



COUNTRY PROFILE



N. MILLER, USAID/BENIN

USAID implements the President's Malaria Initiative, which aims to reduce malaria-related deaths by half in children and pregnant women.

OVERVIEW

In a region with notable cases of failed or failing states, Benin established a government that largely respects basic rights and freedoms. The March 2006 presidential elections resulted in the fourth peaceful turnover of power since democracy was reestablished in the early 1990s. President Thomas Boni Yayi has pledged to fight corruption and ineffective management and to promote economic growth. However, low levels of education and health are the most dramatic constraints to Benin's long-term development.



PROGRAMS

INVESTING IN PEOPLE: EDUCATION

Education is critical to sustained economic growth, improved health, and continued democratization. Benin has made significant steps toward improving primary education over the last ten years. Since 1998, net enrolment rates for boys increased from 65 to 81 percent, while girls' enrolment rose from 32 percent to 58 percent. Despite this progress, major challenges remain, including a severe shortage of trained teachers, and a persistent gap in the number of girls and boys going to and staying in school. To address these issues, USAID focuses on training teachers, increasing girls' enrolment and completion of primary education, and promoting greater community involvement in education. USAID works in communities with low girls' enrolment rates to remove obstacles to their education. Since 2004, more than 6,000 girls and 1,200 boys who would otherwise be unable to continue their education received scholarships and mentoring to help them stay in school.

INVESTING IN PEOPLE: HEALTH

A life expectancy of 53 years, high rates of maternal and child mortality, and high child malnutrition rates, reflect the reality that the health of most Beninese is precarious. USAID interventions over the past decade have focused on disadvantaged areas in central and northern Benin and have led to improved health service delivery and increased use of family health services. USAID is also implementing the President's Malaria Initiative, which aims to reduce malaria-related deaths by half in among children and pregnant women. Health workers are being trained to design and disseminate prevention messages for groups at risk of becoming infected with HIV/AIDS, especially young adults. To prevent childhood illnesses, USAID promotes immunization, breastfeeding, the use of mosquito nets, and the use of oral rehydration salts to treat diarrhea. USAID also supports training of health workers and provides

BENIN SNAPSHOT

Date of independence: 1962
Population: 8.7 million (2008)
GDP per person: \$138 (yr)

Source: U.S. Department of State

USAID IN BENIN

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COUNTRY PROFILE CONTINUED

maternity wards with equipment that helps prevent post-partum hemorrhage and manage obstetric emergencies—both major causes of maternal deaths. They also learn to care for newborns, to correctly treat childhood illnesses, and to diagnose and treat sexually transmitted infections.

INVESTING IN PEOPLE: SOCIAL SERVICES

Benin is one of four African countries that benefits from the Women's Justice and Empowerment Initiative, a three-year initiative that seeks to reduce violence against women. USAID is working to raise awareness of gender-based violence and improve the capacity of Beninese public and nongovernmental organizations to meet the needs of victims. USAID also partners with UNICEF to reduce child trafficking and provide standardized quality care and reintegration for child victims.

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