

Evaluation of Citizens' Voice and Accountability

Pilot Study report: Benin

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Section 1: Introduction

1. Background: aims and objectives of pilot within the V&A project

The purpose of the pilot was to test the evaluation framework, and in particular the five key components to ensure that they are conceptually coherent, resonant with key informants and programme managers working on V&A and function in a variety of country contexts. In particular, the pilot case studies considered:

- The **relevance and applicability of the evaluation questions and of the five main components** of the framework in specific country contexts;
- The **appropriateness of different methods** for consultation and data collection;
- The **availability and quality of data** at the different levels (e.g. national, local, policy, project, etc.).

Thus, the pilot case studies were not evaluations in their own rights. The methodology employed consisted of a process of consultation with key informants, experts and stakeholders (including all ECG donors/donor representatives and civil society organisations and beneficiaries), as well as other activities to generate evaluative findings on the framework. This was supplemented with a series of 'reality checks' on the framework in relation to a selection of V&A interventions funded by different donors. This entailed applying the framework or parts of it in order to test its applicability and operationalisation.

The 5 main elements of evaluation framework

Enabling environment: The enabling environment describes the political and socio-economic context, referring in particular to the conditions that determine the type/degree of V&A that can be exercised by different individuals, groups and agencies. It includes: (i) the structural conditions that govern power relations and forms of inclusion and exclusion (e.g. distribution of assets, economic relations or ethnic or religious composition); and (ii) the institutional frameworks the ('rules of the game') that determine the nature of the political system and provide the incentives that shape behaviour.

Institutional, organisational and individual capacities: Capacity describes the resources, skills and knowledge required for the exercise of V&A. Capacity can operate at different levels – institutional, organisational and individual.

V&A channels and mechanisms: Channels describe the mechanisms through which citizens' express their voice or demands. They are defined by the function they perform (rather than their form) and can therefore include formal and informal organisations, modes of expression and public fora or spaces.

Changes in power, policy and practice: These changes are the intermediate outcomes of V&A interventions – the changes in the policy and practice of state and non-state institutions and actors or in power structures and relations that signal that a meaningful improvement in V&A has occurred.

Broader development goals: Broader development outcomes include meta-goals such as poverty reduction and good governance. V&A interventions may not lead directly to or be primarily responsible for these meta-goals. However, changes in power, policy and practice may play a role in the pathways leading to broader development goals in the long term.

1.2 Methodology of pilot case studies

In the methodological guidance we highlighted ten key steps that we would follow in order to test the evaluation framework. They were:

- i. Context analysis

- ii. Stakeholder workshop
- iii. Key informants interviews
- iv. Interviews with donor staff
- v. Reality check case studies
- vi. Generation of models of change for V&A interventions
- vii. Validation of above 6 steps using DAC criteria
- viii. Assessment of donors' effectiveness based on the Paris Declaration
- ix. Debriefing stakeholder workshop
- x. Written pilot study report

Context analysis

The context analysis was written by a local consultant, partly before and partly after the case study. It identified *structural factors* related to the deep structures of society and its environment; *institutional factors* focusing on formal and informal 'rules of the game' that shape the behaviour of state and societal actors; and *current events and change agents* examining factors affecting the capacity, resources and interests of groups and institutions in the short-term context.

This product fed directly into the analysis of the enabling environment (first component of the evaluation framework) allowing us to identify (i) the main features of the enabling environment for V&A interventions, distinguishing between general dimensions of the context and those directly relevant for V&A interventions; and (ii) the main entry points, opportunities, risks and possible obstacles for effective V&A interventions.

Stakeholder workshop

This workshop was a crucial step in the process as it allowed us to meet with key informants and stakeholders to explain the draft evaluation framework and the pilot case study methodology, with emphasis placed on managing their expectations of what we could achieve given limited time and resources. We were able to have a rich discussion regarding the evaluation framework: its key questions and components and gather their initial feedback. This fed into the construction of the questionnaires for the interviews with key informants, donors and civil society organisations, as well as supporting the development of the enabling environment analysis.

Key informants interviews

We interviewed key representatives/leaders of national state and non state institutions relevant for V&A, including: public officials from ministries and other government departments; media, national and international NGOs, trade unions. We also interviewed experts such as political scientists and evaluation specialists. Interviews were semi-structured using questionnaires devised in conjunction with the local consultant using information gathered via the context analysis and initial stakeholder workshop. Interviews were carried out in the capital cities as well as in the field (in the Borgou and Zou regions) in an effort to combine different levels of interviews (national, regional, local) as well as reaching to the grassroots of V&A interventions. In addition, a number of 'sector specific' focus groups were carried out with representatives from three main sectors relevant for V&A: media, women's rights and decentralisation .

Interviews with donor staff

In both pilot case studies an effort was made to interview all ECG donor representatives in the country, including the senior staff and those more directly responsible for V&A work (typically governance specialist). In Benin we were able to meet with all donors.

In the course of the in depth, semi-structured interviews we were able to gain an overview of the donors' approaches to V&A in the country, explore the drivers and priorities of donors' actions in this sector and to gather views and feedback on the draft evaluation framework.

Reality check case studies

The main purpose of the reality check was to be able to test various components of the evaluation framework in a real setting. A variety of tools and methods were employed, reflecting the nature and focus of the V&A intervention, the stakeholders we met with and the country context. This was done at the national and local levels.

We met with programme managers and project implementers with a focus on project implementation and activities, results and outcomes and entry points and constraints for the interventions. We also held focus groups with beneficiaries and community members to gain insights into their motivations and entry points to the project, their experiences of involvement in project development and implementation and the results and changes they had experienced.

In order to triangulate the information elicited from those directly involved in V&A interventions, ad hoc interviews were carried out with a small selection of stakeholders who were not directly involved in the donor funded projects but who were knowledgeable about them and could provide useful insights.

Generation of models of change for V&A interventions

Using information and knowledge obtained during the interview process we started to elaborate some models of change for a number of V&A programmes/projects. This was aimed at getting a better understanding of the logic underpinning V&A interventions, with a particular focus on the implicit assumptions which are likely to affect the different stages of programme development. However, time and data limitations only allowed for a very preliminary exercise.

Validation of pilot methodology using DAC criteria and assessment of donors' effectiveness based on the principles of the Paris Declaration

The analysis carried out only allows for a very preliminary assessment in relation to DAC criteria, as the pilots are not meant as 'real' evaluations. We carried out an analysis of donor effectiveness using the principles of the Paris Declaration. In particular, we focused on the 3 principles which are of particular relevance in the context of V&A: harmonisation, ownership and mutual accountability. These conclusions were presented at the debriefing stakeholder workshop.

Debriefing stakeholder workshop

The final workshop consisted of the majority of people interviewed in the course of the pilot study, including donors, partners in the V&A projects examined by the pilot and other stakeholders. We presented a number of conclusions which were then discussed and revised further, in an interactive and inclusive process involving donors, civil society and key informants. Furthermore we presented some initial options for revising the evaluation framework based on the findings of the case studies.

Written pilot study report

The report is being written in conjunction with the local consultants employed, and includes summary of main findings of the 'reality check' case studies and some reflections on the application of the draft evaluation framework.

Section 2: Description of the pilot case study

2.1 Donors' support to V&A in Benin

Donors¹ support for V&A in Benin is very diversified both in terms of thematic focuses, actors involved and types of interventions. This is partly explained by the fact that, as explained in section 3.2, donors have different understandings, interpretations and expectations in relation to V&A, whether as a focal sector of intervention or as a theme integrated as a dimension of other sectoral interventions. Despite these differences, most of the donors work on governance related issues in Benin and consider decentralisation processes as the main entry point for V&A work (e.g. BMZ, DANIDA and DCGD). This is consistent with the policy and institutional context in Benin, which has been moving towards a more decentralised governance structure since the late nineties (see Context Analysis in Annexe 1).

Donors are engaged at different levels in these decentralisation process, ranging from working with central government to support the implementation of the legal and institutional framework for decentralisation (e.g. BMZ/GTZ) to supporting local administrations to effectively manage the new decentralised institutions (e.g. DCGD) as well as civil society groups to better engage in policy processes at the local level (BMZ/GTZ and DANIDA).

In addition to the focus on decentralisation, in Benin ECG donors work in the following areas related to V&A:

- Media, with a particular focus on community radios (i.e. SDC) and press (i.e. BMZ)
- Women's' rights (DANIDA)
- Trade unions and social movements (DCGD)
- Citizens' watchdogs and social monitoring (SDC and DANIDA)
- Fight against corruption (DANIDA)

2.2 Specific interventions considered by the pilot

As explained in section 1, the evaluation framework was tested through two main approaches:

(i) by a range of **consultations** with a significant number of respondents directly involved in V&A interventions, including representatives of the four donor agencies, government officials at national and local levels, civil society representatives, citizens and experts. These consultations were carried out through in-depth individual semi structured interviews², as well as through a series of 'thematic reviews' carried out through discussion groups focusing on the following key sectors: *media, women's rights and decentralisation*.

