



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



PHOTO: Catholic Relief Service

USAID's legacy in Benin¹

On behalf of the U.S. Embassy in Benin, through the tireless dedication and skill of its professionals and implementing partners, working both at the grassroots, and national levels, USAID has been at the core of supporting the strong friendship and bond that exists between the peoples of the United States of America, and the Republic of Benin.

¹ This report is intended for informational purposes only. The views and interpretations presented herein do not necessarily reflect those of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the United States Government, or any other affiliated entities. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the information contained in this report, the authors and contributors accept no liability for any errors, omissions, or outcomes arising from its use. References to specific programs, projects, or organizations do not imply endorsement or recommendation by USAID.

Introduction

For more than thirty years, since Benin adopted democracy in 1990 following its landmark National Conference², the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has been a trusted partner in the country's development journey. USAID's operations in Benin date back to 1962. However, this report will focus on the period following the country's significant transition from Marxist-Leninist rule to democracy in 1990. In the decades before, USAID was not always active evenly with the program, as a result of the ups and downs of bilateral relations between Benin and the United States during the cold war. USAID began its current assistance programs in Benin in 1992, and has focused on strengthening health, education, economic growth, and democratic governance.

USAID's longstanding aims in Benin were developed as a result of democratic consensus on the country's development priorities forged after long negotiations between the incredibly diverse groups comprising Beninese society in the National Conference. They were: (1) to accept democratic principles and the will of the people, (2) embrace economic liberalization and market reforms, (3) embrace national unity and reconciliation, and (4) promote good governance and anti-corruption. These have been USAID's touchstones since in Benin.

Through strategic investments, collaborative partnerships, and shared values, USAID worked hand-in-hand with the Government of Benin (GOB), civil society, the private sector, and communities to improve health outcomes, strengthen democratic institutions, advance education and foster a more inclusive and resilient society.

² The full name of the National Conference in French is "La Conference Nationale des Forces Vives de la Nation" or the National Conference of Active Forces in the Nation. The conference was the first of its kind in Africa, occurring even before the end of apartheid. It set a precedent for other countries seeking democratic reforms.

At the center of USAID's mission in Benin is the belief that sustainable development requires both a healthy population and accountable, democratic governance, underpinned by economic advancement. This vision translated into support for essential health services, including malaria prevention, maternal and child health, reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, and nutrition. At the same time, USAID reinforced systems of public-sector transparency, non-violent conflict resolution, and civic participation — recognizing that health gains were most durable when anchored in strong institutions and engaged communities. The agency also supported the Government of Benin to institute major reforms in its education sector.

In recent years, USAID constantly adapted to helping Benin overcome emergent challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic, and the rise of violent extremism in northern regions, while maintaining a strong focus on the most vulnerable populations—especially women, children, and marginalized groups.

This report offers a retrospective of USAID's contributions in Benin since 1990. It provides an overview of the programs implemented, and their measurable impact. It also documents lessons learned and highlights the enduring partnerships that have shaped Benin's progress over the past three decades.

As USAID concludes its presence and operations in Benin on August 15, 2025, this document serves both as a tribute to collective achievements of our dedicated team of Beninese and American officers, to our implementing partners, and a resource for those continuing the work of advancing development in Benin.

Education

USAID began supporting primary education reforms in 1991, as the Government of Benin initiated a review of its education system and began transitioning away from a model influenced by Marxism-Leninism principles, towards a more open and inclusive approach aligned with democratic and economic reforms.

Between 1991 and 2011, USAID invested over \$110 million in improving basic education programs in Benin. During this period, USAID played a vital role in strengthening Benin's basic education system, with a particular focus on equitable access, improving foundational learning outcomes, and promoting institutional reform. These efforts were anchored in a long-term vision to promote the development of Benin's youth, reduce gender disparities between boys and girls, and enhance citizen participation in education. Work in education was also key to support for Benin's strong pursuit of market-oriented economic reforms, modernization and social progress.

Key Activities:

[The CLEF Initiative: A Foundation for Reform](#)

Launched in the early 1990s, the *Children's Learning and Equity Foundation (CLEF)* program was USAID's flagship education initiative in Benin. CLEF was designed to support the newly democratically elected government to rebuild and reform the primary education system after decades of limited investment. Backed by an initial commitment of \$57.5 million—later increased to \$64 million—the program was active for eight years and aimed to:

- Support government budget gaps through direct funding.
- Design and implement 18 action plans to improve curriculum, teacher training, textbook distribution, and school infrastructure.
- Expand enrollment equitably across regions for boys and girls.

- Strengthen systems for student assessment and community engagement.

Although the CLEF program faced challenges in disbursement and counterpart contributions, it laid the foundation for improved education quality and equity by supporting the government to address budget gaps and launched 18 action plans focused on curriculum reform, teacher training, textbook distribution, and community engagement.

USAID's Focus on Reading and Foundational Learning

In subsequent years, USAID reoriented its education support to focus on early grade reading and literacy outcomes, especially through programs targeting grades one to three. Support included:

- Development of local language reading materials and training for teachers in mother-tongue instruction.
- Implementation of standardized reading assessments to measure student progress and improve instruction quality.
- Community-level campaigns to promote reading at home and increase parental involvement in learning.

These interventions supported the development and national rollout of new education programs, resulting in the production and distribution of millions of textbooks and the training of thousands of primary school teachers.

Promoting Girls' Education and Addressing Gender Based Violence (GBV) in Schools

In partnership with the U.S. Peace Corps and local organizations, USAID also prioritized efforts to improve girls' access to education and address school-based gender-based violence. Through initiatives such as Let Girls Learn and the U.S.-led Equal Futures Partnership, USAID supported:

- School-based GBV prevention programs and referral systems for survivors.
- Awareness-raising campaigns to shift social norms around early marriage and girls' education.
- Community and youth engagement efforts to create safer and more inclusive learning environments.

