

**Development Partners Working Group on
Local Governance and Decentralization**

**International Development Partner Harmonisation for
Enhanced Aid Effectiveness**

**ALIGNMENT STRATEGIES IN THE FIELD OF
DECENTRALISATION AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE**

Country Study of Practices and Experiences

BENIN

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

ADECOI	Project d'Appui au Développement Communal et aux Initiatives Locales dans le Borgou
AFD	Agence Française de Développement
ANCB	Association National des Communes du Bénin
BMZ	German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
Danida	Danish International Development Agency
DED	Deutscher Entwicklungsdienst
DGAT	Direction Générale de l'Administration Territoriale
DP	Development Partner
EDF	European Development Fund
EU	European Union
FADEC	Fonds d'Appui au Développement des Communes
FIVIS	Fonds d'Investissement
GTZ	Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit
JAS	Joint Assistance Strategy
KfW	KfW Development Bank
MCA	Millenium Challenge Account
MCL	Maison des Collectivités Locales
MD	Mission de la Décentralisation
MDGLAAT	Ministère de la Décentralisation, de la Gouvernance Locale, de l'Administration et de l'Aménagement du Territoire
MISPCL	Ministère de l'Intérieur, de la Sécurité Publique et des Collectivités Locales
PAACO	Projet d'Appui à l'Agglomération de Cotonou
PACTE	Programme d'Appui aux Collectivités Locales
PAD	Programme d'Appui à la Décentralisation
PADDAT	Projet d'Appui à la Décentralisation, Déconcentration et à l'Aménagement du Territoire
PDDC	Programme d'appui à la Décentralisation et au Développement Communal
PDC	Plan de Développement Communal
PDL	Projet d'Appui au Développement Communal
PGDP	Programme Gouvernance et Droit de la Personne
PGUD	Projet de Gestion Urbaine Décentralisée
PNDCC	Projet National de Développement Conduit par les Communes
PONADEC	Politique National de Décentralisation / Déconcentration du Bénin
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
RAT	Reforme de l'Administration Territoriale
SCRP	Stratégie de Croissance pour la Réduction de la Pauvreté
TA	Technical Assistance
UNCDF:	United Nations Capital Development Fund
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VAT	Value Added Tax

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A. Country Background

Decentralisation is still a relatively recent development in Benin. The 1990 constitution clearly provides for local self-government; however a lengthy process for the elaboration of the legal and political framework and several postponements of the first local elections resulted in the decentralised local governments only being established in early 2003.

The government of Benin has engaged in the process of elaborating various policies and strategies for national development that including reference to decentralisation and local governance. The second generation PRSP (*Stratégie de Croissance pour la Réduction de la Pauvreté*) elaborated in 2007 clearly recognises the role of local governments in poverty reduction. Two of the five interrelated pillars of the poverty reduction strategy put forward the implementation of decentralisation reform as a core element, namely the pillars 'Promotion of good governance' and 'Balanced and sustainable development of the national territory'. The programme for support decentralisation and deconcentration and the national programme for the territorial development are explicitly included in the PRSP as means of implementation.

The vision of the government of Benin with regard to local government is spelled out in the draft strategy document which is based on the reform of the administration of the territory with its two dimensions of i) decentralisation targeting the establishment of local self-governments and ii) deconcentration targeting the creation of a capable administration in the regions. The decentralisation has divided the country into 77 local government (communes and municipalities) which have the responsibility for primary education, the peripheral health centres, rural water supply, rural roads and natural resource management.

Whereas in the early years of decentralisation, government accorded high priority to advancing the reforms on different levels, the later years in power of the last government saw a decreasing commitment and ownership of the process. No progress could be achieved regarding the approval of the decentralisation strategy and the effective transfer of resources and competences.

Major constraints for effective local government and local governance that will need to be addressed over the next years are the lack of a political leadership for the reforms and decentralisation and the lack of a comprehensive strategy for the implementation of the reforms. Currently, the elaboration of a decentralisation policy has already been initiated; however the elaboration not only of the policy but of a comprehensive action plan will take time.

Although support for decentralisation and local governance has focused on the elected local government structures, lack of capacity with regard to technical, organisation and human resource issues are still widespread. The second element of the national strategy focusing on the strengthening of the deconcentrated structured has received considerably less support over the last years and the situation is even more precarious. Due to the lack of a clear vision from government on deconcentration and particular related to the mandate of the deconcentrated technical structures, most sector ministries have not advanced the creation and strengthening of their respective sub-structures. Generally the deconcentrated structures are not in a position to assume the advisory role for elected local governments assigned to them by the overall legal and political framework. The negative consequences of the lack of capacity at the local government level are thus made even increased.

The progress with regard to fiscal decentralisation has not been strong; however a recent initiative for creating a uniform national transfer mechanism for local governments (FADEC) provides an opportunity to increase the transfer of both central government and external funding to the local level. However, in order to build up a functioning intergovernmental fiscal system, issues such as local revenue raising and recurrent transfers will also need to be addressed.

B. Findings

Management of the Decentralisation Process

The responsibility for managing the decentralisation process was for the last years situated at the Ministry for the Interior, Public Security and Local Authorities (MISPCL - *Ministère de l'Intérieur de la Sécurité Publique et des Collectivités Locales*). Several institutions from within the Ministry or linked to the MISPCL were involved in promoting decentralisation and local government reforms, however the roles were not sufficiently clearly spelt out provoking overlap and conflicting interests. The situation was made even more difficult because none of the core institutions disposed of sufficient human and financial capacities to effectively assume the responsibilities assigned to them.

However, the reorganisation of the government in early 2007, which led to the creation, among others - of the new Ministry for Decentralisation (*Ministère de la Décentralisation, de la Gouvernance Locale, de l'Administration et de l'Aménagement Territoriale* - MDGLAAT), changed the institutional set-up for successfully implementing the decentralisation reforms. Not only the appointment of a minister with broad experience of the matter and the internal restructuring of the Ministry with the objective of clearly defining the roles of the different sub-structures and bringing capacities in line with the mandate have already changed the political climate and increased the ownership for advancing the decentralisation reforms. Initiatives have already been undertaken to elaborate a decentralisation policy to spell out governments' vision and provide a clear framework for the implementation of the reforms.

The new president clearly put the reforms high on the political agenda which will also facilitate the recognition of decentralisation as a transversal issue across government and into sector ministries. However, continuous high-level political support will be essential to ensure that the difficult reform issues linked to decentralisation are not sidelined by reluctant sector and line ministries. The Ministry for Administrative and Institutional Reforms as well as the steering committee for the implementation of the poverty reduction strategy may have a role in ensuring coherence between the different public sector reforms, but will also need clear orientation from the highest level.

DP Coordination Mechanism

The coordination mechanism between the government and development partners was set up in 1998 in the context of the first support programmes for decentralisation. The main objective of the technical group for decentralisation was to improve the exchange of information between government and DPs on support projects and programmes as well as to facilitate the political dialogue on decentralisation and local governance.

Since the creation of the group, the leadership has been ensured by the EU delegation. Despite numerous initiatives from the DPs for promoting government leadership of the technical group, the respective changes in the set-up have not yet been achieved. However, the participation of government representatives in the group has changed considerably over the years. In the early years, the Ministry in charge of decentralisation (formerly the MISPCL) was actively participating in the technical group on decentralisation, namely through the representatives from the *Mission de la Décentralisation*.

With the progressive shift of the leadership role for decentralisation within the Ministry from the *Mission de la Décentralisation* (MD) to the *Direction Générale de l'Administration Territoriale* (DGAT), the participation of government representatives and their engagements in the discussions with the DPs declined. The political dialogue between the DPs and the representatives of government as well as the discussion of specific issues related to the decentralisation process was well established in the early years of the technical group, but suffered a setback in the last years due to the lack of government commitment to the process. Recently however, with the changes in government after the 2006 elections, decentralisation has been put back as a priority on the political agenda and the new Ministry (MDGLAAT) shows a clear

commitment to reviving the coordination mechanism. Since mid 2007, the DGAT has effectively assumed leadership over the group.

The meetings schedule of the technical group consists of regular bi-monthly meetings as well as additional ad-hoc meetings contingent upon the need to discuss specific issues (project or programme preparation and evaluation missions, specific issues, etc.). With the recent assumption of the leadership of the coordination mechanisms by the Government, core issues for the decentralisation process have been discussed, including the FADEC, the evaluation of the first generation of local development plans as well as the terms for the formulation of a national decentralisation policy.

The technical group on decentralisation is considered to be very active and it has a strong record with regard to exchange of information between the different DPs engaged in supporting decentralisation. The political dialogue with the government as well as the discussion of specific issues related to the decentralisation process were important function in the early years, however, for the reasons explained above, are at the moment no longer dealt with in the group. The DPs furthermore engaged in a process of presenting their new project and programme concepts to the group in view of strengthened complementarities of the interventions and harmonisation of modalities. However, this process proves to be lengthy and difficult due to the institutional constraints of the different DPs and the diverging intervention modalities and objectives.

For the last years, the lack of commitment from government was considered to be the most important shortcoming with regard to functioning of the group. A strong leadership by the government is expected to facilitate the harmonisation and coordination process by providing a clear orientation in case of diverging DPs positions and by strengthening the argument for decentralisation in the discussions with sector representatives.

In addition to the exchange of information and the cooperation in the context of the formal coordination mechanism of the technical group on decentralisation, different DPs pursue a close cooperation among smaller groups, i.e. the German and French cooperation jointly support the DGAT of the Ministry for Decentralisation.

The setting up of a coordination mechanism bringing together government and DPs for dialogue on specific thematic and sectoral issues was an objective of the first PRSP in Benin. Following an initiative of several DPs, several thematic and sectoral groups were created and one group of the Head of Missions established. However, due to insufficient commitment from government's side, the terms of reference, their mode of operation and the linkages were never really formalized. Therefore, in early 2007, an initiative was launched to review the current set-up and to elaborate a new structure for coordination mechanism based on the proposals put forth by government in the context of the elaboration of the second PRSP and in line with the principles of the Paris Declaration. This initiative covers both the structure and mandate for the thematic and sectoral groups as well as their mode of operation and interaction with the high-level head of missions group. The draft proposal for the set-up of the coordination mechanism stipulates co-leadership of the groups by a government representative from the lead ministry for the issue under consideration together with a DP representative thus addressing one of the major constraints experienced by the technical group on decentralisation over the last years.

Alignment of DP support to country strategies

Although the overall legal and political framework for decentralisation is in place, the lack of an approved decentralisation strategy has had important implications for the degree of alignment of DP support to country strategies. On an overall level, DP support is aligned to the national development objectives as defined by the poverty reduction strategy (PRSP). However, the lack of a detailed programme for implementation the decentralisation reforms provoked the development of different support project / programmes following more the indi-

vidual DP support logic and procedures than being built on the new or not sufficiently developed country strategies and procedures.