(ii) by four '**reality checks' case studies** on the following specific interventions funded by ECG members:

- Projet d'Appui au Developpement Communal et aux Initiatives locales dans le Borgou (ADECOI), funded by DCGD, implemented by UNDP.
- Programme Gouvernance et Droits de la Personne (PGDP), funded by Danida.
Component A: Decentralisation and Component C: Women's and Children's Rights.
- Programme d' Appui a la Communication au Benin (PACOM) funded by SDC
- Programme d'Appui a la Décentralisation et au Developpement Communal (PDCC),
Funded by BMZ/GTZ

The box below summarises the key features of these four interventions:

¹ It should be noted that although the pilot focused on the interventions funded by the 4 ECG members present in Benin – BMZ, DANIDA, DCGD and SDC – other bilateral and multilateral donors are involved in V&A work in the country (The Netherlands and USAID in particular).

² See annexe 2 for a complete list of respondents

Box 1: Reality Checks Case studies

ADECOI:

Donors: DCGD, implemented by UNDP

Date set up: 2003

Key objectives: To institutionalise a participatory and decentralised planning system in order to address poverty issues in the region on the basis of citizens' initiative and their capacity to interact with local authorities

Expected results:

1. A participatory planning system is in place and operational in all 7 municipalities
2. Capacities of local actors to create and manage local investment funds are strengthened.
3. Local development fund in place and operational in all 7 municipalities
4. Practices of good governance are adopted in the municipalities of Borgou and disseminated at the national level in order to influence the debate of democratic decentralisation

PGDP

Donors: DANIDA

Date set up: 2004

Key objectives:

Component 1: Contribute to democracy by strengthening the participation of stakeholders in the decentralisation process

Component 3: Strengthen women's rights and participation in the democratic process

Expected Results:

Component 1:

-Civil society has developed and implemented a system to monitor the performance of municipalities in the decentralisation process and the fight against poverty.

-Support in developing and implementing participatory development planning in the communities

-Support citizens' monitoring and control of municipal management through appropriate mechanisms

Component 3:

-Women's rights have been strengthened

-The participation of women in decision-making has been achieved

-Children's rights have been strengthened

PACOM

Donors: SDC

Date set up: 2006 (phase 5)

Key objectives: Strengthen pluralism in the media and to support the implementation of communication via radio in the communities. Civil society are the main actors in this communication strategy, aimed at supporting local development and grassroots organisations.

Expected Results:

-Radio stations at community level operate in a professional way

-Inter-communal communication has been strengthened

-Responsibility for programming has been progressively transferred to institutions at different levels

PDCC

Donors: BMZ

Date set up: 2004

Key objectives: Public institutions, municipal governments and civil society enable the population to participate in local development and provide public services at local level

Expected results:

-Capacity building and training of ministries in charge of the decentralisation reform

-Support local authorities in development planning and implementation

-Creation of consultation committees (made up by members of the local council and civil society)

-Civil society participates in local decision making

-An effective local government

-Increased revenue raising capacities and investment in socio-economic infrastructure

-Better representation of women

-Poverty reduction at local level

2.3 Activities, data collection etc.

The proposed methodology for the pilot case studies incorporated 10 steps including a selection of relatively 'in depth' case studies. Whilst it was possible in the very short time available to carry out the intended consultations and four reality checks case studies, the time and resources available were too limited to perform in depth assessments or to test methods such as Most Significant Change or Outcome Mapping analysis which require a continuous and in depth engagement with stakeholders of different projects. An additional difficulty was that the four ECG members present in Benin work in different areas/regions of the country, and that choices had to be made to select where to concentrate the fieldwork³.

The main tools for data collection used in the pilot were documentary analysis, stakeholders workshops, individual and group semi-structured interviews and focus groups discussions. A full list of respondents is attached in Annexe 2

There are important lessons to be learnt from the pilot case studies which have implications for the organisation and processes of the 'full' case studies. Importantly, it should be recognised that adequate time and resources are key in order to achieve both the (i) necessary breath for an overall analysis of donors' support for V&A within a particular country as well as (ii) to be able to carry out in depth case studies and evaluations of specific projects and interventions. In Benin, following the advice of ECG members, a conscious choice was made to include a wide spectrum of interventions and the two weeks available for the pilot were barely sufficient to do an initial analysis and assessment of donors' support for V&A in the country and for testing the key components of the framework in relation to the specific interventions. **A full evaluation will require a significantly greater time and resources investment.** This is all the more important given the lack of clarity and common understanding of V&A held by donors and other key stakeholders involved in implementing the interventions at the national and local level (see section 3.2)

Section 3: Voice and Accountability in context

3.1 Context analysis

Full version in annexe 1

3.2 Definitions and understandings of V&A

Defining V&A in principle and, perhaps most importantly, developing a common understanding of its operational features among all stakeholders involved in V&A interventions is a particular challenge in this evaluation (see section 5). This featured throughout the field work and the stakeholders workshops in Benin. In this section we summarise some of the key issues related to defining V&A which emerged in Benin. Some are likely to be common to other contexts (particularly in Francophone Africa), others maybe specific to the Benin context.

- **Language.** The term accountability is difficult to translate into French (as it is in many other languages). The French version of the framework (courtesy of Danida) translated accountability as *responsabilité* although many suggested that *redevabilité* would be more appropriate. In general, these terms are associated with a financial interpretation of accountability and it was difficult to focus the discussion on the set of obligations of the state towards the citizens. Terms like answerability or responsiveness, whilst useful to better qualify the meaning of accountability, are equally complicated to translate.

³ The field work covered one main region, the Borgou, where the projects PACOM and ADECOI are implemented. In addition, a delegation from the PDCC projects based in Atacora joined the team in Borgou and a series of meetings with the Cellules Controle Citoyens were arranged in the Zou region, Abomey province.

- **A foreign concept.** Several respondents commented on the fact that V&A is a 'foreign' or 'imported' concept, with its cultural roots in the Anglo-Saxon world and relatively weak linkages with francophone Africa.
- **Voice as participation.** Voice is generally understood as equivalent to citizens' participation, a concept that donors and partners alike are comfortable with. It is much more difficult to agree on different meanings of voice, such as 'active citizenship' or citizens' engagement. In other words, whereas the notion of citizens being able to express their voice is relatively un-contentious, their capacity to be able to act on it is a more controversial interpretation of voice. In practice this entails different emphasis of V&A interventions: some donors focus on supporting consultative spaces/processes for citizens to be able to express their voice (e.g. the PDCC/GTZ), others are more directly concerned with supporting mechanisms for social accountability/citizens watchdogs, with a stronger emphasis on citizens as direct agents of change (e.g. PGDP and SDC funded work with Social Watch)
- **What relationship between V and A?** Exploring the relationship between enhanced citizens voice and greater government accountability and transparency has proven to be difficult not just in theory (which we expected, given the complexity of this relationship emerging from the literature review) but also from an operational perspective. Most donors' supported intervention focus on either the voice dimension, typically involving civil society actors or the media (e.g. PACOM and PGDP/Component C) or on accountability, mostly through capacity building of state actors (e.g. ADECOI). Very few seem to be working on both dimensions (e.g. PGDP component A and PDCC).

Issues related to definitions and common understanding of V&A are key to better understand the role played by donors' support. They are key to understand why donors focus on certain sectors, actors or engage with specific processes. This is all the more important given that V&A is a relatively 'new' concept, despite the long tradition in related fields such as participation, civil society support, governance and support to public sector reforms. For all these reasons it will be important for the framework to address these challenges and to explicitly aim for a better common understanding and operational definitions of V&A.

Section 4: Main findings

This section provides an overview of the main findings of the pilot case study in relation to the five components of the draft evaluation framework, namely the enabling environment, institutional, organisational and individual capacities, V&A channels and mechanisms, changes in power, policy and practice and broader development goals. The analysis is primarily based on the four reality checks case studies as well as on the ‘thematic reviews’ on *media, women’s rights and decentralisation*.

It should be stressed that this analysis is not intended as an exhaustive assessment of donors’ support for V&A in Benin, nor as an evaluation of the four interventions considered by the reality checks case studies. Rather, this analysis is meant to provide a summary of the main findings emerging from the pilot which, combined with some reflections on the processes and methods used, will form the basis for revising and finalising the evaluation framework (see section 5 for a summary of implications from the Benin pilot).

4.1 The enabling environment

Overall, the political and institutional context in Benin is conducive to V&A interventions. As mentioned in section 3.1 and in the Context Analysis in Annexe 1, since 1990 Benin is characterised by a pluralistic political system, by democratic institutions that overall perform their functions and a multitude of social and political associations. The 2006 elections, characterised by the departure of President Kerekou in accordance to the terms established in the constitution represent an important consolidation of the democratic process in Benin, which is now considered one of the most stable democracy in Africa.