A Legacy of Service and Transformation

Reflections from Marie-Jeanne Aguessy, Program Assistant, USAID/Benin

“USAID made critical investments in education to improve access and quality, especially for girls. We supported the implementation of the 'Nouveau Programme,' established effective teacher training systems, and provided free textbooks. We championed participatory teaching methods—such as group learning—which enabled more children to complete primary school and transition to secondary education. For those who didn't, USAID created pathways to vocational and technical training, giving youth access to job-relevant skills and better chances at economic integration. The program also strengthened community engagement by involving parents and civil society in school governance—making the education system more inclusive and responsive.

When I joined USAID/Benin in 2000 as the Financial Management Office Assistant, the Mission was organized around three core technical areas: Basic Education, Family Health, and Good Governance. Over the years, I have witnessed the profound and tangible impact of our work across these sectors.

USAID's commitment to democracy and governance has been equally transformative. Through targeted gender programs, we empowered women economically and promoted their active participation in political life. The USAID/Benin Mission also managed development assistance and administered

small grants in Togo, Gabon, and São Tomé and Príncipe to support local initiatives under the Self-Help and Democracy and Human Rights programs—helping communities build schools, latrines, and other basic services.

Our health work, which many of us fondly referred to as 'our baby,' saved countless lives. The Integrated Family Health Project (or Projet Intégré de Santé Familiale - PISAF) helped ensure that essential medicines were consistently delivered to health zones. Through flagship initiatives like the President's Malaria Initiative and PEPFAR, we expanded maternal health services and access to family planning, while our efforts against HIV/AIDS extended life expectancy for many. The Young Logisticians Program was a particular source of pride—training passionate youth to manage and distribute health commodities across the country, ensuring no clinic was left without supplies.

We also supported vulnerable populations through initiatives like the ARCH program, ensuring holders of universal health insurance cards could access care regardless of their financial means. Our community health workers played a heroic role, delivering care and early treatment to patients in their homes—saving lives and reducing the burden on distant clinics. And through our WASH programs, we improved hygiene and sanitation conditions for thousands of households.

Looking back, I am proud of the legacy we leave behind. From improved schools and empowered women to healthier families and a stronger democracy, USAID's work in Benin is visible and deeply felt in Benin. When people hear 'USAID,' they don't just recognize the name—they feel connected to it."

Malaria Prevention



Malaria is a significant health challenge in Benin, with the country suffering over 5.1 million cases in 2022. Malaria is the leading killer of children under five years of age. Through the *President's Malaria Initiative (PMI)*, USAID provided vital support for malaria prevention, diagnosis, and treatment in Benin since the program's launch in the country in 2006. This program expansion was marked by President George W. Bush on his visit to Benin on February 16, 2008. PMI has been a cornerstone of malaria control efforts, supporting and working in close partnership with the Ministry of Health's National Malaria Control (NMCP), and other key stakeholders to implement comprehensive strategies that have significantly reduced malaria's awful effects and saved the lives of tens of thousands of citizens. PMI-supported efforts have included the distribution of millions of insecticide-treated bed nets (ITNs), supported the expansion of community-level interventions, and strengthened malaria-related data systems and vector control strategies operated by the ministry. USAID also strengthened the capacity of flagship local research institutions—most notably the Centre de

Recherche Entomologique de Cotonou (CREC)—to support evidence-based decision-making by the government to counter malaria.

Key Components of PMI Implementation in Benin

Since 2008, USAID provided over \$251 million in financial and technical assistance through PMI to support Benin's malaria control efforts. This sustained investment contributed to significant reductions in malaria cases and deaths, while also strengthening the health system's capacity to deliver lifesaving services.

PMI-funded activities include the distribution of 10.9 million insecticide-treated mosquito nets, the delivery of 8.2 million doses of preventive treatments for pregnant women, and the spraying of 3.6 million homes. Additionally, PMI has supplied 20 million rapid diagnostic tests and 19.5 million treatments with fast-acting antimalarial medicines. Over 65,900 health workers have been trained in malaria prevention, diagnosis, and case management.

These efforts have contributed to marked improvements in health outcomes:

- A 25% reduction in all-cause child mortality between 2018 and 2021.
- Reduction of malaria incidence from **21.5%** in 2022 to **16.7%** in 2023 (23% drop) which continued to drop through 2024.
- An increase in households owning at least one net from 25% in 2006 to 92% in 2018.
- A rise in children under five sleeping under a net from 20% in 2006 to 78% in 2018.
- The number of pregnant women receiving the recommended doses of malaria prevention treatment increased from 23% in 2018 to 50% in 2022.

PMI's collaboration with Benin's NMCP and other stakeholders continues to ensure that malaria control remains a national health priority and that efforts will be sustained beyond USAID's presence, particularly during the country's two



rainy seasons (April–July and October–November in the South; May–October in the North).

Prevention Strategies:

- Insecticide-Treated Nets (ITNs): PMI has supported the mass distribution and continuous availability of ITNs to protect households from mosquito bites.
- Indoor Residual Spraying (IRS): Targeted IRS campaigns have been conducted in high-transmission areas to reduce mosquito populations.
- Intermittent Preventive Treatment in Pregnancy (IPTp): PMI has promoted IPTp to protect pregnant women from malaria, thereby improving maternal and neonatal health outcomes.

Diagnosis and Treatment:

- Rapid Diagnostic Tests (RDTs): The initiative has facilitated the widespread use of RDTs to ensure prompt and accurate malaria diagnosis.
- Artemisinin-Based Combination Therapies (ACTs): PMI has ensured the availability of effective antimalarial medications, particularly ACTs, for treating confirmed cases.

Health System Strengthening:

- Capacity Building: Training programs for healthcare workers have been implemented to enhance skills in malaria case management.
- Supply Chain Management: PMI has worked to improve the logistics and distribution systems for malaria commodities.
- Data Management: Efforts have been made to strengthen health information systems for better monitoring and evaluation of malaria interventions.

Community Engagement:

- Behavior Change Communication: PMI supported multiple campaigns to educate communities about malaria prevention and treatment.
- Community Health Workers: The initiative has empowered community health workers to provide malaria services at the grassroots level.

