



National Alliance Against Hunger in Benin

1) What went wrong in your country which prevented the most vulnerable and the poor to improve their access to safe and healthy food?

The errors and acts of negligence that led to food insecurity and malnutrition in the poorest and most vulnerable members of society have a long history in Benin. For a number of decades, Benin has specialised in the production of cotton. Rural communities are very keen on the ready cash that this activity produces at the end of each cotton season, and as a result they have turned away from cultivating food crops. This is the chief source of our food insecurity. The authorities in Benin were extremely slow to identify the problem. When they did, the government launched an appeal for farmers to link cotton with food crop production. This appeal for linkage failed to take into account the need to ensure better organisation and more professionalism for the main actors in these food crop sectors. The actors in the cotton sector are highly organised, while those in the food crop sector do not have the necessary government backing in the form of technical support, materials and financing.

In spite of the innovative idea of linkage, the project was not successful. The fall in cotton prices on the global market caused rural communities to become disenchanted and turn instead to new food crop sectors, though there was insufficient research for their markets. That is what happened with cassava, and unfortunately, this experience subsequently discouraged a great many farmers. The same is true of other sectors, where all the farmers' efforts came to nothing. A number of support projects attempted to introduce jobless graduates into agriculture, but these experiments were in vain. The result: "no convincing change that might spare Benin from the food crisis". The introduction of jobless graduates into agriculture should never have been attempted. Agriculture is a profession that requires a sustainable institutional framework to serve both its actors and potential candidates seeking to enter the profession.



After the present government came to power in 2006, it was quick to take stock of the situation and launch the Green Revolution. But the main difficulty remains the lack of institutional arrangements so that this policy can swiftly be translated into action. Putting these ideas into practice has taken time due to the slow bureaucratic process. This is what led to the grave and unprecedented food crisis of 2007-2008.

2) Did you see any improvement in addressing hunger and malnutrition problems since the High level Conference on World Food Security: the Challenges of Climate Change and Bioenergy held last June at FAO headquarters, Rome?

Some signs of improvement have certainly started to make themselves felt in Benin. It should be remembered that Benin was represented at the highest level by its Chief of State at the High-level Conference on World Food Security held in Rome in June 2008. On this occasion, the President of the Republic made a speech before his peers in which he outlined not only the emergency plans that his government had set in place to respond to the food crisis, but also his wish to ensure food security in Benin by launching the Green Revolution.

A funding framework has been set in place for the sector. At the same time, problems linked to land access are being addressed through the «Millennium Challenge Account» project. In the meantime, the government is negotiating to install young people keen to make a career in agriculture in Benin's state farms and other spaces. Agricultural machinery has been purchased and distributed. However, two major problems remain. The first is how to identify genuine candidates wanting to become agricultural entrepreneurs as opposed to young people seeking to take advantage of the resources made available by the government. Then there is the problem of water management. Agriculture in Benin should not constantly be subject to climate-related hazards. There is therefore a need to set up a less costly plan to manage water to the advantage of the rural community.

Contact: Mr.Tékpon Gblotchaou, e-mail: ipadradel@yahoo.fr