interest in governance and the opportunity for engagement with Beninese authorities on genuine reform measures by local groups and the international community. Corruption and the impunity of public officials, if left unchecked, damages Benin's ability to accomplish its development objectives, including the implementation of President Talon's ambitious development plan, the Government Action Program (French acronym PAG).

Mission Objective 1.2 Benin's civil society strengthens its ability to advocate for good governance and human rights, including the advancement of gender equality.

Justification: Benin's democracy is reinforced by an independent media, a robust civil

society, and active trade unions. President Patrice Talon, elected in 2016, placed the fight against corruption as a pillar of his political agenda. However the existence of widespread corruption and impunity impedes almost every facet of social and economic progress. Citizen-led social accountability initiatives and constructive engagement between the state and civil society are critical to efficient delivery of services that are responsive to the needs of the population. USAID will support the increased capacity of non-governmental local actors to monitor and hold accountable local health providers and the administrative and political systems that have responsibility for the local health providers.

One of the most serious problems facing Benin is the incidence of gender-based violence (GBV). Common forms of GBV include domestic violence, sexual gender-based violence, molestation of students by teachers, and harmful traditional practices, such as early and forced marriage. About 75% of women report having experienced physical violence during their lifetime, and a third of women report having experienced sexual violence (Benin's Ministry of Family, Study on Violence against Women and Girls, October (2009)). In addition, a third of women believe that violence against women is justified, which demonstrates a prevailing level of tolerance for the practice (Demographic Health Survey (2012-2013) and the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (2014)). GBV is pervasive in schools (Plan International and UNICEF studies (2014-2015)), as is child marriage with about 22% of girls (aged 15-19) having been married (Ford Foundation, Mapping Early Marriage in West Africa (2013)).

USAID will support a range of local initiatives that aim to first prevent GBV by expanding awareness and changing attitudes. Assistance will continue to support response services for GBV survivors, including identification of victims, referrals to the centers for GBV services, and increased awareness and combating stigma. If GBV is not addressed, the constrained role and status of women in Benin will continue to affect Benin's ability to achieve development goals.

Mission Goal 2: Benin's institutions reinforce the rule of law and further internal and regional stability.

Description and Linkages: Benin is an active maritime security partner and a strong contributor to UN and regional peacekeeping operations. It is also a transit route for the illegal trafficking in persons and of narcotics and wildlife. The U.S. Mission in Benin's capacity-building programs foster bilateral cooperation and enhance the skills of Beninese law-enforcement, justice, and security personnel to prevent and address

crime and terrorism in Benin and the region. This supports the NSS goal of working with African partners to improve the rule of law and and improve the ability of our partners' security services to counter terrorism, trafficking, and the illegal trade of arms and natural resources.

Mission Objective 2.1 Benin's security and justice actors turn knowledge into action by operationalizing skills provided through training, in order to combat illicit trafficking and improve criminal justice administration.

Justification: Benin is a transit country for cocaine, methamphetamine, chemical precursors, and heroin. Beninese authorities have made significant drug seizures with international assistance but have yet to build cases that target individuals in Benin or Beninese nationals who play a significant role in the operation of regional drug networks, or to support drug investigations in neighboring countries. Benin's proximity to Nigeria, and the related volume of transiting drugs in Benin, requires continued U.S. engagement with Benin and assistance to counter-narcotics units. Benin's populations of elephants, lions, and pangolins are among the highest in the region. Criminal networks and extremist groups exploit security vulnerabilities in national parks, ports of entry/exit, and land borders to poach and traffic wildlife.

Mission Objective 2.2 Benin builds upon its efforts to prevent and counter violent extremist elements and respond to regional crises by cooperating with U.S.-led efforts.

Justification: There is a growing trend of extremist ideologies, movements, and instability in West Africa. Benin is a motivated and strong partner in regional security operations, and its approach to countering violent extremism addresses root causes, consonant with the U.S. strategy focus on drivers of extremism worldwide. An interagency U.S. government strategic assessment in May 2015 identified opportunities for increased focus on violent extremism prevention in Benin. Benin is a strong contributor to UN peacekeeping operations and in response to U.S. requests has agreed to continue and increase its commitments. Benin is also an active maritime security partner, currently hosting the ECOWAS Zone E Multinational Maritime Coordination Center, and over the last year has increased the capacity of its maritime patrolling and policing entities.

Mission Objective 2.3 Improve fraud prevention strategies and modernize consular communication and support for U.S. citizens in order to better protect American citizens at home and in Benin.

Justification: Readily available visa facilitators and falsified documents in Benin make fraud prevention and detection activities essential to keeping bad actors out of the United States. The poor quality of emergency medical care and other social services, underdeveloped transportation and telecommunications infrastructure, and bureaucratic inefficiencies increase the embassy support required by U.S. citizens in crisis in Benin. The consular section will modernize its communication and support to U.S. citizens through the American Liaison Network, and adopt strategies to root out all forms of consular fraud.

Mission Goal 3 Benin is better able to expand opportunity, reduce poverty, and implement effective and transparent development initiatives.