These multifaceted approaches have contributed to significant progress in malaria control in Benin saving tens of thousands of lives since the start of the program. PMI's strategies have been proven in leading to improvements in malaria prevention, diagnosis, and treatment services across Benin.

A Legacy of Service and Transformation

Reflections of Pascal Zinzindohoue, PMI Advisor

Pascal Zinzindohoue joined USAID/Benin in 1994 as a Foreign Service National (FSN) Public Participation Specialist under the Children Learning and Equity Foundation (CLEF) project. Over the course of a nearly 30 year career, Pascal became one of the few staff members to contribute across USAID/Benin's three core strategic objectives in education, health, and governance.

Reflecting on the early years, Pascal notes:

“The first funding coming to Benin went to the Children Learning and Equity Foundation, which supported critical education reforms. The basic concept was to build strong human capital from the start—by investing in children.”

Pascal later transitioned into the health and governance sectors, eventually serving as Deputy Health Office Director, and Health Team Lead. He was instrumental in supporting civil society engagement and promoting democratic reforms, including the single ballot voting system and the development of Benin's political party charter.

In 2003, Pascal was appointed Health Team Lead and managed a portfolio that grew significantly with the advent of the President's Malaria Initiative (PMI). He was key to securing Benin's selection as a PMI country:

“When the Minister of Health, under M. Yayi Boni's government, asked what we were doing to help Benin join PMI, we immediately went to work to make that happen. And our hard work paid off and

we got selected. Then our malaria funding jumped from \$2 million to \$15 million.”

This recognition led to landmark interventions such as the 2008 bed net campaign and the launch of indoor residual spraying in Oueme. One of his most memorable moments was during President George W. Bush’s stopover in Cotonou, which symbolized Benin’s formal entry into PMI:

“To prepare for those three hours at the airport, we worked for two months. It was a proud moment—PMI put Benin on the map”

Despite having no formal background in health, Pascal became a recognized expert through USAID-sponsored training and a postgraduate degree in global health policy:

“USAID was my university. I started as a sociologist, but through USAID training and experience, I became a global health policy expert. That’s the power of this agency.”

Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health (MNCH)



Women have long suffered from high maternal mortality rates in Benin, with its ratio of maternal mortality much higher than the sub-Saharan regional average for 100,000 live births. Meanwhile, neo-mortality rates (or deaths of infants under 28 days of age for every 1,000 live births)

have held constant at 29.7 deaths per 1,000 live births (2020). Major contributing causes are prematurity, and asphyxia (where babies lack oxygen before or after birth). Responding, USAID made significant contributions to improving maternal, newborn, and child health by expanding women's access to high-quality, integrated health services across the country. Through support to local clinics, community-based initiatives, and health system strengthening, USAID helped reduce maternal and child mortality and improve health outcomes for women and children.

Interventions focused on increasing the use of antenatal and postnatal care, promoting skilled birth attendance, and expanding access to essential maternal and child health services. The introduction of integrated service delivery models enabled more effective immunization coverage, enhanced breastfeeding support, and better management of childhood illnesses such as diarrhea, pneumonia, and malaria.

USAID's approach emphasized collaboration with the Ministry of Health and key implementing partners to ensure sustainability, strengthen service delivery, and promote equity in access—especially for women and children in underserved communities.

In recent years, key initiatives included:

- Improving Access to High-Quality Services: Ensuring the availability and utilization of essential and emergency obstetric care, newborn care, integrated management of childhood illnesses (IMCI), immunization, and prevention and treatment of diarrhea.
- Scaling Up Triage, Evaluation, and Urgent Treatment (TETU): Providing life-saving care to children with severe malaria at dispensaries and outpatient clinics.
- Active Management of the Third Stage Labor (AMTSL): Reducing maternal deaths due to hemorrhage during delivery by making AMTSL routine for those assisting deliveries.
- Expanding Community Case Management: Training community health workers (CHWs) to provide integrated care for sick children at the village level.
- Improving Intermittent Preventive Treatment in Pregnancy (IPTp): Ensuring pregnant women receive prophylaxis against malaria during pregnancy.
- Supporting the National Campaign to Eliminate Fistulas: Funding surgical repair, and post-surgery social re-integration for women, along with promoting community awareness, and training for prevention among health professionals.
- Strengthening Quality Improvement Teams: Establishing and supporting teams to oversee health services and ensure adherence to guidelines and best practices.

- Behavior Change Communications: Implementing community mobilization activities to improve health behaviors and promote care-seeking

USAID's longstanding investments in maternal, newborn, and child health have both saved lives, and also strengthened the foundation of Benin's health system, ensuring that women and children continue to receive improved quality care for generations to come.

Family Planning and Reproductive Health³

Through a combination of community engagement and facility-based interventions, USAID promoted informed decision-making and increased access to modern contraceptive methods in Benin. Given the country's high population growth rate, significant unmet need for family planning, and low uptake of modern contraception, USAID's programs focused on expanding service delivery, strengthening contraceptive supply chains, and promoting male involvement in reproductive health.

USAID supported the integration of family planning services into primary health care and worked to ensure a consistent supply of contraceptives at both national and community levels. Demand-generation activities and behavior change campaigns helped raise awareness, reduce stigma, and encourage shared decision-making among couples.

At the policy level, USAID helped Benin strengthen its commitment to regional and global family planning goals, including the Ouagadougou Partnership and the FP2020 initiative. These efforts contributed to national progress in increasing

³ USAID does not provide support for abortions as a method of family planning, and strictly complies with the 1973 Helms Amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act. USAID's family planning programs emphasize voluntarism, informed choice, a broad method mix, and quality of care, aligning with global best practices.

contraceptive prevalence and advancing reproductive rights, especially among adolescents and young women.



Below is a summary of key initiatives:

- Increasing Access to High-Quality Services: Ensuring availability and utilization of voluntary family planning services and reproductive health care on a sustainable basis. This involves expanding choices of modern methods and improving their availability through public and private sector channels.
- Improving Supply Chain and Commodity Logistics: Building an effective supply chain to ensure contraceptive availability, including injectable contraceptives, implants, and intrauterine devices (IUDs). Addressing stock-out issues at front-line clinics and strengthening data collection for supply chain management. Procurement of contraceptive commodities is a key component.

