

PROGRAMME FOR INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT OF
ARTISANAL FISHERIES IN WEST AFRICA

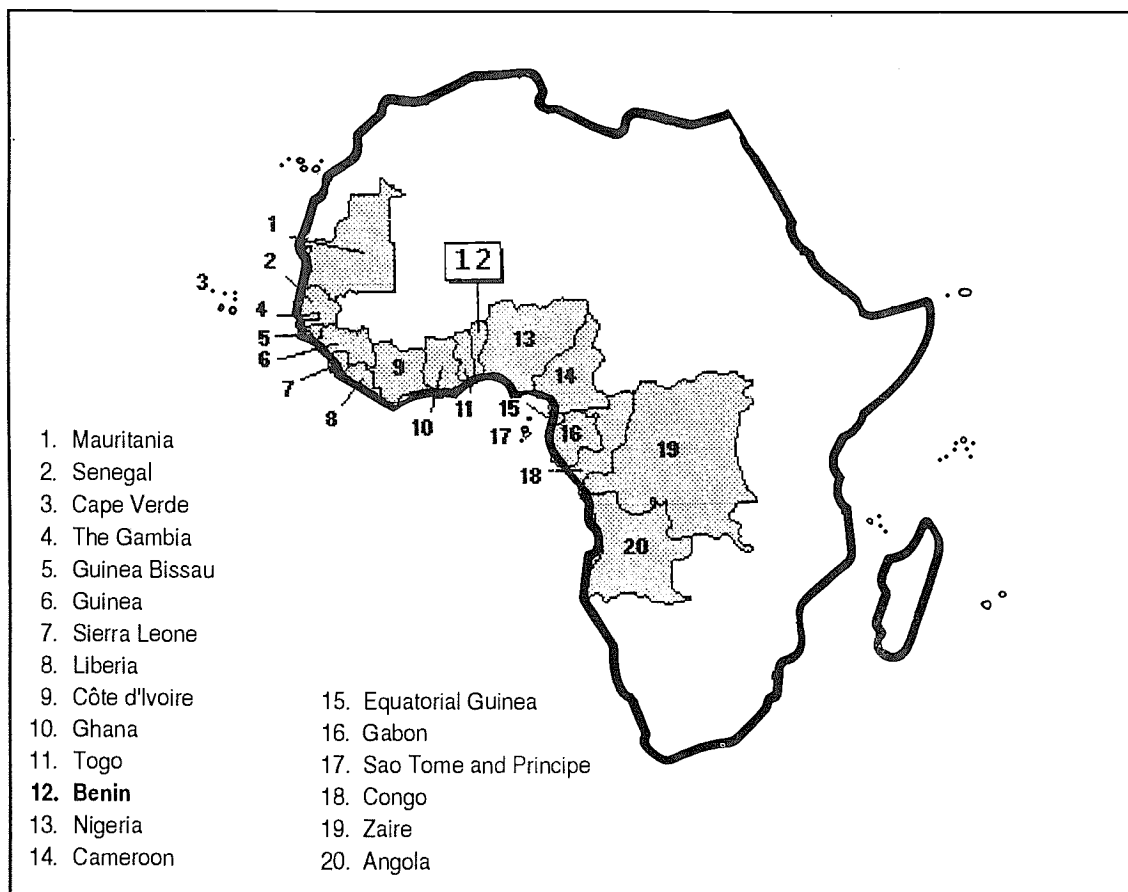
IDAF PROGRAMME

Technical Report N° 85

September 1996

**A Study of Community Participation
in the Aguégué Project
BEN/88/C03 - BEN/88/014**

*(Improving the living conditions of the Populations
in the District of Aguégué)*



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DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION OF DENMARK



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

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**A Study of Community Participation
in the Aguégues Project
BEN/88/C03 - BEN/88/014**

**(Improving the living conditions of the Populations
in the District of Aguégues)**

by

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THE VISION FOR IDAF PHASE III

INTRODUCTION

Development strategy during the 1960 and 1970s was based on the philosophy that developing countries lacked improved technology and capital for speeding up their development. Industrialization was promoted in order to capitalize on the abundant fish resources. However, the anticipated expansion of the economy did not happen and the development approach shifted towards an integrated rural strategy where emphasis is put on the community as a whole to upgrade incomes and the quality of life through technical assistance and the active participation of fisherfolk and the community.

In this context, emphasis was initially placed on the Community Fishery Centre (CFC) concept as a means of promoting artisanal fishery development. But it became apparent that the presence of a complex of facilities and services tailored to meet local needs was no guarantee that the structures/facilities would be used or that development would occur. The active participation of fisherfolk and the mobilisation of local and community resources was imperative in order to assure sustainability of initiatives undertaken by development projects and/or the community.

So far and in general terms, the IDAF Programme has worked under the context of abundant or seemingly adequate fishery resources with moderate population pressure. The scenario is however changing (and very fast for that matter) and we would soon face the triple constraints of reduced or depleting fish stocks, degrading environment and increasing population pressure. Like in other sectors, it must be anticipated that just to survive, parts of the population surplus in the fishing communities will enter the artisanal fisheries, which will increase the competition for the resources among the small scale fisherfolk in addition to the prevailing competition between the artisanal and industrial fisheries, with their attendant effect on the environment.

This scenario calls for a continuation of the integrated participatory strategy which remains relevant to the development of artisanal fisheries in West Africa. However, the emphasis needs to be placed on the elements and mechanisms that favour the sustainability of initiatives: responsible fishing, the empowerment processes that ensure the devolution of major resource management and development decisions to the local community, the strengthening of national human and institutional capacities at all levels for a sustainable and equitable fisheries resources management and development, as well as in the follow-up and consolidation of past achievements.

DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE

Thus the development objective of the Programme in the present phase III which started on 1 July 1994 is to ensure twenty coastal West African countries a sustainable development and management of their artisanal fisheries for maximum social and economic benefit of their fishing communities in terms of employment, proteins and earnings. This will be done through an integrated and participatory approach in which emphasis will be laid on equity, gender issues, the transfer of technology for development, environment protection, as well as the strengthening of human and institutional capacities.