Overall, donors’ support for V&A (and more broadly in support of governance processes) takes into account these key features of the enabling environment for V&A: their interventions build on the existing strengths of the political and institutional system which offer the main entry points for V&A work in the country. More generally, in a country like Benin where the overall context is favourable for V&A interventions, donors’ support tends not to be aimed at significantly transform the enabling environment. Rather, donors tend to interact with the enabling environment following two main strategies:

- **strengthening existing structures, processes and mechanisms** for V&A, at the national and local level, involving either state or non state actors
- **addressing the various obstacles and challenges** which prevent the effective implementation of the norms and policies which regulate V&A mechanisms and processes

This approach is likely to be common in other countries with relatively stable or conducive environment for V&A, normally characterised by political stability and relatively functioning state institutions. However, for the purpose of defining general categories for the evaluation framework, it is important to recognise that in less favourable environment, where the basic rules of state functioning are not in place or not working, the strategies and approaches adopted by donors to support V&A are likely to be different

The approaches adopted by the PDCC (BMZ), ADECOI (DCGD) and PACOM (SDC) provide some useful examples in relation to these two strategies:

Box 2: Supporting decentralisation processes: PDCC and ADECOI

Decentralisation processes are a key entry point for donors' support of V&A in Benin. The main framework for decentralising powers and structures in Benin has been introduced in 1999, with the establishment of 12 regional '*départements*' composed of a total of 11 '*communes*'. Local elections were held in 2002 and 2003 and since then a process of administrative and political reform has been underway.

Despite the adequate normative and policy framework underlying the process of reform and the more recent political will expressed by the current government (in place since 2006) in support of decentralisation processes, progress so far has been slow. For two main reasons:

- (i) the *lengthy and delayed process* of 'power transfer' from central government to local government institutions. This is partly due to lack of resources, insufficient details provided by the laws/policies, but also to competition arising between local elected representatives and sectoral central government representatives/civil servants (*cadres de l'état*);
- (ii) the *weak capacity* of the administration, particularly at local level, to manage policy processes as well service delivery. This is particularly acute in relation to the development of the 'Plan de développement Communale' (municipal development plan) which is the main policy and strategic document to be developed by each commune to establish priorities, expenditures and action plans at the local level.

The **PDCC** programme is designed to address some of these challenges and gaps, by adopting a multi level and multi actors approach. At the national level, the programme supports the Treasury and the Ministry for Planning in four main ways: by providing training and capacity development to the relevant structures/departments; by supporting the development of financial management systems to transfer resources from the central to the local administrations; by supporting the development of a communication strategy and by improving the legal framework underpinning the decentralisation process. At the local level (mostly in the Atacora and Donga regions), PDCC supports the development and implementation of an M&E system for the decentralised functions, it provides training and capacity development for civil society organisations to improve their advocacy and lobbying and it supports coordination and consultation mechanisms to increase citizens participation and voice.

Activities supported by **ADECOI** are focused on the provincial and municipal level in the Borgou region. Its strategy is more focused on addressing the 'capacity' gap, by supporting the establishment of local administrative structures (e.g. the *communes*) and on the production and implementation of local development plans. This entails two main course of actions: a programme of training and capacity development aimed at local administrators/civil servants and the development of a participatory planning system at the municipal level.

Box 3: The importance of context for the media: PACOM

Since the late nineties the media sector in Benin has been progressively growing, and today it represents one of the most advanced in the sub-region and Africa more generally. A number of factors contribute to this, including a regulatory framework which ensures media pluralism, the enforcement of the right to information and freedom of expression; a progressive liberalisation of the sector, including licences for radio frequencies and national press, the establishment of national agency in charge of the implementation of the regulatory framework (the HAAC)

The evolution of the **PACOM** programme follows the evolution of the context: in its first phase in the late nineties the programme was mostly concerned with analysing and understanding the evolving context and working with the state which, at the time, was still the main actor in the media sector. As the liberalisation progressed, PACOM subsequent phases focused on developing and implementing a strategy for community radios which, over the years, have become increasingly independent from project funding. Once established, PACOM worked in partnership with the HAAC with a view to broaden its scope beyond the support of individual radios, to ensure direct engagement and influence on the regulatory framework. In its latest phase (since 2006) the programme is focusing on some of the main challenges emerging in the progressive media sector in Benin: the professionalisation of journalists, the financial autonomy of the radios and the capacity of the regulatory institutions to handle an increasingly complex sector.

The examples above show that donors do take into account the specific context for V&A and that, when the enabling environment is favourable in terms of policy and institutional framework, they are able to identify some of the main challenges for implementation and to focus their efforts on those. However, donors are not necessarily able to address all of these challenges and obstacles which prevent a favourable environment from implementing effective policies and programmes. In Benin these obstacles include **widespread corruption, limited socio-economic development and the predominance of traditional socio-cultural norms**.

In relation to **corruption**, the picture emerging from Benin is particularly complex. Despite the relatively well established democracy and an active, free and pluralistic media, corruption is flourishing at all levels of the public administration and several respondents agreed that this represents one of the main obstacles for furthering socio-economic development in Benin. Despite a general commitment to the fight against corruption, the current government has so far failed to introduce and enforce credible sanctions to concretely reduce misuse of power and resources.

Some donors support anti-corruption initiatives and interventions in Benin, through mostly not the four ECG members (USAID was widely seen as the most committed donor to anti-corruption). Danida, through PGDP and with previous initiatives on governance, works on corruption (although the relevant component of the PGDP programme was not one of the case studies considered by the pilot), though its objectives are mostly related to good governance and transparency rather than to reducing corruption among public officials or promoting the introduction of sanctions for corrupted individuals. A number of respondents of the pilot study reported that donors are not sufficiently active in supporting anti-corruption initiatives, particularly if those are promoted by organisations/actors which do not act in partnership with government, but maintain an independent 'watchdog' role vis a vis government initiatives. The only anti-corruption agency which is currently receiving donors support is the Front Nationale de Lutte Contre la Corruption whose president is currently the general secretary of the anti-corruption commission which comprises both government and CS representatives.

The relatively weak commitments of donors in the fight against corruption could be considered as a signal of the **difficulty in engaging in political processes**, where an approach that supports citizens independent voice whilst at the same time trying to reinforce government accountability can be difficult to achieve without generating tensions on either side.

4.2 Institutional, organisational and individual capacities

Weak capacity of the various actors involved in V&A mechanisms and processes is a serious obstacle to implementing initiatives in this domain and, ultimately, to achieving results. This lack of capacity should not be underestimated and it was raised as a serious constraint by all the stakeholders consulted during the pilot. A closer look to the 'capacity challenge' reveals a rather composite picture: donors' support appears to be more effective in certain areas, whereas gaps remain for some of the most crucial aspects of the 'capacity challenge', as the examples below highlight. More generally, capacity building/development initiatives lack the necessary focus to be specifically useful for V&A purposes.

In relation to the capacity of state actors and institutions, donors focus their efforts in two main areas: primarily, the V&A interventions support local state actors to improve their capacity to implement policy and programmes put in place by the decentralisation process. Secondly, donors work with state actors at the national level to improve their capacity to manage budget systems and processes, and to support the transfer of powers and functions to the local level. Interestingly, the four interventions considered by the pilot focused much more on capacity building at the local level, despite the general recognition that weak capacity of the 'cadres' in

the public administration at the national level is a major constraint in implementing decentralisation policies and programmes. This lack of commitment to 'institution building' may contribute to explain the relative weak results in terms of enhanced government accountability.

Developing the **capacities of local public institutions**, and specifically of the newly elected councillors and mayors of the communes, is the main objective of the ADECOI and PDCC programmes and, to a lesser degree, of the PGDP programme. However the emphasis of the three interventions is slightly different. ADECOI⁴ applies a more 'direct' approach to capacity building, mostly focusing on reinforcing the technical and management skills required by the local administrators to develop, implement and monitor the 'Local Development Plans'. In addition, ADECOI supports a range of specific initiatives aimed at strengthening the monitoring and evaluation of these plans. As well as supporting the development and implementation of the 'Local Development Plans', PDCC has developed a methodology for 'Participatory Impact Monitoring' at the local level, involving not only state actors, but also NGOs and CSOs (see section 4.3 for more details).

The aim of all these initiatives is to improve the **efficiency** the local administrators and institutions in managing the policy process and the related operational priorities at the local level. However, the link with improving the accountability of these institutions remains, on the whole, weak. The focus on building the capacity on monitoring and evaluation of the Local Development Plans has at least introduced some practices which, in time, should increase the overall transparency of the local public administration. However, it was not clear from the data collected during the fieldwork in the Borgou region – which included several interviews with locally elected administrators, civil servants and project staff- what is the relationship between a more efficient and a more accountable administration. More specifically, it cannot be assumed that the technical and administrative skills acquired to improve efficiency and capacity to plan and manage policies and programmes will result in more transparent and accountable behaviour or practice. This is probably explained by the lack of support for concrete accountability mechanisms and processes (see section 4.3).