- Promoting Healthy Timing and Spacing of Pregnancies: Implementing education and communication campaigns to promote the health and economic benefits of spacing children 3-5 years apart and delaying first pregnancies.
- Improving Quality of Counseling and Service Delivery: Enhancing the quality of family planning counseling, particularly postpartum counseling. Implementing a patient-centered model of confidential and respectful care through quality assurance initiatives in health facilities.
- Behavior Change Communication (BCC) and Social Mobilization: Supporting interpersonal communication and social mobilization skills to promote FP/RH. Developing stories for print, radio, and television to raise public dialogue and support.
- Engaging Community Health Workers (CHWs) and Private Sector Providers: Training CHWs and private sector providers to deliver FP/RH services, including the insertion and removal of IUDs and implants. Supporting franchised networks of clinics and mobile outreach services.
- Policy and Regulatory Support: Providing technical inputs to the Ministry of Health (MOH) for policy updates and developing service standards for FP/RH. Advocating for licensing of private sector providers and facilities.
- Addressing Barriers and Improving Attitudes: Engaging with the religious community to build consensus, improving provider attitudes and practices, and promoting women's ability to make reproductive health decisions.

Given Benin's context where maternal health services are strained, USAID's family planning support empowered individuals—especially women and youth—to make informed choices, contributing to healthier families, reduced deaths among women, newborns and children and greater equity between men and women.

HIV/AIDS Prevention and Key Populations Support

USAID has supported the government of Benin in the fight against HIV/AIDS throughout the years. The disease remains a threat to the country given that Benin is at the cross-roads of West Africa, and HIV/AIDS can quickly spread if not properly monitored. In 2023, UNAIDS estimated that there were 68,000 adults and children living with HIV in Benin, with a range of 57,000 to 82,000. Nevertheless the country has made strong progress in controlling the epidemic, and USAID has been a key supporter through its PEPFAR-funded programs.

After a long interruption, USAID resumed direct HIV/AIDS programming in Benin in 2022 through the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), with a renewed focus on high-risk groups to come and seek treatment and support. To help Benin in its fight against the spread of HIV/AIDS, USAID emphasized targeted HIV testing, linkage to treatment, and differentiated service delivery models for sex workers, men who have sex with men (MSM), and vulnerable youth.

Community-based outreach, stigma reduction campaigns, and technical support to national HIV programs strengthened the continuum of care and contributed to improved health outcomes. These efforts aimed to reduce new infections, improve retention in care, and ensure that HIV services were more accessible, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of marginalized populations.

Some Key Initiatives include:

- Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission (PMTCT): Programs aimed at reducing HIV transmission from mothers to their babies during pregnancy, delivery, and breastfeeding. These involve providing antiretroviral drugs, counseling, and support to HIV-positive pregnant women.

- Sexual Prevention - Abstinence/Be Faithful: Initiatives that promote abstinence and fidelity as methods to prevent HIV transmission. These often involve education and awareness campaigns targeted at specific groups, such as youth.
- Sexual Prevention - Other Sexual Prevention: Initiatives encompassing a broader range of prevention strategies, including condom distribution, peer education, and outreach to high-risk populations, such as sex workers and truck drivers. Also promoting male circumcision and discouraging female circumcision.
- Counseling and Testing: Providing voluntary counseling and testing services to identify HIV-positive individuals and link them to care and treatment. Includes training of health workers to provide counseling and testing.
- HIV/AIDS Treatment/ARV Services: Ensuring access to antiretroviral therapy (ART) for people living with HIV/AIDS to improve their health and reduce viral load.
- Palliative Care: Providing basic healthcare and support, including tuberculosis/HIV palliative care, to individuals in stages of advanced HIV/AIDS.
- Policy Analysis and Systems Strengthening: Working to create a supportive policy and program environment for HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment, including strengthening the capacity of the National AIDS Control Program (NACP).
- Host Country Strategic Information Capacity: Improving monitoring and evaluation systems, surveillance, and health management information systems (HMIS) related to HIV/AIDS.
- Targeting specific at-risk populations: Programs focus on youth, female commercial sex workers (FSWs), men who have sex with men (MSM), and truck drivers as part of prevention efforts.

- Behavior Change Communication: Using peer education, multiple media channels, and targeted messages to promote safer sexual behaviors and reduce stigma.
- Coordination with other donors: Working with other organizations like the World Bank, WHO, Global Fund, the U.S. Department of Defense (who support PEPFAR programming with the Beninese military), Peace Corps, and local organizations to maximize impact.



USAID's efforts in HIV/AIDS prevention, care, and treatment in Benin reflect a steadfast commitment to leaving no one behind. Despite periods of funding interruption, the agency successfully resumed programming through targeted support to key

populations, capacity building of national systems, and strategic cross-border collaborations. By integrating stigma reduction, service delivery, and community engagement, USAID helped ensure that vulnerable groups received life-saving services and that national responses were strengthened. USAID's approach to tackling the scourge of HIV/AIDS has always been anchored in promoting evidence-based approaches, inclusive policies, and stronger, better equipped public health systems to serve all segments of the population.

Health Systems Strengthening and Governance

Recognizing the importance of building quality healthcare at the “systems” level, USAID invested in strengthening the governance and administration of Benin's health sector. USAID championed public and private sector collaboration to deliver results. From leadership development to financial planning and digital transformation, support included capacity building for local health management teams and improved coordination with central health authorities. USAID contributed to modernizing the Health Management Information System (HMIS) and improving supply chain reliability for life-saving commodities.

USAID's health systems strengthening efforts in Benin were guided by a long-term vision to build a more resilient, equitable, and efficient national health system — capable of delivering quality services to all, including the most vulnerable. From the outset, USAID worked in close collaboration with the Government of Benin to identify systemic bottlenecks and implement reforms that addressed both structural and operational weaknesses. These included inadequate planning and coordination capacities among health managers, poor-quality supply chain data, underfinancing of health services, high out-of-pocket expenditures, and fragile governance structures.