The immediate objectives are:

1. To identify, assess and disseminate strategies and mechanisms for sustainable management and development of the artisanal fisheries in fishing communities;
2. To improve the competence of national Fisheries Departments staff in development and management planning of artisanal fisheries;
3. To enhance regional technical competence in the fisheries disciplines, particularly in fishing and fish technology;
4. To improve information and experience exchange related to artisanal fisheries within the region;
5. To promote regional and sub-regional collaboration for the development and management of artisanal fisheries

In this context, IDAF will among other things tackle the following major aspects in its work :

- assisting in the elaboration and implementation of a clear and coherent national development policy for the artisanal fishery sector;
- providing advice on management and allocation of resources between artisanal and industrial fishing fleets, both national and foreign;
- involving users in the design and management of on shore infrastructures;
- monitoring the sector's evolution by the setting up of an economic indicator system for the sector adapted to the financial and human availabilities;
- improving fishing technologies in accordance with the available resources;
- increasing the final product's value by improvement in processing and marketing;
- promoting community development in accordance with the lessons learned from Phase I and II and oriented towards the sustainability of actions undertaken;
- reinforce the Programme's information/communication system.

It is anticipated that by the end of the third phase of the Project, the region will have a nucleus of field oriented experts capable to respond to the challenges of the artisanal fisheries sector and to spur development in their individual countries in keeping with the aspirations and needs of fisherfolk.

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Finally, I would like to thank especially all the members of the Project team, local services as well as the Aguégues populations who contributed to this study. I hope this report gathers and gives a faithful account of their thoughts.

Introduction

A. Presentation of the project

The project BEN/88/CO3-BEN/88/O14 "Improvement of the Living Conditions of the Aguégúés District Populations" is a rural integrated development project which falls within the framework of United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) "participatory" projects.

a) Area of the Project.

The project is located in the Aguégúés District, in the South-West of Oueme Department (South-East Benin), near the administrative capital of Porto-Novo.

The area of the Aguégúés District extends in the lower part of the Oueme river alongside Porto-Novo lagoon. Covering a total area of 52km², it is subject to high and low tides and is completely flooded when the river level rises from July to November.

The Aguégúés District consists of 3 rural municipalities and 21 villages (see map):

- rural municipality of Houedome (7 villages),
- rural municipality of Avagbodji (6 villages),
- rural municipality of Zoungame (8 villages).

It has a population of about 22.000 inhabitants, of whom about 11.000 are active.

As a lake side district, the populations earn their living mainly from the exploitation of water bodies (fishing and fish culture for men and the women are fish traders). In the rural municipalities of Houedome and Zoungame the populations live exclusively on fishery products. In the municipality of Avagbodji fisheries activities in the river swelling period are replaced by an off-season agriculture when the river level drops.

The major problems that the district faces and which were revealed during the Project formulation mission are remoteness, lack of health and social infrastructures, fall in the earnings of the populations.

b) Objectives of the Project

These objectives, as defined in the Project Agreement (1992) are:

Development objectives.

- to help the populations solve the short-term problems they have and;
- to provide them with a mechanism which can allow "self-promotion without degrading nature", to improve their living conditions in order to satisfy the existing needs as well as those resulting from a better technical knowledge of the possibilities of exploiting available resources.

Therefore, the first chapter will give detailed information (evaluation and nature of the participation, explanations concerning the problems encountered) on the two aforementioned components and brief information about the "Reconstitution of an Appropriate Ecosystem"¹ component.

As the population participation in the first three components of the Project depends partly on the activities of the fourth "Strengthening of the mechanisms of Population Involvement", the population participation in the latter component will be dealt with in the second chapter.

Finally, the concluding third chapter summarizes the benefits of the Project in terms of the population participation and self-promotion and provides recommendations to improve them while the Project still lasts.

Chapter 1: Study of the population involvement in the "improvement of basic infrastructures", "village equipment fund" and "reconstitution of an appropriate ecosystem" Components.

1.1 Study of population involvement in the "improvement of basic infrastructures" component.

1.1.1 Participation in construction and rehabilitation works

1.1.1.1 Generalities

The construction and rehabilitation of basic infrastructures as well as the follow up of these works were carried out by the "Mobile Construction and Rehabilitation Support Unit" of the Association of French Volunteers of Progress (UMACR-AFVP).

The design of the buildings has been discussed with the persons concerned (administration, health, education staff) and then approved by the Management Committee of the Project.

The works started at the end of 1993 after a general phase of sensitization and animation by the Project between April and June 1993. During this phase, the terms and conditions of the participation of the population in the works were discussed.

Before beginning a new construction site, a meeting was organized to recall the terms and conditions of the participation of the populations and organize the work. These terms and conditions were afterwards presented in the form of "Village Conventions" between AFVP and the target village community. Then, to ensure a good organization of the participation, Follow up Committees were set up.

Consultations with the populations during the Project formulation mission ended with two types of terms and conditions for the participation:

¹ The component "Accessibility" which included the construction of sea walls and a landing site started only recently.

* Concerning the construction/rehabilitation of schools and health centres, the terms and conditions of the participation as described in the conventions are:

- provision of storage premises and a watchman for these premises;
- management of the stocks of materials;
- cleaning up of the sites selected and clearing of rubbles during the whole period of the works;
- supplying the construction sites with water and sand;
- loading and unloading construction materials and equipment as well as carrying by canoe loads weighing less than 500kg;
- unpaid labour for excavation works, making of concrete and mortars, moulding of cement-blocks and other prefabricated materials.

The conventions also stipulate that the works would be carried out in accordance with the request and under the supervision of AFVP.

* For the other construction and rehabilitation works (Project and administration buildings) the conditions were the same except that the labour was paid by the contractor.

In any case the skilled labour was paid.

1.1.1.2 Participation evaluation

From the phase of sensitization preceding the beginning of works, the population expressed reservations regarding the terms and conditions of supplying sand to building sites and its transportation by canoe. This type of participation never took place but was rather delegated to a group of carriers hired and paid by AFVP. However, the populations were responsible for the unloading of the canoes.

As for the other terms and conditions, the populations made no objections concerning their participation. The choice of building sites by the populations aroused a strong mobilization at the beginning because each person was hoping that something would be built in his/her village.

And yet, despite all the organization efforts, the effective participation of the in the works was generally very unequal and very insufficient.

Thus, very soon after, problems occurred on the building sites:

- the number of people supposed to work on the building sites was not enough and the group consisted of children and women,
- the persons present refused to work without being paid. For instance, they prevented the loading of the canoes until canoe men accepted to pay the unloading.

AFVP, the Project Cell, and administrative authorities tried to solve the problem. Religious authorities and other influential leaders were contacted, animators were recruited in the three municipalities, but none of these initiatives helped to find a long lasting solution to the situation.

Consequently, it was decided to pay the village labour from different village funds (taxes, village water works management funds, etc...). Thereafter, administrative authorities provided and paid the labour. As for the costs of unloading canoes, canoemen agreed with them.

