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## Assessing the impact of governance programmes: GIZ support to citizen participation in local governance in Benin

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# Assessing the Impact of Governance Programmes

## GLZ Support to Citizen Participation in Local Governance in Benin

*Lisa Groß*

# Assessing the impact of governance programmes

GIZ support to citizen participation in local governance in Benin

Lisa Groß

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## Foreword and acknowledgments

This Discussion Paper was written as part of the DIE research project “Wirkungsinitiative Afrika”, currently being implemented in cooperation and with the financial support of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). The project aims at identifying preconditions and opportunities to apply rigorous methods of impact assessment more systematically in governance interventions. It also explores the benefits of the applied cooperation format of accompanying research in which researchers and practitioners develop and implement the evaluation design in close cooperation. Currently the project is working together with two programmes: “Programme d’appui à la Décentralisation et au Développement Communal” in Benin and “Good Financial Governance” in Mozambique. Previously, similar projects have been implemented in Peru and Togo together with the Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW Development Bank) and GIZ.

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Bonn, May 2018

Lisa Groß

## Contents

Foreword and acknowledgements

Abbreviations

Translation of official positions into English

<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2 The Benin context</b>	<b>6</b>
2.1 The economic situation	8
2.2 The political system	8
2.3 Civil society	10
2.4 Citizen participation at local level	11
2.5 GIZ support to decentralisation and citizen participation in Benin	14
<b>3 Analytical framework, research design and methodological approach</b>	<b>17</b>
3.1 Analytical framework	17
3.2 Research design	18
3.3 Reconstructing the theory of change	21
3.4 Methods of data collection and analysis	23
<b>4 Results of the impact assessment</b>	<b>24</b>
4.1 Citizen participation at municipal level	25
4.2 The case of public accountability hearings	30
4.3 The case of monitoring municipal planning	40
4.4 Further results on the effectiveness of citizen participation mechanisms	49
<b>5 Conclusions</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Appendix</b>	<b>57</b>
Appendix 1: Capacity building workshops to promote RDCs	57
Appendix 2: List of interview partners	58

## **Tables**

Table 1: Comparison of approaches in Phase III and IV	16
Table 2: Overview of case selection	21
Table 3: Outcomes in the implementation of public accountability hearings by municipality	36
Table 4: Number of success stories from public accountability hearings	39
Table 5: Success stories from participatory municipal planning	48
Table 6: Percentage of respondents from municipal authorities remembering a success story as a result of a given citizen participation mechanism	49
Table 7: Percentage of respondents from civil society remembering a success story as result of a given citizen participation mechanism	50

## **Figures**

Figure 1: The analytical framework	18
Figure 2: Map of selected municipalities	20
Figure 3: Step 1 from input to outcome	22
Figure 4: Step 2 from outcome to impact	23
Figure 5: Use of information channels by municipal authorities and civil society	25
Figure 6: Awareness of citizen participation amongst municipal authorities and civil society	27
Figure 7: Participation in citizen participation formats in the past year in partner (TC) and non-partner municipalities (NTC)	28
Figure 8: Estimated influence of citizen participation formats “very high” in partner (TC) and non-partner municipalities (NTC)	29
Figure 9: Dimensions of individual and organisational efficacy amongst civil society in partner municipalities (TC) and non-partner municipalities (NTC)	30

## Abbreviations

AA	action area
ALCRER	NGO
CCOM	Chargé de Communication/Communications Head
CPC	Cellule de Participation Citoyenne/Citizen Participation Unit
CSO	civil society organisation
FADEC	Fonds d'Appui au Développement des Communes/Fund for the Support of Municipal Development
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (Germany)
MDGLAAT	Ministère de la Décentralisation, de la Gouvernance Locale, de l'Administration et de l'Aménagement du Territoire/Ministry of Decentralization, Local Governance, Administration and Territorial Administration
MAEP	Cellule Mécanisme Africain d'Evaluation par les Paires/Unit of the African Peer Review Mechanism
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NTC	non-treatment community
PAI	Plan Annuelle d'Investissement/Annual Investment Plan
PONADEC	Politique Nationale de Décentralisation et de Déconcentration/National Policy of Decentralisation and Deconcentration
PDC	Plan de Développement Communal/Community Development Plan
PDDC	Programme d'Appui à la Décentralisation et au Développement Communal/ Programme to Support Decentralisation and Communal Development
RDC	Reddition de Comptes/public accountability hearing
TC	treatment community
USD	United States dollar

## Translation of official positions into English

Position in French	English translation
Maire	Mayor
Premier adjoint du maire (PAM)	First deputy mayor
Deuxième adjoint du maire (DAM)	Second deputy mayor
Secrétaire général (SG)	Secretary general
Chef service technique (CST)	Head of technical services
Chef d'arrondissement (CA)	District head
Chef de village (CV)	Village head
Conseil communal (CC)	Municipal council
Commune	Municipality
Chefs services déconcentrés	Heads of deconcentrated services



## Executive summary

This discussion paper analyses whether and how external support to citizen participation in decentralisation contributes to the quality of public services and local governance at municipal level. The question is analysed with the example of Benin, where the German bilateral development cooperation GIZ promotes citizen participation at the local level within the context of a long-standing decentralisation programme. The GIZ decentralisation programme has been supporting citizen participation since 2012, promoting different citizen participation formats at municipal level through low-level financial assistance, capacity building, accompaniment and advice to municipal authorities and civil society in 25 partner municipalities. A particular focus of the study is on the impact of two citizen participation formats supported by GIZ: the public accountability hearings (RDC/reddition de comptes) and monitoring municipal planning (Suivi-PAI/Plan Annuel d'Investissement, Suivi-PDC/Plan Annuel de Développement). The study measures the effect of GIZ activities on the quality of these citizen participation formats and traces the impact these citizen participation formats have on the quality of public service provision and local governance in the municipalities. The findings are based on a structured comparison of four partner municipalities and two non-partner municipalities and draws on data from 71 semi-structured interviews and 460 questionnaires from municipal authorities and local civil society.