Combating counterfeit medicines and strengthening the governance of the pharmaceuticals system.

Between 2014 and 2018, USAID took decisive action to raise awareness among the Government of Benin and key stakeholders about the growing threat of cross-border crime—specifically, the widespread circulation of counterfeit medicines arriving principally from Nigeria. These efforts were instrumental in improving the integrity of pharmaceutical supply chains by promoting the use of verified, official distribution channels. As a result, the availability of safe, quality-

assured medications increased, and the groundwork was laid for deeper health sector reforms.

This growing awareness culminated in strong political will and national action. In November 2016, USAID intensified its high-level engagement to support the government’s crackdown on the illicit medicine market. Working in close collaboration with the Ministry of Health and key regulatory entities—including the Direction de la Pharmacie, du Médicament et des Explorations Diagnostiques (DPMED) and the Agence Béninoise de Régulation Pharmaceutique (ABRP)—USAID and its implementing partner, the Global Health Supply Chain Technical Assistance (GHSC-TA) Francophone Task Order, supported a multi-faceted response.

In 2017, the Government of Benin carried out two landmark seizures of counterfeit pharmaceuticals—recovering nearly 250 tons of illicit medications in February and December. USAID supported the immediate response by assisting with the inventory and safe destruction of the seized products. Significantly, the government later took full ownership of subsequent seizures, conducting an environmentally sound destruction using its own resources—marking a shift toward national sustainability and leadership.

Another key achievement was the adoption of the “Medicrime Law”—a presidential decree passed by the National Assembly in June 2017. This law significantly increased penalties for individuals involved in the trafficking of counterfeit medicines. USAID played an important role in drafting this legislation and subsequently provided training for magistrates to ensure its effective application in the justice system.

Pharmaceutical Reform and Broader Health Systems Strengthening

Building on these gains, USAID continued to strengthen pharmaceutical governance as part of its broader Health Systems Strengthening (HSS) agenda.

Beginning in FY 2018, USAID prioritized improving leadership, accountability, and service delivery across the decentralized health system—spanning community, health zone, and departmental levels. USAID’s support focused on:

- Modernizing pharmaceutical and commodity management systems to ensure reliable access to essential medicines;
- Providing technical assistance for the Health Management Information System (HMIS) to improve data-driven decision-making;
- Supporting the design and implementation of ARCH, Benin’s flagship universal health insurance scheme, which aims to expand coverage for the country’s poorest and most vulnerable populations.



These efforts have been essential in aligning and integrating services across maternal and child health, family planning, malaria, and HIV/AIDS programs—creating a more cohesive and effective health system. By combining immediate response with long-term structural reform, USAID

helped lay the foundation for a more secure, efficient, and equitable pharmaceutical landscape in Benin. Its sustained investments have not only improved the availability of quality medicines but also contributed to the emergence of a health system that is more transparent, accountable, and capable of delivering critical services to all citizens.

By reinforcing the capacities of health authorities and supporting better coordination with central government institutions, USAID contributed to more responsive and transparent health service delivery. The agency also provided technical assistance to modernize health information systems and improve pharmaceutical and commodity management—ensuring essential medicines and supplies reached the communities that needed them most.

USAID deepened its engagement through a newly designed Health Systems Strengthening (HSS) activity that sought to enhance the overall system performance and accountability. The program introduced several key initiatives: implementing inclusive leadership models, improving the use of health data for planning and resource allocation, developing domestic resource mobilization strategies to reduce reliance on external aid, and strengthening workforce planning to address human resource gaps in the health sector.

In addition to national-level reforms, USAID provided targeted funding to reinforce cross-cutting health systems functions at the operational level. Through comprehensive and multi-tiered investments, USAID helped lay the foundation for a stronger, more integrated health system in Benin. Its contributions enhanced the government's capacity to lead, plan, and deliver essential services, while promoting equity, accountability, and sustainability. As Benin continues to advance its health reforms, USAID's systems-strengthening support remains a vital pillar in achieving long-term health security and improved outcomes for all citizens.

Gender Equity and GBV Prevention

USAID played a pivotal role in the fight against gender-based violence (GBV) in Benin. Programs supported legal reform implementation, community education, and the establishment of One-Stop Centers to provide comprehensive care to survivors. Special efforts targeted school-based GBV, early marriage, and the empowerment of women and girls through advocacy and partnerships with local organizations.

Gender Equity Efforts

- Recognizing Societal Imbalances:
 - USAID identified deep-rooted gender disparities in Beninese society.
 - *Women and girls* face limited access to health, education, employment, and political participation, while health risks to them begin early in life, due to cultural preferences for boys.
- Strategic Prioritization:
 - Promoting gender equality and reducing the effects of inequality are central themes across USAID/Benin's health and development programs.
- Inclusive Engagement:
 - Programs target both men and women—individually and as couples—to promote joint decision-making in family health matters.
 - Special emphasis is placed on engaging men as supportive partners and role models in family planning and reproductive health.
- Partner Sensitization:
 - Activities raise awareness among husbands and male partners about women's health issues, encouraging financial support, early care-seeking during pregnancy, and acceptance of modern contraception.
- Community Norms and Tailored Interventions:

- Health interventions are customized to reflect and engage on existing gender norms while upholding equality and reproductive rights for all genders and age groups.
- Gender-Responsive Data Use:
 - Sex-disaggregated service delivery data is systematically collected and analyzed to identify and address gender-based disparities in access and outcomes.
- Women's Participation in Health Systems:
 - USAID promotes gender balance in health sector training and works to enhance women's representation in community health committees and grassroots organizations.
- Private Sector Gender Analysis:
 - A rapid gender assessment of private health facilities was conducted to identify barriers and opportunities in service access and delivery.
 - The findings informed a gender strategy that also includes support for female-owned clinics.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Initiatives