1.1.1.3 Reasons for poor participation of the populations to the works

The investigations carried out with the populations never enabled us understand the real reasons for the poor participation because all the persons met (except for a man who declared that it was not his business since it was "a task devoted to women") said that they participated without any problem and free of charge in the construction works.

Some admitted that other people were paid for the same task but they could not understand why. Finally, some declared that "if the request had been made by local authorities, they would have executed it without any problem and free of charge, but if it was made by the contractor they wanted to be paid".

However, the discussions with AFVP, the vice president of the Development Association, and local authorities, as well as the records in the Project documents give the following reasons for the failure of the participation in this aspect.

- * **The mentality of the Aguégúés populations.** The first explanation generally put forward in the documents or by the persons questioned is the mentality of the Aguégúés inhabitants. Reputed to be a difficult population by all the people who deal with them (most of whom admit that they do not understand them) the populations of the Aguégúés district are said to be less communicative, very independent and therefore not much inclined to do community works. They do not have a high sense of civic responsibility and cannot imagine being mobilized for operations carried out by the government or a project without pay, even if they are aware that they are the beneficiaries of the actions undertaken.
- * **Lack of consultation with the populations during the formulation phase of the project and the definition of the terms and conditions of their participation.** One of the possible causes of the failure and maybe the primary cause, is the lack of consultations with the populations during the formulation phase of the Project. If it is true that it is the populations themselves who, in the last resort, have decided that basic infrastructures (especially those of health) would be one of the top priorities of their development, it is almost obvious that the populations, local associations and the administration personnel were not sufficiently consulted during the formulation phase of the Project and therefore, the constructions planned cannot be considered as the result of an explicit request they made.

Similarly, the terms and conditions of the population participation to the whole Project and in particular to the "Improvement of Basic Infrastructures" component were discussed very late with the populations during the phase of sensitization and animation preceding the Project. Indeed it was obvious, at the beginning, for the authorities of the district or its structures that the contribution required from the populations in terms of time and money was too important but that it was accepted as "the price to pay to get the Project".

Moreover, the phase of sensitization and animation preceding the Project did not necessarily reach the persons involved later in the works since a poor mobilization of the populations and especially of women was noticed. And yet, as mentioned above, they were the first sent on the construction sites.

* **The design of the Project.** Some arrangements of the design of the Project related to the "Improvement of Basic Infrastructures" component also help to explain the difficulties met in its implementation.

The first has to do with the importance of the works to be achieved as well as the time limits (construction or rehabilitation of more than 50 buildings in less than five years) which hindered the mobilisation of the populations because:

- they required a quasi-permanent and important mobilisation of the populations,
- they allowed little room to manoeuvre in planning construction periods,
- they did not allow the contractor and other people concerned to take the time to solve problems as they had time constraints.

The second has to do with the awarding of both the execution and follow up works to AFVP which deprived local authorities and the Management Committee of the right to control the works.

It seems that this arrangement significantly contributed to the "bad" relationships between AFVP and local authorities. This resulted in a lack of collaboration between the two parties and negatively affected the mobilization of populations.

Finally, **the third** has to do with the terms and conditions of the participation as defined by the Project which varied according to the type of building to construct and the works to carry out. The labour, depending on whether it was skilled or not, intended for the construction of schools or administrative buildings, was paid or not paid. This created confusions within the populations and those who were working free of charge felt that they were being exploited or were encouraged by the others to claim payment.

* **The organisation of the distribution of WFP foodstuff.** One last explanation of the poor participation of the populations is related to the problems of organisation of WFP foodstuff distribution. As they have apparently never been supplied in time to the Project and sometimes arrived many months after the end of the construction works, the voluntary workers were never able to take advantage directly of these foodstuff on the building sites, although it was a promise.

1.1.2 Participation in maintenance

The agreement document of the Project raises the question of maintenance of the infrastructures supplied. It suggested the creation of follow up committees and maintenance funds by the populations for schools and health centres, payment of rent for the housing of civil servants, the search for a formula which guarantees the maintenance of administration buildings.

Up to this date, no concrete arrangement has been made to solve this problem of maintenance. The difficulties encountered in the construction of buildings has largely contributed

to reducing the enthusiasm of the populations and local authorities. It seems that this problem of maintenance of infrastructures is avoided for the time being.

The Project Team is working now on this issue with the Aguégués Development Association, but it is faced with some problems of organisation as all the village offices of the Association are not functional.

However, a step was taken concerning the problem of the housing of civil servants. The Aguégués Development Association organised meetings with the persons concerned but received a flat refusal from teachers and health agents who believe they have nothing to pay since the government is supposed to provide housing.

The populations suggested two initiatives during the discussions:

the women of the three groups supervised by the Project have initiated a cleaning task of health infrastructures. Their group spends one day a month on this activity; furthermore, one group has initiated an animation of health services as well as a support to the poor women; they are all aware of the contribution of the health infrastructures to their community and declare that they are ready to participate free of charge to the maintenance works if asked or to pay dues if necessary. However, they confess that they are the only ones committed to the activities described above and that the other members of the community laugh at them,

- for some rehabilitated buildings (town hall of Houedome, youth center) the money earned from the sale of the materials of the old buildings was used to constitute a basic fund.

Nothing was undertaken for the maintenance of the other infrastructures.

During the discussions with the populations, the question of maintenance of schools and health centers was raised. Most of the persons questioned admitted that they neither have thought about this problem nor remember it being raised during the presentation of the Project. However, some are aware of the existence of the problem and the necessity to think about it together.

The following proposals were made:

- creation of reflection committees at the level of villages,
- the Aguégués Development Association should be in charge of organising the maintenance,
- Association of Parents of Pupils should be in charge of the management of schools.

Field observations also revealed that a structure already existed for the health infrastructures, that is a management committee of communal health centers (COGEC). This structure, which manages the supply of drugs and its distribution to the populations² at a low price, has for the time being no relationships with the Project. However, it would have an important role to play in the maintenance of the infrastructures supplied.

² These are drugs under generic name offered free of charge through the channel of a national health program

1.2 Study of the populations involvement in the "village equipment fund" component

1.2.1 Generalities

As specified in the Agreement document of the Project, a fourth component was to set up at the district; a Village Equipment Fund (known by its french acronym, FEV), financed partly by UNCDF and partly by villagers. FEV was intended to finance activities which can help improve socio-economic conditions in the Aguégoués district. It has three main components: fishing and marketing agriculture and breeding (inputs and veterinary products) execution of the valorisation plan of sites and improvement of tourist circuits. It was planned to grant short and medium term credits as well as rural credits and preference would be given to pre-cooperative structures and groups. It was also planned that FEV would rely on financial institutions (Regional Fund of Mutual Agricultural Credit-CRCAM/Local Funds of Mutual Agricultural Credit-CLCAM) existing in the Oueme region.