Donors support a very wide range of **capacity development initiatives for non state actors**, including CSOs, NGOs, media, networks and coalitions and trade unions. These include more generic initiatives such as public awareness or civic education (often aimed at specific groups, such as women in the PGDP programme) as well as initiatives aimed at developing more specific skills (e.g. advocacy and communication supported by PDCC and PGDP) and technical skills (e.g. media training, IT related skills for broadcasting supported by PACOM etc.). In some cases, though they appear to be quite limited, donors support capacity development for networks/organisations directly involved in political processes, such as political parties (e.g. PGDP), trade unions (e.g. DCGD supports them through Solidarité Mondiale, a Belgian NGO working on labour/employment issues worldwide), networks of groups directly involved in political/legal campaigns (e.g. the women's network Rifonga, who campaigned to introduce and approve a new national family bill on supported by Danida/PGDP).

It is not always easy to identify the direct effects of capacity building on V&A practices. However, some examples of good practice can be identified, normally associated with an adaptive and evolving approach to capacity building, as the two examples below demonstrate.

⁴ It should be noted that ADECOI, alongside its 'human capital' objectives, ADECOI directly funds infrastructural projects in the same communes in the Borgou.

Box 4. Good practices in capacity building: PACOM and PDCC

The approach to capacity development and support adopted by **PACOM** has been evolving since the programme was first funded by SDC in 1996. For the first few years the focus was on establishing the radios at the community level, training the staff and ensuring technical support on broadcasting technologies. As the institutional context and regulatory framework evolved (see section 4.1), the objectives of the programme have changed accordingly, including its approach to capacity development. These days the focus is much more on the autonomy, sustainability and governance structures of the community radios, and this is reflected in the strategies to further develop the capacity and the potential of the community radios as a credible channels for citizens' voice and to demand government accountability. The approach is one of 'coaching' and 'mentoring' whereby the Institute Kilimanjaro, the project implementer, provides direct support at regular intervals to radios' staff and governing bodies to ensure not only that the radios can generate sufficient revenues to operate autonomously, but crucially that their controlling systems, governance procedures and budget transparency are in place in order to ensure regular feedback to the communities as well as sufficient credibility for demanding accountability of the local administration.

The **PDCC** programme supports a number of 'consultation' mechanisms and processes (see section 4.4) which provide CSOs and citizens with a space to express their voice and engage with the state institutions. These mechanisms are the main vehicle for supporting the capacity and skills of the organisations involved, with a view to incrementally increase their control over the management and implementation of the consultation processes and spaces.

Several gaps were identified in relation to donors' support for capacity development for V&A. In particular, respondents from the social movements and civil society argued that **CSOs actors lack coordination capacity to build networks and coalition** with the sufficient strengths, depth and reach which are necessary to scale up their effort to achieve long lasting change. Donors do not appear to be engaging on these fronts, often preferring to support individual sector specific organisations which are more able to fulfil their funding requirements, including legal status and reporting capacity. This approach excludes a significant proportion of formal and informal actors whose voices are consistently not heard in public life in Benin.

4.3 V&A channels and mechanisms

Channels for V&A describe the actors, mechanisms, processes and spaces through which citizens' express their voice and are able to hold the state to account. Despite the difficulties in defining and translating the concept of 'channel' (see section 5), it was widely felt that it is the combination of actors, processes, mechanisms and spaces which can make a concrete difference for enhancing citizens' voice and for increasing the accountability of the state.

A) Actors:

A multitude of **actors** are involved in V&A interventions in Benin. Donors' funded programmes engage with some of them, but not all. The risk is that some voices are excluded and in turn this could limit the potential of V&A to achieve results. According to our (limited) analysis based on the ECG members portfolio of work in Benin, the actors *most commonly involved* in donors' funded V&A interventions include:

- individual NGOs, normally working in a specific sector
- community based organisations, active at the village/commune level
- professional associations, mostly at the local level
- local state institutions, particularly elected bodies such as councils and mayors
- national state institutions, within specific ministries (e.g. planning, women and children, treasury etc.)
- multilateral donors

Other types of actors which are *less frequently involved*, but still quite crucial to achieve V&A results are :

- the media (community radios and regulatory bodies supported by PACOM)
- citizens' watchdogs (e.g. Social Watch soon to become a partner of SDC and '*cellules citoyens*' supported by PGDP)
- networks and coalitions (e.g. women's network supported by PGDP)
- trade unions and social movements (supported by DCGD)

Interestingly, the first type of actors are often the direct recipient of donor's funding in V&A interventions, and in turn they support the second (e.g. UNDP implements ADECOI with DCGD funding; PACOM directly funds an NGO, the Institute Kilimanjaro, which supports the community radios: PGDP funds the NGO Cbedes which supports the '*cellule citoyens*' in the Zou and Collines region etc.)

Actors which *do not appear to be involved* in donors' supported V&A interventions in Benin include: political parties, anti-corruption commissions and organisations (see 4.1), business, campaign organisations or coalitions, professional organisations at the national level (e.g. lawyers), human rights defenders/organisations. However, it is important to recognise that ECG members are not the only donors funding V&A initiatives in Benin and that some of the more active donors, such as the Netherlands and USAID may involve a wider range of actors in the interventions they support.

One key question which we were only able to partly explore during the pilot in Benin, is related to **how these actors become involved in donors sponsored interventions**. In particular, in what ways donors 'choose' the partners they work with and to what extent local state and non state actors shape the agenda of V&A initiatives. Clearly, technical and organisational issues play a role here: it was suggested that a relatively 'small' donor like SDC, with a stronger mandate to work with civil society, has more freedom to engage with a wider range of smaller and less organised non state actors than Danida which has a larger investment programme in Benin which requires more coordination as well as strong and well organised intermediaries to disburse significant funding.

However, it was also suggested that donors find it difficult to engage groups which are less committed to 'tangible' deliverables, such as social movements and trade unions. Finally, as suggested in 4.1 there is some evidence that donors do not engage much in political processes or issues, such as corruption. This may explain the relatively weak engagement of anti-corruption groups and of political parties.

Finally, the extent to which civil society actors and organisations are able to attract donors' funding based on their own proposals and existing work appears to be a signal not only of the autonomy of the organisations, but also of their legitimacy and credibility. This is the case of Social Watch, a network of citizens' watchdog organisations which is funded by a range of bilateral and multilateral donors in Benin (including SDC) or of Rifonga, a network of women's organisations. When on the other hand groups are created by donors' initiatives (see below the discussion on spaces and mechanisms) or are primarily dependant on the funding of one donor only there is a risk that the initiatives put in place are not sufficiently grounded in the realities where they develop or do not have sufficient legitimacy in the wider community.

The credibility, legitimacy and, ultimately, the accountability of all actors involved in V&A interventions is an important aspect that the evaluation framework should consider. It is not only important to ensure sufficient reach and relevance of the initiatives, but also to maximise their potential to achieve results, including the sustainability of the spaces and mechanisms that these interventions seek to establish and support. The community radios supported by PACOM are a good case in point.

Box 5: Autonomy and accountability of community radios

The community radio of Niki, in the Borgou region, has been operating since 1999. Over the years, the radio has been increasingly focusing on two particular aspects to increase its reach and, ultimately, its capacity to achieve change:

- its financial autonomy, which was achieved by a mix of ‘on demand’ services sold to a variety of actors (including donors and state institutions) and by the individual contribution of community members
- its own governance and monitoring procedures, including the reporting mechanisms to its governing board which, in turn, ensures the regular feedback and consultation with community members as well as credibility *vis a vis* the government structures that it aims to hold to account.

In relation to **state actors**, the interventions considered by the pilot study indicate a greater involvement of local state actors, especially local government structures and elected officials, than of national state actors. Even though PACOM, PDCC and PGDP all collaborate to some extent with national institutions and ministries, the emphasis is much more on the relationship between the citizens and local state institutions, and on supporting decentralisation processes at the local level. This is of course desirable in terms of building the capacity of those directly involved in this relationship. However, it was also pointed out that weak institutions and political will at the national level are as serious a challenge, often underestimated by donors who tend to work at national level on more traditional sectors (infrastructure, education etc.). This is further emphasised by the introduction of ‘new’ aid modalities such as SWAPS and GBS.

B) Spaces and mechanisms

As a consequence of the favourable enabling environment, in Benin there is a multitude of spaces and mechanisms available to citizens to express their voice. These spaces are animated by a vocal and pluralistic civil society which actively participates in public life, particularly at national level. The media are also very active in providing a space for citizens’ voice, though dozens of daily newspapers, radios and to some extent TV channels.

However there are some shortcomings to the availability and openness to these spaces: these gaps are to some extent addressed by the donors’ supported V&A interventions, although some challenges remain. Some of the shortcomings of spaces for citizens’ voice include:

- mostly, spaces are available for citizens and NGOs to engage at the **national level**. By comparison, the initiatives for citizens’ involvement at local level are scarce.
- **direct citizens’ engagement in policy processes** at national and local level is not frequent, and few dedicated spaces or mechanisms are available
- these spaces are mostly ‘**closed**’, i.e. controlled by elites, typically politicians or ‘**invited**’, i.e. open only to particular groups. Very few are ‘**claimed**’, i.e. created by citizens.
- as a result of all of the above, vulnerable or marginalised groups, individual citizens or informal groups which are not affiliated to a formal organisations such as trade unions or NGOs, are often excluded from these spaces and cannot get their voices heard.