- Comprehensive GBV Response:
 - USAID supports gender-focused training, improved GBV data collection, and expanded public awareness campaigns.
 - Programs address social norms, strengthen GBV referral systems, and advocate for increased government support.
- Training for Service Providers:
 - Social workers, nurses, midwives, and community health workers are trained to identify and assist GBV survivors, including referrals to One-Stop Care Centers.
- Overcoming Challenges:

- USAID addresses stigma and underreporting of GBV through education campaigns and community mobilization, encouraging greater use of available support services.
- Economic Empowerment of Survivors:
 - Programs promote the economic reintegration of GBV victims through livelihood opportunities and financial support mechanisms.
- Legal Rights and Awareness:
 - USAID partners with local NGOs to inform women and girls about their rights under the anti-GBV law and available victim services, promoting increased reporting and community accountability.
- Tackling Harmful Social Norms:
 - FY 2022 funds support initiatives aimed at engaging and dialogue on norms around early marriage, family size, girls' education, and gendered power dynamics.
- Government Advocacy and Support:
 - Ongoing advocacy with the Government of Benin seeks to expand funding for One-Stop Care Centers and improve nationwide GBV response systems.

Through its integrated approach to gender equity and GBV prevention, USAID not only advanced the rights and well-being of women and girls in Benin but also fostered more inclusive, informed, and resilient communities equipped to champion equality and dignity for all.

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

USAID's WASH programming in Benin focused on expanding access to clean water, improving sanitation infrastructure, and promoting hygiene practices—particularly among underserved urban, peri-urban populations, including in Cotonou, Abomey-Calavi, Allada, Avrankou, So-Ava, Ouidah, Aplahoue, and Bohicon. This was done in partnership with municipal governments, the national water authority, or Société Nationale des Eaux du Bénin (SONEB) and public services, and service providers, along with other government agencies and private sector partners. Through targeted investments and local partnerships, USAID advanced public health outcomes, while supporting local economic development.

Support for Sanitation Entrepreneurs



USAID empowered local Beninese entrepreneurs to become drivers of change in their communities by producing, marketing, and selling affordable sanitation

products such as handwashing stations and latrines. These efforts extended to building sanitation facilities in homes, schools, and small businesses, and promoting access to individual and shared toilets in densely populated areas. In 2022 alone, USAID supported over 30 small-scale entrepreneurs, resulting in more than 300,000 people gaining access to improved sanitation. By 2023, more than 40 entrepreneurs had been supported, reaching an additional 39,000 people.

Technical Assistance to Improve Service Delivery

Recognizing the critical role of public institutions and private operators in ensuring sustainable WASH services, USAID provided technical assistance to municipalities and service providers. These efforts focused on enhancing the quality and reach of drinking water and sanitation services, especially for underserved urban populations.

Community-Level Health Interventions

To reduce waterborne diseases, USAID supported community health workers in the diagnosis and treatment of childhood diarrhea, including referral systems for severe cases. Health center staff also received training in effective case management, improving both prevention and response capabilities at the local level.

Humanitarian Response

In times of crisis—such as flooding and heavy rains—USAID mobilized humanitarian assistance through the Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) to meet the urgent WASH needs of affected populations. This included emergency support for clean water access, sanitation infrastructure, and hygiene supplies to reduce the risk of disease outbreaks.

Through its WASH programming, USAID not only improved health outcomes but also stimulated local enterprise, strengthened municipal service systems, and

helped build community resilience in the face of public health threats and climate-related shocks.

Democracy, Rights, and Stability

In the last phase of its presence in Benin, USAID expanded its focus to governance, democracy, and to promote stability through the prevention and resolution of conflicts at the community level. Programs supported civic education, electoral participation, and institutional capacity building to promote the protection of human rights, and democratic governance. USAID also funded initiatives to prevent violent extremism in northern Benin, and collaborated with the Human Rights Commission, along with civil society organizations to promote human rights and social cohesion.

Throughout its engagement in Benin, USAID placed democratic governance, human rights, and civic stability at the heart of its development strategy. Recognizing that long-term prosperity and social resilience require not only health and education but also strong democratic institutions and active citizen engagement, USAID implemented a range of initiatives to uphold core democratic values and reinforce accountable governance structures.

Protecting Human Rights and Democratic Values

USAID supported programs that advanced access to justice, human rights protections and reparations for violations against individuals and communities affected by violence. This helped to safeguard recognized freedoms under Benin's constitutions—including freedom of expression, association, and assembly. USAID's programs prioritized the inclusion and participation of women, youth, and marginalized populations in political and civic life, ensuring that democratic gains were equitably shared. Gender equity and social inclusion were embedded across programming, reflecting USAID's broader commitment to building

societies where all individuals have the right and opportunity to participate in shaping their future.

Promoting Accountable and Transparent Governance

USAID invested in strengthening the integrity and transparency of public institutions and fostering anti-corruption initiatives. Activities included capacity-building for government actors, improved public financial management, and support for inclusive electoral processes. These efforts were designed to promote fair and competitive elections, combat corruption, and increase the responsiveness of institutions to citizens' needs. By fostering a culture of accountability, USAID helped reinforce the social contract between citizens and the state.

Strengthening Democratic Institutions and Civil Society

Recognizing the role of civil society as a pillar of democracy, USAID worked to bolster the capacity of local organizations, media outlets, and watchdog institutions. Support included technical assistance for civic education campaigns, training for human rights defenders, and engagement with grassroots groups advocating for transparency and access to justice. At the institutional level, USAID collaborated with government counterparts to advance legal reforms and enhance the effectiveness of key democratic institutions, including the Beninese Human Rights Commission.

Expanding Stability and Countering Violent Extremism through the Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI)

In response to the growing threat of violent extremism spilling out of the Sahel region in 2020 towards coastal West Africa, USAID/OTI launched the Littorals Regional Initiative (LRI - also known in French as the Programme Régional d'Appui aux Pays Côtiers) in 2021. Operating in northern Benin—specifically in the departments of Alibori, Donga, and Atacora—the LRI initiative complemented broader USAID and U.S. government democracy and stability efforts by helping local communities, particularly young people, to build resilience against radicalization and conflict fomented by Violent Extremist Organizations such as Al-Qaeda and its affiliates who seek to destabilize northern Benin and seize territory.

