



CASE STUDY

# Benin: Development of an Enabling Environment and Pilot Practices for Resilient Management of the Porto-Novo Lagoon



## Summary

**In August 2014, Benin adopted a framework law on fishing and aquaculture. The result of the efforts of the Ministry of Fisheries was reinforced by the advocacy of the Benin Country Water Partnership (CWP-Benin) for the resilient management of the Porto-Novo lagoon. This law enshrines the harmonization of fisheries legislation with IWRM principles and helps incentivize resilient public investments in this sector.**

## Background

Since the end of the 2000s, Benin has put in place several important instruments for the operationalisation of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM). These include the 2009 national water policy, the 2010 water management law and the first National Action Plan for Integrated Water Resources Management (PANGIRE) implemented over the 2011-2015 period. This progress was achieved with the financial support of the Netherlands through the Multi-annual Support Programme for the Water and Sanitation Sector (2007- 2012) and the Partnership for Africa's Water Development. From 2007 to 2012, CWP-Benin participated in the joint implementation, with the Directorate General for Water (DGEau), of component 4 of the PPEA, entitled «Support for the IWRM process». It has initiated, with its Local Water Partnerships (LWP) and other stakeholders, pilot actions on five sites, including the Porto-Novo lagoon.

This lagoon, with a surface area of 35 km<sup>2</sup>, is the most important waterway in Benin. It flows eastward, parallel to the Atlantic Ocean and empties into the Lagos Lagoon in Nigeria. It also

communicates with Lake Nokoué through the Totché channel. Together with this lake and the lower Ouémé valley, it forms Ramsar site 1018. The diagnosis carried out in 2010 highlighted major problems affecting the water resources of this lagoon. These included:

- Organic and chemical pollution as well as the modification of physico-chemical conditions caused by the deforestation of catchment areas and the construction of engineering works;
- The destruction of fish habitats and spawning grounds due to pollution;
- The invasion of the lagoon by aquatic plants (water hyacinth);
- The anarchic development of inappropriate fishing practices, which have led to a reduction in aquatic biodiversity;
- The silting up and erosion of the banks due to the advanced degradation of the plant cover and the rise in water levels due to climate change.

These problems, which affect the quality and quantity of resources, exacerbate conflicts between lake fishermen and agri-fishermen and threaten the development of their activities, which, along with aquaculture, play an important role in the economy. The objective of the pilot action for IWRM in the Porto- Novo lagoon, initiated by CWP-Benin, was to set up an institutional and technical environment favourable to the sustainable inter-communal management and restoration of the lagoon in consultation with the riparian communes, the State and users.

## **Actions taken**

The first phase was implemented from July 2010 to December 2012 by four riparian communes: Porto-Novo, Sèmè-Podji, Aguégúés and Adjarra. At the operational level, the IWRM action was carried out by the Nokoué Intercommunal Eco-Development Council (CIED), the coordination structure of the intermunicipal association. The aim was to develop the capacities of the actors and to conduct the appropriate advocacy to establish the required IWRM framework and tools. For phase 2 of the IWRM pilot action Lagoon of Porto- Novo (2013-2015), CWP-Benin focused in particular on the vote of the framework law on fishing and aquaculture, in the context of the finalisation of the Master Plan for Water Development and Management (SDAGE) of the Ouémé Basin and the elaboration of the Delta Plan. It seemed to the stakeholders that this law could facilitate the mobilisation of the investments necessary to restore and establish sustainable management of the ecosystem.

The awareness-raising activities carried out by CWP Benin and CIED-Nokoué during the first phase of the pilot action, inviting the implementation of sectoral regulations in harmony with the basic principles of IWRM enshrined in the law on water management, led the stakeholders in the fisheries sector to become aware of the importance of the synergies to be built for the management of Benin's

water bodies and the Porto-Novo lagoon in particular. For national actors, particularly those in the fisheries sector, this pilot action was an opportunity to speed up the vote on the framework law on fisheries and aquaculture, the drafting process for which had begun in 2002 and was struggling to reach a conclusion.

CWP-Benin and CIED Nokoué's advocacy was conducted in collaboration with the DGEau, the Fisheries Directorate (D-Pêches) and the Departmental Directorate of Water and Energy (DDMEE) of Ouémé- Plateau. The following activities marked out the advocacy process:

- Inventory of the actions carried out by the Ministry of Fisheries and the existing blockages;
- Identification of decision-makers, interests, and alliances;
- Signature of a collaboration agreement between CWP-Benin and D-Fisheries;
- Identification by CWP-Benin of opportunities to influence legal processes;
- Definition of an advocacy strategy;
- Lobbying of CWP-Benin with MPs, particularly with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the National Assembly's planning Commission in charge of studying the draft law;
- Holding several working sessions between CIED Nokoué and the D-Fisheries to prepare a visit to the lagoon by MPs and the relevant parliamentary administration (design and distribution of an information sheet by CWP-Benin);
- Organisation of a field visit to the lagoon in 2014 for MPs, including an exchange with users;
- Holding a workshop to inform MPs about the content, innovations, and added value of the draft framework law in 2014 in Grand Popo, following the field visit.