Based on the case of Benin, the following recommendations can be drawn for a successful promotion of citizen participation in decentralisation contexts:

First, promoting citizen participation with **a multi-stakeholder approach can increase the effectiveness of citizen participation** to improve local governance and public services. The multi-stakeholder approach implies the cooperation with all actors concerned – in decentralisation, this means political actors, administrative staff, civil society, and private actors. The example of Benin showed that support to citizen participation was more likely to yield improvements in local governance or public services where international actors had cooperated with municipal authorities *and* civil society, as opposed to municipalities, where international actors had only cooperated with one side. It thus seems beneficial to offer support to all actors involved in citizen participation to ensure a common understanding, and adequate capacity building.

Second, the use of **a multi-level approach** in the promotion of citizen participation can increase the **sustainability of citizen participation** in decentralisation. In Benin, the multi-level approach implies the cooperation with the central, regional and municipal levels to advance the decentralisation process. If the international activities at all levels are interlinked, it can help to make citizen participation more sustainable. In the case of Benin, international actors lobbied at national level to include particular citizen participation mechanisms in the legal framework, and accompanied municipalities in the implementation of these mechanisms. The inclusion in the national-level framework helped to spread implementation of that citizen participation format, also to non-partner municipalities. The support at municipal level increased the quality and endurance of implementation. Citizen participation in Benin thus became more sustainable.

Third, international actors need to make **a long-term commitment** to support citizen participation in order to increase the **sustainability of citizen participation** practices. The

example of Benin shows that those citizen participation mechanisms that were supported for more than five years were more likely to be sustained by partner municipalities, while practices with one-time support were less likely to be repeated. International actors thus need to offer long-term support of several years in order to ensure that citizen participation practices are integrated into the routines of municipal administration, civil society, and citizens.

Fourth, the **intensity** of international support makes a difference with regard to the **quality of citizen participation** mechanisms. In the case of Benin, it was observed that the more intensive the support to a citizen participation format, the higher the quality of implementation regarding the application of rules and regulations. If international actors want to ensure that citizen participation takes place on the basis of high quality standards, they need to have clear guidelines on how to implement a citizen participation tool, provide targeted capacity building, and develop a strategy to accompany all actors in the implementation and follow-up of the process.

Fifth, **“less is more”**: To support citizen participation successfully, international actors should concentrate on a few mechanisms and refrain from experimenting with a high number of approaches at the same time in order to ensure clear communication to the partner municipalities. This concerns the programming within the GIZ programme as well as within the broader donor community of Benin. Experimenting with a high number of approaches is detrimental to the goal of building sustainable institutions, as municipalities and civil society alike will perceive too many citizen participation activities as “just another project” instead of integrating them into their institutional routines.

## 1 Introduction

International actors have provided extensive support to decentralisation in developing countries in recent years. According to international development actors, decentralisation programmes can make an important contribution to development and democracy: First, decentralisation is seen as reducing poverty and promoting development at local level because the de-concentration of public services tends to result in a better provision of public services in line with local needs (Caldeira, Rota-Graziosi, & Foucault, 2015, p. 2). Second, decentralisation is also seen to strengthen democracy as the devolution of political power to the local level provides a counterbalance to central state power and offers citizens opportunities to engage more directly in municipal affairs. By transferring competencies and administrative units to the local level, decentralisation thus offers the chance to adapt public services to local needs, provide citizens with room for participation in local politics, and balance the concentration of political power at national level.

Citizen participation forms an important component of most decentralisation programmes. International actors expect that the promotion of citizen participation will strengthen local democracy and improve the quality of public service delivery and local governance at municipal level. There is, however, no conclusive research if – and under what conditions – the promotion of citizen participation contributes to an improvement of public services and local governance.

Citizen participation aims to provide for policy processes “through which citizens can articulate their demands or satisfy their own needs” (Cornwall & Schattan Coelho, 2007, p. 1). It is thus about deepening democracy by developing and sustaining more substantive citizen participation in the political process (Gaventa, 2007, p. 2). Opportunities for citizen participation can be either **offered by the state** in a top-down logic, or **demanding by citizens** in a bottom-up process. Also, citizen participation mechanisms can either provide opportunities for participation for **individual citizens (“lay” citizens)**, or they can provide opportunities for participation for **organised groups within society** (civil society) as an intermediate between state and society (Smith, 2009, p. 2). The key idea is that there are institutionalised ways of exchange, feedback, or control between the political elite and the society beyond elections.

This study analyses **whether and how international support to citizen participation in decentralisation contributes to the quality of public services and local governance** at municipal level. In a first step, the study measures the effect of GIZ activities on the quality of citizen participation formats. In a second step, it traces its impact on the quality of public service provision and local governance in the municipalities. In doing so, the impact assessment analyses **the potentials and limits** of international support to citizen participation, and identifies **conditions that make international support to citizen participation more successful** in decentralisation contexts. The study concludes with an assessment of whether and how external support could contribute to the quality of public services and local governance and offers recommendations on how to support citizen participation in decentralisation programmes. After all, knowing what works, and why, is a crucial question for successful programming and implementation.