However, with the first generation of project / programmes coming to an end, the commitment of the DPs to the principles of the Paris Declaration and the renewed dynamic for the decentralisation reforms brought about by the change in government, the perspectives for alignment of DP support to country strategies and procedures have improved. The elaboration of a decentralisation policy with a detailed programme of action, but also the development of a uniform national funding mechanisms and the evaluation of best practices regarding the elaboration of local development plans will provide a framework conducive for alignment. A number of DPs have engaged in the process of preparing new support initiatives for decentralisation and local governance and these second generation programmes are clearly more aligned to country strategies and procedures than their predecessors.

Modalities of DP support

The first generation of projects and programmes supporting decentralisation and local governance in Benin is characterized by a large variety of modalities, regarding funding mechanisms, governance structures, approaches to capacity building, training, etc. The focus of the different DP-support programmes on one or two regions of the country (regionalisation of DP support) led to the development and implementation of programme specific approaches in the different regions. This variety can be considered as a rich pool of experiences, however there is urgent need for harmonising the modalities since overlap and conflicting interventions could not be prevented. The co-existence of diverse supply-driven capacity building and training programmes for local governments calls for rationalisation and consolidation to break with the current practice of local governments accepting to participate in numerous training not necessarily related to their key capacity deficits in order to enjoy the training benefits. A second example are the different set-ups of the capacity building through local advisers being support by the different programmes, ranging from specialised integrated advisors to teams of consultants providing advise on demand.

However, the recognition of the specific challenges related to the diversity of aid modalities being implemented in the same regions has brought about local coordination mechanisms. The regional forum bringing together both DPs as well as local government representatives and deconcentrated sector institutions has provided a platform for identifying the interventions proposed and supported by the different programmes and for better coordinating the activities. The positive experience of this local level coordination has been replicated in other regions and up-scaled to the national level.

With regard to the funding modalities, the large variety in mechanisms currently being applied by the different projects and programmes have been analysed in the preparation of a uniform national funding mechanisms, the FADEC. The concept for the FADEC is still under preparation, however, once the system will have been set, it provides as a building block for harmonising the currently diverging modalities.

C. Lessons learned and perspectives

The following lessons learned and perspectives have been derived from the analysis of the situation in Benin with regard to harmonisation and alignment of DP support in the field of decentralisation and local governance:

- **Recognition of decentralisation as a cross-cutting issue essential for success of reforms:** Despite the fact that decentralisation has been recognized as a transversal element for poverty reduction in the current PRSP, there is urgent need to integrate the principles of local self government into specific strategies and policies, in particular the sector policies, and to strengthen coherence between the different national strategies and policies, but also between the programmes for implementing the PRSP. The establishment of spearheads for decentralisation in the different ministries can be considered as a promising approach in this respect.

- **High-level political support essential for coherence between decentralisation and other public sector reforms:** Even if decentralisation has been recognized in the overall national strategies as across-cutting issue, the transfer of responsibilities and resources from the central to the local level is often only hesitantly promoted by the sector ministries, but also by the ministries responsible for public finance and public service administration. High-level political support is essential for ensuring that decentralisation is recognized as a priority on the political agenda not only by the respective ministry, but across government. The establishment of a high-level political steering committee for the reforms (decentralisation and deconcentration) could facilitate the process.
- **Elaboration of decentralisation policy as a precondition for strengthened alignment:** The elaboration of a comprehensive decentralisation policy will provide the necessary foundation for the DPs to base their support on. However, the policy will have to be translated into a detailed action plan / reform programme with clear orientations regarding the specific activities, responsibilities and time frames. By providing a framework into which the different DP support project / programmes initiatives can be integrated, the development of an action plan will facilitate harmonisation and alignment and provide the starting point for developing a comprehensive support programme for decentralisation integrating the 'national uniform building blocks' such as funding mechanism FADEC but also national procedures and systems for capacity building.
- **Review of current DP coordination mechanism as an opportunity for increasing government ownership and strengthen vertical and horizontal linkages:** In order to make DP coordination more effective, the proposal for restructuring the dialogue mechanism between government and DPs stresses the need for government leadership (together with DP representatives). Likewise is the link between specific thematic and sector issues and the macro-level reforms reflected in the proposal (vertical linkages with the high level head of mission group). However, more attention needs to be paid to the strengthening of the horizontal linkages, i.e. the dialogue between the technical group on decentralisation and the sector groups in order to address the challenges for the decentralisation process in a comprehensive way.
- **Evaluation of best practices as input for development and/or improvement of uniform national systems:** The variety of different project and programme concepts and interventions logics supported during the first years of decentralisation in Benin provides a rich experiences from which best practices for future interventions and the development of uniform systems and procedures can be derived. The recent initiative to evaluate the current practices with regard to the elaboration of the local development plans and to draw conclusions from the findings to improve the respective national manual can be cited as a good example; another being the up-scaling of the experiences with the regional coordination fora.
- **Harmonisation of funding flows within uniform national transfer mechanism:** The development of the national mechanism FADEC which will provide funding for infrastructure investments to the local governments as well as the commitment of the government and several DPs to channel their funding through the FADEC will be a key step forward in the process of harmonisation. A core challenge over the next years will be to achieve a broad integration of national and external funding for local governments into the FADEC in view of the risk that the persistence of parallel mechanism (either for specific poverty targeting or sectoral funding mechanisms) can undermine the effective functioning of the FADEC.
- **Flexibility in project / programme design to integrate new national systems and procedures during implementation:** The divergence in commitment and programme cycles makes it difficult to provide full support to new national systems from their start and to integrate new national procedures if funding provided by DPs is committed to programme / project approaches with specific procedures. In view of the upcoming establishment of the FADEC, some new programme and projects have already incorporated

the channelling of funds through the FADEC as soon as it becomes operational thus minimizing the risk of undermining the FADEC by the persistence of parallel funding streams.

I. Introduction

This report has been prepared as part of a study commissioned by the Development Partners Informal Working Group on Local Governance and Decentralisation and sponsored by the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the Danish International Development Agency (Danida). The objective of the overall study is to provide detailed insight into current practices in view of proposing common good practices / guidelines for Development Partners (DP) support to decentralisation and local governance that will enhance aid effectiveness. To that effect, country practices and experiences with regard to harmonisation and alignment strategies in the field of decentralisation and local governance were analysed in four selected countries: Tanzania, Benin, Nepal and Nicaragua. The terms of reference for the review study including the countries studies is annexed to the main report. The main report with the lessons learned and perspectives derived from the country studies will be presented at a workshop of the Development Partners Group in Berlin in September 17th and 18th, 2007.

The country studies were carried out using the analytical framework with the four thematic issues presented in the conceptual framework for the study. The four issues address those aspects and dimensions of the decentralisation process in the partner countries that are inherently related to alignment and harmonisation of DP support to the reform process:

- (i) management of the decentralisation process,
- (ii) DP coordination mechanisms,
- (iii) alignment of DP support to country strategies and
- (iv) the modalities of DP support.

The country study in Benin was carried out from July 1 to 13th, 2007. The findings and conclusions presented in the report are based on a documentary study and the interviews conducted with representatives of government, development partners and civil society (List of persons met included as Annex 1). The mission benefited greatly from two meetings with the technical group on decentralisation. An initial meeting was held on Monday, July 2nd, 2007 to present the objectives of the study and to receive detailed guidance with regard to ongoing developments in the field of decentralisation relevant for the study purpose. A debriefing held on Wednesday, July 11th, 2007 provided the opportunity for the consultant to present the preliminary findings (Annex 2) and discuss the lessons learned and perspectives with both government and DP representatives.

The mission was greatly facilitated by the Ms. Catherine Pravin, chair of the technical group on decentralisation, and Mr. Helmut Burmeister, deputy chair of the technical group, and their respective teams. We take the opportunity to express our gratitude to all persons who made themselves available for interviews and participated in the discussions.

II. BACKGROUND TO THE DECENTRALISATION PROCESS

II.1 Milestones of decentralisation and local self-governance in Benin

Decentralisation is still a relatively recent development in Benin. The decision to opt for decentralised local governments was taken during the National Conference in 1990 and the resulting New Constitution (1990) clearly provides for local self-government. The development of the legal and political framework was undertaken in the following years and the decentralisation laws were finally approved in 1999. The effective implementation of decentralisation started in December 2002 when elections were organized and communal councils subsequently established in February 2003.

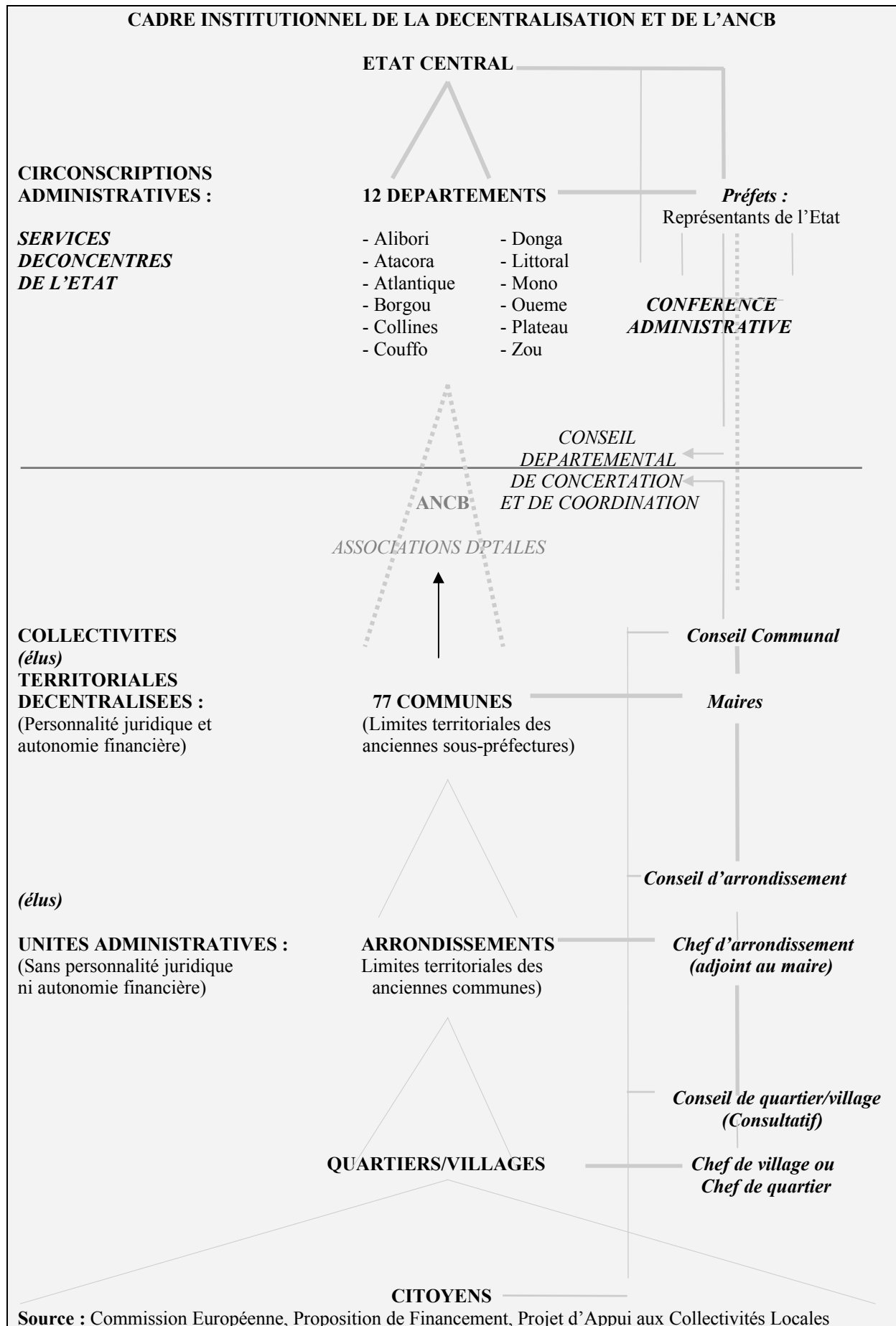
System of local self-governance and deconcentration

The main decentralisation option chosen by the country – as stated in a set of laws adopted in 1999 – is to create a single level of local governments with autonomy in essential services delivery and to reinforce a central government structure at the department level that will be able, in compliance with decentralisation law, to: (i) provide communes with technical support; and (ii) be the prime focus of interaction between central state and communes.