A United Nations Volunteer (UNV), specialised in rural credit, was supposed to be appointed to the Project to help set up the FEV by:

- initiating and encouraging the populations to use the credit as a means of development,
- studying applications and helping, eventually, applicants formulate their request,
- setting up systems that CRCAM can use later on.

As the post of UNV has been cancelled, it was decided to entrust the "credit" aspect of the project to the care of the Benin Federation of Savings Banks and Mutual Agricultural Credit (FECECAM-BENIN). The practical implementation modalities of credit operations were then decided upon together with the technical services of the Regional Union of Oueme Mutual Agricultural Credit Local Funds and the members of the Board of Directors of CLCAM Porto-Novo.

The modalities agreed upon are those in force at FECECAM:

- membership/opening of an account
- previous savings (20% of the amount of the loan requested) at a rate of 3% a year
- short term credit only (10months maximum) with an interest rate of 16%
- credits suspended above 10% of unpaid debts.

1.2.2. Population involvement in the "credit" component

The organisation of a sensitisation campaign for credit contributed to the creation in April 1995 of a Village Savings and Credit Bank which became in December of the same year CLCAM thanks to a sufficient number of members joining in.

A 15 member Board of Directors - including 5 women - was elected at the level of the district. It comprises representatives of the three municipalities of the district (5 members per municipality).

CLCAM-Aguégoués has presently 1800 members. As the target population is about 11,000 persons, participation could be evaluated to a little more than 16%. Its registered capital is over 4million FCFA and the total deposits exceed 36million FCFA.

The total amount of credits granted in 1995 was 142 million FCFA³. 893 members of CLCAM were granted a credit, among them 289 women. Thus, women represent 32% of the members granted a loan but they received only 17% of the total amount of the credit granted. Considering the experimental nature of the "credit" aspect, the credit limit was 500,000FCFA. The fishing aspect received 72,3% of the total amount of the credits granted, marketing activities 21,5% and agricultural activities 6,2%.

1.2.3 Factors influencing population participation in the credit aspect

The membership of beneficiaries to the "credit" aspect was relatively important from the beginning of the activity because access to credit was and remains a priority for all the persons met.

However, the group discussions revealed mitigated involvement of the populations and serious problems which, if unsolved, will affect the involvement of the populations in the long run.

There are different factors which explain the non involvement of the populations in the "Village Equipment Fund" component:

- Information and disinformation

Information of the population was made difficult because of certain rumours such as:

- credit funds were created with the remnants of the financing of infrastructures and should therefore be shared free of charge among the members of the community,
- women would not have access to credit.

This affected the implementation of the information phase and its impact on the populations. Some men were disappointed and felt that they have been betrayed when they learnt that it was necessary to have a previous savings. Some women, who believed that they were not concerned, and for whom no particular effort of sensitization was made from the beginning, were not mobilised. Moreover, those who were informed regretted that the credit system was set up so late after the beginning of the Project.⁴

Populations lack confidence in the banking system. After many unhappy experiences and unkept promises in credit, the populations do not trust the banking system because they feel that despite much higher interest rates, it is easier to borrow from private people.

Moreover, some people raised the problem of the formalities to fulfill to become a member of the fund: administrative formalities are considered long and tiresome. The populations met have regretted that "everything is done on paper without human contacts". Furthermore, this problem is aggravated by the location of the fund in the municipality of Houédome⁵, that creates a real

³ For its first working year, UNCDF has contributed 108 million FCFA to VEF.

⁴ The first credits granted were released in June 1995, that is more than two years after the Project really started

⁵ Houédome is the capital of the district

problem of access for the populations of the municipalities of Avagbodji and Zoungame. This constraint explains in fact why some people have given up their applications.

Inadequacy of the conditions of granting loans in and the Aguégues area.

- **Previous savings.** The necessity to have a savings account was considered by the populations as one of the major reasons for their refusal to become members. It has played a dominating role in the poor mobilisation of women (the women who finally became members of the fund admit that access was possible only because of the Project Team's intervention in lowering the savings level requested which was a real problem for those who satisfied the condition (some had to mortgage pieces of land, others had borrow from private people).

- **Amount of the credit granted and the terms of the credits.** The credits granted as well as the terms are considered respectively too low and too short by the majority of the persons questioned.

The example of "acadja" operators was given. The 500,000FCFA credits granted, are hardly enough to cover half of the investments necessary for the full exploitation of the stock (estimated to be 1,2 million FCFA). Therefore, the loan becomes risky because with 500,000FCFA the operators can only set up the "acadja" but are not sure to find the money necessary for the exploitation at the end of the stocking. So some people did not want to take the risk.

The women in the groups met who received credit make similar reproaches. They received only 20,000FCFA to be repaid within six months. According to them, this amount just represents their daily working capital and as such is not very useful. They consider the amount all the more low as the money invested to obtain the credit (application expenses, savings, transportation) is more than 8,000FCFA.

Moreover, many people noted that short term credits do not allow an investment in equipment. According to the populations, a two-year duration credit would be more adequate for the activities in their area.

- **Interest rates.** They are considered too high for the credit and too low for the savings.

Apart from the reasons which explain the non membership of the populations or their reluctance to some principles of the setting up of the Village Equipment Fund, it is important to mention some problems which occurred during this setting up and which, in the long run, might affect negatively the success of the operation.

Difficulties faced by certain groups to obtain credit. Women of the interest groups, as mentioned above, were not favoured at the beginning in credit allocation; access was made possible only with the intervention of the Project Team. Generally speaking, and contrary to what was initially planned in the Project Document, groups were not particularly favoured in credit allocation. Moreover, the applications introduced by some groups were rejected because "the fund did not accept groups". Therefore, only the women groups mentioned above were able to obtain a credit. The other group members were obliged to introduce individual applications. This situation led some members to give up and many were not able to obtain the credit (out of the 80 "ahlos" fish pond operators of the 4 groups at Avagbodji, only 4 obtained credit).

The reasons given are:

- lack of confidence in the groups due to an unfortunate credit experience the area had with another programme which planned to grant credit only to groups. The result was that, the groups formed with this intention fell apart after the credits have been granted,
- lack of knowledge of existing groups in the district and their value. Furthermore, it seems that the populations of Avagbodji had corruption problems with the members of the Board of Directors of their municipality before the latter can defend their applications at the Credit Committee.