The findings used here stem from an impact assessment of GIZ support to citizen participation within the context of a GIZ decentralisation programme in Benin. It is based

on a structured case comparison of six municipalities and uses data from 71 semi-structured interviews and 460 questionnaires from municipal authorities and local civil society. The GIZ has been accompanying Benin's decentralisation process since 2003 and uses a multi-level approach that involves the government at the central level, departmental level, and 25 partner municipalities. It has been engaging in the promotion of citizen participation since 2012 with a multi-stakeholder approach to support citizen participation from the top down (municipalities) and from the bottom up (civil society) and works via the instalment of different citizen participation mechanisms such as public budget hearings, participatory municipal planning processes, interactive radio shows or complaint boxes. The two citizen participation formats analysed in this study are **public accountability hearings** (RDC/reddition de comptes) and **monitoring municipal planning** (Suivi-PAI/Plan Annuelle d'Investissement, Suivi-PDC/Plan Annuelle de Développement).

Citizen participation in Benin's decentralisation process takes place in a difficult context. While municipalities have been receiving greater competencies in decision-making and public service delivery since 2001, the liberal idea that citizens do have to actively engage in politics to advocate for their interests or the public good is not deeply engrained in the consciousness of many Benin citizens. Although Benin has an active and heterogeneous civil society at local level of community-based associations, development associations, professional organisations, trade unions, church groups, or non-governmental organisations (NGOs), its members seldom engage through formal channels with the municipal administration or take up a more political role as advocates for transparency, accountability and participation in local governance. Most organisations are built around specific purposes – economic self-help, education, health, economic development, and professional interests – and have developed their own strategies to engage with their community and, less often, their administrations (Le Meur, Bierschenk, & Floquet, 1998, p. 3). In addition, years of colonial rule, followed by military rule and a Marxist-Leninist regime have promoted an idea of citizenship, where citizens are merely “administered” by the state administration rather than participating *in* public affairs. The widespread poverty in Benin creates further dependency relationships between citizens and politicians that can make it difficult for individuals or organisations to voice their interests, needs and concerns freely. It remains a challenge to engage these organisations and citizens more directly in municipal politics and to take on a more political role to ensure transparency, accountability and responsiveness of municipalities.

### *Findings on assessing the impact of GIZ support to citizen participation*

In order to assess the impact of GIZ support to citizen participation in Benin, the study differentiates two levels where change might theoretically be observed: First, GIZ support could make a difference at the outcome level with regard to the quality of the implementation of supported citizen participation formats. Second, GIZ support could make a more indirect difference at the impact level with regard to the question of whether individual citizen participation formats actually result in concrete improvements of public services or local governance at municipal level. The study concludes that GIZ support has been able to achieve changes at both levels – on a small scale. The conclusions are based on a comparison between municipalities that received GIZ support (partner municipalities or treatment communities/TC) and municipalities without GIZ support (non-partner municipalities or non-treatment communities/NTC).

*Direct effects of GIZ support at the outcome level*

GIZ support can increase the **professionalism and inclusiveness** of citizen participation practices. Partner municipalities were more likely to follow guidelines and more likely to include civil society at different stages of the citizen participation mechanism. The accompaniment and capacity building provided by the GIZ to municipal politicians, municipal administration and civil society played an important role here. The effects were higher in those partner municipalities that received more intensive support in terms of number of activities organised and number of years support was provided.

External support from GIZ can also increase the **results-orientation** of citizen participation practices and thus contribute to greater **effectiveness of citizen participation mechanisms** to influence municipal policymaking. The accompaniment and capacity building encouraged partner municipalities to organise a follow-up on citizen participation events, and civil society to follow up on the commitments made by the municipal authorities. The combination led to greater results-orientation among municipal authorities and civil society.

*Indirect effects of GIZ support at the impact level*

Because external support from GIZ can contribute to **greater effectiveness of citizen participation**, it can generate indirect effects at the impact level, contributing to the **improvement of the quality of local governance and public services** in municipalities. Citizen participation mechanisms in partner municipalities were more likely to result in improvements in the quality of public services and governance, particularly in the two partner municipalities with a high intensity of international activities. It is likely that the emphasis of GIZ on the follow-up of citizen requests led to greater responsiveness of municipalities to citizen requests raised in the context of citizen participation events.

External support can also have indirect effects on the sense of **self-efficacy of civil society actors** with regard to their influence on municipal politics. Civil society actors in partner municipalities showed a significantly higher sense of self-efficacy with regard to their degree of influence on municipal politics (at individual level, the level of their own organisation, as well as civil society in general). Given that the effectiveness of citizen participation in partner municipalities is also higher, the higher sense of self-efficacy might be rooted in real experiences of being able to make a difference. International support might thus provide the ground for a more sustainable participation of civil society.

GIZ support, however, did not lead to a higher rate of participation in citizen participation formats. In the case of Benin, international support thus made a **difference with regard to the quality of citizen participation but not with regard to the quantity of citizen participation**. If we compare the number of participants from partner and non-partner municipalities in different citizen participation formats, the numbers are similar. The survey among civil society even showed that the absolute number of participants in citizen participation mechanisms is slightly higher in non-partner municipalities than in partner municipalities.

There is also room for improvement with regard to balancing the multi-actor-approach: during the time of study, GIZ support focused largely on municipal administrations and the neglected long-term capacity building of the civil society. Civil society has been often weak

in coordinating and preparing common positions for the various different events. Some municipal administrations complain about the low response rate of civil society to invitations as well as the low quality of civil society contributions to municipal planning sessions. Some civil society organisations, in turn, mention the need for further capacity building with regard to their own organisational capacities, financial management, coordination and knowledge of municipal procedures.

