

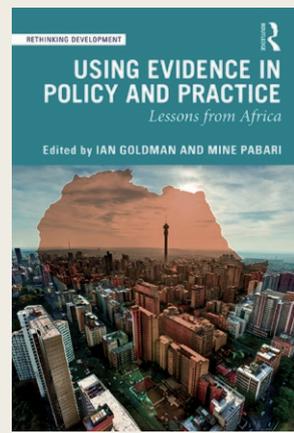


POLICY BRIEF

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THE POTENTIAL AND THE CHALLENGES OF EVALUATIONS TO POSITIVELY INFLUENCE REFORMS: WORKING WITH PRODUCERS IN THE BENIN AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

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SUMMARY & KEY MESSAGES

This brief focuses on an evaluation of the agricultural sector development policy in Benin that was carried out in 2009, and how the evidence was used to inform later policies, and what factors led to use. In 2006 a new President of Benin was elected with a particular interest in good governance. He considered public policy evaluation as key to good governance and established an Office for Evaluation of Public Policies (BEPP) and a national evaluation system (NES). An evaluation of the agricultural policy was conducted in 2009 at an early stage of the NES. In 2008 to 2009, the role of civil society and agricultural producer organisations in policy development was transformed, and they began to play a key role in management of the sector. The research for this case study found that the 2009 evaluation was used instrumentally, and made a significant conceptual contribution in terms of understanding the needs of the sector. Factors that led to this included production of a high-quality evaluation, and the strong involvement of wider stakeholders, notably producer organisations, who pushed to use the evidence.

Introduction

From 1990 to 2019 Benin's agricultural sector underwent various policy changes.¹ Five major policies were adopted without much impact on the development of the sector. In 2006, President Yayi Boni was elected. He considered public policy evaluation as key to governance and established an Office for Evaluation of Public Policies (*Bureau d'Évaluation des Politiques Publiques*, BEPP, later BEPPAAG) and a national evaluation system (NES). In 2009, as a part of the responsibilities of the new NES, an evaluation of the agricultural policy, the Strategic Plan for the Revival of the Agricultural Sector (PSRSA 2006-2011) was commissioned.

This policy brief addresses "The potential and the challenges of evaluations to positively influence reforms." It shows how instrumental, conceptual, process and symbolic use of evaluation results (Johnson et al., 2009) created an inclusive context that dramatically changed working relations and conditions between government administration and civil society organisations (CSO) including producer unions.

¹ The 2009 evaluation report has a whole section devoted to the analysis of the different policies from a historical point of view (pp. 24–46). Much of the information presented in the journey of the policy comes from this report.

Research methodology

This brief is informed by case study research carried out between November 2018 and January 2019, that used qualitative and participatory methods, including a document review, over 20 interviews and three mini-workshops. The research examined the processes supporting or inhibiting evidence use. The case study research was one of eight case studies carried out across five countries and the West Africa regional organisation (ECOWAS). Findings emerging from the research are also shared through videos and a published book: "Using Evidence for Policy and Practice –Lessons from Africa," Goldman, I and Pabari, M (eds), with 39 contributing authors².

THE EVALUATION AND THE FOLLOW-UP

The 2009 evaluation was conducted by an external consultant, and so was independent. Its steering committee was made up of key stakeholders and chaired by the Ministry of Planning. The report was validated through a three-day workshop bringing together the main stakeholders of the sector who were also involved in the revision of the PSRSA. The evaluation thus generated reliable information accepted by all stakeholders in a timely way for further utilisation.

The 2009 evaluation report made 15 major recommendations in four broad areas (see Table 1), namely, (1) Strategic vision of development, (2) Strategic programming of interventions, (3) Operational programming and management of interventions and (4) Institutional framework. Nine of those recommendations were directly focused on the PSRSA. **Table 1** shows four of the recommendations whose implementation most helped design effective policies for the sector that are still in force to date.

The quality of evidence from the 2009 evaluation helped stimulate demand for further studies. Since 2011, PNOPPA has initiated a significant number of studies, ranging from a document review on the maize sector and its added value chains in Benin (June 2011) to a study on the cash purchase of fertiliser by producers (October 2011). Those studies responded to the needs in the field and led to development of a policy for the maize sector, as well as for sectors such as cassava, rice, cashew, pineapple, aquaculture, milk, table eggs, meat and market gardening, and so policy making has become more evidence based.