Donors’ interventions to support V&A take these limitations into account and seek to address them, though it is interesting to note that the strategies adopted can differ quite significantly. All four donors support initiatives which are aimed at creating or increasing spaces for citizens’ voice at the local level. However the nature of these spaces, including the extent to which they are open, invited or claimed, can be very different as the examples below show.

Box 6 Decentralisation and spaces for citizens' voice

Both the Danida funded PGDP and the BMZ funded PDCC support the establishment of spaces and mechanisms for citizens' engagement. However, the emphasis of the PDCC funded initiatives is on creating opportunities for consultation with CSOs and citizens representatives, whereas PGDP aims to establish a number of *cellules citoyens* whose mandate is to directly control and monitor public action.

The Consultation Framework (*Cadre de Concertation*) supported by **PDCC** is aimed at creating a participative space for citizens, CSOs and professional associations to regularly meet with their locally elected officials to discuss (among other things) the Local Development Plan and to monitor progress. It was piloted in one commune in the Atacora region (Bassila) and since then it has been introduced in other communes in Atacora and Donga. The main features of this framework are:

- it is open to all local groups, including CSOs, NGOs and professional associations
- the meetings are called for and chaired by the mayor or one of its representatives, The mayor has a formal obligation to follow up on the suggestions put forward by the consultation.
- it is primarily aimed at making information directly available to CS groups and citizens and to empower them to express their views on public actions
- it does not focus on resources availability or resource allocation

Despite the 'invited' nature of the Consultation Frameworks – which are ultimately under the control of the mayor, they have proven to be very successful among CSOs and NGOs in the regions. It was reported that since they have been in operation it has been possible to clarify a number of issues with the municipality, including allocation of market spaces and revenue issues, and a number of disputes have been settled as a result. Although at the central level (i.e. in Cotonou) the PDCC programme partners maintain that the programme is not aimed at supporting mechanisms for direct citizens' control of public action, at the local level the expectation is very much that over time CSOs and NGOs will take effective control of the spaces provided by the Consultation Frameworks, by being able to put enough pressure on the public authorities so that they will have to respond to citizens' demand, handing over the power to call and chair the public meetings.

The Danida funded **PGDP** has a much more explicit focus on citizens' direct control of public action, including budgets and infrastructures. In the Zou region it supports the establishment of a number of citizens' groups (*cellules citoyens*) whose role is to directly 'control' public actions by demanding to review budgets, by visiting infrastructure sites and by requesting and official 'status' as citizens' watchdogs to be approved by the municipality. These groups were formed on the basis of existing groups/contacts that Danida had in the area based on their work on water and transportations.

Although these citizens groups have only been established very recently, there are some signals that the chosen approach may not be the most conducive to the desired results. A number of these groups are encountering some difficulties including lack of recognition by the mayor or the local councillors, attempts to 'capture' the membership by the local elite, failure to obtain access to information. There are a number of reasons which might explain these difficulties, including:

- lack of legitimacy of the citizens' group which were not established as a result of a concerted process
- lack of negotiation with state institutions and other local groups over the mandate and role of the citizens' groups
- limited experience and 'status' of groups' members
- confusion over the independent role of the groups and the requirements to obtain official recognition by the public authorities

More generally concerns were raised that this initiative was very much owned by Danida rather than by the communities in the region. As such it was defined as an imported model, which lacked ownership at the local level and hence perceived as an artificial attempt to create space for citizens' voice.

The analysis conducted suggests that, despite the challenges, donors make a direct contribution to creating spaces and supporting mechanisms for citizens' voice. The picture is less clear in relation to accountability.

Concrete **mechanisms for state accountability** towards its citizens in Benin are very weak⁵, particularly at the local level. Despite a generalised concern, donors' support is mostly confined to building the capacity of the relevant state actors (and even then, as discussed in section 4.2, the results are unclear) to ensure more efficiency and, to some extent, transparency. The interventions considered by the pilot were mostly focused on the local level, and perhaps more could be said in relation to national government accountability. At the local level, the only concrete mechanisms that were mentioned time and time again were:

- the open/public sessions of the local council/assembly which can be attended by any citizen (though with no right to intervene)
- and the requirement to post the budget approved by the commune outside the municipal building

Some work is currently underway to ensure greater transparency and accountability in budget processes, both at the national and local level. However, the organisations mostly involved in these initiatives (e.g. Social Watch and Alcrer) are currently not supported by ECG members⁶.

4.4. Changes in power, policies and practices

As indicated in section 2, the limited time availability and the nature of the pilot did not allow for a comprehensive assessment of the results of the four interventions considered, although we were able to collect some examples which are useful to scope the range of expected results and the changes that actually occur at different levels.

In relation to **changes in policies**, including the legal and regulatory framework, it should be noted that as argued in 4.1, the substantially favourable enabling environment in Benin implies that most donors' efforts are not directed at changing or introducing policies as such, but rather at addressing the obstacles that prevent policy to turn into effective actions. The only exception observed during the pilot was the PGDP funded initiative in support of the introduction and implementation of a new family law (le Code de la Famille) which, in line with the commitment to women's' and children rights, regulates the rights and obligations of the 'legal' family, and wife in particular, vis a vis those of the other 'wives' and offspring outside the legal marriage. Interestingly, despite the general agreement that this new bill is a significant step towards a full recognition of women's rights and equality, many in Benin think that the introduction of a new law is not sufficient to change attitudes and beliefs which are grounded in social and cultural norms. As discussed above, these social and cultural norms and their gatekeepers, typically traditional chefs or religious groups or other informal structures, are currently not significantly involved in donors' funded V&A interventions.

Perhaps the greatest limitation in relation to achieving change at the policy level is the limited engagement, and hence results, in establishing and nurturing concrete mechanisms to enhance the state answerability and responsiveness, which are the two main components of accountability.

Finally, although the analysis was limited in this respect, donors do not appear to be very involved with national level campaigns and movements/coalitions fighting for constitutional change or policy reform⁷.

⁵ It is important to bear in mind that the pilot did not look at the justice sector, including access to legal services.

⁶ Although SDC is likely to support Social watch in the future.

Changes in practice can be observed at different levels. At the local and community level the most significant changes include:

- **PDCC**: the establishment of consultative spaces for citizens' voice; piloting and scaling up of the model of the Consultation Framework in several communes of the Donga and Atacora; establishment of follow up mechanisms and responsabilisation of mayors/elected officials; increased participation of CSOs and local groups in consultation meetings, planning and monitoring of the implementation of the local development plans. Most of these changes are related to improved spaces for voice. It is difficult to assess the extent to which this has also resulted in to improved capacity to act on it; even more to assess the results on state accountability.
- **ADECOI**: monitoring and evaluation processes and systems for the local development plans; awareness on decision making processes in relation to location and management of infrastructure. Despite an intention to move beyond the current focus on the 'supply' side of the decentralisation process (i.e. on the role and capacity of local state institutions to manage policy processes and plans), to include a more demand driven approach supporting citizens' engagement, so far the project has focused more on technical support and capacity development and it would be hard to assess its results in terms of voice or accountability.
- **PACOM**: sustainability, independence and autonomy of community radios (Niki and Bembereke); exposure of misuse of resources and low standards of basic services; increased availability of information to citizens concrete channels for citizens concerns and demands to responsible public authorities and service providers; establishment on public enquiries; behaviour and attitude change among population. One of the main limitations of the community radios is the lack of coordination among them: they all seem to operate in a very independent mode, even within the same regions there are no mechanisms to exchange good practices or to join up forces to achieve greater impact at the regional or even national level.
- **PGDP**: information and greater awareness of women's rights; improved political and negotiation skills of women (leadership, political skills, electoral campaign, management, electoral law etc.); introduction of innovative approaches to citizens' control of public action, though it is too early to say and there are early signals of some challenges arising.

Beyond these specific example of results at the local level, one of the most significant change introduced by several V&A interventions which is slowly influencing practice at different levels is the establishment of monitoring systems and processes (particularly of local development plans) which, over time, are likely to contribute to greater transparency of the public administration.

One of the key areas that donors do not appear to be addressing and one of particular importance in terms of resistance to change are (traditional) socio and cultural norms. In Benin these often imply discrimination against women and young people and unequal access to information and resources and, sometimes, the acceptance of misuse of power. Unless V&A interventions are able to address some of these challenges it is unlikely that they will scale up their potential results.

The lack of attention for traditional socio-cultural norms and the lack of engagement with informal or traditional actors makes it difficult to assess actual **changes in power** structures and relations. However our preliminary analysis reveals that power changes are mostly confined to examples of 'power from within' , i.e. changes in the individuals' capacity to act as a result of improved confidence and awareness of rights and entitlements; or 'power with', i.e.

⁷ Prior to the last elections in 2006 a wide network of CS movements, organizations and individual citizens campaigned under the banner 'Touche pas ma constitution' to avoid constitutional change which would have allowed president Kerekou to stay in power for a n third term. This was largely achieved without significant donors' funding

the increased ability of groups and networks to take collective actions. It is less clear if as a result of V&A interventions citizens are able to better challenge existing hierarchies (power to) or to achieve power changes over resources and decision making (power over).