### *Research design*

To assess the impact of the GIZ support to citizen participation in Benin, the study compares GIZ partner municipalities (treatment communities/TC) and non-partner municipalities (non-treatment communities/NTC). Using the method of structured case comparison, the study compares two GIZ partner municipalities with high degrees of GIZ intervention, two GIZ partner municipalities with medium degrees of GIZ intervention and two non-partner municipalities to assess the impact of GIZ support in the field of citizen participation. The focus is on specific GIZ-sponsored citizen participation formats such as **public accountability hearings** (reddition de comptes/RDC), and two forms of **monitoring municipal planning** – the Suivi-PAI (participation in the annual investment plans) and Suivi-PDC (participation in the 5-year community development plans). The GIZ-supported citizen participation mechanisms differ regarding the duration of GIZ support: While public accountability hearings received continuous support every year, the monitoring of municipal planning received only punctual support. The impact assessment is divided into two steps: In the first step, the influence of GIZ activities (input level) on the quality of the citizen participation formats (outcome level) was analysed. In the second step, the influence of the citizen participation format (outcome level) on the quality of local governance/public services (impact level) was recorded. Data was collected through 71 semi-structured interviews with civil society members as well as with representatives of the municipal administration and through a survey administered to 460 members of the civil society and the municipal administration.

The report is structured as follows. Section 2 outlines the role of citizen participation in the decentralisation framework and provides context information on the economic situation, the political system and civil society in Benin. It also explains the activities of GIZ and other donors in civil society support. Section 3 presents the analytical framework, research design and methodological approach. Section 4 presents empirical findings. The section first discusses general findings from the survey on citizen participation in Benin's municipalities, and then the impact of GIZ in supporting the two citizen participation mechanisms. Section 5 provides a summary of results as well as recommendation on the methodological and programmatic aspects.

## **2 The Benin context**

Assessing the impact of citizen participation support in Benin requires knowledge about the role of citizen participation within Benin's framework of decentralisation. The Decentralisation Law 97-029 was passed in 1999. It created 77 local governments with autonomy in essential services and introduced central government structures at the department level, the prefectures and deconcentrated services. Municipalities received four

types of competencies: exclusive local competencies, shared competencies, delegated competencies, and specific competencies.<sup>1</sup> Municipalities are now able to take own decisions in a clearly defined range of topics: i) communal planning and construction of infrastructure, ii) hygiene and sanitation, iii) primary education, iv) health, v) economic services and investments in building, equipment, and maintenance of markets, and vi) environment. Furthermore the law allows communities to elaborate a municipal development plan (Plan de Développement Communal/PDC) and to draw on several sources of revenue: local own-revenue (local taxes and fees), earmarked and non-earmarked transfers from central level (via the Fonds d'Appui au Développement des Communes/Fund for the Support of Municipal Development (FADEC)), external transfers, and loans.

The Decentralisation Law stipulates a general right to citizen participation. However, the concrete rights that allow for citizen participation or access to information are rather basic. The legal requirements ensure a minimum of citizen participation and transparency of the municipality: i) the meetings of the municipal council have to be public (Article 18), but citizens do not have the right to speak, ii) the decisions and the minutes of the municipal council meeting have to be posted on the public notice board during the 8 days after the meeting (Article 22), iii) citizens have the right to access and make copies of all minutes of the municipal council and all municipal acts passed (Article 23). Thus, while the decentralisation framework contains concrete regulations to ensure transparency, substantial citizen participation is not foreseen.

The legal basis for introducing more substantial citizen participation mechanisms is provided by Article 2 of the decentralisation framework:

La commune constitue le cadre institutionnel pour l'exercice de la démocratie à la base. Elle est l'expression de la décentralisation et le lieu privilégié de la participation des citoyens à la gestion des affaires publiques locales [The municipality represents the institutional centre for the exercise of local democracy. It is the expression of the decentralisation and the privileged space for the participation of citizens in the management of public affairs at local level. *Here, as throughout the text, Author's translation*]. (Article 2, Law 97-029, 15 January 1999)

Yet the legal framework does not stipulate any concrete citizen participation mechanism that would allow citizens to provide input into the municipal decision-making processes. The lack of formal citizen participation mechanisms implies that donors operate in a legal vacuum when promoting citizen participation and leads to a diversity of strategies and approaches. It also means that the offer of citizen participation formats is subject to negotiation and depends on good will of the government or municipality.

The following subsections provide relevant context information on the economic, political and social context in which the programme operates and discusses its implications for assessing the impact of GIZ support to citizen participation in Benin's decentralisation process.

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1 Specific competencies apply only to the cities with special status, namely Cotonou, Porto-Novo and Parakou.

## 2.1 The economic situation

Benin is a lower income country with an estimated per capita income of USD 840 in 2015 (World Bank, 2017) and ranks 160 out of 186 countries in the UN Human Development Index 2014. This means that Benin's Human Development Index at 0.485 is below the average in Sub-Saharan Africa (UNDP [United Nations Development Programme], 2014). 53.3 per cent of the population live beyond the income poverty line of USD 1.90 per day. Net official development assistance is at 6.3 per cent of gross national income (GNI), while remittances make up to 3.6 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) (UNDP, 2016). The dire economic context leaves state institutions with few financial resources to invest in development. This is compounded by a low tax collection rate. Municipalities are continually underfunded and struggle to increase their budget with own source revenues through fees and local taxes. Access to clean drinking water is estimated at 85 per cent in the cities and 72 per cent in rural areas (The Global Economy, 2017). At only 38.4 per cent, the literacy rate is low (UNDP, 2014). The Beninese economy is almost entirely "informal". Cross-border trade and micro enterprises are at the heart of the informal economy and account for approximately 50 per cent of total GDP. There are almost no manufacturing industries in the country. Agriculture is the most important economic sector and accounts for approximately 40 per cent of GDP. It provides for 70 per cent of domestic exports and 45 per cent of all employment (UNDP, 2016).