² Available at <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/using-evidence-policy-practice-ian-goldman-mine-pabari/e/10.4324/9781003007043>

Table 1: Recommendations and implementation

Recommendation	Subsequent policies and implementation
Sector strategic vision of development	
MAEP develops a new agriculture sector policy in line with Benin's new development orientation	Evidence from PSRSA mid-term and final evaluations was used for drafting the new policy, PSDSA 2017–2025 and its operational plan.
Government prepares and Parliament adopts an agricultural sector law in line with the emerging economic vision and Benin's strategic development approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Producer unions and civil society organisations supported by DPs led the drafting of the law. • Parliament required an ex-ante evaluation prior to the introduction of the law (Evidence generation and utilisation).
Government considers the 2006 version of the PSRSA as an interim strategic plan pending drafting of a new agricultural sector policy and adoption of a law on agriculture	In addition to drafting the new agricultural sector policy, other documents were produced, including, the promotion of 13 agricultural sectors, based on producer union-generated evidence; the establishment of an efficient financing system for the agricultural sector; implementation of the institutional and organisational reform of the ministry; the establishment of the Benin Agency for the Promotion of Agricultural Value Chains (ABePROFA).
Operational programming and management of interventions	
The ministry sets up a consultation framework for synergistic implementation of projects and programmes	In 2013 the National Guidance and Monitoring Council (CNOS) was created for implementation of the PSRSA. It currently has 12 regional and 77 local branches.

WHAT USE HAPPENED OF THE EVIDENCE?

In the analytical framework of the book,³ we refer to instrumental, conceptual, process and symbolic use. In terms of *instrumental use*, some recommendations from the 2009 evaluation were directly implemented. The PSRSA was reviewed and its new version adopted.⁴ The process leading to the adoption of the agriculture sector orientation law is underway. Recommendations to become inclusive of producers were taken on board.

However, the biggest impact has been *conceptual use*. The evaluation report stands as a major landmark for the quality and quantity of the information it brought, which helped to bring clarity to the sector. It informed subsequent discussions developing the PSRSA. Since 2011, PNOPPA has initiated a significant number of studies, the most important being the ones that generated the Farmer Memorandum, a consensus document produced after more than 40 meetings at local, regional and national levels that summarised the expectations of stakeholders on the content and orientation of the law on the agricultural sector (PNOPPA, 2016, p. 4). In the introduction of the Memorandum, almost all the background information utilised came from the 2009 evaluation report. The cross analysis of previous policy

documents showed their limitations and facilitated the use of the evaluation to inform the revision of the PSRSA. According to the former president of the platform, 'transparency and evidence use have become systematic in their operating mode; for their own reputation, every decision has to be evidence-based'. As a matter of fact,

The previous history was of public policies in the agriculture sector in Benin being developed by the ministry for compliance purposes, without involving stakeholders, so these were symbolic and not implemented. In terms of *positive symbolic use*, as one of the first evaluations commissioned by the BEPP, the 2009 agricultural sector evaluation enhanced the importance of evaluations in providing evidence for policy making and implementation.

Process use can also be seen, i.e. use not from the findings but from the learning process which the evaluation supported, and the ownership assumed by producers in policy design processes. The experience of the revision of the PSRSA created awareness of the importance of a more inclusive and collaborative platform of stakeholders. That context fostered the use of evidence and therefore more demand for generation of user-oriented evidence. Many studies, especially the ones on the 13 targeted agricultural sectors, were commissioned by producer associations for their own use, based on the evaluation recommendations.

3 The analytical framework builds on: Science of Using Science's framework (Langer, Gough, Tripney 2016) and The Context Matters framework (Weyrauch, Echt and Suliman, 2016).

4 The new Strategic Plan for the Development of the Agriculture Sector; in French, *Plan Stratégique de Développement du Secteur Agriculture* (PSDSA), was adopted by the government in November 2017.

WHAT LED TO THE EVIDENCE BEING USED

The key intervention which led to use was most of the stakeholders participating in the validation workshop including the ministry (MAEP), civil society organisations (CSOs), and development partners (DPs). As these stakeholders were then involved in the revision of the PSDSA, and in subsequent processes, this enabled them to start with the same level of information and provided the opportunity to directly use the results of the evaluation. The redefinition of roles that followed led to increased responsibilities of CSOs in the restructuring of the institutional framework for the agricultural sector. The new roles of the producer unions' meant that their role had to be strengthened to enable them to take up their new responsibilities. This enabled them to take the lead in the process of introducing the agricultural sector law to the Parliament. The process triggered change mechanisms increasing *trust*, *access to information*, *agreement on ways forward*, and provided an *institutionalization* of their changed role.⁵

As a result the *outcomes* were increased *capability* of the producer unions to play a strong role in the revisions to the policy, a formalised *opportunity* for that role to change, and increased *motivation* by the unions to play that strong role, as well as by MAEP to involve wider stakeholders.

Notable changes took place in the process of revision of the PSRSA. The institutional framework of the sector has been completely restructured. As recommended by the evaluation, the National Guidance and Monitoring Council (*Conseil National d'Orientation et de Suivi – CNOS*) with 12 regional and 77 local branches was established in February 2013 to guide and regulate the national agricultural sector development policy.

With the support of development partners, MAEP and the National Platform of Farmer and Agricultural Producer Organisations (PNOPPA) carried out studies that led to the establishment of 13 sectors and boosted agricultural production. The numerous studies commissioned by PNOPPA are based on real needs. The recruitment of consultants was more on the basis of their skills than based on development partners or ministry administration agendas. More recently during the process of drafting the law on the agricultural sector, PNOPPA carried out consultations with grassroots stakeholders at local, regional and national levels. This enhanced role is an unprecedented case of the responsibility of a non-government body in the history of Benin.