Description and Linkages: This goal reflects the National Security Strategy and Joint Regional Strategy focus on supporting African nations to move from assistance recipients to enduring partners that promote prosperity, improve the business environment, and become strong trade partners. The fight against poverty remains at the heart of Benin's development agenda. This effort requires bringing electricity to Beninese businesses and homes, promoting economic growth and trade, and improving health outcomes in order to have a healthy, capable workforce. In alignment with the Joint Regional Strategy's objective of promoting and protecting fundamental rights and liberties, these efforts will place a special focus on reducing gender-based violence and supporting those who have been affected, strengthening women's roles regarding health care decisions for themselves and their families, and promoting women's leadership, including in determining health budgets, and monitoring for accountability and transparency from the national to the community level.

Mission Objective 3.1 Benin capitalizes on U.S. assistance and trade-preference programs in order to attain broad-based, sustainable economic growth and closer trade linkages with the United States.

Justification: Benin has a substantially agrarian economy: more than 70 percent of the population depends on agriculture, which contributes around 35 percent of the country's GDP. Cotton is the principal cash crop, accounting for 70 percent of official export earnings. Other export items include cashews, shea butter, pineapples, and sea food products. The country's longterm vision is to move toward greater diversification in order to both develop a more robust services sector and become a major exporter of agricultural products by 2025. Benin is also encouraging new information and communication technology in an attempt to boost economic growth.

Mission Cotonou will increase efforts to support Benin's growing economy, focusing specifically on increasing U.S.-Benin economic activity by promoting AGOA, encouraging improvements in the business climate that create a level playing field for local and international companies alike, encouraging and supporting entrepreneurship, and increasing energy generation so that companies can count on a reliable and improved energy supply.

The 2017-2022 Millennium Challenge Corporation Compact will increase the quantity and quality of electric power in Benin through policy reforms, institutional strengthening, and infrastructure investments. The Compact aims to (i) strengthen the operational and financial viability of the national electricity utility through implementation of a management contract and establishment of an independent electricity regulator and tariff reforms; (ii) attract private sector investments in the energy sector through the competitive solicitation of an Independent Power Producer to invest in solar power production; (iii) fund infrastructure investments in electric generation and distribution through investments in solar photovoltaic generation and grid modernization in Cotonou and regional areas; and (iv) increase off-grid electricity access through the government's adoption of a policy, strategy, master plan and regulatory framework for off-grid electrification, and establishment of a grant fund that provides project financing for renewable energy solutions.

Lack of access to electricity, economic opportunities, and quality health services diminishes the life expectancy and quality of life of Benin's population and undercuts Benin's ability to serve as a strong diplomatic, economic, and security partner to the United States.

Mission Objective 3.2 A healthier and more inclusive society is fostered by expanding the delivery of health services and strengthening the governance of health sector resources.

Justification: Benin's development is impeded by the extremely poor health status of its citizens, which is evidenced by extraordinarily high infant, child, and maternal mortality rates. More than a third of Beninese children suffer from chronic malnutrition, which significantly contributes to premature deaths. Poor water quality and sanitation furthermore increases the incidence of diarrhea and other infectious diseases, resulting in annual cholera outbreaks. Infectious disease is also a top public health threat in Benin, and deeply affects the wellbeing of its citizens and significantly weakens its workforce. Endemic malaria is the leading cause for all hospital visits and

the primary cause of child mortality. Although bed net ownership and use is improving, malaria prevalence remains high with almost a third of children carrying malaria parasites.

Benin's population growth rate of approximately 3% annually is unsustainable, and will have serious consequences to the country's development if left unchecked. Benin's low contraceptive prevalence rate of 12.5% is an outlier for the region, falling well below neighboring countries. Together, these trends are costly to individuals, families, and communities, and ultimately to the nation as it tries to respond to the chronic burden of disease and reduced productivity. In order for Benin to overcome its major development challenges, it will require a strong and healthy workforce. The U.S. government will help to strengthen Benin's capacity to foster a healthier, more inclusive society by expanding the delivery (both supply and demand) of essential health services, strengthening the management systems that govern health sector resources, and ensuring the most marginalized groups in Benin are more integrated within the larger society.

Although Benin's investments in other areas, for example in education and economic growth, will also be critical in moving the country along the development continuum, a healthy workforce is an essential element. If conditions for a strong and healthy workforce are not ensured, Benin's movement along a sustainable development trajectory will be impeded.

4. Management Objectives

Management Objective 1: Improve the Mission's effectiveness in attaining ICS goals with an enhanced diplomatic platform, including improved services.

Justification: The U.S. Embassy in Cotonou moved into the New Embassy Compound (NEC) in 2015. Frequent electricity cuts require backup systems to ensure a reliable power supply when the main feed is down, and the Mission will take steps to reduce consumption at the NEC and at residences to reduce electricity costs. Workforce efficiencies can also be gained by improving the mission's IT infrastructure and updating the housing and residential property platform while maintaining high standards of cost efficiency and accountability.

Management Objective 2: Build a more effective workforce through competitive recruitment and effective personnel development.

Justification: In order to maximize the Mission's effectiveness and enable it to fully implement the ICS goals and objectives, we need to recruit competitively and advance existing personnel development efforts in order to ensure every staff member has the skills, resources, and motivation to perform at the highest possible level.