With the implementation of the decentralisation reforms, the country was divided into 77 local governments (communes). The decentralisation law 97-029 transferred to communes the following mandates: communal planning, construction of infrastructure (building / Maintenance of roads, street lighting), environment, hygiene and sanitation (drinking water, waste management, rainwater), literacy, early childhood and primary education (building, equipment and maintenance of schools), health and social education (building, equipment and maintenance of public health centres), economic services and investments (building, equipment, and maintenance of markets and abattoirs). The laws furthermore allowed communes to delegate, obtain assistance, contract out, and sub-contract part of their mandate and directed each commune to elaborate a local development plan (*Plan de Développement Communal* - PDC).

Concurrently, the legal framework provided for reforms of the one level of deconcentrated structures, the departments. The former sub-prefecture level disappeared, now replaced by the decentralised communes, and the mandate as well as the total number of prefectures at the departmental level were modified. The decision was taken to increase the number of departments from six to twelve and to develop the prefectures in charge of the departments as administrative territories into advisory and supervisory structures for the local governments. According to the laws, the deconcentrated structures (prefect) have a role of supervising the communes and controlling the legality of their administrative acts as well as an advisory role. To that effect, the authority of the prefects was reinforced with respect to (i) control of the legality of the communes' acts; and (ii) coordination of the deconcentrated services' activities. They have authority over the departmental budget (i.e. become "*ordonnateurs*" of the State's budget), under the control of the Treasury Controller for expenditure of all sectors in their departments. They also approve the development plans of all the communes in their departments. However, until now, only the six formerly existing prefectures have implemented the new organisation structure and to a certain extent assumed their new roles and responsibilities, the other six still need to be created.

Within the system of territorial administration in Benin, the department is the level on which most of the deconcentrated services of the line ministries are located. Some of these deconcentrated services were already in place before the reforms. (education, health, social protection, rural development, planning, finances, etc.) However, the promulgation of the decentralisation laws required the line ministries to engage in a process of making their sectoral strategies as well as set-up coherent with decentralisation. Some ministries have already initiated the process and strengthened their deconcentrated structures, among them the Ministry for Agriculture and the Ministry for Environmental Protection



Strategy for the Reform of the Territorial Administration

Whereas in the early years of decentralisation, government accorded high priority to advancing the reforms on different levels, the later years in power of the last government saw a decreasing commitment and ownership of the process. The completion of the legal and policy framework for decentralisation and deconcentration with the necessary laws, by-laws and regulations, the effective transfer of resources and competences as well as the elaboration of a clear policy and strategy was proceeding only slowly. The lack of core instruments for effectively implementing and steering the reforms became evident and the Ministry in charge of decentralisation undertook to elaborate a strategy for the implementation of the reforms.

The vision of the government of Benin with regard to local government is spelled out in the draft strategy document for the reform of the administration of the territory¹ (*Reforme de l'Administration Territoriale – RAT*). The draft strategy elaborated in 2006 with support from different DP provides the framework for the future implementation of the reform process in Benin with its two dimensions of decentralisation targeting the establishment of local self-governments and deconcentration targeting the creation of a capable administration in the regions.

The draft strategy clearly highlights the achievements of the reforms up to date as well as the persisting constraints and deficits, both regarding the legal and regulatory framework for the reforms and the effective application of the texts on the ground. There are uncertainties created by the interpretation of texts and laws on the powers and prerogatives of the local public administration, and a lack of a clear institutional framework to support implementation. The core issues identified in the strategy regarding the legal framework, the organisation and human resource dimension of the decentralisation and deconcentration process, the institutional set-up as well as the area of fiscal decentralisation are:

- lack of an overall organisation framework for implementation and a concrete action plan, including human resources strengthening activities and lack of clarity on the framework for fiscal decentralisation;
- lack of cooperation between key actors (the mayors as head of the local governments, the prefects and the heads of deconcentrated sector offices);
- lack of a strategy and agenda to increase budget transfers to municipalities and improve their own revenues; and
- lack of monitoring and evaluation of the progress of the reform.

The strategy proposes specific strategic actions to address the constraints identified as well as an institutional set-up for managing the implementation of the reforms. However, due to the presidential election in 2006 and the change in government, the strategy was not taken forward and approved.

New Policy for Decentralisation / Deconcentration in Benin

The new government has engaged in a process of further defining the framework for decentralisation and local governance in Benin. Since the lack of a national policy for the implementation of the reform of the administration of the territory (RAT) is considered as one of the main bottlenecks for effective decentralisation, an initiative has recently been launched for the formulation of a decentralisation policy (*Politique Nationale de Décentralisation / Déconcentration du Bénin – PONADEC*).

The main objectives of the policy are to provide a coherent and broad framework for the decentralisation and deconcentration process that will facilitate the implementation of the reforms. To that effect, it is intended that the policy includes orientations and directives for bringing the sector interventions in line with the principal of territorial administration and thus making them coherent with local self-governance.

¹ Document de Stratégie de mise en Œuvre de la réforme de l'administration territoriale, Projet, Mission de Décentralisation, Ministère de la Sécurité Publique et des Collectivités Locales, Juillet 2006

II.2 Coherence of National Development Strategies

The Government of Benin had developed and adopted a first **Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS)** in December 2002 for the period 2003-2005. Within the context of a change in government at the conclusion of the March 2006 Presidential elections, an evaluation of the 2003-2005 PRS was undertaken and the process for the elaboration of the new Strategy initiated. The Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy (*Stratégie de Croissance pour la Réduction de la Pauvreté – SCRP*) sets out the broad economic and financial orientations for the 2007-2009 period and was approved in April 2007.

The PRSP II is structured around five broad strategic axes, namely (i) growth acceleration, (ii) infrastructure development, (iii) strengthening human capital, (iv) promotion of good governance, and (v) balanced and sustainable development of national territory. The strategy clearly recognises the key role of local governments in poverty reduction and reference is made to decentralisation and local governance throughout the document. Two of the five interrelated pillars explicitly put forward the implementation of decentralisation reform as a core element, namely the pillars (iv) 'promotion of good governance' and (v) 'balanced and sustainable development of national territory'.

The PRSP II explicitly recognises the role of decentralisation and regional planning and development for advancing local development and the participation of men and women in local self-governance. The government commits itself to (i) strengthen to capacities of the deconcentrated structures and render them functional, (ii) to enhance the coordination of the deconcentrated sector agencies by the prefect in view of improving synergies and efficiency of development activities promoted by the state, (iii) to develop the capacities of the deconcentrated sector agencies in line with the requirements provided for by the RAT and financial framework of the government, (iv) to strengthen the human resources of the deconcentrated structures (*prefectures* and deconcentrated sector agencies), (v) to make the local governments more efficient with regard to their mandate for local development including the promotion of local economic development, and (vi) to build capacities at the deconcentrated structures for assuming their advisory and supervisory role for local governments.

The reform of the territorial administration with its two dimensions of decentralisation and deconcentration remains the core strategy for government in the pursuit of the above-mentioned objectives. The lack of progress in the implementation of the strategy is the reason for Government to envisage a review of the existing legal and regulatory framework and to proceed to the elaboration of complementary laws and regulations.

Furthermore, the PRSP II stipulates, that each Ministry will be equipped with a strategic plan for promoting the deconcentration process in order to address the two dimensions of the territorial administration in a balanced and efficient way. Likewise, the coordination of local development activities at the level of the prefect will be strengthened by the elaboration of departmental multisectoral programmes with a comprehensive, results-oriented departmental budget and the promotion of the departmental coordination mechanisms (*Conférences Administratives Départementales* and *Commissions Départementales de Concentration et de Coordination*). In addition, the lagging transfer of competencies and resources from the central to the local level will be addressed through the elaboration and implementation of a detailed and time-bound programme of action.

With the strong commitment of Government to the reform of the territorial administration in the new PRSP, the overall policy environment for decentralisation and local governance has been markedly improved. However, the political will needs to be matched by commitment to translate the concept of local self-governance into all national and sectoral strategies and policies. The sector ministries are in charge of taking the deconcentration reforms in their respective sectoral set-up forward. So far however, the deconcentration process is constrained by several factors:

- The lack of vision and a strategy to implement the reform of the territorial administration within the sector ministries, in particular with regard to the specific mandates and the division of labour between the central and the departmental level.
- The lack of commitment of the sector ministries to transfer certain prerogatives to the deconcentrated services at departmental level.
- The need to clarify the role of the deconcentrated structures as advisory services for the communes and the lack of capacity of the former to efficiently assume the role.
- The insufficient human and financial resources of the deconcentrated structures.

The perspective for setting up a coherent framework for decentralisation and local governance have been markedly improved by the recognition of the role of local governments in the new PRSP II and the ongoing initiative of the Ministry to elaborate a policy for the reform of the territorial administration.

II.3 Key issues for decentralisation and local governance

In the first study carried out by the informal group that sponsored this study, five key issues were identified concerning the decentralisation process. These five pre-conditions were considered minimum elements for a national decentralisation strategy in order for it to be conducive for successful decentralisation and coordinated and harmonised DP support to decentralisation and local governance:

- legal framework for decentralisation;
- financial resources for local governments;
- human resources and capacity building for local governments;
- transparency and accountability and
- institutional arrangements in support of the decentralisation process from central level.

The current situation in Benin regarding the decentralisation reforms has been analysed for the first four issues and key issues are described below. Regarding the fifth issue, a more detailed assessment is made in chapter III.