Bad organisation of credit allocation. In 1995, credits were granted over a limited period of time (the four sessions took place in June, July, September and December respectively) and this did not enable the populations to make an optimal use of credits. Thus, some credits were not received early enough or not at the best period. That is for instance the case of farmers and "ahlos" operators (they received the credit in December while they needed it for October/November) and also of women fish traders who need cash most at the fishing peak period that is from mid-April to mid-July. The problem worries the populations all the more as it might occur again with the 10% outstanding payments clause⁶

Field surveys did not help to know exactly the causes of the problem. The long time it takes the Board of Directors to study applications was evoked by the president of the board himself. It is also possible that due to lack of information and experience some applications were not introduced in time.

Finally, we should observe that the discussions about the theme of credit provoked the following comments and requests from the populations met:

- priority of credit allocation in the first year seems to have been given to fish culturing activities and especially to the exploitation of "acadja". Many regret that no credit was planned for the acquisition of fishing equipment,
- some groups raised the problem of technical follow-up of the activities undertaken with the credit.

⁶ The 1996 credits will be allocated only after collection, for each repayment session, of over 90% of 1995 credits. This might limit the freedom of the Board of Directors in its choice of dates for the allocation of new credits.

1.3. Study of population involvement in the "reconstitution of an appropriate ecosystem" component

1.3.1 Generalities

In the Project Document the participation of the populations to this component consisted of:

- information and animation sessions on the protection of natural resources,
- the establishment of mangrove tree nurseries (Houedome and Zoungame) and forest species adapted to fresh water swamps (Avagbodji),
- animation-dissemination sessions of planting and reforestation.

The Beninese NGO, CERAE (Research and Action Center for Environment Protection) was selected to provide technical assistance for the execution of the work.

The work started in 1994 with a quick diagnostic-evaluation survey on the perceptions of natural resources degradation problems in the Aguégué district. The information gathered facilitated the production of an audio-visual materials on sensitization (slides video cassettes, etc...) which were used during sensitization and animation sessions. Tree nurseries were after set up with the help of the populations.

1.3.2. Evaluation of population participation

The documents consulted and the discussions in the field gave an impression that the operation was in general successful. The populations showed up at the sensitization and animation sessions organised by the animators of CERAE and were very motivated by the audio-visual methods used during the sessions.

Generally the populations were more and more aware of the necessity for a rational management of natural resources.

The populations organised themselves to set up a sufficient number of tree nurseries, although they did not receive the WFP foodstuff as promised.

Many private persons came to get seedlings from nurserymen. Thus, 10 000 seedlings of forest species were replanted on the banks. As should however be noted that:

- replantations of trees concern mainly fresh water species and more specifically the *Acacia auriculiformis species*, very much appreciated by fish culturists because of its use in the production of "acadjas" and its rapid growth. The "Niaouli", *Melaleuca sp.*, which grows more slowly and decays more rapidly is less appreciated. Mangrove replantations did not have a great success (the collaboration work with the Lagoon Fisheries Project which was supposed to provide the seedlings, did not function well).
- the component seems to be losing ground; CERAE, for internal reasons to its organisation, abandoned the work, which has been delegated to the Forestry Officer of the Aguégué Rural Development Sector (CARDER) - Aguégué; in fact at the time of the study,

nurserymen were complaining about not receiving the seeds and bags supposed to be supplied by the Project.

The reasons given to explain the poor participation of the populations, as well as the comments that the discussions have provoked (lack of consultation with the populations, information and sensitisation problems, lack of support to groups, lack of technical support in the case of the "Village Equipment Fund" component) are very often linked to the activities of the fourth component of the Project which aimed, as mentioned above, at the "Strengthening of population involvement mechanisms" through different activities.

The following chapter will be devoted to the study of the population participation in this fourth and last component of the Project.

Chapter 2: Population involvement in the activities of the "strengthening of the mechanisms of population involvement" component.

2.1. Generalities

The Project document gives a brief description of the activities to be undertaken within the framework of the "Strengthening of the mechanisms of population involvement" component. It specifies that the component "will be closely related to technical assistance and will facilitate the training of the members of the various groups (village committees, fishermen group, farmers, women fishmongers, etc...), and involve them in the execution of the Project".

To do this, it was planned to set up a technical assistance cell comprising:

- an expert in rural development as Chief Technical Adviser,
- a UN Volunteer, an economist experienced in credit to help set up the VEF,
- a fish culture specialist for all the activities related to the water bodies,
- an agro-ecologist for the execution and follow up of the reforestation programme,
- advice to farmers in vegetable gardening, small-scale animal husbandry, and environment protection,
- an administrator accountant for the management of the VEF.

The positions of UNV and agro-ecologist were cancelled from the very beginning of the Project because of a budget restriction policy by UNDP. The absence of the UNV was compensated, as mentioned earlier, by the delegation to FECECAM of the setting up of VEF. The absence of an agro-ecologist was compensated by choosing the NGO, CERAÉ, to do reforestation activities, and by the delegation to the fisheries specialist who should in actual fact be an agro-fish culturist in the agriculture activities.

Presently, as the Chief Technical Adviser's contract ended and the NGO, CERAÉ stopped work within the Project (see 1.2.3.), the assistance cell is reduced to only the administrator accountant and the agro-fish culturist. The latter is in charge of most the Project activities.

The activities carried out by the technical assistance cell since February 1993 -effective date of the beginning of the Project- are:

- creation and periodical meeting of a Project Management Committee comprising representatives of the populations,
- sensitization and animation of the populations,
- training and supervision of the populations.

2.2 Evaluation of population participation in the activities of the "strengthening of the mechanisms of population involvement" component.

2.2.1 Population participation in the Management Committee of the Project.

Since the beginning of the Project, a Management Committee was set up. It is the decision-making body of the Project and has the following functions:

- defining the priority lines of intervention,
- updating the conditions and modes of VEF intervention,
- exchanging experiences and suggesting more efficient strategies,
- coordinating yearly activity programs,
- ensuring the follow up of the Project activities.

The Committee includes, beside the Project staff, local authorities and government officials (District Administrator, Regional Directors of the different ministries involved in the Project, representative of the Rural Development Sector (CARDER), educational representative, etc...) other representatives of the populations in the Aguégúes district, namely:

- the representative of the Fisheries Committee,
- the representative of Women Association,
- the representative of Farmers,
- the representative of the Aguégúes Development Association,
- the representative of the Association of Pupils' Parents,
- the mayors of the three municipalities.

The Aguégúes populations are thus well represented in the Committee and participate in all its functions. This integration in the decision-making of the Project is very much appreciated, because it enables, according to the participating members of the populations questioned, the participants to give their opinion on the activities of the Project and to make suggestions.