The poor economic situation influences the prospects for promoting citizen participation in Benin. The tight budget of Benin's municipalities means that they have only limited resources available to react to citizens demands to improve public services or local governance. Also, the individual poverty of citizens means that they often find themselves in strong dependency relationships with patrons or political authorities and may not feel free to voice criticism towards authorities.

## 2.2 The political system

Benin is still a young democracy. The country was ruled by kingdoms during much of its history until the French started colonisation in the 1870s. French colonial rule ended on 1 August 1960, when the country declared independence as the Republic of Dahomey. The years after independence were highly unstable with several government changes and military coups. The military coup of 1972 brought to power Major Kérékou who remained there until 1991. Kérékou and his People's Revolutionary Party of Benin aligned the military regime with the socialist bloc. Marxism-Leninism was introduced as the official ideology, one-party rule established and the name of the country changed to the People's Republic of Benin.

In the country's move to democracy, Benin's civil society played an important part. Democratisation began in 1989 when criticism of the government and corruption became louder and strikes, demonstrations and unrest spread in major cities (Heilbrunn, 1993, p. 285). At the heart of the protests were student organisations and autonomous trade unions, which had formed during the mobilisation (particularly amongst teachers and public service employees), and, partially, the Catholic Church or organisations of Catholic intellectuals (Banégas, 1997, pp. 40ff). When protests became increasingly unbearable over 1989, President Kérékou decided to abandon Marxism-Leninism as the official ideology and to



drop the one-party monopoly. A few months later, the Conférence Nationale des Forces Vives de la Nation decided the country's transition to a multi-party system and introduced a democratic constitution. The Beninese National Conference became the model for similar conferences in other African states. The first democratic elections took place in 1991. Since then, Benin has seen several peaceful and democratic changes of power and counts as positive example of democratic transition in Africa.

Despite the successful transition to democracy, many challenges remain for Benin's democratic system. As a semi-presidential system, national politics are highly biased in favour of the executive, and in particular the president. Political relations are characterised by neopatrimonialism, and widespread corruption, ethnicity and regionalism are constitutive factors of the political dynamic (Bierschenk, 2009, p. 2). "Political transhumance" – the frequent changing of party affiliation by individual leaders for strategic reasons – is a common feature in Benin politics. To individual leaders, it is more important to garner own support bases for a political career and, ultimately, a government post, rather than showing party loyalty.<sup>2</sup> Larger parties also actively seek to win the loyalty of individual politicians with a broad voter base, independently of previous political affiliation. In addition, the party system is fragmented with more than 100 officially registered parties (Bierschenk, 2009, p. 17). Parties are often built around individual politicians (or coalitions of "big men" in the case of the larger parties) who have the necessary finances to create a party. Internal conflicts are typically resolved by splitting up, if the opponent has the financial means to set up a party on his own. There are few large parties of national importance; the rest are small and only relevant in a particular region or locality. All parties have a clear regional base (Bako-Arifari, 1998). Party-building depends strongly on financial capacities and less on political values or ideas. The party system is thus highly unstable and names of parties change often.

The logic of "political transhumance" is important to understand the often tense relationship between politicians and civil society in Benin. Politicians often describe civil society as "politicised" and the relationship is shaped by mistrust. The reproach of *politisisation* (French; English: politicisation) accuses civil society leaders of using their position and visibility in their community to build up their own support base for future elections. Some political leaders thus see civil society leaders as direct competition and are therefore reluctant to give potential direct competitors access to municipal politics and thereby to further strengthen their power position. While this can be interpreted as an excuse for politicians to exclude civil society actors from political life, it is not unfounded. There have been cases in the past, particularly the 1990s, where local "development associations" were important bases for bringing local politicians into national careers (Bierschenk, 2009, p. 20). Even today, this is the case. The mayor of one of the municipalities studied, for example, was a professional *grogneur* (French; English: groaner) in the local radio and definitely profited from his visibility in the mayoral elections. Also, several civil society interview partners were contemplating the idea of going into politics in the future. Whether this is a reason to restrict the opportunities of citizen participation is, of course, a different discussion.

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2 This logic of political transhumance was described in several interviews I held with municipal politicians, for example Interviews 18, 37 and 42.

Promoting citizen participation in a political context of mistrust between politics and civil society thus requires a high degree of political sensitivity on the part of donors. Decisions by international actors to cooperate with one or another civil society group might have fairly large repercussions in the political fabric of the municipality and have an effect on the project's success. Hence international actors need to be aware of potential political agendas among civil society actors along with dependency relations between politicians and civil society actors.

### 2.3 Civil society

Promoting active citizen participation in a context like Benin is not an easy task. In the face of poverty and inequality, citizens often find themselves entangled in multiple dependency relations that might make them reluctant to openly voice criticism and risk good relations with the authorities. Years of colonial rule and a military-Marxist regime have further entrenched an idea of citizenship where citizens are subordinated to state institutions. The liberal idea that citizens do have to actively engage in politics to advocate for their interests or the public good is not as deeply engrained in the minds of most people in Benin.

Nevertheless, Benin has a long tradition of associational life, shouldered by citizens who do take responsibility for their communities. Some organisations have a long history going back to colonial times (such as religious communities), some have existed since the revolutionary period and benefited from post-1990 democratisation (for instance, community organisations, trade unions, professional associations), and others only appeared just before or after the democratic renewal in the early 1990s (for example, NGOs or cultural associations). Many activists from the post-1990 civil society sector gained initial organisational experience in the mass revolutionary organisations (Le Meur, Bierschenk, & Floquet, 1998). According to the latest census, roughly 12,000 civil society organisations exist in Benin, either formally or informally (EU [European Union], 2015, p. 4). Most of these civil society organisations are registered in the South of Benin, particularly in Cotonou, although not all of them are active (Gautier, 2005, p. 33). According to the “Charte des organisations de la société civile” (2009), Benin's civil society differentiates seven components of the civil society sector: i) associations (women's associations, youth associations, parents' associations, religious associations, or development associations), ii) NGOs, iii) religious groups, iv) media, v) professional organisations (artisan organisation, and so on), vi) traditional authorities (elders and aristocracy) and vii) trade unions. These seven components are often used by umbrella organisations to structure their membership.