Legal framework

The legal and regulatory framework for decentralisation and local governance is constituted by a set of 5 laws and 30 by-laws and regulations. The passing of the decentralisation laws in 1999 (Law No. 97-028 on the organisation of the territorial administration; Law No. 97-029 on the organisation of the communes; Law 98-005 on the organisation of communes with a particular statute; Law No. 98-006 on the electoral, communal and municipal regime; and Law 98-007 on the financial regime of the communes), has provided the basis for:

- the organisation of the first local government elections and the establishment of the local governments
- the facilitation of the elaboration and the implementation of the local development plans and
- the setting up and functioning of the local governments as well as the deconcentrated structures and their interaction.

Although the decentralisation laws provide the overall legal framework for decentralisation and local governance, a number of problems have been observed in their application due to difficulties in interpreting the regulations and due to gaps in the regulations. Eleven decrees complementing the decentralisation law have been adopted, mainly regarding the reorganisation of the department and the new responsibilities of the prefects, the Departmental Council of Deliberation and Coordination, and the communes' Secretary Generals. However, the effective transfer from central government to new local governments, of the six competencies requested to be transferred by the decentralisation law No. 97-029, has not yet taken place. This lack of law enforcement generates conflicts of competencies and hinders the ac-

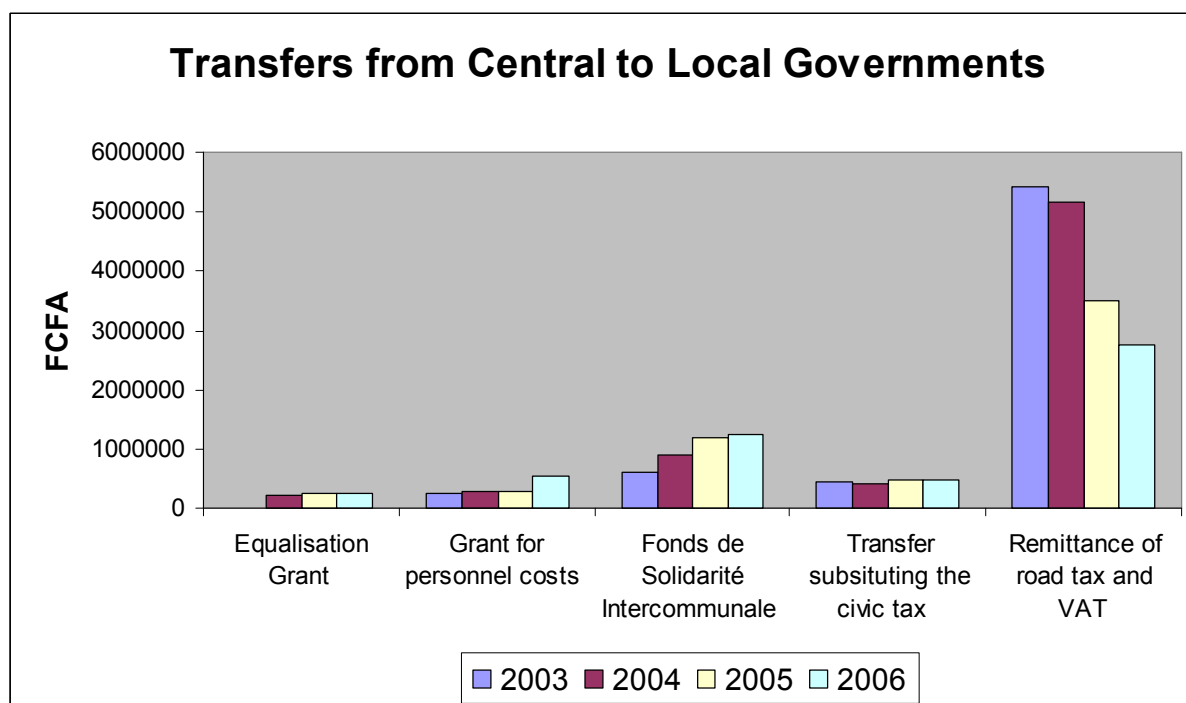
tivities of the latter. The consequences of the insufficiencies in the legal framework are extensive; they include diverging interpretation of the laws and regulations, the non-respect of the spirit of the laws and regulations, the confusion with regards to roles and responsibilities, the refutation of the decisions of the supervising authority (prefect), the inefficiency / non-functionality of the local administration, and the slowness of the decentralisation process in particular with regard to the transfer of competences and resources by the sector ministries.

Financial resources for local governments

The decentralisation laws, in particular the law 98-007 and the respective by-laws and regulations, on the financial regime of the commune and the pertaining regulations, provide the framework for the fiscal decentralisation in Benin. However, certain regulations essential for the effective application of the existing framework are yet to be elaborated and approved.

According to the laws, the local governments dispose of four main funding sources, namely their own revenue, the financial transfers from the central level, external funding and borrowing. Furthermore, the law provides for new revenue sources for the local governments, including a local development tax, grant transfers related to the competencies devolved from the central to the local governments, a specific grant provided for 3 years to cover the costs for setting up the communes and getting started as well as a Solidarity Funds (*Fonds de Solidarité Intercommunale*) and a financial institution for local governments.

Overall, the financial situation of the local governments shows a positive development over the five years of their first term. The capacities of the local governments to mobilise resources for investment purposes have been strengthened and been translated into an increase of the local capital spending of about 10% between 2003 and 2005. Likewise, the revenue from fiscal and other sources has been increased and the percentage of external funding for local governments included in the local budgets has augmented. Furthermore, an increasing share of their recurrent expenditure is funded from their own budgets.



However, despite these positive trends in the financial situations of the local government, their resources are still by far insufficient to make significant improvements in service delivery and to effectively manage the local development. There are several reasons given:

- The transfers from the central to the local governments are still at a very low level, although increasing over the last years, and not always effected timely and to the full

amount. However, the remittances of the road tax and the VAT from the central to the local level, that were introduced as a major funding source for local governments, have declined significantly over the last years (see diagram above)².

- The legal provisions for the application of the local development tax have only recently been created with the 2007 budget (*Loi de Finance pour la gestion 2007*) which stipulates that the tax will come into effect. However, the detailed modalities regarding the operationalisation of the tax have yet to be elaborated and approved by Cabinet.
- The transfers from the sector ministries are not at all effective or only to a very limited extent;
- Tax collection is still at a very low rate due to the limited capacities of the deconcentrated services of the Ministry of Finances who are responsible for collecting local taxes and fees.

The draft decentralisation strategy³ recognizes the key constraints for fiscal decentralisation and a sound financial management at local level and proposed several strategic actions for (i) improving the system of intergovernmental transfers, (ii) increasing the own revenue of the local governments, (iii) strengthening the financial management capacities of the communes and (iv) elaborating a policy and strategy for funding the decentralised and deconcentrated administrations.

Several initiatives have been undertaken over the last years to improve the financial situation of the communes, in particular with regard to the establishment of the Solidarity Fund (*Fonds de Solidarité Intercommunale*) and the Local Government Finance Institution (*Institution de Financement des Collectivités Locales*). A by-law for setting up the FADEC (Fonds d'Appui au Développement des Communes) as a public institution was prepared in 2006, however due to the diverging views within Government regarding the objectives, set-up and modalities of the FADEC, the process was temporarily put on hold. Instead, an in-depth study combined with several stakeholder workshops was launched to deepen the reflexions regarding a Local Government Financial Institution.

Human resources and capacity building

The 77 recently established local government can be considered operational with regard to ensuring the core functions and administrative processes provided for in the law. The councils meet regularly and the decisions made during these meetings are submitted to the prefect for control of their legality. The personnel of the local governments are constituted from the staff of the former sub-prefectures and were reinforced through the recruitment of key qualified staff to strengthen capacities for managing local development. Most of these local staff are hired directly by the local government and are financed from the budget of the commune.

Several guidelines, handbooks and manuals have been elaborated and disseminated to all local government in order to facilitate the local self-government, among them a handbook for the mayor and the elected councillors, guidelines for local development planning and local project implementation as well as a manual for the control of the legality of the communes act by the prefect. Furthermore, a number of training and capacity building initiatives have been carried out over the last years to help the local government assume their new roles and responsibilities.

However, despite the efforts undertaken, the lack of capacity at local level is still one of the major bottle necks for the decentralisation process. The majority of the actors involved in local development both on the local governments side and on the side of the deconcentrated

² Data taken from: Conception du Fonds d'Appui au Développement des Communes (FADeC), Document de Travail pour la table ronde, Institutions et Développement, Avril 2007.

³ Document de Stratégie de mise en Œuvre de la réforme de l'administration territoriale, Projet, Mission de Décentralisation, Ministère de la Sécurité Publique et des Collectivités Locales, Juillet 2006

structures do not fully understand the specific roles and responsibilities assigned to them and therefore do not assume their new functions.

Effective mechanisms for local accountability

The basic documents regarding the newly established local governments have been broadly made available to civil society and specific material was developed to inform groups of the population (women, students, central government agents, etc.) on the process of decentralisation, the mandate of the local government as well as their own right and responsibilities in respect to local governments.

So far, the participation of civil society in managing local development is limited, mainly because the concept of local self-governance has not yet been fully internalised. The communication of the major reform elements was further made difficult by the large number of local languages and the sometimes contradictory or incomplete information presented in the sensitisation campaign. But local level accountability is not only hampered by the insufficiencies on the demand side, i.e. lack of knowledge on how to participate in local decision making and therefore lack of demand for transparency and accountability of the local governments. Certain supply-side factors related to bad local governance also have a negative impact; these include political interests influencing local administration, social conventions defining decision making, lack of transparency as well as the autocratic management style of selected mayors.

The limited degree of participation is also due to the fact that decentralisation has not yet been implemented on the lower levels given that election for councils at village or ward (arrondissement) level have not been organised.

II.4 DP support to decentralisation

With the clear commitment to local self-governance at the National Conference in 1990, most of the DPs have included the support to decentralisation and local governance into their overall cooperation programme with Benin. When decentralisation became effective with the first local elections end of 2002, a large number of projects and programmes supporting the decentralisation process and the newly created local governments were initiated.

The major programmes currently being implemented include the PGUD II (Projet de Gestion Urbaine Décentralisée) and the PNDCC (Projet National de Développement Conduit par les Communautés) financed by the World Bank, the PDDC (Programme d'appui à la Décentralisation et au Développement Communal) and the FIVIS (Fonds d'investissement) supported by the German Development Cooperation (BMZ with GTZ and KFW), the PAACO (Projet d'Appui à l'Agglomération de Cotonou) with funding from AFD, the PDL (Projet d'Appui au Développement Communal) jointly funded by AFD, the French region of Picardie and UNCDF, ADECOI (Projet d'Appui au Développement Communal et aux Initiatives Locales dans le Borgou) jointly supported by UNCDF, UNDP and Fonds Belge de Survie, the PGDP (Programme Gouvernance et Droit de la Personne) funded by DANIDA, the PAD (Programme d'Appui à la Décentralisation) with support from USAID as well as the support from the Netherlands (an overview is provided by the tables on the following pages). Several new programmes are currently under preparation, including the PACTE (Programme d'Appui aux Collectivités Territoriales) with funding from the EU, the PADDAT (Projet d'Appui à la Décentralisation, Déconcentration et à l'Aménagement du Territoire) supported by the French Development Cooperation; the new sector budget support for the future FADEC from the German Development Cooperation as well as the approaches from the Swiss and the Belgian Cooperation.

