



# afrialliance socialinnovation

## *Improved Access to Quality Water for Villages and Schools in Rural Benin*

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### DESCRIPTION AND BACKGROUND

In low-income countries, particularly African countries, including Benin, sustainable water supply and sanitation, which are fundamental to food security, health, survival, social welfare and economic growth, are generally not achieved. There can be no life without water. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), water scarcity affects one in three people in Africa. The situation is further aggravated by population growth, economic development challenges, urbanization, population movements and climate change. In addition, contaminated water and poor sanitation conditions lead to vulnerability to water-borne diseases such as diarrhea, cholera and typhoid fever. This can lead to significant human and economic costs and potentially affect peace and security in the country.

The provision of safe and quality drinking water is a constraint for rural communities that are particularly vulnerable to climate change in Benin. These threats to drinking water in Benin are mainly related to human activities that are often a source of chemical and bacteriological contamination. This situation is mainly due to the lack of an adequate sanitation network and the failure to comply with regulatory standards for the protection of wellfields.

Moreover, women giving birth are expected to bring the water they need to the maternity clinic themselves and this is standard practice in northern Benin. Even health centers there lack water for medical care as well as for washing linen and cleaning equipment and rooms. The contaminated water people bring to the health centers is a health risk for mothers and newborn infants alike. The water shortage goes to show how far northern Benin still is from having a reliable supply of clean water.

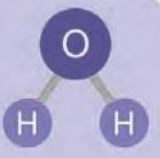
In order to address these problems, it is essential to implement social innovations that will not only facilitate access to safe and quality drinking water by promoting technologies related to access to quality water, but also by strengthening the capacities of local communities in water purification and management, implementing policies that promote equitable access and reduce social inequalities related to drinking water, and finally a sustainable economic model.

Therefore, the project "**Improved Access to Quality Water for Villages and School in Rural Benin**" has been implemented by HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation in the departments of Borgou and Atacora in the north of Benin aims at improving the living conditions of the rural population in the departments of Borgou and Atacora in northern Benin. It consists of transforming existing unprotected wells into protected wells with pumps but also installing a small scale piping system that provides health centers and schools with a running water supply via a water reservoir

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### Abstract

Social innovation is understood as processes and outcomes focused on the achievement of societal goals. A social innovation combines four dimensions: technology, governance, capacity development, and business roadmap. Here is a case study describing a social innovation in the water and sanitation sector implemented in Benin. It is about the project "Improved Access to Quality Water for Villages and School in Rural Benin" has been implemented by HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation in the departments of Borgou and Atacora in the north of Benin.



## TECHNOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS

- Installation of wells by rotary mud pump drilling consisting of driving a rotating drill head into the ground and adding additional "rods" to the drill pipe as you drill.
- In the past patients and babies had to bring their own water to the Sirarou infirmary in northern Benin. Today there is a well that supplies water to the infirmary, maternity and nearby school
- In order to promote the water supply, hygiene and the building of latrines,
- Ventilated Improved latrines are built: Toilets are designed to limit smell and flies encourage proper, safe, and secure bathroom use.
- Helvetas works directly with municipal authorities and communities to support them in developing the technical and administrative know-how.
- Water management committees charge a few cents for every jerry can of water drawn from a public well.
- The consumers know they are not paying for the water itself, but for the upkeep of the well. Women who live nearby are often trained to take care of a well and can earn a little money on the side in this capacity. So they have an economic interest in keeping "their" well clean and operational

## CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT



- The project has also initiated a process of community education. In order for people to make the most of a new water point, they must participate in learning sessions on hygiene and sanitation. In these workshops, group discussions and/or home visits, local people are able to learn often new concepts.
- Trainings topics include disease transmission, personal hygiene and cleanliness, proper disposal of waste and proper water storage methods.
- People also learn how to build a dish drainer in their homes to prevent clean cooking utensils from lying around, or the importance of washing their hands before and after meals. Digging latrines and building four walls and a roof for them is also a key lesson in these education programs.
- Women who live near the wells are often trained as well as tenants on how to keep the wells.



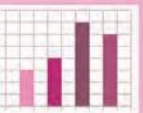
## SOCIAL INNOVATION



## GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

- Helvetas helped the local authorities and water management committees in the northern Benin in planning maintenance efficiently and openly reporting how revenue from water charges is used
- Good maintenance is just as important as getting the water system installed. Only then does clean water actually flow from tap.
- Water directly by house is appreciated most. The population is gradually becoming more and more aware of the fees.
- Helvetas works closely with municipal authorities and communities. A central goal has been to identify and manage internal conflicts within the district at an early stage, in order to neutralize them around the common issue of water management.

## BUSINESS ROAD MAP



- As well tenants women can earn additional incomes
- Indeed, users were willing to pay for a service that was competitive with other offers in these precarious neighborhoods and managed by a legitimate committee because it was based on the internal social norms of the neighborhoods. All the notables, leaders and representatives of recognized organizations in the neighborhood are included in the management system.
- While users benefit from an improved service, committee members also benefit from their new function. It strengthens their leadership and their capacity to influence the neighborhood and gives them important symbolic power. Indeed, they have a hand in the management of a vital collective service.
- In addition, the committees manage the money from the sale of water, a not insignificant financial windfall, which is then redistributed through collective investments for the neighborhood and for social works for the most deprived people.



The project “Improved Access to Quality Water for Villages and School in Rural Benin” has been implemented by HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation in the departments of Borgou and Atacora in the north of Benin aims at improving the living conditions of the rural population in the departments of Borgou and Atacora in northern Benin. For instance, in the past patients and babies had to bring their own water to the Sirarou infirmary in northern Benin to get treatment. But, today there is a well that supplies water to the infirmary, maternity and nearby school In order to promote the water supply, hygiene and the building of latrines. The project has also initiated a process of community education. In order for people to make the most of a new water point, they must participate in learning sessions on hygiene and sanitation. In these workshops, group discussions and/or home visits, local people are able to learn often new concepts. HELVETAS also works closely with municipal authorities and communities. A central goal has been to identify and manage internal conflicts within the district at an early stage, in order to neutralize them around the common issue of water management. Moreover, Furthermore, HELVETAS helped the local authorities and water management committees in the northern Benin in planning maintenance efficiently. It has to be mentioned that as well tenants women can earn additional incomes. In addition, the committees manage the money from the sale of water, a not insignificant financial windfall, which is then redistributed through collective investments for the neighborhood and for social works for the most deprived people.

Building Wells and Washing Hands | Benin | Helvetas. Available at: <https://www.helvetas.org/en/switzerland/what-we-do/how-we-work/our-projects/africa/benin/benin-qualieau-water-program> (Accessed: 12 July 2020).

HELVETAS (2015) Ecoles Bleues Eau Potable pour écoles et Centres de Santé-EPECS, report.

(HELVETAS (2014); Improved Access To Quality Water For Villages And Schools In Rural Benin, 2014; Building Wells and Washing Hands | Benin | Helvetas, no date)