The LRI program, along with other USAID stabilization initiatives in northern Benin funded through the Global Fragility Act (GFA), worked closely with the U.S. military (including units under AFRICOM and Special Operations Command Africa - SOCAFRICA). USAID also worked closely with the State Department who supported the development of Benin's army (Forces Armées Béninoises) and police (Police républicaine du Bénin) to reinforce security in northern Benin and support local communities.

Since its inception, the LRI program implemented 66 activities in Benin—as part of over 200 across the subregion—focused on:

- **Strengthening community cohesion** through collaboration among traditional, community, and religious leaders, and ensuring the inclusion of historically marginalized groups like the Fulbe (also known as the Fulani).
- **Empowering women as peacebuilders**, including support for income-generating activities, storytelling, and leadership training to amplify women's roles in conflict prevention and community advocacy.

- **Engaging youth and reducing marginalization** through sports, cultural events, and community dialogues that promote participation and awareness around preventing violent extremism (PVE).
- **Reaching remote communities** with strategic media campaigns and improved local government outreach to expand civic engagement and trust.



LRI exemplifies USAID's commitment to advancing **conflict prevention, combating violent-extremism, democratic resilience, and social cohesion** in fragile contexts. In northern Benin, LRI served as a critical tool for reinforcing stability in communities vulnerable to extremism, while enabling the Government of Benin to better address this growing threat.

In its final years in Benin, USAID also integrated stability-focused programming aimed at mitigating the risks of violent extremism and addressing root causes of social unrest, especially in the northern part of the country. These initiatives focused on community-level conflict prevention, youth engagement, local

economic development and building social cohesion in regions vulnerable to instability. Areas of focus for USAID included Collines, Atacora, Alibori and Donga departments, where USAID worked closely supporting communities and local governments to resolve conflicts and build for the future together.

Through its democracy, rights, and stability portfolio, USAID contributed to the emergence of a more open, accountable, and resilient Beninese society—one better equipped to uphold democratic values and respond to the aspirations of its citizens.

Economic Growth and Private Sector Development

Over the past two decades, the Government of Benin undertook an ambitious series of economic reforms aimed at improving and liberalizing the business enabling environment, attracting foreign and domestic investment, improving productivity, formalizing the informal sector, and diversifying the economy. USAID's economic growth and private sector engagement strategy aligned closely with these national priorities, contributing to systemic change through targeted technical assistance, catalytic investments, and strategic partnerships.

USAID's strategy in Benin centered on catalyzing the Beninese private sector's growth particularly in health services and agri-business by fostering an enabling environment, supporting local businesses, and deploying innovative financing approaches.

Public-Private Partnerships in Health & Beyond

- USAID helped establish the Benin Private Sector Health Platform (PSSP). This initiative shaped the National Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Framework for health, co-designing procurement processes, financing structures, and policy tools adopted by the Ministry of Health. This enabled

the Ministry of Health to collaborate with the private sector to achieve healthcare solutions.

- Launched quarterly PPM forums in seven health zones, institutionalizing dialogue between public and private actors—resulting in improved data use, Maternal Newborn Child Health service delivery, and strengthened trust.

Boosting the Capacity of Private Healthcare Firms

- USAID-enhanced private health providers through e- learning programs, clinical accreditation protocols, and gender-sensitive capacity-building—benefiting over 100 private clinics with improved quality standards.

Healthcare Market Systems & Financial Sector Investment

- In collaboration with the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC), USAID/Benin advanced its private sector investment in healthcare. This was marked through the launch of a \$15 million loan guarantee with a key local bank, Orabank, designed to expand access to finance for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in key sectors such as health and agriculture, with a 50% risk-sharing arrangement. Building on this success, a second DFC-backed guarantee of \$14 million is currently being established at the time of this report with another local bank, offering 70% coverage for health-focused SMEs and 50% for those in other sectors. These initiatives collectively promote inclusive economic growth and strengthen the enabling environment for private investment in Benin.

Agri- Business & Export Promotion

- With support from USAID's West Africa Trade and Investment Hub, USAID supported innovative local companies in Benin to build competitiveness and productivity and forge partnerships with international investors, including from the United States. A great example of this work is

the story of our partnership with the Beninese firm - Promo Fruits. With support from USAID through a \$2 million co-investment, Promo Fruits was able to expand its juice production facility, increasing capacity from 40 to 200 metric tons of fruit per day. This helped the company generate over \$3.9 million in exports (including to the United States) and created more than 1,000 new jobs, benefitting both factory workers and smallholder farmers. The factory now serves as a reliable buyer for pineapple producers, while also providing training, equipment, and agricultural inputs to help them scale sustainably. This partnership also facilitated the creation of a brand new mango processing factory in the town of N'Dali, in northern Benin. This is exactly where increased economic development efforts are needed to help the local economy. USAID's ability to identify and help local firms build their capacity and productivity, while linking with international investors, is catalysing agricultural growth, advancing sustainable community

development and positioning small firms like Promo Fruits as a regional model for agro-industrial growth.



Focus: Support to Benin’s utilization of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA): Trade⁴ Facilitation & Export Promotion

In support of Benin’s integration into global markets, USAID played a pivotal role supporting Benin’s utilization of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA)—a Congressionally-mandated trade preference program that grants duty-free access for eligible goods from sub-Saharan Africa to the U.S. market.

Boosting Export Capacity

USAID partnered with Benin’s Investment Promotion Authority (APIEx) to elevate awareness of AGOA among manufacturers and exporters. Through workshops, training sessions, and informational campaigns, businesses—including textile, cashew, and nut-processing firms—gained insights into AGOA eligibility requirements, documentation standards, and market-entry strategies.