The projects/programmes provide their support to the decentralisation reforms and local governance through different approaches. Most programmes intervene directly at the local level and the majority of them is characterized by a **regional concentration**; the two World Bank supported programmes (PGUD 2 and PNDCC) and the EU-supported programmes (former PRODECOM, future PACTE) being the exception with approaches encompassing all

communes. The projects/programmes generally have several components and provide support to the decentralised (local governments) and/or the deconcentrated (prefectures) structures. However, the most support programmes privileged the local governments and thus contributed to the unbalanced development of the two dimensions of the reform with decentralisation progressing more rapidly and deconcentration lagging behind.

Capacity building is an integral part of most project/programmes and focuses on key issues for establishing and strengthening local governments: the elaboration of local development plans, the mobilisation of physical, human, financial and external resources to implement communal projects, the management of projects including project related procurement as well as the development of relations between the communes and the different social and economic structures.

Several programmes set up mechanisms to provide local government with **funding for implementing communal infrastructure projects** identified in their local development plans. These approaches differ considerably with regard to the funding mechanism (budget support type vs. project finance type), the use of national transfer mechanisms (transfers via the treasury) and the extent to which the local governments in charge for the implementation of the projects. (The differences are discussed in detail in chapter III.4).

Some programmes also provide support to the **national structures**. The French development cooperation (PADDAT) has been supporting key actors of the decentralisation process, namely the DGAT of the MISPCL, the *Maison des Collectivités Locales* as well as the *Délégation à l'Aménagement du Territoire*. The German Development Cooperation has focused its support at the national level on the DGAT (through the PDDC/GTZ) and the ANCB (through DED) and the DANIDA-funded PGDP provided support for the Mission de la Décentralisation.

Programme / Project	Development Partner	Intervention Zone	Time Frame	National Partner	Total Costs	Funding for Investments	Institutional Support
Programme d'Appui à la Décentralisation et au Développement Communal (PDDC)	Germany, BMZ	Abmey, Bohicon, Natitingou, Ouidah, commune of the departments of Atacora, Donga,	7/2007-6/2010	MISPCL/MDEF	7,27 Mio EUR		Support to MISPL, MDEF, ANCB, selected communes
Fonds d'Infrastructures Villes Secondaires (FIVIS I+II) en liaison avec PDDC	Germany, BMZ	Abmey, Bohicon, Natitingou, Ouidah et Bassila, Kérou, Pehounco, Tanguéta	2004-2009	MISPCL	8,11 Mio. EUR	4,875 Milliards CFA	Support to the technical and financial departments of the beneficiary communes
Under préparation : Sector budget support for local investments (FADeC)	Germany, BMZ	National funding mechanism (FADeC)	Start in 2008	MISPCL	5,5 Mio. EUR		
Programme Gouvernance et Droit de la Personne du Danemark, Zou et Collines (PGDP)	Denmark DANIDA	15 communes in the departments of Zou and Colline	2004-2007	MISPCL	2 393 200 000 CFA	Economic infrastructure	Cont'd Support to communes, support to the Mission de la Décentralisation concluded
New project under preparation	Denmark DANIDA		Start in 2008-				
Projet d'appui au GIC (PDL Collines)	EU, AFD, Région Picardie, UNCDF	Collines (16 communes), Alibori (6 communes)	2006 - 2008	MISPCL	800 000 000 CFA	multisectoral	Support to communes and groups of communes
Appui au Développement Communal et aux Initiatives Locales dans le Borgou (ADECOI)	UNCDF, UNDP, Fonds Belge de Survie	Department of Borgou (communes of Bembèrèkè, Nikki, N'dali, Kalalé, Pèrèrè, Si-nendé, and Tchaourou)	2003-2007	MISPCL	5,311 Moi US\$	multisectoral	Support to communes and communities

Programme / Project	Development Partner	Intervention Zone	Time Frame	National Partner	Total Costs	Funding for Investments	Institutional Support
Projet de Gestion urbaine décentralisée 2(PGUD 2)	World Bank, AFD	Departments of the Littoral, Ouémé, and Borgou (Cotonou, Porto-Novo and Parakou) – Secondary municipalities	2000-2008		3 017 000 000 FCFA	Full amount for investments	
Projet National d'appui au Développement conduit par les communautés (PNDCC)	World Bank	74 communes with 1515 villages / communities	2005-2010	MDEF	68 Mio US\$ for all components	multisectoral	Support to communes, communities and the central government
Projet d'Appui à la Décentralisation, Déconcentration et à l'Aménagement du Territoire (PADDAT)	France	Karimama, Malanville, Grand Popo, Comé, Kpomassé	2008-11 Under preparation	MISPCL	1 180 000 CFA (excluding TA)		Support to communes, to the DGAT, the prefectures, the DAT and MCL
Programme d'Appui à la mise en oeuvre des PDC dans les départements du Mono, du Couffo, de l'Atacora et de la Donga (PAPDC)	Belgium BTC	Communes in the departments of Mono, Couffo, Atacora, Donga	10/2007 – 9/2011	MISPCL	11 400 000 EUR	7 000 000 EUR	Support to communes and deconcentrated technical services
Programme d'Appui aux Collectivités Locales (PACTE)	European Commission	All communes	2008-2011	MDEF	15 000 000 EUR	10 000 000 EUR (Sector Budget Support)	Support to communes, to prefectures/DGAT (delegated to GTZ)
Appui néerlandais à la mise en œuvre de la déconcentration	Netherlands		2006-2008	MDEF	793 000 000 CFA		Support to deconcentrated structures, DGAT, MISPCL
Projet "Etat Local" de la coopération suisse, en cours de réflexion.	Switzerland		Under preparation				

III. PRACTICE OF AID HARMONISATION AND EFFECTIVENESS

For the purpose of the review, the specific situation in Benin was analysed using the four thematic issues proposed by the conceptual framework. The four issues address those aspects and dimensions of the decentralisation process in the countries that are inherently related to alignment and harmonisation of development partners support to the reform process: (i) management of the decentralisation process, (ii) DP coordination mechanisms, (iii) alignment of DP support to country strategies and (iv) the modalities of DP support. The following chapters discuss these thematic issues and present the findings and conclusion for improving alignment and harmonisation for effective decentralisation in Benin.

III.1 Management of the decentralisation process

The underlying policy and strategy documents for the decentralisation process as well as the overall orientation of the government as expressed in broader reform programmes, poverty reduction strategies and national development initiatives set the context for the implementation of decentralisation and local governance reforms. The institutional arrangements for the management of the decentralisation reform process, in particular with regard to the leadership role within government for the process, the implication of core stakeholders and the interrelation of the management structures for the decentralisation process with the arrangements for the management of a broader public administration reform.

Institutional Set-up for managing the decentralisation process

The implementation of the Reform of Territorial Administration (RAT) was entrusted in the Ministry of Interior, Security and Local Governments (*Ministère de l'Intérieur, de la Sécurité et des Collectivités Locales* – MISPCL). As a result of an internal restructuring of the Ministry to comply with the requirements of the reform implementation, the MISPCL created three specific structures responsible for the reform:

- The **General Division of Territorial Administration** (*Direction Générale de l'Administration Territoriale* – DGAT) comprises the National Division of Local Authorities, in charge of enforcing all the decentralisation laws in coordination with the other ministries, and monitoring the communes' operations including personnel and budget.
- The **Decentralisation Mission** (*Mission de la Décentralisation* – MD), established in 1997, is entrusted with the preparation of draft laws and regulations to be proposed to the government as well as strategies, actions and procedures necessary for their implementation (studies, guides and manuals for the elected representatives, etc.) This structure was expected to be phased out after the launching of the communes (its creation decree limited its duration to three years).
- The **House of Local Authorities** (*Maison des Collectivités Locales* – MCL) created in 1997, is entrusted with the support of the communes through training and technical assistance, and plays an important role in the matter. For instance, it has been implementing since 2003, the training programme for the French-Cooperation financed Decentralisation and Urban Management Support Project, the EU-financed PRODECOM programme through which the MCL has already implemented training plans for 19 communes. Its objective is to implement a year-time training plan for all 77 communes.

The establishment of these three structures provided a valuable platform for conducting the reforms. However, a number of constraints became evident over the years and hampered the effective implementation of the decentralisation process. These major constraints were:

- The insufficient implication of the sector ministries in the work of the Decentralisation Mission, in particular with regard to necessary reorganisation of the ministries in order to comply with the provision of the reform.
- The mismatch between the limited capacities of the DGAT in comparison to its multiple responsibilities and the gap in the legal framework that prohibited the reinforcement of the capacities and the introduction of an autonomous management.

- The lack of clarity in the legal provisions regarding the roles of the different structures, provoking not only overlapping of mandates between the DGAT and the MD, but also interferences of the competences of the DGAT on one side and those of other ministries on the other side (i.e. the Ministry of Finance for local government finances)
- The insufficiency of the human, material and financial resources of the three structures and the lack of coordination of capacity building activities in order to enable them to effectively conduct the reform process. However, at the same time the imbalance in the external support to the three structures lead to considerable differences with regard to available resources resulting in a spirit of competition rather than cooperation between them.

The **National Association of Communes of Benin** (*Association Nationale des Communes de Bénin* – ANCB) was created in 2003 to reinforce the institutional framework to support the communes. However, up to now the ANCB is not in a position to fully assume its mandate, participate in the implementation of the reforms and facilitate the communication between the local governments, the central government as well as the DPs. The ANCB is supported in the context of several programmes in order to build up capacity for effectively assuming its role.

The Reform of the Territorial Administration (RAT) is part of the broader public sector reforms (*Réforme Administrative*) undertaken by the government. The creation of a **Ministry for Administrative and Institutional reform** aims at addressing the lack of coordination between important reforms being designed or implemented in the country, including decentralisation and public finance. So far, however, this ministry is lacking the budget and powers necessary to fulfil its mandate and allow it to make significant progress in implementing its action plan by 2009. Also the three specialised structures created in 2005 to coordinate the different public sector reforms have not yet become fully operational and played a significant role in the implementation of the reforms.

