

# DECENTRALIZATION AND TRANSFER OF POWERS TO MUNICIPALITIES IN BENIN: THE EXAMPLE OF THE MUNICIPALITY OF ABOMEY-CALAVI IN THE PERIOD 2000/2010

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## **Abstract:**

*Numerous reforms aimed at bringing about major political and institutional changes for Benin were taken during the conference of the nation's forces of life in February 1990. These include, among others, decentralization which implies a transfer of powers in many areas and which constitutes the development option made by Benin. But we can see today in the communes of Benin that the targeted development is still far from being achieved. The quantitative and qualitative study took place in the municipality of Abomey-Calavi. It is based on the theories of authors such as: Agblémagnon N.F., Touraine A., Gérard M., Rocher G. Through this study, we seek to assess the transfer of skills in the municipality of Abomey-Calavi based on the activities carried out and the types of relations that exist between the main actors in the context of decentralization.*

**Key Words:** decentralization, transfer of skills, Abomey-Calavi, municipality.

## **1. INTRODUCTION:**

The conference of the living forces of the nation in February 1990 ushered in an era of reforms leading to major political and institutional changes for Benin. It decided, among other things, to implement decentralization, a mode of governance that brings the administration closer to the citizens. According to Adjaho (2002), decentralization is "the creation by the State and outside it, of other persons of public law capable of taking charge of part of the management of the city"

Decentralization is based on principles and pillars, one of which is the transfer of powers. This is defined as "the transmission or devolution of a power to act or to perform acts of an administrative nature. It is in fact for the State, to entrust to local authorities, within the framework of the implementation of the policy of decentralization, the care of holding and managing in its place and place, the competences initially held and managed by central or deconcentrated public services by virtue of the powers of the Ministries to which the latter report". Thus, the laws relating to decentralization in Benin distribute competences between the State and the municipalities while specifying the nature of the relations which must henceforth exist between them. The powers to be transferred to the municipalities should enable the elected deliberative bodies to better manage the local authorities with a view to their development.

Today, we can see in the communes of Benin, in particular in that of Abomey-Calavi that the development so sought after is still far from being achieved. The study on the theme "Problem of the transfer of powers to municipalities within the framework of decentralization in Benin: the case of the municipality of Abomey-Calavi" responds to the desire to conduct investigations to better understand this situation. It aims to assess the transfer of skills in the municipality of Abomey-Calavi through the activities carried out and the types of relationship that exist between the different actors in the context of decentralization.

## **2. STATE OF THE PROBLEM:**

Benin is one of the 49 Least Developed Countries (LDCs) listed in 2003 by the Economic and Social Commission of the United Nations (UN). Its Human Development Index (HDI) was 0.459 in 2008, which ranks it 161st out of 179 countries studied. Its economic growth rate in progress since 2005 (2.90 / 0) to 2008 (5.1 0/0) must decline in 2009 because of the international economic crisis.

The development situation of the municipality of Abomey-Calavi finds its justification in this state of development in Benin and also in the difficulties it encounters in certain areas. Indeed, the town is poor in sports and cultural infrastructure. It does not have a stadium worthy of the name and cultural centers are almost non-existent. Despite the existence of tourist sites (the royal palaces of Calavi and Hêvié, the maritime facade, sacred forests, convents, pythons temples and especially the lakeside city of Ganvié) tourism is not very developed in the town. The

security and gendarmerie posts do not cover the entire territory of the municipality, which constitutes a risk of insecurity for the populations, given the proximity to the city of Cotonou, characterized by a high crime rate.

The municipality of Abomey-Calavi is poorly covered by electricity and water supply networks. Public schools are insufficient there. The wandering of animals in the rural districts leads to a high prevalence of epizootic diseases. Difficult access to credit is a real economic problem facing the municipality. The use of prohibited gear (small mesh nets) prevents good fish production. The development of the hotel sector is limited because of the proximity of Cotonou; the industrial fabric is almost non-existent. Despite their diversity, the natural resources (lowlands, laterites, clays, bar lands, thermal sources of drinking water, 580 ha of classified forests, 98km of waterways, and access to the Atlantic Ocean) are poorly managed. Informal activities are highly developed in the trade sector. There is poor coverage and under-equipment of health services. The rate of participation of women in decision-making in management bodies also remains low. The tax base is important there, but poorly exploited. However, the law provides for the transfer of powers to the municipalities in most of the sectors mentioned above.

Therefore, will improving the skills transfer process in the municipality of Abomey-Calavi be a response to the difficulties encountered? To answer this question, we will seek to know the skills transferred to the municipality of Abomey-Calavi, the activities carried out by the said municipality within the framework of this transfer and the types of relations maintained by the main actors, which are the communities, local elected officials and Deconcentrated State Services.