The development of the 13 main production sectors has resulted in more effective management with a direct *impact* on agricultural production. As a result, for instance, Benin is in the leading pack of African cotton-producing countries.

Table 2 summarises some of the key factors that enabled use, identifying those that were encouraged by having an emerging national evaluation system (NES). As can be seen the Benin NES provided key elements to support use of evidence from the evaluation. The 2009 evaluation was external with an inclusive steering committee chaired by the Ministry of Planning and its findings validated by the main stakeholders. The report was publicised and is available on the NES and Ministry of Agriculture websites. ⁶Such conditions warrant the quality of evaluations and increase the possibility of evidence use.

⁶ See: <https://evaluation.gouv.bj/uploads/RapportevaluationPolitiquedeveloppementsecteuragricole.pdf>. Many other public policies have been evaluated since and are made available on the Presidency of the Republic site (www.presidence.bj/evaluation-politiques-publiques).

⁵ The italicisation refers to elements of the analytical framework.

Table 2: Factors enabling and inhibiting evidence use

Elements under the National Evaluation System (NES)	Other elements that favored use
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The availability of a credible evaluation report Steering committee bringing together the key players Consensual validation of the report Role of the MAEP in bringing together the various stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Timeliness of the evaluation for the revision of the PSRSA Active and effective involvement of non-governmental actors Consultations with grassroots actors at local, regional and national levels Support of DPs, including capacity building of both non-government and government stakeholders
Factors inhibiting evidence use	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Institutional instability of the MAEP (10 Ministers in 10 years) Fear of the unknown and reluctance to change from normal practice Poor communication between stakeholders due to the “paternalistic” position of the government partner Sector-wide administrative red tape Limited resources: human, material, financial 	

Conclusions

Evaluations are undertaken fairly frequently in the agricultural sector. However, as one development partner responded “Their effectiveness remains to be proven. Indeed, in addition to the many duplications of evaluations, the actual use of evaluation results is clearly not common.” The various evaluations conducted in the ministry-dominated context result in a mechanical execution of tasks rather than responding to real needs (MPDEPP-CAG, 2009), ticking the box that an evaluation has been done rather than using its conclusions (Yerly, 2017). The 2009 evaluation marks a breaking point in that the context favoured its validation and the subsequent use of its results at a time when there was a critical need for them.

There have been many policy documents for Benin’s agricultural sector (MPDEPP-CAG, 2009) but as noted by the PNOPPA Past-Chairman, “these documents are designed by ministry officials for the needs of the administration and not for agricultural producers.” The stagnation of the sector and its weakness in responding to national development needs are a result of this.

The evaluation highlighted recurring issues in the sector. Its consensual validation provided an opportunity for stakeholders to create a favourable environment to implement its recommendations. This collegial approach prevailed through the revision of the PSRSA and especially the restructuring of the institutional framework of the sector with the integration of non-governmental players who took on decisive roles. The importance of a more inclusive collaborative environment was demonstrated in both the production and use of evaluation results. Further evaluations that PNOPPA commissioned followed the standard and demand became chiefly determined by real needs in the field. This was further supported by some elements of the NES such as multistakeholder steering committees promoting the collaborative approach. The key lessons arising from the Benin case are shown in Box 1.

Box 1: Key lessons learned from Benin agricultural sector policy evaluation

- The importance of conducting *high quality evaluations*.
- The importance of *timing*: having evidence available at a time of change motivates use.
- The importance of a *national evaluation system* to promote use.
- The importance of involvement and *commitment from key stakeholders*.
- The importance of *development partners* being willing to question ways of operating and to motivate for and support a multistakeholder approach.

Benin’s Deputy Minister of Agriculture in his comments on the book said, “The participation of my ministry in the research and writing of this book has been a great opportunity to mobilise the key stakeholders in the agriculture sector around the importance of evaluation and the incomparable benefits of developing public policy based on evidence” (Goldman and Pabari, 2020).

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ABOUT THE RESEARCH

This brief draws on case study research carried out for the project, 'Evidence in practice: documenting and sharing lessons of evidence-informed policy making and implementation in Africa', supported by the Hewlett Foundation. The case study research was guided by an analytical framework that combines two different frameworks: i) the Science of Using Science's framework that looks at evidence interventions and outcomes from a behaviour change perspective (Langer et al., 2016) and the Context Matters framework that serves as a tool to better

understand contextual factors affecting the use of evidence (Weyrauch et al., 2016). The framework approaches evidence use from a policy maker's perspective (i.e. from a demand rather than supply perspective). The framework takes into account contextual influencers and breaks down an evidence journey into the ways in which evidence is generated, the interventions taken in order to ensure evidence use, the change mechanisms that arise as a result and the relationships between the evidence journey and the immediate and wider outcomes that emerge.