In this paper, civil society is defined as organised, not-for-profit groups with a wide array of activities that include community groups, non-governmental organisations, labour unions, indigenous groups, charitable organisations, faith-based organisations, professional associations, and foundations (World Bank, 2013). Donor support often concentrates on a narrow conception of civil society and chooses advocacy NGOs in the area of good governance, human rights, or environmental protection as project partners. The direct partners of GIZ in Benin fall into this category of not-for-profit advocacy NGOs. These partner organisations, however, collaborate with a wider group of civil society organisations at municipal level, which is why this study included different types of civil society actors – NGOs, trade unions, professional associations, religious associations, religious leaders,

elders and royalty – to understand how civil society voices their concerns vis-à-vis municipal authorities.

## 2.4 Citizen participation at local level

Benin's civil society at local level is very diverse. The primary purpose of most associations is to satisfy the concrete, immediate interests of their members or their community. There is a multitude of associations for social groups (for example, women, youth, parents, handicapped) or social purposes (for instance, development, education, religion). The goals pursued can vary widely from professional goals to social or political ones. Civil society organisations tend to serve their members as an exchange platform for everyday problems – healthcare, children's education, and nutrition – or aim to contribute to the development of their community. Youth associations, for example, regularly organise cleaning days around the village or help to build roads or toilet facilities. The Christian church provides employment in social projects in the agricultural sector. Professional organisations bring together individuals with the same professional background and have an important function for the regulation of standards, prices, and the settling of disputes between their members. Many of these associations have complex structures stretching from the village level up to the departmental or even national level, for example, the parent's association.

Beninese citizens are not passive or disinterested in collective action, as observers of political participation often conclude.<sup>3</sup> Most civil society organisations are built around a particular purpose considered relevant by their members – such as community development, collective cashpoints or professional organisations – and are able to mobilise their members to come to meetings, sometimes even once a week. At the same time, only a few civil society associations have regular contact with municipal authorities; most organisations meet amongst their members to find own strategies to address their needs. It is the professional organisations, particularly the artisan association, that have most regular contacts to the municipality because of concrete interests to negotiate with the administration such as market-stand fees, business registration fees, or the verification of certificates.

Civil society organisations in the realm of advocacy NGOs which aim to play a watchdog role in municipal politics seem to have fewer mobilisation capacities. Most citizens do not easily grasp the ultimate benefit of such a “watchdog engagement”. Possibly, they are also afraid of being seen as a “watchdog” by local politicians. Many civil society members emphasise that they do not want to be seen checking of the municipal authorities but rather helping the municipality in the development of their community. This framing of civil society as “helping the municipality” is key to reducing municipal authorities' mistrust towards civil society and has helped to gain access to the municipal administration. In my interviews, I heard often sentences similar to those below:

Les élus aussi ne maitrisaient pas le rôle de la société civile par rapport à leur rôle. Ils pensaient que la société civile venait jouer le rôle de gendarme ou d'espion. [...] avec le temps, ils ont compris que on n'était pas arrivé pour les espionner, mais on était arrivé pour leur prêter mains fortes pour les aider à réussir leurs missions [The elected representatives also do not understand the role of civil society in relation to their own

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3 See, for example, the assessment of civil society by the EU (EU, 2015).

role. They thought the civil society would play the role of police or spy. With time, they understood that we did not come to spy, but to lend our strong hands to help them to succeed in their mission]. (Interview 57, civil society, Toffo)

The civil society organisations at local level whose primary goal is political advocacy for democracy, good governance or citizen participation are the three umbrella organisations: **Cadre de Concertation de la Société Civile; Cellule Mécanisme Africain d’Evaluation par les Paires (MAEP); Cellule de Participation Citoyenne (CPC)**. These three umbrella structures advocate for participation, accountability and transparency in municipal politics. They are also the main interlocutor for donors as well as municipal authorities when the latter wish to include civil society and citizens. All three have been created with support from the national level. Cadres, MAEP and CPC exist in almost every municipality in Benin, although their degree of functionality differs widely, depending to a great extent on financial assistance from donors: The cadres were the first civil society structure established at local level in 2007 (with funding having ceased, they are also the most dysfunctional by now); MAEP followed in 2009 (with funding having ceased in 2016, they are in danger of becoming more dysfunctional); and CPC followed between 2010 and 2012 (with continued funding in the South so that they may continue to be functional in the South).

### *Cadre de Concertation de la Société Civile*

The Cadre de Concertation de la Société Civile is an official structure that regroups all seven components of the civil society sector. Each of the seven components elects a representative and the seven representatives then elect a “bureau” with a president at its top. The cadres originate from the “Charte de la Société Civile” in 2007 and are the official structure of civil society representation recognised by the Benin government. Offices of the cadres were established at municipal, departmental and national level with the purpose of i) coordinating civil society activities, ii) acting as representatives of the civil society towards government structures, iii) monitoring activities of the government in the area of decentralisation. All officially registered civil society organisations automatically belong to the cadres at either municipal, departmental or national level. Despite their formal recognition, the cadres are the most dysfunctional structures in the municipalities under study. Most of the cadres do not meet regularly and do not follow an agenda of their own. There is a lack of purpose for these cadres, and, the cadres have no funding source from national level to maintain an office space or pay travel costs to meetings. Due to the inactivity of the cadres, and consequently their invisibility in municipal politics, not all of the municipalities contact the Cadre de Concertation as the interlocutor of the civil society.