### 3. METHODOLOGY:

The present study took place in the municipality of Abomey-Calavi. The quantitative and qualitative study involved a sample of sixty-two (62) people, including 44 people from the communities chosen at random for the villages to be surveyed and following a reasoned choice for the people interviewed (a member of the village council and one resource person per village surveyed), 11 among the local elected representatives systematically chosen (the mayor and his deputy having the development portfolio, the heads of districts) and 7 among the Deconcentrated Services of the State (SDE), chosen reasonably (those responsible for these services). The study took place in six (6) stages over a period from March to August 2009.

Table I: Steps followed in the research

N <sup>o</sup>	Step	Tool, technique and model
1	Literature search	Documentation
2	Sampling	Random sampling and according to reasoned and systematic choices
3	Collection of data	Documentation, interview guide
4	Data processing	Data processingCodification, analysis, processing of results in Microsoft Excel 2007 software, visualization
5	Analysis and presentation	Description, comparison of results

### 4. RESULTS:

The presentation of the results of the study requires the precision of the survey coverage rate. In fact, out of 62 people initially planned, 48 were interviewed, it is to say a coverage rate of 770/0.

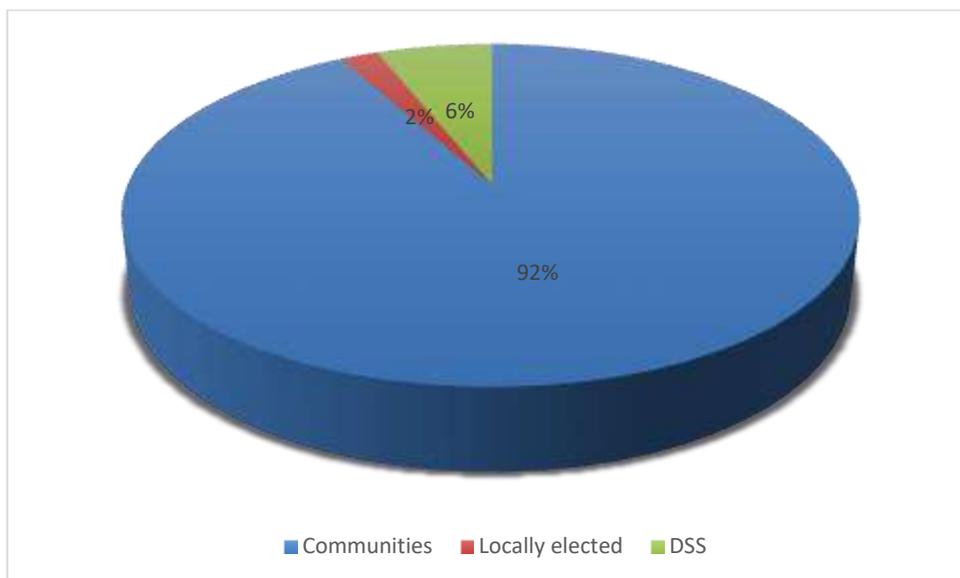
Table II: Survey coverage rate

Category	Coverage rate in%
Communities	100
Locally elected	9
SDE	43
Total	152

#### 4.1 Identification

Breakdown of respondents by category

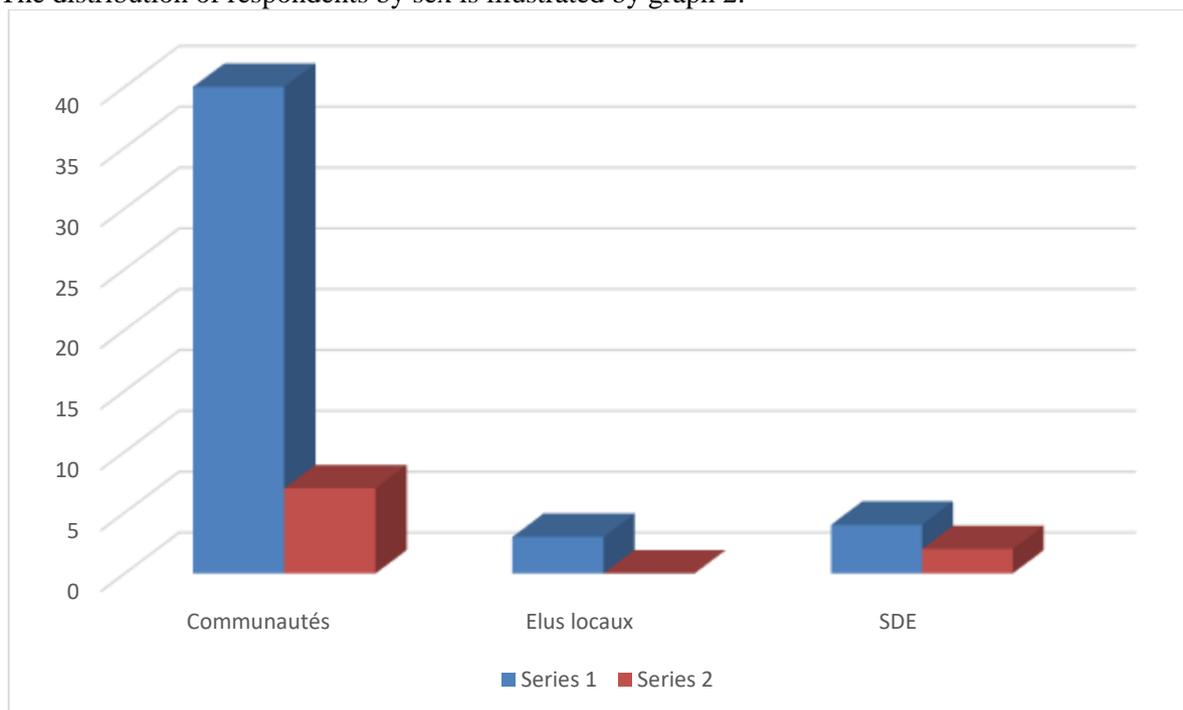
Graph 1 shows the distribution of respondents according to the different social categories that are communities, local elected officials and Deconcentrated State Services (DSS).