2.2.2. Population participation in the sensitization and animation activities

2.2.2.1. Information and sensitization phase preceding the beginning of works

Three months before the effective beginning of field work, a campaign of information and sensitization was organised. On this occasion, a Limited Monitoring Committee for the implementation of the sensitization phase was set up.

It includes:

- the Chief Technical Adviser of the Project,
- the National Director of the Project,
- the mayors of the three municipalities,

- the Officer-in-Charge of the Aguégués Rural Development Sector (CARDER),
- a representative of AFVP, and
- a representative of Aguégués Development Association.

Meetings were organized in the municipalities and in all the 21 villages to make the populations express their problems, their priority needs, propose solutions and discuss the Project content and approach with them. Despite all the organization efforts, many people did not attend the campaign which was characterized by a very poor participation of women.

The campaign was relatively short (three months). It seems that the limited monitoring committee set up during the first phase did not later have any role in the population animation and thus animation and supervision activities undertaken were very limited and less coordinated.

2.2.2.2 Population animation after the beginning of the Project

Sensitization, animation, and training activities were later carried out with the populations on specific themes, such as management of natural resources -reafforestation and management of water bodies, animation of women and fish culturists groups.

Contrary to the general sensitization phase preceding the beginning, specific animation works on a given theme or group were well attended by the populations.

Sensitization and animation on the management of natural resources. It was mentioned in the preceding chapter that the population participation in the animation work carried out by the NGO, CERAE in the field of reafforestation was very good and that it already had impacts on the involvement of the populations in the reafforestation of the district.

Similarly, the work done by the National Expert, fisheries specialist, in the field of water bodies management, was much appreciated by the fishing community because it solved specific problems identified by fishermen themselves (water body occupation conflicts by the different fishing systems; decline in fishery resources).

The animation work eased the reinforcement of the existing structures (fisheries committees, fishermen associations) and to work with them toward the resolution of their problems. Thus, the community together with the Project team marked out the conflicting areas on the lagoon of Porto-Novo and established some rules to favour restocking (the use of some fishing gears is prohibited).

Support work to groups. The project has set up some groups (groups of women fish traders, groups of fish culturists). The work achieved with them revealed the strong interest of the population, especially women.

The case of women. The poor participation of women at the beginning of the different activities of the Project (sensitization phase, credit aspect) led the National Expert of the Project and the fisheries technician of the Rural Development Sector (CARDER) of Aguégués to work for the promotion of women fish traders groups. Women became aware of the role they could and should play in their own development and hence, there were many requests for assistance on the creation of women groups. Women are now able to define their problems and needs and propose

solutions to the Project team. They are very dynamic and impatient to witness the realization of their proposals.

The reasons given during the field work to justify this success are:

- women are "happy to be attended to". Up to now, they thought that the Project (and projects in general) was not intended for them, but the fact that they have been directly contacted and specifically requested to participate in the Project is at the root of this sudden change,
- participation in a training conducted by Mono women's group animator was an opportunity to express themselves and understand that they were able to take charge of themselves, compare their situation to that of Mono women (at the end of the training, the women of the Aguégues groups expressed the desire to go to Mono and discuss with them, as a result a one day trip was organized in May 1996 to Grand Popo).
- finally, the work done by the Project team to make access to credit easier, was the landmark of their joining the Project and their confidence in the Project team.

The case of fish culturists groups. The experiences on the fish culturing ponds in plains (whedos) and on banks (ahlos) carried out by the National Expert, a fisheries specialist, were very successful with the fish culturists of the area who decided on their own to start the activity without waiting for any promotion. In fact they got together and were not supervised from the beginning of the activity, which resulted in poor results in the first season and the groups regretted the lack of technical support from the start. It followed that the National Expert and the fisheries technician of the Rural Development Sector (CARDER) undertook a supervision/animation/-training work to support these groups in 1996. The groups met seem very motivated to participate in this type of activity.

2.2.3. Population participation in training activities

2.2.3.1 Literacy campaign

Three literacy programmes were initiated by the Project since its beginning. The first, launched in 1994, was intended for Avagbodji farmers groups (first groups existing and identified before the Project); the second in 1995, for fish culturists groups of the three municipalities; the third started this year with the women groups of the three municipalities.

The "Centre Departemental d'Alphabetisation" of Ouémé (CDA-O) was in charge of the literacy programmes carried out preferably with groups.

This activity, although faced with some organizational problems⁷ aroused a strong mobilization of the populations. The programmes initiated until then had failed, especially as far

Due to a problem of disinformation, the working books used could not be collected as planned from farmers groups at the end of the first programme. This delayed the beginning of the second programme and discouraged some fishermen. This year, and to solve the problem, women were asked to purchase their books themselves (in exchange for WFP foodstuff to the participants). The majority of groups welcomed the idea

as women are concerned. Thanks to the Project, the literacy programme initiated this year has already reached more than 220 women members of various groups.

This new mobilization for literacy can be explained by:

- the hope that literacy will give access to some activities of the Project such as the credit,
- an awareness by the population of the importance of literacy, a result of the conscience awakening work undertaken by both the Development Association and religious authorities,
- the social promotion acquired through literacy (the new literates are asked to read during religious ceremonies),
- the perspective of a concrete use of literacy for other activities of the Project (credit, management of income generating activities, technical booklets translated in "goun").

2.2.3.2 Other trainings

In order to strengthen the knowledge of the populations, various trainings were organized:

- for the members of the Management Committee, a training in the Participatory Rapid Appraisal method,
- for health agents, a training/refresher course through four seminars (Management of community fund and the filling up of statistical tools; Clinical and therapeutic responsibility of cases of diarrhoea and malaria attacks; training/refresher courses for COGEC members; administrative management and intersectorial collaboration).
- for 32 fish culturists, a training related to the creation and management of a fish culture unit;
- for 70 women fish traders, a training on the conservation and processing of fishery products.

Participation in the training sessions was satisfactory.

The fish culturists and women fish traders met were very interested in the technical nature (which means immediately applicable) of the trainings they have received. They expressed the wish that additional technical and in-depth trainings be organized.

2.2.4. Limitations of the "Strengthening of the mechanisms of populations involvement" component and causes

Apart from the failure in the participation in the sensitization phase, the activities undertaken within the framework of the component were generally characterized by a satisfactory mobilization of the populations. However, despite these positive results, the study revealed a number of problems in the implementation of the component and which contributed in limiting the full participation of the populations in the execution of the Project.