### *Mécanisme Africain d’Evaluation par les Paires (MAEP)*

The second umbrella structure at municipal level are the Cellules Mécanisme Africain d’Evaluation par les Paires (MAEP). The MAEP is a self-monitoring tool by the states of the African Union to assess their governance and socio-economic development. The MAEP secretariats are usually established at national level to monitor national-level developments, but the Benin government has gone an innovative step further by establishing municipal-level structures to follow up on municipal performance. The Cellules MAEP are composed of representatives from the seven components of civil society and have the mandate to monitor municipal performance in the political and economic sector. The results are compiled in an annual report, which is then presented to the municipality for validation and

sent to the national level. Cellules MAEP also conduct field visits to check on infrastructure projects and are eventually contacted by the population or local councillors in the case of problems. As a structure established by government decree, Cellules MAEP are not completely independent from the government, but this does not mean that they are complacent to municipal politicians. The MAEP representatives seemed to be well respected by the municipal administration and had found a way to raise critical issues without causing diplomatic fallouts. In contrast to the cadres, the Cellules MAEP seem to be generally functional and meet several times per month. Thanks to donor funding from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and partially from GIZ and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (Switzerland) (SDC), the national secretariat was able to provide its municipal branches with monthly allowances and travel reimbursements until 2016, while the municipality provided office space.

### *Cellules de Participation Citoyenne (CPC)*

The Cellules de Participation Citoyenne is the youngest umbrella structure active in Benin's municipalities. The CPC were established around 2013 by the national NGO ALCRER/Social Watch to actively monitor and participate in the development of the municipality within the context of the "Particip" project, financed by the Royal Embassy of the Netherlands and by the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA). The CPCs are composed of 15 members who have been elected by a general assembly of interested civil society organisations (CSOs). The CPCs conduct four types of citizen participation activities: i) participation in municipal council meetings and analysis of protocols, ii) the request and accompaniment of reddition de comptes, iii) carrying out field visits to infrastructure projects, and iv) the organisation of interactive radio broadcasts for citizens. The 49 CPCs in the South receive financial support in terms of meeting allowances and travel reimbursements, as well as financial assistance to implement their activities. The remaining CPCs in the North do not receive such financial support. Again, financial means are decisive for the functionality of the structure: while the CPCs in Southern Benin (Lokossa, Toffo, Dassa) meet regularly for their activities, the bureaux of the CPCs in the northern part (Kérou, Copargo, Natitingou) have difficulty in keeping up the working morale of their members despite having motivated and well-meaning individuals in the bureaux.

### *Interrelationships*

The three civil society networks Cadre, MAEP and CPC are strongly intertwined and there is a great extent of personal overlap amongst the three organisations. There are usually several individuals who are active in at least two of the structures. In Kérou, for example, the presidents of the Cadre de Concertation and MAEP are both members in the CPC, while CPC and MAEP are members in the Cadre de Concertation. In Toffo, the president of the Cadre de Concertation and the president of MAEP act as representatives in the CPC, while the president of the CPC acts as the representative in the Cadre de Concertation. In Copargo, the secretary of the cadre de concertation is also the rapporteur for the CPCP. The strong personal interlinkages mean that there is a rather small circle of individuals when it comes to representing civil society in front of the municipal administration.

Si moi je prends mon cas, je peux dire que c'est les mêmes personnes. Au niveau des OSC, je suis secrétaire et au niveau de la CPC, je suis rapporteur. On peut dire que c'est les mêmes personnes [If I take my case, I can say that these are the same people. At the level of NGOs, I am the secretary, and at the level of the CPC, I am the note-taker. One can say that they are the same persons]. (Interview 23, civil society, Copargo)

The relations between the three umbrella structures seem to be of a cooperative nature. There is thus a lot of mutual support and exchange between the active individuals of civil society. The three umbrella structures regularly collaborate and join in each other's projects. MAEP is often most active. In Kérou, for example, it initiates field visits and invites the members of the Cadre de Concertation and the CPC to join.

## 2.5 GIZ support to decentralisation and citizen participation in Benin

In order to measure the impact of the GIZ intervention, the input of the GIZ in this field needs to be disentangled carefully and analysed in isolation of the input of other donors. The following section therefore explains the setup of the GIZ decentralisation programme and then provides an overview of other donors who support citizen participation in the context of decentralisation in Benin. The GIZ decentralisation programme has supported the Benin government since 2004 and is currently in its fifth phase. The programme supports the Politique Nationale de Décentralisation et de Déconcentration (PONADEC) with the goal of i) improving coordination between national ministries, departments and municipalities, and ii) increasing capacities in municipalities “for the provision of high quality basic public services for citizens while taking into account the principals of good governance.”

The GIZ decentralisation programme pursues a **multi-level approach** with partners at national, departmental, and municipal level. At national level, the Programme d'appui à la Décentralisation et au Développement Communal/Programme to support Decentralisation and Communal Development (PDDC) cooperates with the ministry of decentralisation MDGLAAT, the secretariat of the PONADEC, and several national line ministries. At departmental level, the programme collaborates with the prefectures. At municipal level, it cooperates with 25 partner municipalities and maintains contact with the municipal administration as well as civil society. This multi-level approach allows for a comprehensive support to the decentralisation process. It enables the GIZ to advise on national legislation and then accompany implementation by national-level ministries, prefectures, and municipal administrations, but it also allows for experimentation with different approaches at local level, bringing the most convincing one into national legislation.