CWP-Benin and D-Fisheries convinced the MPs of the need to conduct a comparative study of the draft framework law and the 2010 water management law. The presentation of this cross-analysis of the two texts enabled the workshop participants to understand the need to ensure that the draft framework law on fisheries and aquaculture currently under study is consistent with the water law that has already been voted on and promulgated.

On the recommendation of the deputies, the D-Fisheries asked the CWP-Benin to revise the explanatory memorandum for the vote on the draft framework law. Following this work, the CWP-Benin took part in the work of the committee with the deputies for the study of the draft framework law in order to provide them with additional information. This allowed the study of the draft framework law to proceed smoothly in the plenary session of the National Assembly. The advocacy led to the vote on the draft framework law on fisheries and aquaculture in the Republic of Benin on 6 June 2014.

## **Outcomes**

Adopting the framework law on fisheries and aquaculture has made it possible to put in place an appropriate and innovative legislative framework in line with the challenges of sustainable management of fisheries resources and the implementation of IWRM. The intervention of the CWP-Benin has allowed, beyond the successful advocacy in favour of the vote of this law, the appropriation of the diagnosis of the management of this sector by the different stakeholders and their preparation for future actions. The principles and institutional framework of IWRM have been taken into account in the framework law. This work of influence of the CWP-Benin has further strengthened its credibility with the Members of Parliament and the administration of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Fisheries.

The action carried out has also enabled the DGEau to be rehabilitated in the institutional landscape of IWRM in Benin as a structure in charge of coordinating the action of the Ministry of Water with the sectoral structures, including the APRM. This led to a strong contribution by the APRM to the establishment of the Inter-ministerial Water Commission (CIE) in October 2015 and its participation in sessions on its animation and functioning.

Similarly, this advocacy facilitated the understanding of the usefulness of the PANGIRE steering committee, the clarification of the roles of the different actors and their ownership.

The diagnosis made by the CWP-Benin in 2010, the information gathered during visits to users of the Porto- Novo lagoon and the explanatory memorandum presented by the Ministry of Fisheries to the National Assembly clearly indicate that the framework law on fisheries and aquaculture fills a major gap. The new framework law opens the door to multiple investments, including in the form of public-private partnerships. It provides a basic regulatory tool to secure interventions and strengthen their sustainability. It also allows for a better codification of the institutional, technical and financial arrangements possible in the management of fisheries in Benin, including those in the Porto-Novo lagoon. The improvement of the legislative framework helped to guide the following investments and actions:

- The project «Strengthening Investments for Climate Change Resilient Development» for an amount of 587,420 EUR. Its aim is to increase investments in adaptation and resilient development to climate change, towards improving living conditions of the Lake Nokoué-Lagune complex in Porto-Novo. This project also focuses on the development of proliferating aquatic plants (water hyacinth). In June 2021, a national strategy for the management of these aquatic plants was being developed.
- The government's commitment since 2017 to clean up water bodies led by the Ministry of Fisheries, showing renewed interest in this sub-sector, with funding from the general state budget through, among other things:
  - the systematic removal of prohibited fishing gear from Lake Nokoué and the Porto-Novo lagoon, at a cost of about 150,000 euros in 2019, in order to promote exchanges between the lagoon and the lake and with the Badagry lagoon (Nigeria), i.e., almost the entire lagoon, which promotes oxygenation of the ecosystem as well as better navigability. The 2019 Agricultural Sector Performance Report estimated that over 8,000 prohibited fishing gears were removed.
  - The setting up, training, and equipping of the Surveillance Unit for Water Bodies and Rivers with the recruitment of about sixty fishing brigadiers, to be trained in February 2021, to ensure the non-recolonisation of water bodies, including the Porto- Novo lagoon, as provided for in the law.

These combined efforts have contributed to fisheries production increase, excluding tuna production, increasing from 71,000 tons in 2018 to 90,00 tons in 2019 (26% increase). The level of aquaculture production also increased from 1,300 tons in 2015 to 5,300 tons in 2019 (308% increase).

## **Lessons Learned**

To operationalise the IWRM approach at the country level, it is possible to engage stakeholders from a local level as shown by the example of advocacy for the sustainable management of the Porto-Novo lagoon led by CWP-Benin and its partners. An important condition is to target and engage the right actors and partners as well as the opportunities to influence governance processes.

Overall, the CWP-Benin has taken a cautious approach that emphasises sustainability over speed of implementation. Thus, the stakeholders were able to become real partners for action and actors of qualitative changes committed to strengthening the achievements and their sustainability after the end of the IWRM pilot action.

The field visit that allowed the MPs to see the extent of the degradation of Lake Nokoué and the lagoon and to exchange directly with the users and actors of the fisheries sector was decisive in the outcome, less than two months later, of the process of voting on the framework law on fisheries and aquaculture.

The availability and capacity to mobilise the expertise of the CWP-Benin for the cross-analysis of the draft framework law with the law on water management, as well as the updating of the explanatory memorandum, were also key factors in the rapid completion of the process.

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**Supporting Materials**

Partnership action for water security and climate resilience of populations and ecosystems in West Africa

**Related IWRM Tools**

Water Allocation Regimes, Coastal Zone Management Plans

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