4.5 Pathways to broader development goals

The types of changes in policy, practice and power described in section 4.4 can play a role to achieve wider development goals such as good governance and poverty reduction. The analysis conducted by the pilot is not sufficient to elaborate the specific features of such pathways to long term change. However, some insights were provided, which should be followed up and integrated in the revised evaluation framework.

In relation to **poverty reduction**, it was found that in many cases the link between enhanced citizens' voice, government accountability and reduction in poverty levels is not a direct one and it is difficult to establish a causal relationship. However it was suggested that certain types of V&A interventions, particularly those which are directly aimed at improving revenue collection or recovery and budget monitoring and allocation, might have the potential to directly contribute to reducing at least some dimension of poverty (e.g. access to basic services). It was also suggested that in relation to economic benefits, it should be possible to at least consider the relationship between some element of V&A, such as government transparency and accountability, and economic growth.

In relation to **good governance**, most interventions aimed at supporting decentralisation processes assume a direct relationship between enhanced citizens' voice and improved governance. This needs to be further investigated as the lack of broader support for institution building (see section 4.3) is likely to undermine this relationship as the focus rests on building individual or technical capacities at the local level rather than on a more comprehensive effort to support public sector reform.

Finally, the definition of development goals could be broadened to include dimensions such as **changes in people's lives and human development** where the link with V&A outcomes is likely to be more direct.

4.6 Aid effectiveness and architecture

In this section we provide an initial analysis of what can be learnt from the Benin pilot in terms of donors' activities and behaviours in their support for V&A and the consequences for aid effectiveness and architecture.

Donors' harmonisation: (i.e. *increased co-ordination and streamlining of activities of different aid agencies, with the aim of reducing the transaction costs to governments receiving aid*).

Donors' harmonization in supporting V&A in Benin is very limited: not only there are no joint initiative or co-funded interventions (all four considered by the case study were funded by individual donors), but there are no institutionalized (nor I suspect informal) mechanisms to coordinate donors' support in this domain, or in governance more generally. In many ways the pilot was an opportunity for the four donors to initiate a dialogue on these issues, to learn about each others initiatives and to identify possible synergies and opportunities for collaboration.

As a consequence of this lack of coordination, initiatives have been duplicating on the ground particularly in some areas (Borgou, Zou). This has resulted in some forms of 'ex post' operational coordination: ADECOI for example has been joining up efforts with similar

initiatives in the region. However these are ad hoc initiatives which are not likely to improve coordination at the more strategic level.

The lack of donors' coordination on V&A has a number of consequences for the evaluation, at the strategic and operational level. At the strategic level, it should be recognized that this evaluation covers an area where not only collaboration is very limited, but so is mutual understanding or even an agreement as to what constitute an operational approach to V&A. The evaluation can make a significant contribution to this gap, as it provides a unique opportunity for donors and other key stakeholders to engage in a dialogue leading towards a common understanding on these issues. Operationally, the main implication is that the evaluation requires careful preparation to ensure ownership and follow up as it cannot be assumed that county programmes will commit to a joint exercise unless the potential benefits are clearly spelled out.

Ownership (i.e. *partner countries exercising effective leadership over their development policies and strategies, and coordinating development actions*).

Most donors' interventions are consistent with the key features of the institutional and political context in Benin. However, it is not clear if the specific priorities and approaches adopted by the V&A interventions are informed by 'effective leadership' of the Benin partners. In particular, the citizens' groups supported by PGDP were seen as disconnected by the specific realities where they operate. On the other hand, the initiatives aimed at developing the capacities of local elected officials and at establishing local consultative fora for citizens are guided by the proprieties and processes set in place by the nationally owned and driven decentralization reform.

Mutual Accountability (i.e. *making sure that aid relationships are embedded in accountability mechanisms that guarantee an adequate degree of monitoring of reciprocal commitments, in order to enhance aid effectiveness*).

The weakness of existing domestic accountability mechanisms (beyond elections) and the relatively weak focus placed by donors' interventions in this respect (see 4.3) suggests that donors' contribution to mutual accountability through V&A interventions is currently not very significant. This is a considerable gap since in principle V&A interventions are aimed at enhancing domestic accountability and, more generally, at nurturing a culture of accountability between the state and its citizens.

4.7 Models of change: how do the different donors work?

As discussed in the sections above, there are a number of common features in the ways in which donors support V&A in Benin, as well as some fundamental differences. The elaboration of detailed models of change would fulfil one specific objective of the evaluation framework (which is currently not sufficiently explicit in the draft version), i.e. to achieve a better common understanding of what constitutes V&A and how it can be operationalised in a more coordinated manner.

The analysis conducted in the pilot is not sufficient to elaborate detailed change models. However, it provides some useful pointers which highlight what are the key features of different interventions (and to some extent donors) change models. These should be taken into account in the revision of the framework.

Some of the most common features in donors' approaches to V&A are:

- most donors support the organisational and capacity development of the main actors in involved in V&A, mostly at the local level.

- most donors work with both civil society and state actors, mostly at the local level, mostly through separate initiatives (i.e. not joint)
- most donors use decentralisation as the main entry point

However, there are some significant differences in their approaches:

- As shown in Box 6, Danida's approach to citizens' voice is much more explicitly related to citizens' direct control of public action, whereas BMZ/GTZ relies on a more consultative approach
- The work of SDC funded PACOM is clearly oriented at strengthening a particular form of channel (the radio), most other donors focus on more traditional channels, e.g. NGOs and CSOs

There are a few assumptions underlying almost all interventions which should be further tested by an in depth evaluation exercise. They include:

- An assumed relationship between enhanced citizens' voice and improved government accountability.
- For those working to strengthen local state institutions capacity, an assumed relationship between more efficient institutions becoming more transparent, responsive and, ultimately, accountable.
- The lack of capacity of local state institution as the main obstacle to implement decentralisation, even though most would agree that weak central institutions and lack of political will are equally important factors.
- An assumption that a space, which in principle is open to all groups, is sufficient to ensure a really inclusive engagement. It remains unclear who is actually excluded by some of the spaces and mechanisms, and the extent to which efforts to support or consolidate them are successful at reducing discrimination.

Finally, as highlighted in the previous sections, there are a number of gaps in current donors' approaches which may undermine their potential to achieve results and significant change:

- Little or no involvement with informal groups, including traditional leaders, religious gatekeepers, rural women etc. This undermines efforts to enhance
- Lack of focus on institution building at the national as well as local level as a key 'channel' for state and government accountability
- Difficulties in engaging in more 'political' processes, such as the fight against corruption.

These elements start to define a few models of change, although probably specific to the interventions, as not enough data was collected to generalise these findings to an overall approach taken by a donor. The full evaluations should broaden the analysis to develop donors' specific change models. This could form the basis for a dialogue among donors and key stakeholders with a view to achieve greater clarity and a common understanding on how they see change happen as a result of their support for V&A interventions

Section 5: Reflections on the application of the framework

In this section we provide a very initial reflection on the usefulness and applicability of the draft evaluation framework. Additional thoughts on the implications for revising the framework, including some proposals, will be discussed at the ECG meeting in Stockholm.

Overall, the framework was a useful analytical tool to analyse V&A interventions, even within the very limited time and resources available for the pilot. The five main components are comprehensive enough to analyse the different dimensions of V&A, although the definitions and to some extent the terminology used can be improved. In the presentation at the end of the pilot the consensus was that, once improved along the lines suggested in the presentation

attached, the framework will be a really useful tool to better understand how V&A works in practice, to improve current efforts to support V&A and to assess the extent to which donors' supported interventions are effective at improving V&A.

Areas for improvement include:

- The framework for the context analysis is too broad, it should focus on the specific elements which are relevant for V&A (see Nicaragua report for some suggestions on this)
- Clarification of the relationship between the Context Analysis and the Enabling Environment. In Benin this worked because the context was good enough for donors to concentrate on the challenges which prevent the effective implementation of the policy or legal framework. But in practice the two categories can conflate
- There is a need to better define the key features of voice, accountability and the relationship between them. Achieving a greater understanding among all those involved, donors and stakeholders alike, should be a key objective of the evaluation.
- The terminology of channels, mechanisms and actors can be improved to achieve greater clarity, although this is a central dimension for evaluating V&A
- More generally, all dimensions should be defined by a small selection of key criteria to guide the analysis.
- Generating models of change on the basis of the relatively short analysis carried out was difficult. However it remains a key feature of the framework and it should be improved in the revised version

Annexe 1: Context Analysis – Benin ⁸

A former French colony in the Gulf of Guinea, which used to be known as Dahomey, the present day Republic of Benin is a French-speaking West African country. It extends over 11,763 km² and its estimated population in 2004 was 7,198,618. Administratively, Benin is divided into twelve *départements*: Alibori, Atacora, Atlantique, Borgou, Collines, Couffo, Donga, Littoral, Mono, Ouéme, Plateau and Zou. The latest presidential elections in Benin were held in March 2006 and a new elected president took office. The new government was installed in April 2006. Unlike the previous regime, which was marked by slackening State control over public life and management of the national economy, the new government is endeavouring to strengthen the authority of the State by means of reforms. These involve efforts to combat corruption, improve the management of public finances, boost the national economy by diversifying export products (cotton having traditionally been the mainstay), engage in social dialogue with the various stakeholders in public and economic life (private sector, trades unions, press, civil society and Beninese living abroad) and step up diplomacy to improve the country's image amongst development partners. The present government is taking steps to extend its control throughout the territory of Benin.