2.2.4.1. Limitations in the functioning of the Management Committee and causes

The field surveys as well as the Project documents emphasize the problems of operation that the Management Committee faced. Here are some of the comments made:

- * ***Poor availability of some members of the Management Committee.*** The Management Committee is hindered by the lack of availability of the National Director and regional officials although they have an important role to play in the technical supervision of the Project which requires a sound knowledge of both documents and populations,
- * ***Lack of means*** The Management Committee does not have the means to ensure its role of monitoring of activities in the field because no working budget has been allocated from the Beninese government counterpart funds. This situation inevitably affects the participation of the committee members in the execution of the Project,
- * ***A certain rigidity in the design of the Project*** The Management Committee is faced with a certain rigidity related to the design of the Project which makes it difficult to give a new orientation to the activities of the Project and to consider the populations' suggestions and initiatives while the Project is being executed (for example the problem of the construction of a building for the Social Welfare Centre requested by the representatives of the population since the beginning of the Project is still not solved).

2.2.4.2 Limitations in the activities of monitoring, sensitization, animation, population training and causes

Despite all the efforts of the Project team, the work undertaken with the populations is very limited in scope. The study revealed the following problems:

- * ***Lack of general supervision of the populations related to a lack of good organization*** The animation and supervision work carried out by the Project has not reached all the population. After the first phase of sensitization, and although the difficulties met during this phase could have encouraged the Project team to continue the work of sensitization which is a long and demanding work, they decided not to invest further in this venture preferring to hand it over to local structures, namely the organisations of the local government (local authorities) and the Aguégués Development Association.

Despite a three-day training, these structures were not able to correctly play the role assigned to them because of:

- a lack of adequate skills to work with the populations (the local authorities admit that they do not understand the mentality of the populations and wished that a sociological study be conducted to help them in this matter)
- problems of operation and means (the Development Association is aware that its present structure is not functional: subscription fees are unpaid, certain offices are not active, etc..)
- * ***a technical support considered insufficient by the populations, due to a lack of both technical staff and collaboration with the technical agents in the field***

The Project actually supervises a relatively small number of groups, and only those which derive their earnings from fishery products. The farmers groups of Avagbodji which existed before the Project, received little attention and help from the Project.

Similarly, among the target groups selected by the Project, more effort is needed. For instance the periodical animation work and the trainings intended for women are limited for the time being to three groups only (one group per municipality). As no animator has been recruited or trained by the Project to ensure the monitoring and animation of women groups or activities, the work is done by the National Expert and the fisheries technician of the Rural Development Sector (CARDER). The animation and monitoring work is scheduled for only one year, a period considered too short by the women.

Generally, although the monitoring of some groups may have gained ground, the populations consider the technical support provided by the Project as insufficient and the time spent to react to their initiatives (implementation of the solutions arrived at after the diagnostic) much too long (the women wonder for instance if their requests will be taken into account before the end of the Project).

These problems are related to:

- a shortage of technical staff appointed in the Project and working directly and periodically with the populations. The National Expert, agronomist specialized in fish culturing, is the only technical staff appointed in the Project, and he cannot alone satisfy all the demands,
- lack of collaboration between the services concerned in the field, and especially with the agents of the Rural Development Sector (CARDER).
- * ***Lack of coordination between the activities of the Project.*** Evaluation of the literacy activity carried out by the beneficiaries of the first two programmes (the farmers and fish culturists groups think that "it is not profitable for them yet") shows that there is a lack of coordination between the different activities of the Project. This is further confirmed by the person in charge of CDA-O, responsible for the literacy programme, and one of the agents of the Rural Development Sector (CARDER).

They regret that literacy is not sufficiently considered as a horizontal component of the Project.

This is due to the fact that the Project has never launched, even two years after the first literacy programme, the second phase of the programme, that is the post literacy phase to show the value of this activity to the beneficiaries and thus ensure its durability. And yet this phase could be a good approach for population self-learning, self-promotion and the dissemination of information related to other activities, since it provides for the creation of reading clubs supervised by local animators.

The aims of these clubs are to:

- consolidate literacy,
- learn calculation and management in depth (it is planned to translate in "goun" an FAO document on the management of income generating activities),
- encourage reflection sessions through technical documents and booklets.

Chapter 3: Conclusions and recommendations

3.1. Conclusions on population involvement in the project and the strengthening of their capacities for self promotion

The study of population involvement in the Project revealed variable mobilisation of populations depending on activities. The activities undertaken at the beginning of the Project (sensitization of populations, construction of basic infrastructures) were characterized by a mobilization of populations which was generally insufficient.

Later, however, the mobilisation of populations for credit and reforestation activities was better.

An awareness of problems was noted during animation activities on the management of natural resources (reforestation and water bodies management). This led to the populations' taking control their problems.

Similarly, the training of the women undertaken in 1995 was much appreciated. The women became aware of their role in their own development and are very much motivated to act with the help of the Project.

However, these successes are limited to certain activities and groups only and it was noted that, on the whole, the populations were not fully aware of their role in the Project and in their development in general (the Project is still too often perceived as "a cake from God", "a saviour", "a project like the others which will solve all the problems"). The beneficiaries did not take charge of the problems of infrastructure maintenance).

Therefore, the efforts made by the Project Team to strengthen the mechanisms of population involvement were very limited and very little coordinated. Many improvements can be initiated for a better participation.

3.2. Recommendations

3.2.1. General recommendations for the strengthening of population involvement in the Project and the increasing of their self-promotion capacities

Considering the comments in chapter 2 about the very poor population supervision, and in order to ensure the sustainability of the actions undertaken by the Project, it is necessary that, for the last three years, the Project Team works more seriously toward population animation; its initiation and organisation.

To do this, it should:

recreate a Reflection and Organisation Committee on population animation and sensitization activities

Like the Limited Monitoring Committee, this committee could comprise of:

- * representatives of the Project (National Director, National Expert),
- * administration authorities (village mayors)
- * development agents (Rural Development Representative of CARDER-Aguégués, Representative of the Development Association) and also
- * the person in charge of the literacy programme of CDA-O,
- * representative of the Social Welfare Centre and representatives of the populations participating in of the management Committee (see 2.2.1.).

Its role will be to think about themes to be developed during animation sessions and to see to the organization of the sessions.

- strengthen its collaboration with the local structures which can execute the general work of animation in the field (local government, Development Association) and help them function better and play their role through technical assistance in animation provided for example by an NGO (in that case, the technical assistant should be a member of the Reflection and Organisation Committee).

- increase the support to groups and especially to women groups:

- * technical support to their activities,
- * support in access to credit
 - help prepare files
 - negotiations with the Board of Directors of CLCAM-Aguégués for a representation,
 - technical monitoring of the activities undertaken with the credit,
- * support to training and consolidation of groups.