Graph 1: Distribution of respondents by category  
 Source: Field surveys

#### 4.2 Distribution of respondents by sex

The distribution of respondents by sex is illustrated by graph 2.



Graph 2: Distribution of respondents by sex  
 Source: Field surveys

#### 4.3. Distribution of respondents by category and age

The following table breaks down the people surveyed according to category and age. Three (3) age groups are retained in line with the historical dates of Benin:

- less than 20 years, for people born after the conference of the living forces of the nation where the principles of decentralization are established;
- from 20 to 50 years, for people born between independence and the conference of the living forces of the nation
- 50 years or more, that is to say before the independence of the country.

Table III: Distribution of respondents by category and age

Category	Number of surveys	Under 20	20 to 50 years	50 years or more
Communities	44	1	23	20
Locally elected	1	0	0	1
SDE	3	0	3	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>21</b>

Source: Field surveys

Of the forty-eight (48) people surveyed, the number of those under 20 is minimal (one person among the communities). Two age brackets will then be retained

- respondents under 50;
- respondents aged 50 or over.

Table IV shows the distribution of respondents according to the two age groups mentioned above.

Table IV: Distribution of respondents according to age group

	Effective	Percentage
Under 50	27	56
50 years or more	21	44
Total	48	100

Source: Field surveys

#### 4.4 Nature and role of the actors

In Benin, within a municipality, there are several actors including local elected officials. We see that the people surveyed within the Abomey-Calavi community are not unaware of the nature and role of their local elected officials.

Table V: Knowledge of local elected officials

Level	Village	Borough	Municipality
Yes	43	41	38
No	1	3	6
Total	44	44	44

Source: Field surveys

However, it should be noted that the advisers at the different levels (village / district, district and municipality) are often forgotten, in particular by the resource persons surveyed.

With regard to the role of the actors, the answers given by the respondents are generally true. However, none has been able to give an exhaustive list of the roles of local elected representatives and specifically the emphasis has not been placed on the collaboration that should exist between local elected representatives and the communities.

In addition, the communities of Abomey-Calavi do not have a good knowledge of their roles in the context of decentralization. It would be interesting to know their perception of their own role according to the age group

- respondents under the age of 50, having lived in a period marked by political instability and an interventionist state
- respondents aged 50 or over, having lived in a period marked by a territorial administration of the interventionist type that did not involve the communities too much in the management of local affairs.

Table VI: Understanding by communities of their roles according to age group

What respondents under 50 think	What respondents aged 50 and over think
Exercise their jobs, carry out development activities with the village chief to understand each other and understand the local elected officials; exprimer les besoins pendant ou en dehors des réunions ; aider les élus locaux ; créer et appartenir aux associations de développement.	Same
Respect instructions and obey guide young people looking for projects respect the laws maintain good social relations (do not envy your neighbor or be mean to him)	self-manage on their own help each other join together in mutual awareness

Source: Field surveys

#### 4.5 Level of satisfaction of communities with respect to achievements

Various responses are obtained as to the level of satisfaction of the communities with regard to the achievements of the town hall:

- totally satisfied with the achievements of the Town Hall,
- partially satisfied;
- not satisfied;
- no answer.