Politically speaking, the country's most striking characteristic is its experiment in democratic pluralism, which was launched in 1990. Benin has a presidential system, based on three powers: executive power embodied in the government led by the President of the Republic, the Head of State; legislative power held by a single chamber, the National Assembly; and judicial power, exercised concurrently by the Supreme Court and the High Court of Justice (which has jurisdiction over the President and members of the government). Through the constitution, the people of Benin have also established other institutions that are just as important: the Constitutional Court, the Audiovisual and Communications Authority (HAAC) and the Economic and Social Council (CES). In addition, the political scene is dominated by a concern for good governance.

In short, the institutional framework in Benin has favoured democracy since 1990: there are regulatory institutions and bodies – power and countervailing power (the institutions of the Republic) – diverse, multifaceted civil society organizations – a decentralization process – rules and statutes protecting fundamental rights (law on family and individual rights).

Benin belongs to the major sub-regional and regional networks, namely the Entente Council, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA), and is an active member of the African Union (AU).

As regards poverty in Benin, there has been no improvement in the situation. Quite the contrary, the overall incidence of poverty has risen from 26.5% in 1996 to 33.8% in 2002. The Human Poverty Index (HPI) was 38.5 in 2002. According to the 2002 Global Human Development Report, with a Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.420, Benin ranks amongst the countries with the lowest level of human development (HDI < 0.500). It was 158th of 173 countries in 2002 and is classed amongst the heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC). Rising poverty has obviously affected the country's health situation.

Economically, there has been a slight rise in GDP at constant prices, while the economic growth rate fell from 4.4% in 2002 to 2.7% in 2004. However, GDP per capita remained relatively stable at FCFA 276,000 (US\$458) between 2001 and 2004.

According to the World Bank assessment, Benin has made remarkable progress in economic growth whilst strengthening democratic pluralism over the past decade. The government has managed to establish fiscal discipline, open up the economy, privatize the bulk of State enterprises and improve the business environment. Most social indicators confirm gradual improvement during the 1990s, especially in health and education. However, as stressed in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PSRP), Benin is still a poor country as its GDP was US\$440 in 2004. This figure shows that the country is lagging behind in the health, education, transport, electricity, water and sanitation sectors. Moreover, Benin is still very dependent on cotton production and re-exports to Nigeria, putting it at the mercy of the market price of cotton and economic and political developments in Nigeria. Its vulnerability became very clear in 2004. Firstly, the slowdown in cotton production in 2003-2004 (due to the

⁸ Written by Dr. Adolphe Kpatchavi

introduction of a parallel input and marketing network) was apparently accentuated in 2004-2005, coupled with a sharp fall in cotton prices on the world market. Secondly, since the beginning of 2004, Nigeria has imposed new restrictions on re-exports from Benin. The second "Poverty Reduction Support Credit (PRSC-2)", amounting to US\$30 million in 2005, is designed to strengthen and consolidate results obtained in connection with PRSC-1, whilst forming the basis of a new series of reforms.

In socio-cultural terms, Benin displays strong linguistic and ethnic diversity. Polygamy is widespread, affecting 50% of women between 15 and 49 and 33% of men between 20 and 64 years of age.

Moreover, there is a very high rate of female illiteracy, as a result of low school attendance by girls in Benin (with only 65.2% of girls as opposed to 94.4% of boys attending primary school in 2000). The illiteracy rate is 80.8% for women in general and 70.8% for women aged between 15 and 49.

The annual average rate of demographic growth is an estimated 3.25% for the country as a whole and 4.12% for the urban population, with average density of 58.8 inhabitants per km². The composite fertility index was 5.53 according to the latest General Census of the Population and Housing in 2002, having fallen gradually between 1996 and 2002. Life expectancy at birth is 59 years (57.18 years for men and 61.25 for women). A breakdown by sex and age reveals a young, predominantly female (51.4% women) population, with a masculinity ratio of 96%. Table 1.3 [not supplied] shows the distribution of the population of Benin by age group, with 46.7% below 15 years of age, 47.9% between 15 and 60 and 5.3% over 60, clearly demonstrating the youth of the population.

As regards the organization of territorial and political administration, Article 6 of Law No. 97-028 of 15th January 1999 on the organization of territorial administration in the Republic of Benin divides the national territory into 12 *départements* as follows: Alibori, Atacora, Atlantique, Borgou, Collines, Couffo, Donga, Littoral, Mono, Ouémé, Plateau and Zou, covering the following surface areas:

Alibori	: 26,242 km ² ;	Donga	: 11,126 km ² ;
Atacora	: 20,499 km ² ;	Littoral	: 79 km ² ;
Atlantique	: 3,233 km ² ;	Mono	: 1,605 km ² ;
Borgou	: 25,856 km ² ;	Ouémé	: 1,281 km ² ;
Collines	: 13,931 km ² ;	Plateau	: 3,264 km ² ;
Couffo	: 2,404 km ² ;	Zou	: 5,243 km ² .

Each *département* is subdivided into *communes*. Benin has 77 communes including 3 with special status. The communes are subdivided into *arrondissements*, of which there are 546 in the country. Arrondissements are divided into villages or urban districts (3747 in total). Each village or urban district constitutes the basic administrative unit around which social life and production activities are organized.

Commune and municipal elections were held in Benin in December 2002 and January 2003, resulting in the establishment of 77 communes, led by elected councils and chief executives (mayors) appointed amongst members of the councils. For the past four years, decentralization has been the priority political and administrative reform in Benin. The previous government had declared it to be its main concern until April 2006, while the present government that took its place has listed decentralization as priority 3 in its development policy statement. Currently, debate hinges on the issue of transferring powers from the central State to the territorial [local] authorities. In the context of decentralization in Benin, the powers of the communes now include:

- Powers specific to the communes: local development, housing development and town planning, infrastructure, equipment and transport, environment, hygiene and sanitation, commercial services and economic investment.
- Powers shared with the State: primary and nursery education, literacy training and adult education, health, social and cultural activities.
- Delegated powers which come under the State but may legally be exercised by the communes: civil registration, administrative police, security, publication and implementation of laws and regulations, organization of operations to appoint members of bodies below commune level.

A national forum to assess three years of decentralization took stock of transfers of powers, distinguishing two blocks of transfers:

*- **the block of immediate transfers:** human, material and financial resources transferred from the former sub-prefectures and urban divisions, local development, commune or municipal budgeting, local development plan, regional planning (development blueprint, town planning scheme, parcelling out, etc.), management of bus stations, car parks, landing stages and markets (with the exception of the major international market at Dantokpa managed by the Market Management Company - SOGEMA), management of solid and liquid waste, urban sanitation, planning permission, etc.; other delegated powers such as civil registration, administrative police, civil protection, etc. are also exercised by the communes;*

*- **the block of deferred transfers:** this mainly involves the sectoral powers of particular ministerial departments: **construction of nursery and primary schools**, construction of health centres, installation of local telecommunications lines, installation and management of the public lighting system, supply and distribution of drinking water, construction of rural roads and civil engineering work.*

The block of deferred transfers was the focus of the work of a joint State-Commune Committee established by Ministerial Order No. 06/MCPPD/MISD/MFE/DC/SGM/SA of 27th January 2005, whose job was to suggest procedures and a timetable to the government for the actual transfer of the powers listed above. The last government was not able to review the report of the committee dating from December 2005. Interministerial Order No. 493/MDEF/MSPCL/MDCITPU of 16th June 2006 set up another interministerial committee to examine procedures for transferring powers. Its report is not yet available. The institutional problems relating to the transfer of powers are a serious constraint on the process of delivering public services in all communes in Benin.

The issue of transferring powers from the central government to the local authorities has become heavily politicized, while there is competition between local elected officials and officials of the sectoral administrations of the State whose powers are to be transferred to the communes. One of the sectors most affected by this competition is drinking water supply, where the legal powers of the communes have been delegated to the water department through a system of delegated project management, at the initiative not of the communes but of the central government – on the pretext that the communes do not have the skilled human resources to manage this sector. In addition, the central government is taking a two-speed approach to decentralization. Laws are enacted to grant powers and the State has the human resources, but it deliberately slows down the process by constantly arguing that officials working for the communes are not competent, instead of redeploying State personnel to the communes. The same applies to the primary education and health sectors, where mayors still have no power to give orders to teachers and health workers, except those paid directly from the commune budget.