The insufficient knowledge of the existing groups and their reliability requires a preliminary study of groups which will help to⁸:

- list all the existing groups in the district, ...
- assess the level of organisation reached by each of them and emphasize their weaknesses,
- appreciate their needs in training, credit, technical support, etc...

The primary objective of this study will be to serve as a basis for the elaboration of real support programmes to the groups. It could later be used as reference for the monitoring of the evolution of groups during the training work and for the groups access to credit.

As far as the increase in the training work is concerned, it is inevitable that the Project recruits animators or signs a contract of collaboration with qualified agents of the Rural Development Sector (CARDER) or the Social Welfare Centre (specialists in farmers organisation, technical agents, men/women animators).

⁸ Research has already been made on this theme by CARDER agents. It is then a question of updating existing data

The animation work could be done notably through visits, using audio-visual methods or reading clubs.

encourage the creation of animation structures like reading clubs planned in the literacy programme. Also, encourage animators of these structures by giving them a bonus.

3.2.2 Specific recommendations for the "Improvement of Basic Infrastructures", "Village Equipment Fund" and "The Reconstitution of an Appropriate Ecosystem" Components

3.2.2.1 Specific recommendations for the "Improvement of Basic Infrastructures" Component

Construction of infrastructures. The question of population participation in the construction of basic infrastructures was solved by local authorities who decided to compensate the shortage of manpower on construction sites by hiring workers who would be paid out of the miscellaneous village funds. Even if this solution is not entirely satisfactory from the "participatory" aspect and that it uses for this activity funds which were not intended for it, it seems that it is the only way to operate in order to build or rehabilitate the remaining infrastructures.

However, the problems identified in section 1.1.1.3. could serve as experience for the design of similar projects.

Maintenance of infrastructures. The following recommendations on the initiation of population reflection on the question of infrastructure maintenance is based on suggestions gathered in the field.

The organisation of the reflection will be submitted to the Development Association.

For health and school infrastructures, there will be in each village a reflection committee comprising of users representatives (for example, parents association for schools), village authorities, and whenever they exist, members of management structures (COGEC for example), to discuss the problem of maintenance of buildings and think about solutions.

The reflection should be about not only the infrastructures built in the village but also the municipal infrastructures or those intended for the whole district. The population as a whole must give their opinion on this problem.

For administrative infrastructures and the accommodations of state agents, users themselves will lead the reflections with the government agents concerned. The population could also be consulted so that they could inform on what might be their contribution in this field.

3.2.2.2 Specific recommendations for the "Village Equipment Fund" Component.

Following the comments raised by the study on population participation in credit (see 1.2.3.), the persons in charge of CLCAM responsible for the monitoring of the Aguégué fund, should think about a way to improve these arrangements:

- ***better adapt the credit modalities to the Aguégué population conditions*** by increasing the amount of the loans granted and the repayment term to two years. It seems that "acadja" production requires a loan of 800.000 FCFA and it is desirable to grant the first half, that is 400,000 FCFA, at the establishment of the enclosure and the second half when the production is about to start,
- ***make access to credit easy for groups.*** The persons in charge of CLCAM as well as the members of the Board of Directors should be aware of the study and training carried out in the interest of groups, which should contribute to their recognition,
- ***simplify the process and reduce the time spent to get loan*** by opening branches or creating liaison cells in the municipalities of Avagbodji and Zoungame. These cells could rely on the existing village information cells,
- ***organise the distribution of loans according to the periods of each activity*** and speed up the deliberation pace of the credit committee, either by increasing the number of staff at the cash delivery office or by increasing the number of credit sessions matching them with the different activities.
- ***create a line of credit for the purchase of fishing equipment.*** It seems that this disposition has already been taken into account because the 1996 budget provides, on an experimental basis, for the granting of 10 loans of 700,000 FCF each to purchase "acadja" production nets. They are two year loans.

3.2.2.3 Specific recommendations for "The Reconstitution of an Appropriate Ecosystem" component.

The recommendations concerning the "The Reconstitution of an Appropriate Ecosystem" component are largely related to the strengthening of animation and technical monitoring activities presented in paragraph 3.2.1.

The collaboration with the forestry agent of the Rural Development Sector (CARDER) who took over the NGO CERAE to carry out the component, should take the form of a contract so that he can continue the animation and nursery supplies. Concerning reforestation in particular, he should encourage the training of the structures likely to guarantee the sustainability of reforestation activities. The role of nurserymen as well as the involvement of teachers in sensitization works and planting/reforestation sessions could be reinforced.

Finally, arrangements must be made for the distribution of WFP foodstuff promised at the beginning of the Project to become effective.

ANNEX 1.

LIST OF PEOPLE MET

Mr. AGONSANOU L. Raymond,	Administrator of the Aguégoués District, Chairman, Project Management Committee.
Mr. GNANCADJA Gérard,	Project National Expert.
Mr. KOUKPODE Bruno,	Fisheries Technician of the Rural Development Sector (CARDER) - Aguégoués
Mr. GNANHO Michel,	Farmers Organization Spécialist of the Rural Development Sector (CARDER) - Aguégoués
Mrs FASSINOUE Elisabeth,	SENAPA (Nutrition), Rural Development Sector (CARDER) - Aguégoués
Mr. ZOUMENOUE René and Mr. DOUTETIEN Nicolas	Administrative Officers of the District
Mr. ZOSSOU André,	Officer-in-charge CDA - O
Mr. AKLE Jonas Mr. TOVIDE Pierre	Vice President Aguégoués Development Association Secretary of Aguégoués Development Association
Mr. KINSOU Jacques,	Chairman, Fisheries Committee. Member, Project Management Committee, Fisherman/Acadja Fish Culturist.
Mr. KINSOU Philippe,	Fisherman/Acadja Fish Culturist, Nursery Caretaker
Mr. HOUSSOU Thomas,	Chairman, Aguégoués CLCAM Board of Directors, Fisherman/Acadja Fish Culturist.
-	Women Fish Mongers Organization of Houinta (Avagbodji Area)
-	Women Fish Mongers Organization of Dagodo (Houédomé Area)
-	Women Fish Mongers Organization of Djigbékomé (Zoungamé Area)
-	The three Fish Pond Culturists Organizations (whédos) of Zoungamé Area
-	Fish Pond Culturists Organization (ahlos) of Houinta Village (Avagbodji Area)
-	Farmers Organization of Houinta Village (Avagbodji Area)
-	The participants to the meeting organised by the officers of the Regional Credit Project RAF/94/CO ₁ /, MM. DOMMEZ Henri and ADECHOUBOU A. Makarimi, Porto-Novo CLCAM officers, members of Aguégoués CLCAM Board of Directors.

ANNEX 2.

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