- The **National Consultative Commission for the Administrative Reforms** (*Commission Nationale Consultative de la Réforme Administrative* – CNRCA) was set up to provide for the broad participation of core stakeholders in the reform implementation. The CNRCA comprises representatives from central and local government administrations, of the local governments, of social partners and civil society.
- The **Coordination Committee for the Administrative Reforms** (*Comité de coordination de la réforme administrative* - CCRA) is an inter-ministerial committee for the technical coordination and the monitoring of the implementation of the cross-cutting reform components. It is constituted of the Secretary Generals of the different Ministries and other representatives of key central government structures. Three sub-committees (reform of public administration, decentralisation/ deconcentration and public finances) analyse the different reform activities and programmes under the angle of their specific cross-cutting issue.
- The **Sectoral Units for the Administrative Reform** (*Cellules Sectorielles de Pilotage de la Réforme Administrative* – CSPRA) have been set up in every Ministry to coordinate and follow up on the reforms activities and their specific implication on the sectors.

Presidential Elections in 2006 and Changes in the Policy Environment

However, the reorganisation of the government in early 2007, which led to the creation, among others - of the new Ministry for Decentralisation (*Ministère de la Décentralisation, de la Gouvernance Locale, de l'Administration et de l'Aménagement du Territoire* - MDGLAAT), changed the institutional set-up for successfully implementing the reforms of the administration of the territory with its two dimensions decentralisation and deconcentration. A number of factors contribute to the more conducive set-up: (i) the appointment of a minister with broad experience of the matter and (ii) the internal restructuring of the Ministry with the objective of clearly defining the roles of the different sub-structures and bringing capacities in line with the respective mandates. These recent initiatives have already changed the political climate and increased the ownership for advancing the decentralisation and deconcentration reforms. The ministry has demonstrated its strengthened ownership for the reforms by the recent ini-

tiative for elaborating a decentralisation policy to spell out governments' vision and provide a clear framework for the implementation of the reforms. Likewise, the renewed interest of the Ministry to participate in the meeting of the technical group on decentralisation, and eventually to take on the leadership of the group, is a clear sign.

The new president put the reforms high on the political agenda which will also facilitate the recognition of decentralisation as a transversal issue across government and into sector ministries. The prominent role of local governments in the current poverty reduction strategy is a first step for enhancing the recognition of decentralisation as a cross-cutting issue. With regard to sector strategies, the coherence needs to be increased.

However, continuous high-level political support will be essential to ensure that the difficult reform issues linked to decentralisation are not sidelined by reluctant sector and line ministries. The Ministry for Administrative and Institutional Reforms as well as the steering committee for the implementation of the poverty reduction strategy may have a role in ensuring coherence between the different public sector reforms, but will also need clear orientation from the highest level.

III.2 Development Partner coordination mechanisms

The coordination between the Government of Benin and the different development partners is ensured by several different mechanisms. They include:

- the monthly coordination meeting of the head of missions,
- the forum 'Gouvernement/Partenaire' as main dialogue mechanism for the implementation of the poverty reduction strategy, with co-leadership by a government representative and a representative of the development partners,
- the technical group on decentralisation originally conceived as a forum for policy dialogue and coordination between government and development partners regarding issues related to local governance and decentralisation, however in the last years mainly active as a coordination mechanism between DPs with leadership from the EU, and
- The sector coordination group lead by the Ministry of the Interior.
- The overall set-up of the dialog and coordination mechanisms in Benin is currently being reviewed as part of the implementation strategy of the PRSP II and the initiatives undertaken for enhancing aid efficiency based on the principles of the Paris Declaration. The momentary more of operation of the technical group on decentralisation and the current practices and experiences regarding coordination between DPs is presented below followed by an outlook to the upcoming reforms of the coordination mechanism.

Technical Group on Decentralisation

The coordination mechanism between the government and development partners was set up in 1998 in the context of one of the first support programmes for decentralisation. The main objective of the technical group for decentralisation was to improve the exchange of information between government and DPs on support projects and programmes as well as to facilitate the political dialogue on decentralisation and local governance.

Since the creation of the group, the leadership has been ensured by the EU delegation. Despite numerous initiatives from the DPs for promoting government leadership of the technical group, the respective changes in the set-up have not yet been achieved. However, the participation of government representatives in the group has changed considerably over the years. In the early years, the Ministry in charge of decentralisation (formerly the MISPCL - *Ministère de l'Intérieur de la Sécurité Publique et des Collectivités Locales*) was actively participating in the technical group on decentralisation, namely through the representatives from the *Mission de la Décentralisation*.

With the progressive shift of the leadership role for decentralisation within the Ministry from the *Mission de la Décentralisation* to the *Direction General de l'Administration Territoriale*, the participation of government representatives and their engagements in the discussions

with the DPs declined. The political dialogue between the DPs and the representatives of government as well as the discussion of specific issues related to the decentralisation process was well established in the early years of the technical group, but suffered a set-back in the last years due to the lack of government commitment to the process. Recently however, with the changes in government after the 2006 elections, decentralisation has been put back as a priority on the political agenda and the new Ministry (*Ministère de la Décentralisation, de la Gouvernance Locale, de l'Administration et de l'Aménagement du Territoire - MDGLAAT*) shows a clear commitment to reviving the coordination mechanism and assuming leadership over the group.

The meetings schedule of the technical group consists of two regular semi-annual meetings as well as additional ad-hoc meetings contingent upon the need to discuss specific issues (project or programme preparation and evaluation missions, specific issues, etc.). The technical group on decentralisation is considered to be very active and has a strong record with regard to exchange of information between the different DPs engaged in supporting decentralisation. The political dialogue with the government as well as the discussion of specific issues related to the decentralisation process were important functions in the early years, however, for the reasons explained above, are at the moment no longer dealt with in the group. The DPs furthermore engaged in a process of presenting their new project and programme concepts to the group in view of strengthened complementarities of the interventions and harmonisation of modalities. However, this process proves to be lengthy and difficult due to the institutional constraints of the different DPs and the diverging intervention modalities and objectives.

The lack of commitment from government is considered to be the most important shortcoming with regard to functioning of the group. A strong leadership by the government is expected to facilitate the harmonisation and coordination process by providing a clear orientation in case of diverging DPs positions and by strengthening the argument for decentralisation in the discussions with sector representatives.

Another constraint to the group's effectiveness regarding harmonisation and alignment is the issue of inclusiveness. Currently, only those DPs are regularly participating in the group's meeting who are considering themselves to be supporting decentralisation and local governance. However, targeted programmes (poverty reduction or specific urban infrastructure) as well as the sector infrastructure programmes have a strong bearing on local governments and the decentralisation process. Funding mechanisms and implementation procedures set up by these programme are very often not in line with the provision of the decentralisation laws. The participation of DP representatives involved in managing or steering these engagements in the technical group could extent the outreach of the coordination efforts beyond the range of programmes primarily supporting decentralisation.

Joint mission and analytical work

Together with Government, several DPs recently engaged in a process for enhancing aid efficiency through two initiatives: the first targeting the improvement of the coordination between DPs and their alignment to country strategies based on the Paris Declaration and oriented towards a JAS-type process, and the second focusing on government respecting and integrating the Paris Declaration into the PRSP II⁴. The studies undertaken in the context of this process not only analysed the existing coordination mechanisms (findings below), but also tried to establish the current situation with regard to the different indicators of the Paris Declaration.

With regard to joint missions and the sharing of analytical work as one element for improving coordination and harmonisation, the DP support to decentralisation and local governance is cited as a negative example: In 2006, 6 parallel missions for the formulation of new projects

⁴ Groupe sur l'Efficacité de l'Aide, Mise en Œuvre de la Déclaration de Paris au Bénin, Rapport de Mission, COWI A/S, 2006

and programmes were carried out by DPs participating in the coordination forums (Switzerland, Denmark, European Commission, France, Germany and Belgium). The reasons for the observed low level of coordination were given as (i) the lack of tradition of working together; (ii) the existing incentive systems within DP organisations which do not accord priority to carrying out joint activities; (iii) the very heterogeneous level of knowledge and capacities within the country offices of the DP organisations regarding harmonisation and alignment; (iv) the lack of a clear vision and objectives of some thematic groups hinders the strengthening of coordination and (v) the insufficient delegation of human resources as well as decision making authority from the DP headquarters to the country offices.

However, it has to be noted, that a number of DPs supporting decentralisation and local governance have committed to improving coordination through the integration of joint activities into their programme concepts and through the enhancing the complementarities of their interventions (discussed in more detail under III.4, Modalities of DP support). Likewise, a number of joint activities initiatives and co-financing agreements have already been supported through the first generation of programmes and projects in Benin. These small-scale experiences with coordination provide a valuable platform for enhancing harmonisation in the future.

Reform of Dialogue Mechanisms between Government and DPs

The setting up of a coordination mechanism bringing together government and DPs for dialogue on specific thematic and sectoral issues was an objective of the first PRSP in Benin. In 2004, following an initiative of several DPs, several thematic and sectoral groups were created and one group of the head of missions established. The overall group (head of missions) covers the discussions related to the implementation of the PRSP and therefore takes up diverse sectoral and thematic issues. The 12 technical and sectoral sub-groups under leadership from a DP representative have an advisory role for the head of missions group with regard to their field of specialisation.

However, due to insufficient commitment from government's side, the terms of reference of the different groups, their mode of operation and the horizontal and vertical linkages were never really formalized; most of the groups did not even have ToR. Therefore, in early 2007, an initiative was launched to review the current set-up and to elaborate a new structure for the coordination mechanism based on the proposals put forth by government in the context of the elaboration of the second PRSP and in line with the principles of the Paris Declaration. This initiative covers both the structure and mandate for the thematic and sectoral groups as well as their mode of operation and interaction with the high-level head of missions group. The draft proposal for the set-up of the coordination mechanism stipulates co-leadership of the groups by a government representative from the lead ministry for the issue under consideration together with a DP representative thus addressing one of the major constraints experienced by the technical group on decentralisation over the last years.

III.3 Alignment of DP support to country strategies

Although the overall legal and political framework for decentralisation is in place, the lack of an approved decentralisation strategy has had important implications for the degree of alignment of DP support to country strategies. On an overall level, DP support is aligned to the national development objectives as defined by the poverty reduction strategy (PRSP) and the legal framework for local self-governance as set out in the decentralisation laws. However, the lack of a detailed programme for the implementation of the decentralisation reforms facilitated the development of different support projects / programmes following more the individual DP support logic and procedures than being built on country strategies and procedures that were not fully established and transparent and efficient.