Table VII indicates the number and the percentage obtained for each answer

Table VII: Distribution of respondents according to the level of satisfaction with the achievements of the Town Hall

Satisfaction level	Effective	Percentage
Totally satisfied	13	30
Partially satisfied	12	27
Not satisfied	7	16
Without answer	12	27
Total	44	100

Source: Field survey

#### 4.6. Nature and types of skills transferred

The study also looked at the nature and types of skills to be transferred to the municipality of Abomey-Calavi. There are three BDSs investigated, namely:

- the Social Promotion Center v / the Tax Service; the Abomey-Calavi II School Circumscription Center;
- from the answers given by those in charge of the BDS, it appears that certain powers are transferred to the municipality of Abomey-Calavi. As a result, it carries out several activities such as;
- helping the needy; v / school management; v / training of children etc.

#### 4.7 Nature and Opes of relations between SDEs and local elected officials

According to the heads of the BDS, the types of relations existing between the Local Elected Officials of the municipality of Abomey-Calavi and the Deconcentrated Services concern.

- the advisory relationship; v / the administrative relationship;
- the service relationship; the assistance relationship.

However, the level of maintenance of these types of relationship remains low due to a lack of good knowledge of the laws on decentralization.

### 5. INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION:

#### 5.1 Identification

The results of the study show that the survey coverage rate is 77%. It is respectively 100%, 9% and 43% for the categories community, local elected officials and SDE. The majority of the people surveyed come from the community category (graph 1), that is to say the one whose responsibility is limited to the village / district level. On the other hand, local elected officials and BDSs were more difficult to survey due to their limited availability.

The distribution of respondents by sex (graph 2) reveals a predominance of men at the community level, that is to say 39 men for 5 women. This predominance could be explained by the role attributed to women by traditions and their low interest in questions relating to politics. At the level of local elected officials and SDEs, the coverage rate not having been reached, it cannot be generally stated that men predominate.

As shown in Table IV, the distribution of respondents according to age indicates that people under 50 are in the majority.

#### 5.2 Roles of the actors

In the process of decentralization, communities are the first actors in their own development which includes the protection and security of their localities, financial self-management and collaboration with local elected officials. The survey revealed that a tiny part of the respondents recognized the duty of participation and collaboration, without however being able to explain its consistency.

The answers given on the role of communities, according to Table VI, can be associated with the periods of membership of the respondents. Also, the communities do not have a good knowledge of the roles of local elected representatives in the context of decentralization. The political and social change implied by the transfer of skills is not yet fully understood at the time of the study. The capacities of the communities must be strengthened in terms of understanding their role and that of local elected officials in the decentralization process.

### 5.3 Level of community satisfaction with the achievements

The answers given by the respondents (Table VII) indicate that 30% of the respondents are completely satisfied with the achievements made in their municipality, unlike the remaining 700/0. It should be remembered at this level that it is not certain that all the achievements listed are the assets of the town hall. The strengthening of communication towards the populations (communities, local elected officials and SDE) on the activities and achievements of the municipality of Abomey-Calavi is essential.

### 4.4 Nature and Types of relations between local elected officials and BDS

Competences are transferred to the municipality of Abomey-Calavi which carries out several activities within this framework. However, the relationships identified between local elected officials and BDSs, which are consultancy, administrative and service support relationships, are currently underdeveloped. Such a situation cannot promote the effective implementation of the powers transferred to the municipality of Abomey-Calavi. For real cooperation between these two actors, it is necessary to strengthen their capacities.

## 5. CONCLUSION:

The present study carried out in the municipality of Abomey-Calavi with a view to assessing the transfer of skills through the activities carried out and the types of relations existing between the different actors, has shown that:

- powers are effectively transferred to the municipality of Abomey-Calavi which, in this context, carries out several activities;
- relations of cooperation and partnership between the actors in the municipality of Abomey-Calavi are lacking.

The communities do not have a good knowledge of their roles and those of local elected officials, which limits their collaboration.

- the lack of information between actors in relation to the achievements made in the municipality reflects a lack of communication and collaboration between them.

These various findings confirm the first two hypotheses of the study, namely that: powers are transferred to the municipality of Abomey-Calavi within the framework of decentralization and that it carries out several activities related to the powers to be transfer to a municipality with ordinary status.

On the other hand, the observations invalidate the third hypothesis relating to the cooperation and partnership relations developed between the actors of the decentralization process. Despite more than five (5) years of decentralization exercise in Benin, it remains a great unknown in certain aspects and for a large number of actors. As such, it has not yet moved beyond the phase of trial and error, resistance and misunderstanding. The change that it implies will only be effective if the actors reinforce their different types of relationships and learn new games, and not just new rules (Crozier and Friedberg, 1977; Mendras, 1983: 10) in order to better ensure social control, which is their main prerogative.

Solving the issue of skills transfer in the context of decentralization requires that particular emphasis be placed on building the capacities of the main actors (communities, local elected officials and Deconcentrated State Services). The modalities of such reinforcement should be the subject of multidisciplinary reflection.

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