In political terms, the current problem is still how to operationalize the institutional framework: reinforcing democratic and local governance institutions, supporting the preparation of commune development plans (PDC) and improving access to basic services. However, there are many constraints: inadequately drafted legislation, vacuums/delays in reforming administratively decentralized structures to support the communes (difficulties with State financial support for the communes), slowness in transferring powers to the communes (in this regard, some of the people interviewed said that, according to the law, the transfer was to be done gradually, but mayors were often in a hurry), failure to elect village and district chiefs, weak capacity of commune administrative and technical staff – illiteracy, socio-cultural tensions (communications difficulties - [between] the mayor [and traditional] chief, local disputes between supporters and opponents [of decentralization] as regards management and distribution of community infrastructure), weak ability to bargain with and control elected officials and even development partners.

The laws on decentralization have shortcomings, restricting voice and especially responsibility initiatives: for example, it is stated that meetings of the commune council should be open to citizens who are not members but are there as observers and must not speak. The law has not provided for any other forum for consultation and dialogue between elected officials and citizens in respect of specific commune-level issues. This explains why mayors are not accountable for their actions. The consultation forum initiatives of the PDDC (programme of support to commune decentralization) in Atacora and Donga are designed to fill the gap.

The law in Benin provides for two kinds of oversight in public life: legal or judicial oversight and citizen oversight – monitoring by a civil society organization does not necessarily require official authorization. Another shortcoming is that there is no legislation on auditing commune accounts (the NGO ALCRER has launched an initiative to fill the gap and monitor what elected officials do; the process is currently under way).

Civil society organizations and associations do have monitoring mechanisms but, *paradoxically*, many of them are engaged in negotiation with the bodies to be monitored (mayors and development partners), seeking legitimacy, legality and sometimes financial resources to implement community projects. In most cases, it may be assumed that monitoring and accountability initiatives come more from development partners than from communities (as in the case of the PDDC consultation forums and the focus groups of the PGDP [governance and human rights] programme); as a result, initiatives are induced, artificial, with weak ability to negotiate or monitor what elected officials do.

In the context of Benin, specific actors or groups of actors such as Transparency International, the Front of National Organizations fighting Corruption, trades unions, the Association to Combat Regionalism, Ethno-centricity and Racism (ALCRER), the media, etc. influence the major events in public life: challenging amendment of the Constitution by the previous government, opposing extension of the National Assembly's mandate to five years, negotiating over choices in respect of capacity-building (some decentralized communes have demanded that local elected officials should be involved in choosing participants in capacity-building activities).

Structures working on voice and responsibility have trouble getting funding, because their activities are "invisible" and do not always mirror the government's concerns. Initiatives relating to citizens' voice require that civil society organizations should have a degree of autonomy. In Benin, trades unions and the media receive State funding, but other organizations do not. The lack of funding undermines voice and responsibility initiatives.

At commune level, the landscape is changing in terms of associations and civil society organizations, with the emergence of new actors or groups of actors: religious and corporatist organizations (associations of motorcycle taxi drivers, traders, etc.) have joined traditional development associations, religious organizations and NGOs; new space has opened up for dialogue and dynamic interaction with local elected officials and development partners in respect of new issues: scope for negotiating projects with partners, debates on the tax system (corporatist groups need to be set up to discuss taxes and duties with mayors), discussions and clashes about equity in redistributing community infrastructure and other public property.

Annexe 2: People consulted during the Pilot

Name	Structures	Intervention	Role
TRUDEL Linda	DANIDA		Donor
HODONOU Assogba	Observatoire du Changement Social (OCS)		NGO/Experts
TOGNOLA Claudio	Coopération Suisse		Donor
BURMEISTER Helmut	PDDC GTZ		Donor
ODJOUBE Justine	Observatoire du Changement Social (OCS)		NGO, Expert
LEBRUN Pierre	Ambassade de la Belgique		Donor
PROVOT Roland	Ambassade d la Belgique		Donor
MOUSSA Okanla Moussa	DANIDA		Donor
LONSTRUP Esther	Ambassade du Danemark		Donor
OLOU Rémi	Solidarité Mondiale		INGO, partner DCGD
MAMADOU Omar	PACOM Instut Kilimanjaro		NGO, PAOM partner
SAMA Rufine	Chargée de programme Coopération Suisse		Donor
ABBENANTE Lioba	DED		Donor
JAGODE Gérard	GTZ		Donor
GERALDO Moustapha	Mairie de Ouidah	PDCC	Local municipality, Partner PDCC
AGBO Rufine Félicité	DANIDA	PGDC	Donor
AGONKAN Gildas	Mairie d'Abomey	PDCC	Local municipality, Partner PDCC
TWAGILIMANA Uzziel	Conseiller Technique des projets Solidarité Mondiale		INGO, partner DCGD
JAN Niklas Engels	Représentant Résident de la Fondation Friedrich Ebert Stiftung		Donor, Media
AKPLOGAN Huguette	Coordonnatrice Social Watch		NGO, partner SDC
ASSOGBA Martin	Association de lutte contre le racisme l'ethnocentrisme et le régionalisme (ALCRER)		NGO
SOGLOHOUN Théodule	Front des Organisations nationales de lutte contre la corruption (FONAC)		NGO/Network
GBEGNONVI Roger	Représentant Tranparency Internatonal		NGO, expert
TODJINOUE Pascal	Secrétaire Général Confédération des Syndicats d l'Administration (CSA)		Trade Union
KOTO Aboubakar Yérima	Coordonnateur PROMUSAF / Solidarité Mondiale		Trade Union
HOUNDOLO Serge Armand	Gestionnaire du Centre Afrika Obota		NGO
NANAKO Cossoba	Parakou UNDP	ADECOI	Implementer
ISSAKA Koussoumou	Parakou UNDP	ADECOI	Implementer
DJAUGA A. Amadou	Parakou UNDP	ADECOI	Implementer
GARADIMA Moussa	Parakou UNDP	ADECOI	Implementer
HOUEBELO Angèle - Marie	Parakou UNDP	ADECOI	Implementer
SANOUSSE Razaki	Parakou UNDP	ADECOI	Implementer
NANSOUNON Chabi Kinissi	Conseiller en Communication Société Civile AD -	PDCC	Donor-Implementer
DAMANE Tairou	Sociologue - Juriste	PDCC	CSO -

	Président Nouveau Défi pour le Développement Durable (N3D)		Recipient
ATTA Kakayatchi Sahada	Vice Président du Collectif des artisans de Bassila	PDCC	Professional Association - Recipient
DITTI Alexandra	Ingénieur Agronome Coordonnatrice Centre Béninois d'Appui au Développement économique et social et à l'auto-promotion	PDCC	CSO - Recipient
MADOUYOU Moussa	Directeur de la radio communautaire de Nikki	PACOM	Recipient, SDC
SINATOKO Kignaré	1 ^{er} Adjoint au Maire de Nikki		Local Public official
BOUKARI Kpandé Issakou	2 ^{eme} Adjoint au Maire de Nikki		Local Public Official
ZATO Kassim	Directeur de la radio communautaire de Bembèrèkè	PACOM	RTrecipient, SDC
DIBOUSSE Tamou	Chargé de programme Radio communautaire de Bembèrèkè	PACOM	RTrecipient, SDC
DEBOUROU Idrissou	Maire de la commune de Bembèrèkè		Local Public official - Mayor
TOGNON Christian	Chef service technique chargé de la planification, de suivi et évaluation de la mairie de Bembèrèkè		Local Public official
TOHINLO Peggy	CBDES Assistant de recherche	PGDP	NGO - Recipient
TONOUKOUIN Elias	CBDES Assistant de recherche	PGDP	NGO - recipient
ATOHOUNTOU René	CBDES Assistant de recherche	PGDP	NGO - Recipient
ZINSALO Janvier	Membre société civile point focal Bohicon	PGDP	Cellule Citoyen
HONKPATIN Julien	Membre société civile point focal Bohicon	PGDP	Cellule Citoyen
GNIDJAZOUNON Augustin	Membre société civile point focal Bohicon	PGDP	Cellule Citoyen
MONGBO Grâce	CBDES Assistant à la coordination	PGDP	NGO
GANDEGBADJI A. Clément	CBDES Assistant de recherche	PGDP	NGO
DOUNA F. Mariette	CBDES Assistant de recherche	PGDP	NGO
AGNAMEY Geoffroy	CBDES Assistant de recherche	PGDP	NGO
AGBO Rufine Félicité	PGDP : chargé de recherche	PGDP	Donor
TEBLENOU Eric	Société civile Point focal Abomey	PGDP	Cellule Citoyen
BOKO Thophile	Membre société civile point focal Bohicon	PGDP	Cellule Citoyen
ATACLA Bernadette	Membre société civile point focal Bohicon	PGDP	Cellule Citoyen
NADOBLO Tchogninou Gualbert	Membre société civile point focal Bohicon	PGDP	Cellule Citoyen
KONOUIDOHOU Léontine	Président du Réseau RIFONGA	PGDP	NGO/Network-Recipient
DADJO Antoinette	Responsable RIFONGA - Antenne Zou - Collines	PGDP	NGO/Network-Recipient
OGOUSSAN Geneviève	Ministère de la famille, de la femme et de l'enfant - Directrice Genre et Développement		National Public Official