Overall Alignment of DP support

The study initiated for enhancing overall aid efficiency in Benin in line with the Paris Declaration, analysed the degree of alignment of DP support to country strategies and procedures

across the board. Some positive changes were recorded, including the fact that a group of several DPs (European Commission, France, Belgium, Netherlands, Switzerland, Denmark and Germany) established a road map for improving harmonisation and alignment in 2005 and individual DPs integrated specific objectives for alignment and harmonisation into their country strategies or the annual work programme. However, the translation of these commitments into practices on the ground has proved difficult. With regard to the use of national systems, progress has to be considered limited. Budget support - as the aid modality aligned most to country strategies and systems - is mainly being applied in the context of support to the implementation of the PRSP. Some projects and programmes do integrate national procedures to a certain extent, in particular the national procurement system or the national public financial management systems. However, most DPs still provide support through projects and programmes that are not aligned to country strategies and procedures. The study finds that the group of DPs not at all integrating country strategies include the US (USAID, MCA), Belgium, Japan, Canada, UNDO and China. Another group of DPs (Switzerland, World Bank, African Development Bank and European Commission) only align to country procedures for budget support, for all other types of aid, the DP specific procedures and systems are being applied.

The reasons for the slow progress regarding alignment are twofold:

- **Procedural Constraints:** Some DPs organisation have their own, very specific procedures and very little to no flexibility for adapting them to the partner-country specific context. This is in particular the case for the European Commission who is tied to the procedures established for the respective EDF for any project support (budget support is excluded).
- **Assessment of Country Systems and Procedures:** Typically, alignment will progress as soon as the respective partner country systems and procedures are considered to be satisfactory with regard to transparency and efficiency. The implementation of anti-corruption measures as well as the improvement of control mechanisms and internal and external audits of public financial management are time-consuming processes and alignment will only slowly follow the improvements of the national systems.

Specific Issues for Decentralisation and Local Governance

The degree of alignment to country strategies and procedures of the first generation of support programmes for decentralisation and local governance was rather limited. This was due to the procedural constraints experienced by some DPs as well as the insufficient progress regarding the improvement of country systems and procedures cited above. However, some specificities are related to the incomplete overall framework for decentralisation and local governance. In particular with regard to the capacity building initiatives supported in the context of most project/programmes, the national systems and procedures were only being elaborated, while at the same time the respective activities were already being carried out on the ground. This is the case for the elaboration of the local development plans, for which respective guidelines were elaborated parallel to the support extended to the local governments on the ground.

The same is valid for the broad range of training and capacity building initiatives for local governments which were developed in the context of the different support programmes with their respective regional focus. In providing support to capacity building initiatives, most programmes did not include the strengthening of the deconcentrated structures at departmental level, who according to the laws had been assigned a key advisory role for the local governments. Instead most programmes set-up temporary mechanisms for building local government capacity for technical, organisational and financial issues, thus neglecting the aspect of sustainability of the support for local governments. However, the biased focus of the DP programmes is only one side of the problem, the reluctance of the sector ministries to implement the deconcentration reforms and transfer resources and capacities to the departmental level being the other, equally relevant side. A second reason for the divergence regarding the ca-

capacity building was linked to the lack of clarity with regard to specific roles and procedures in the legal framework.

The analysis of the use of national procurement systems and national financial management systems in the context of those programmes providing funding for local infrastructure investments has clearly revealed the different approaches and diverging degrees with regard to alignment to the national procedures (see also below, section III.4).

However, with the first generation of project / programmes coming to an end, the commitment of the DPs to the principles of the Paris Declaration and the renewed dynamic for the decentralisation reforms brought about by the change in government, the perspectives for alignment of DP support to country strategies and procedures have improved. The elaboration of a decentralisation policy with a detailed programme of action, but also the development of a uniform national funding mechanisms and the evaluation of best practices regarding the elaboration of local development plans will provide a framework conducive for alignment. Several DPs have engaged in the process of preparing new support initiatives for decentralisation and local governance and these second generation programmes are clearly more aligned to country strategies and procedures than their predecessors.

III.4 Support modalities for DPs

The first generation of projects and programmes supporting decentralisation and local governance in Benin (see overview provided in chapter II.4) is characterized by a large variety of modalities, regarding funding mechanisms, governance structures, approaches to capacity building, training, etc. The focus of the majority of the DP-supported programmes on one or two regions of the country (regionalisation) has led to the development and implementation of programme specific approaches in the different regions. This variety can be considered as a rich pool of experiences, however there is urgent need for harmonising the modalities since overlap and conflicting interventions could not be prevented despite various individual initiatives.

With regard to the **funding modalities**, the large variety in mechanisms currently being applied by the different projects and programmes has been analysed in the context of the preparation of a uniform national funding mechanisms, the FADEC. The existing approaches differ considerably with regard to the allocation mechanism (budget support type vs. project finance type), the use of national transfer mechanisms (transfers via the treasury) and the extent to which the local governments are in charge of the implementation of the projects. The report elaborated for conceptualising the FADEC⁵ distinguishes between three different types of projects:

- **Unconditional budget support to the local governments:** The first type of programmes will transfer the allocations directly to the local governments only based on the fulfilment of some eligibility criteria, without requiring the presentation of an investment programme or specific projects for funding. This approach will be implemented in the newer programmes currently under preparation, namely the new EU-supported PACTE as well as the programmes supported by the Belgian Cooperation and UNCDF.
- **Budget allocations to local governments linked to approval of local projects / programmes:** The majority of approaches were based on providing budget allocations to local governments, but at the same time insisting on a more or less complex procedure for the approval of individual projects and non-objections for different stages of the project implementation, mainly for procurement. Two programmes targeting urban local governments (FIVIS and PGUD) based their approach on a delegation of the project sponsorship to specialised national agencies.

⁵ Conception du Fonds d'Appui au Développement des Communes (FADeC), Document de Travail pour la table ronde, Annexe N° 2, Analyse et leçons des programmes d'appui aux communes au Bénin, Institutions et Développement, Avril 2007.

- **Conditional project funding:** This approach is based on the appraisal and approval of investment projects submitted by the local government to the programme structure before funding is made available. In the past, the PGDP programme followed this approach, however was at the same time characterized by according full responsibility to the local governments for the implementation of the projects.

Furthermore, the report analysed the use of the national funding mechanisms and disbursement channels by the different programmes and found that most programmes managed their funds separately at national level, but during the implementation transferred the respective allocations to the accounts of the local governments. The two urban programmes transferred the funds directly to the project executing agency (AGETUR); whereas the ADECOI and the PGDP programmes were trendsetters regarding the full use of the national system (*système Trésor*).

This diversity of allocation and disbursement mechanisms was considered a major impediment to the effective strengthening of the local governments and not appropriate in view of the mostly insufficient capacities for financial management at local level⁶. At the same time, it became obvious that the national system (*système Trésor*) needs to be improved in order to meet the requirements of efficient project implementation. A considerable delay in making the funds available to the local governments was an experience of those support programmes that had integrated the national system in their approach.

However, the project and programmes of the first generation differed in other respects as well. As provided for in the decentralisation laws, the local government engaged in the elaboration of a five-year **local development plan**. A guidebook for communal planning developed by the Ministry of Planning with support from the German development Cooperation and a second guideline elaborated by the *Mission de Décentralisation* provided overall guidance for the local governments in this process. Although these two documents provided for a certain harmonisation of the methodologies applied, the local governments being supported by different programmes (ADECOI, Danish Cooperation, PDDC, PDL Collines, PRODECOM and SNV) still led to certain differences in the approaches as well as the outcomes. These are particularly evident in the type of downstream plans elaborated to guide the implementation of the local development plan (action plans, annual investments plans, and detailed quarterly and six-monthly plans) and in the mechanism for monitoring the implementation of the plan.

Beginning 2008, the duration of the first local development plans will come to an end and the respective local governments will have to engage in a process of elaborating their second plan. In order to provide them with an improved guideline integrating the lessons learned from the first round, an evaluation of the experiences is currently under way. The elaboration of an improved and – in certain respects – more detailed handbook for the local planning exercises will also counteract the tendency of the first generation of support programmes to develop a programme specific approach or customise the existing methodology.

Further areas where the support programmes brought about divergent approaches is the area of capacity building. The co-existence of diverse **supply-driven capacity building and training programmes** for local governments calls for rationalisation and consolidation to break with the current practice of local governments accepting to participate in numerous training not necessarily related to their key capacity deficits in order to enjoy the training benefits. A second example are the different set-ups of the capacity building through local advisers being support by the different programmes, ranging from specialised integrated advisers to teams of consultants providing advise on demand.

⁶ The draft decentralisation strategy (Document de Stratégie de mise en oeuvre de la reform de l'administration territoriale) identifies the diverging conditionalities and disbursement procedures implemented by the different programmes as one of the constraining factors and stresses the need for the establishment of a uniform mechanism in the context of the FADEC.

Already during the implementation of the first generation of support programmes, complementarities and synergies between different programmes were actively promoted by the respective partners. The recognition of the specific challenges related to the diversity of aid modalities being implemented in the same regions has brought about **local coordination mechanisms**. In the region of Atacora-Donga, the prefect has – with support from the PDDC - established two mechanisms for coordination between the local governments, the deconcentrated structures and the DPs. The round table (*Table Ronde des Partenaires de l'Atacora-Donga*) and the forum (*Forum des Partenaires de Développement de l'Atacora-Donga* (FDAD)) have provided a platform for the exchange of information on planned and budgeted activities between the different programmes and the expression of demand for support from local governments and enhanced the coordination between the interventions. The positive experience of this local level coordination has been replicated since in other regions and up-scaled to the national level.

Lessons learned have been drawn from the diversity of the different programmes of the first generation and best practices are further promoted in the second generation of programmes. Furthermore, the new programmes supporting decentralisation in Benin currently under preparation are set in a context of **increased coordination and harmonisation** in line with the commitment of the government and the DPs to enhance aid effectiveness based on the principles of the Paris Declaration and a specific action for Benin. The new spirit is clearly visible in the new project documents, drawing attention to the complementarities of the interventions supported by different DPs as well as the development and application of joint mechanisms and procedures for funding and providing TA.

The development of the **uniform funding mechanisms FADEC** is an important step forward for harmonising one element for supporting decentralisation and local governance. The integration of the funds provided by DPs as well as central government to the local governments into one transfer mechanism with transparent and efficient allocation and disbursement procedures will contribute to improving the conditions under which local government can gradually strengthen their capacities and assume their competencies for local development as provided for in the laws.

However, integrating other development and recurrent transfers to the local level into the FADEC will be a challenge for the years to come – in particular in view of the recently set-up sector programmes with their specific funding mechanisms. Developing the FADEC into a comprehensive funding mechanism over the years will determine its viability as well as sustainability, while the persistence of parallel funding mechanisms risks undermining both government and DP commitment to channel their funding through one unified mechanism.

