

BRIEF

Political and institutional factors impacting on governance reforms in Benin

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Since 1990, Benin has known substantial advances in improving governance. Major reforms have been implemented or are underway: political system reform, public administration reform, decentralisation and deconcentration, budgetary reform (including public procurement), justice reform, anti-corruption initiatives (law under preparation). A legal framework, although limited and incomplete, has been developed. Nevertheless, it is observed that political elites and public administrators delay implementation and/or the consolidation of these achievements for better governance in Benin.

Political factors

The major political factors that have and continue favouring change towards better governance are:

- ✓ Broad social consensus on the necessity of change and participatory process to define objectives (*Conférence des forces vives de la Nation in 1990*)
- ✓ Adoption of a new constitution in 1990 and return to a democratic political system with free elections.
- ✓ Increasing concern and growing role and commitment of civil society actors in public affairs e.g. community groups, interest groups, human rights organisations, religious groups, etc.
- ✓ High level of freedom of expression and press freedom
- ✓ Respect of election results and political alternation.

The major political factors that limit change towards better governance:

- ✓ Patronage-oriented political culture at national and regional levels. Political parties built around regional and ethnical electorate and personal ambitions of individuals and groups, who will channel resources to their region and network.
- ✓ Political forces are often closely linked to economic interest groups seeking to control and use public institutions to favour private appropriation. This has contributed for example in biasing the privatization of public enterprises.
- ✓ Political organisations lack inner-party democracy. Many candidates to the various elections are wealthy individuals dominating their own political organisations, being the major financial contributor.
- ✓ Local politics capture by national political parties is a threat to local democracy. National and regional elites strongly influence and interfere in local politics, through “development associations”, in their native places. Many communal council members are divided along major national political party lines. Local elected officials are also frequently absent or do not reside in the community they represent.
- ✓ Successive electoral processes (presidential, parliamentary and local) lead to frequent break ups in the work process and to a high level of mobility of civil servants, contributing to a lack of continuity in the management of public affairs.

Institutional factors

The major institutional factor that has and continues favouring change towards better governance is:

- ✓ Legal and institutional framework for improving governance and insuring accountability at all levels exist.

The major institutional factors that limit change towards better governance are:

- ✓ Highly centralised and hierarchical public administration. Extensive powers in the presidency (appointment of senior staff, legislate by decree, etc.)
- ✓ High level of politicization in the administration which is resulting in a lack of continuity in the management of public affairs (important mobility of high rank civil servants) and induces lack of respect for public authority.
- ✓ State capture by private interest groups or individuals through political parties. State institutions are being used for illicit appropriation of resources for personal benefit by politically organized private interest groups leading to frequent situations of conflict of interests in the management of public affairs.
- ✓ Daily varied corruption practices undermine the functioning or improvement of service delivery.
- ✓ Public servants capture resources, doing private consulting or forming their NGOs to seize opportunities.
- ✓ Lack of effective control of the government by National Assembly.
- ✓ Weak public service. Competence is a secondary criteria while patronage is predominant in allocation of key positions.
- ✓ Weakness of control institutions and mechanisms; insufficient resources, capacity and ability to sanction corruption practices, administrative abuses, etc., creating a culture of impunity.
- ✓ Civil servants resist and disobey relocations at communal level.
- ✓ Lack of appropriate strategic planning and implementation of reforms. Implementation of reforms is often carried out under donor pressure, without monitoring and evaluating adequately and thoroughly progress of processes.
- ✓ Weak control and sanctioning mechanisms mainly due to insufficient capacities
- ✓ Weakness of government coordination of reform processes and of donor support to governance improvement.
- ✓ Informal economy is dominant, limiting level of mobilisation of internal financial resources; high level of dependency on external aid.
- ✓ Lack of access to information: information within the public sector is generally not collected through regular mechanisms (monitoring of reforms, etc.) and/or not made available easily to demanders and users.

Opportunities

- ✓ The increasing role and awareness of Civil Society.
- ✓ Diversified and lively media environment enabling public debate.
- ✓ Stronger commitment for change at the local level as a result of the decentralisation process.

Challenges

- ✓ Democratization of existing political parties and emergence of political forces more representative of social than private interests.
- ✓ De-politicisation and professionalisation of public administration in order to improve governance.
- ✓ Empower and provide adequate resources for the functioning of control institutions and systems.
- ✓ Increase transparency through participatory monitoring and evaluation of public reform processes, and improved access to information by Civil Society.
- ✓ Professionalize and improve ethics in the media.