AGOA Workshops and Stakeholder Engagement

In September 2024, USAID, the U.S. Embassy, and Africa Trade & Investment (ATI) co-hosted an AGOA capacity-building workshop in Cotonou. Participants such as Promo Fruits (Jus IRA / Pineapple), Tolaro Global (Cashew), Natura (Shea Butter) and Korosho Benin Sarl (Cashew) showcased their products, engaged directly with buyers, and met high-level stakeholders including the U.S. Ambassador and the Beninese Minister of Industry.

Strengthening Institutional Alignment

By collaborating with APIEx, USAID helped streamline export processes under AGOA—ensuring that national policies and practices aligned with AGOA protocols and rules of origin. This institutional alignment reduced trade barriers and improved investor confidence.

⁴ The African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) expires under its current mandate in September 2025. The main objectives of AGOA are to expand trade and investment between the United States and sub-Saharan African countries, promote economic development and diversification in Africa, and encourage market-oriented reforms and good governance. AGOA provides eligible sub-Saharan African countries with duty-free access to the U.S. market for thousands of products.

Trade Capacity Building

USAID supported Benin's participation in AGOA-linked regional trade hubs. These hubs provided technical assistance in areas such as product certification, quality control, trade logistics, and participation in international trade fairs—helping local firms meet exacting U.S. import standards.

Impact on Local Firms

Local businesses that participated in USAID's AGOA support reported improved understanding of compliance procedures, expanded market access, and the pursuit of export markets in the United States. Though statistics for Benin-specific exports are limited at the time of this writing, Benin's current eligibility for textile and apparel exports under AGOA likely is just a starting spot, with more sectors being included in the future as the country builds economic competitiveness.

Conclusion

As USAID concludes its operations in Benin, the legacy of its presence and support is felt and resonates across the country—in classrooms and clinics, company boardrooms, and inside government and civic institutions. Most significantly it is felt through empowered youth and women. It is sustainable. It is wholly locally owned and led. It will be carried forward. USAID's success in Benin (and around the world) is based on identifying and catalyzing the talent, drive and initiative of our local partners who established the vision, and created political, social and economic will for change. As the U.S. government's development agency, USAID's magic was to identify those leaders for change, to create partnerships driven by mutual problem-solving, and to quickly provide world-class support through technical assistance and flexible financing. USAID employees in Benin, and across the world, kept sacred the obligation to make clear to our

counterparts that everything they provided was as a result of the deep generosity of the American people and government. USAID embodied the best of America.

USAID has been by Benin's side the country's remarkable 1990 democratic breakthrough, as one of the first countries in Africa to successfully transition from Marxist-Leninist autocracy, to democracy and market economy. USAID's investments were guided by steadfast commitment to Beninese ownership, transparency, and sustainability. Programs mentioned throughout this document in health, education, violence prevention, economic development, WASH,



democracy and governance responded to urgent development needs, and also laid the groundwork for Benin to develop further and faster. This focus on trust, and problem-solving is the essence of international relations and development partnership done right.

As we close, it's worth pondering on the testimony from a team-member at USAID/Benin, reflecting on USAID's enduring value to the United States and the world.

From local beneficiary to leader at USAID/Benin: A Personal Journey

Reflections from Virgile Gnanguenon, Malaria Specialist

“My journey with USAID and the United States began long before I became an employee in 2021. In 2008, as a student of medical biology at the Centre de Recherche Entomologique de Cotonou (CREC), I had the opportunity to participate in the USAID-funded Indoor Residual Spraying (IRS) program. I was a research assistant at the time, collecting entomological baseline data and monitoring malaria vector control efforts. That experience was a turning point. The program allowed me to complete my thesis, obtain my diploma, and open the door to pursue further academic and professional growth.

Through USAID’s support, I received both technical and financial assistance that enabled me to pursue a PhD in medical entomology. I had access to expert mentorship, scientific data for analysis, and the opportunity to publish my research. In 2015, after completing my doctorate, I was hired as Chief of Party for the USAID-funded Malaria Indoor Residual Spraying project in Burundi, and later led the VectorLink (malaria) program from 2017 onward in Burundi. All told, I spent nearly nine years benefiting directly from USAID-supported programs at which point I was hired to join USAID/Benin.

When I joined USAID/Benin as a staff member, I brought with me a strong sense of mission. Having experienced firsthand the life-saving impact of its programs, I felt a profound responsibility to ensure that our work remained relevant and impactful to the communities we serve. I understood what it meant to be a beneficiary, and that perspective gave me unique insight into the design, supervision, and implementation of development activities.

One of the things that stood out most to me was the quality and intentionality of USAID’s malaria control programs (under the President’s Malaria Initiative). USAID’s work was strategic, grounded in science, and well-resourced. From entomological surveillance to indoor spraying, every element was designed to save lives—especially those of pregnant women and children. These programs

also aligned seamlessly with national health priorities, which contributed to their long-term sustainability and impact. My transition into USAID wasn't without challenges. Adjusting to the internal language—full of acronyms, protocols, and donor systems—was initially overwhelming. But thanks to mentoring and the foundational experience I had gained through USAID-supported programs, I adapted quickly. I now see myself not just as someone who works for USAID, but as someone who embodies its values.

If given the opportunity, I would advocate for the expansion of our malaria programming—deepening life-saving interventions and enhancing data-to-action strategies. The work USAID has done in Benin has not only saved lives; it has built a generation of committed professionals, like myself, who are equipped to carry the mission forward long after the agency's closure.”

May USAID's role, and the work of international development and humanitarian assistance, never be abandoned as an essential element of success for U.S. foreign policy, and national security. For any development agency, philanthropy, or investor, the lessons from USAID's journey in Benin, and around the world, serve as a valuable resource - a springboard for good development. They are: a relationship built on trust, clear objectives, the full transfer of knowledge, flexible tools to help partners meet the moment in crisis and opportunity, and a focus on the long-term. USAID's legacy in Benin is one of collaboration and hope. It is a

testament to what is possible when nations and people come together with shared values in pursuit of shared prosperity, dignity and mutual advancement.