IV. LESSONS LEARNED AND PERSPECTIVES

The following lessons learned and perspectives have been derived from the analysis of the situation in Benin with regard to harmonisation and alignment of DP support in the field of decentralisation and local governance:

- **Recognition of decentralisation as a cross-cutting issue essential for success of reforms:** Despite the fact that decentralisation has been recognized as a transversal element for poverty reduction in the current PRSP, there is urgent need to integrate the principles of local self government into specific strategies and policies, in particular the sector policies, and to strengthen coherence between the different national strategies and policies, but also between the programmes for implementing the PRSP. The establishment of spearheads for decentralisation in the different ministries can be considered as a promising approach in this respect.
- **High-level political support essential for coherence between decentralisation and other public sector reforms:** Even if decentralisation has been recognized in the overall national strategies as a cross-cutting issue, the transfer of responsibilities and resources from the central to the local level is often only hesitantly promoted by the sector ministries, but also by the ministries responsible for public finance and public service administration. High-level political support is essential for ensuring that decentralisation is recognized as a priority on the political agenda not only by the respective ministry, but across government. The establishment of a high-level political steering committee for the reforms (decentralisation and deconcentration) could facilitate the process.
- **Elaboration of decentralisation policy as a precondition for strengthened alignment:** The elaboration of a comprehensive decentralisation policy will provide the necessary foundation for the DPs to base their support on. However, the policy will have to be translated into a detailed action plan / reform programme with clear orientations regarding the specific activities, responsibilities and time frames. By providing a framework into which the different DP support project / programmes initiatives can be integrated, the development of an action plan will facilitate harmonisation and alignment and provide the starting point for developing a comprehensive support programme for decentralisation integrating the 'national uniform building blocks' such as funding mechanism FADEC but also national procedures and systems for capacity building.
- **Review of current DP coordination mechanism as an opportunity for increasing government ownership and strengthen vertical and horizontal linkages:** In order to make DP coordination more effective, the proposal for restructuring the dialogue mechanism between government and DPs stresses the need for government leadership (together with rotating DP representatives). Likewise is the link between specific thematic and sector issues and the macro-level reforms reflected in the proposal (vertical linkages with the high level head of mission group). However, more attention needs to be paid to the strengthening of the horizontal linkages, i.e. the dialogue between the technical group on decentralisation and the sector groups in order to address the challenges for the decentralisation process in a comprehensive way.
- **Evaluation of best practices as input for development and/or improvement of uniform national systems:** The variety of different project and programme concepts and interventions logics supported during the first years of decentralisation in Benin provides a rich experiences from which best practices for future interventions and the development of uniform systems and procedures can be derived. The recent initiative to evaluate the current practices with regard to the elaboration of the local development plans and to draw conclusions from the findings to improve the respective national manual can be cited as a good example; another being the up-scaling of the experiences with the regional coordination forum.
- **Harmonisation of funding flows within uniform national transfer mechanism:** The development of the national mechanism FADEC which will provide funding for infrastruc-

ture investments to the local governments as well as the commitment of the government and several DPs to channel their funding through the FADEC will be a key step forward in the process of harmonisation. A core challenge over the next years will be to achieve a broad integration of national and external funding for local governments into the FADEC in view of the risk that the persistence of parallel mechanism (either for specific poverty targeting or sectoral funding mechanisms) can undermine the effective functioning of the FADEC.

- **Flexibility in project / programme design to integrate new national systems and procedures during implementation:** The divergence in commitment and programme cycles makes it difficult to provide full support to new national systems from their start and to integrate new national procedures if funding provided by DPs is committed to programme / project approaches with specific procedures. In view of the upcoming establishment of the FADEC, some new programme and projects (i.e. the EU-supported PACTE) have already incorporated the channelling of funds through the FADEC as soon as it becomes operational thus minimizing the risk of undermining the FADEC by the persistence of parallel funding streams.

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**Etude sur les Stratégies d'Alignement dans le domaine
de la décentralisation et de la gouvernance locale
Analyse des pratiques appliquées et des expériences acquises**

Réunion du Groupe Technique

Notes sur les conclusions préliminaires

Appréciation Générale

Le Bénin doit être considéré comme étant relativement au début d'un processus d'alignement et d'harmonisation des appuis dans le domaine de la décentralisation et la gouvernance locale. Les premières années de la mise en œuvre de la décentralisation ont été caractérisées par des projets et programmes divers intervenant et au niveau local et au niveau national. Pendant que la première génération de projets et programmes est en train d'être terminée, la préparation des prochaines interventions se situe dans un contexte plus orienté vers la coordination des interventions et l'harmonisation des approches. La reconnaissance de la décentralisation comme priorité politique pour un développement à la base et la lutte contre la pauvreté par le gouvernement ainsi que la création d'un Ministère chargé de la décentralisation ont renforcé l'appropriation des processus de mise en œuvre de la décentralisation et la déconcentration ainsi que de la coordination des interventions par le gouvernement. Actuellement, la situation est considérée comme très favorable pour un réel avancement dans le processus de la décentralisation et l'alignement des interventions dans le domaine.

A. Gestion du Processus de la Décentralisation

Décentralisation est encore un phénomène récent au Bénin et le processus de la décentralisation est actuellement caractérisé par une phase de transition avec une perspective positive mais des étapes importantes à franchir avant qu'une réelle prise en charge du développement local par les collectivités locales puisse être assurée.

- La décentralisation est une expérience récente au Bénin qui s'impose seulement petit à petit au niveau local et national. Des éléments importants doivent être mise en œuvre avant que la prise en charge des compétences transférées puisse réellement être assurée par les communes (transferts de compétences et ressources, changement de comportement, etc.).
- Le cadre réglementaire pour la décentralisation fut établi au début du processus de la décentralisation et fourni une base adéquate pour le renforcement du niveau local.
- Pourtant, le cadre institutionnel pour gérer le processus de la décentralisation était caractérisé dans le passé d'une grande hétérogénéité et un grand nombre d'acteurs avec des missions pas suffisamment complémentaires et harmonisées.
- L'élaboration de la politique de décentralisation doit être considérée comme étape clefs pour définir le cadre politique des interventions dans le domaine de la décentralisation.

- Le fait qu'il s'agit d'un thème transversal pour le développement demande que la décentralisation dépasse son cadre 'sectoriel' et devienne une réelle priorité politique reconnue également par les ministères sectoriels.
- Pour assurer le lien entre la politique de la décentralisation et les autres initiatives et réformes du secteur public il est essentiel que la coordination soit assurée par un cadre supraministériel de pilotage politique du processus RAT avec ses deux volets décentralisation et déconcentration avec le poids politique pour 'faire bouger les choses'.

B. Mécanismes de Coordination des PTF

La dimension 'échange d'information' est bien assurée par le mécanisme de coordination existant, pourtant pour une meilleure concertation et coordination des interventions il est nécessaire que le gouvernement assume réellement son rôle de leader pour la coordination et que l'articulation horizontale et verticale du groupe technique sur la décentralisation avec les autres groupes techniques et le niveau macro soit renforcée.

- Le groupe technique assure un échange d'informations régulier entre les PTF et permet d'élaborer des positions communes sur certains développements dans le domaine de la décentralisation et la gouvernance locale.
- Parmi les différents groupes techniques, le groupe sur la décentralisation est apprécié comme un des plus actifs.
- Mais la structure et la façon de travailler actuelle du groupe n'ont pas souvent permis d'aller au-delà des échanges d'information due au manque de leadership et de participation régulière par le gouvernement et suite à une certaine hésitation et résistance de la part des PTF quant au rôle du groupe en tant que forum de concertation et de validation des approches.
- Perspective positive pour la réorientation de la manière de travailler dans le nouveau système de groupes techniques qui prévoit le leadership du gouvernement et des axes de communication bien définis.
- Opportunités pour élargir le dialogue gouvernement – PTF de façon verticale, dans l'objectif de faire intégrer systématiquement les aspects clés sur la décentralisation dans le dialogue au niveau macro, et de façon horizontale, c'est-à-dire de promouvoir une meilleure coordination et concertation des activités sectorielles avec le processus transversale de la décentralisation.
- Opportunité de mener une réflexion quant à l'intégration / l'articulation du groupe technique avec les différents comités de pilotage de projets et programmes ainsi que parmi les comités de pilotage dans le souci de créer des mécanismes plus harmonisés et une base pour une concertation plus profonde.
- Un plan d'action / programme d'activités à élaborer sur la base de la nouvelle politique de la décentralisation pourrait servir de point de départ pour cette articulation renforcée en fournissant un cadre bien structuré dans lequel les différentes interventions peuvent se situer. Ce cadre permettra également d'aller petit à petit à un programme global d'appui à la décentralisation en intégrant les différents appuis et en assurant leur complémentarité.

C. Alignement

Tendance forte d'alignement générale à la politique de réduction de la pauvreté et au processus de décentralisation, à constater par l'intégration / l'adaptation des objectifs et indicateurs dans les programmes et projets. Perspective pour un alignement plus profond sur la base de la future politique de décentralisation et de la mise en œuvre du FADEC.

- Le DSRP / SCRP est reconnu comme stratégie globale du développement intégrant la dimension décentralisation et gouvernance.
- Le manque d'une stratégie de décentralisation approuvée par le gouvernement a donné lieu à un certain vacuum qui a permis la mise en œuvre des différentes interventions peu coordonnées.
- En même temps, le progrès constaté dans autres secteurs quant à l'élaboration des stratégies et politiques explique l'alignement à ces cadres existants.
- L'élaboration d'une politique de décentralisation représente une étape clefs et fournira la base sur laquelle l'alignement des interventions aux stratégies nationales s'imposera pour tout appui dans le domaine de la décentralisation et la gouvernance locale.
- La mise en œuvre du FADEC sera un élément important du cadre nécessaire pour un alignement des interventions, pourtant la politique de décentralisation devra aller au delà dans la définition des axes stratégiques et modalités d'intervention.

D. Modalités de l'Aide

Grande diversité dans les modalités d'appui, pourtant tendance à la capitalisation des différentes expériences sur le terrain et processus d'harmonisation des modalités en cours.

- Première génération des projets et programmes d'appui à la décentralisation caractérisée par une grande diversité d'approches et de modalités et par la focalisation géographique des interventions.
- Expériences riches et diverses sur le terrain pendant une phase initiale, mais en même temps constat de l'existence des initiatives non-complémentaires, des doublages et de différents standards de qualité dans les différentes zones d'interventions.
- Initiatives ponctuelles de coordination des interventions et des modalités, soit au niveau local (forum des bailleurs, table ronde, etc.) soit au niveau national (coopération bilatérales entre différents PTF).
- Phase d'évaluation des expériences initiée avec la perspective de la capitalisation des meilleures approches et de la consolidation des interventions et modalités vers une approche nationale.
- Harmonisation des circuits financier dans le contexte de la mise en œuvre du FADEC comme étape clef, pourtant nécessité de réussir l'intégration large des fonds nationaux et externes pour la viabilité du FADEC. Risque de permanence de mécanismes de financement parallèles (soit sectoriels soit ciblage spécifique) avec implications négatives.

- Souci concernant l'accompagnement des communes dans la prise en charge de leur mandat exprimé par la majorité des interlocuteurs ce qui donne lieu au risque de la justification et la pérennisation des appuis diverses et hétérogènes dans la logique 'projet'. Opportunité d'entamer un processus de réflexion sur les dispositifs d'appui et d'accompagnement des communes et des services déconcentrés.