The programme design follows a **multi-stakeholder approach**. Cooperation partners include national ministries that might be reluctant to devolve power and competences as well as departmental prefectures, which are caught between representing the central government and providing (impartial) support to municipalities. The GIZ also cooperates with the secretariat of the PONADEC and municipal administrations which support decentralisation. In addition, the GIZ seeks cooperation with civil society at national and local level to empower citizens to participate in political decisions at municipal level. The multi-stakeholder approach puts the GIZ in a position of facilitator between the partners' diverging interests, and prevents power imbalances from one-sided donors support.

The programme focuses on **four components** (action areas/AA) to support Benin in its decentralisation efforts.<sup>4</sup> The first component “Political and administrative decentralisation and deconcentration” (AA 1) advises the MDGLAAT and the prefectures. The second component “Fiscal decentralisation” (AA 2) advises the Ministry of Finances, the deconcentrated services, the secretariat of CONAFIL (Commission Nationale des Finances Locales/National Commission of Local Finances) and local tax administrations on financial management and tax revenue generation. The third component “Citizen-oriented municipal administration” (AA 3) provides capacity building to the municipal administration regarding the citizen-oriented provision of basic public services. The fourth component “Local democracy and citizen participation” (AA 4) offers capacity building and advice to municipal administrations, municipal councils and civil society on how to include citizens and civil society into political decision-making at municipal level.

### *GIZ support to local democracy and citizen participation*

The GIZ programme began to support citizen participation in Benin in 2012<sup>5</sup> with the goal that the “institutional capacities of the supported municipalities in the area of citizen participation [... should be] improved.” As the decentralisation law does not provide for specific institutions or procedures for substantive citizen participation, many donors in the field decided to draw up their own citizen participation mechanisms to promote citizen participation. The GIZ also experimented with a variety of **citizen participation approaches** such as interactive radio broadcasts, dialogue youth fora, public Reddition de Comptes (public hearings on municipalities activities), Suivi-PAI (citizens participate in the evaluation of the annual investment plan), the Evaluation Sociale PDC II (citizens participate in the evaluation of the 5-year municipal development plan), the Suivi Elaboration PDC III (citizens participate in the elaboration of the PDC III), citizens’ participation in public procurement commissions, the Cadre Intégrateur (a coordination mechanism of civil society participation in municipal commissions), the Espaces de Dialogue (dialogue fora between citizens and municipality on a specific problem), or complaint mechanisms (a municipal commission to process citizen complaints). The programme worked closely with the municipal communications officials to promote municipal transparency, mainly through micro-projects for communications tools such as municipal notice boards, websites or social media. A further area of engagement was the support of well-established civil society organisations working on governance and citizen participation such as Maison de la Société Civile in Cotonou and RODEL<sup>6</sup> in Natitingou.

Table 1 shows that GIZ pursued a **high number of approaches with low continuity** between Phase III and IV. The citizen participation formats selected for this study – reddition de comptes, Suivi-PAI/PAD – are among the approaches that were supported continuously between Phase III and IV.

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4 The description of programme components refers to the components in Phase IV of the programme (2014-2017).

5 The PDDC added the support to citizen participation to integrate the Deutscher Entwicklungsdienst (DED) development assistants after the merger of the German development institutions GTZ, DED and InWent (GIZ, 2012).

6 Réseau des Organisations de la société civile pour la bonne gouvernance et le Développement Local à Natitingou (Network of civil society organisations for good governance and local development in Natitingou).

The programme uses a wide range of **instruments** to promote citizen participation. The most important instruments are: accompaniment, advice, capacity building, occasional material assistance, and financial assistance as well as the commissioning of studies from external experts. Financial assistance to partners is provided either through local subsidies, partner conventions, direct financial support for concrete activities (micro-projects), or as project-related contracts for civil society organisations.

The following approaches were supported during Phase III and IV between 2011 and 2017.

<b>Table 1: Comparison of approaches in Phase III and IV</b>	
Phase III (2011-2014)	Phase IV (2014-2017)
<b>Participation mechanisms</b>	
Interactive radio broadcasts	Interactive radio broadcasts (stopped)
Auto-evaluation of local governance	Auto-evaluation of local governance (AELG)
Public accountability hearings	Public accountability hearings
Jeunesse et Démocratie	Youth fora
Suivi-PAI/PAD	Suivi-PAI/PAD
Suivi Evaluation (SILP)	
Audit Social	
	Evaluation Sociale PDC II
	Suivi Elaboration PDC III
	Citizen participation in public procurement
	Cadre Intégrateur
Espaces de Dialogue	Espaces de Dialogue
	Complaint mechanism
<b>Transparency mechanisms</b>	
	Communication plan
	Notice boards
	Municipal website and social media
	Municipal info magazines
	Awareness raising on citizen rights
<b>Civil society partners</b>	
Centre Afrika Obota	
Maison de la Société Civile	Maison de la Société Civile
RODEL	RODEL
Social Watch	
Source: Impact matrix PDDC IV, 2015, brochure “Promouvoir la participation citoyenne”, Plan d’Opération, 2016	

### *Other donors in the field of citizen participation*

Assessing the impact of an intervention requires taking into account the actions of other donors. In the case of Benin, the other relevant donors in the field of local-level citizen participation are the Netherlands and Switzerland.



The Royal Embassy of Netherlands finances the programme **Particip**<sup>7</sup> to promote citizen participation at municipal level through the setting up of Cellules de Participation Citoyenne (CPC) to engage in and monitor municipal politics. The programme is implemented by the national NGO-network ALCRER/Social Watch and covers 49 of the 77 municipalities in Benin. ALCRER/Social Watch has ensured financial assistance from OSIWA for the remaining municipalities not covered by Particip. While CPCs sponsored by Particip receive financial support for their activities, the OSIWA CPCs have no financial backing.

The Swiss SDC supports Benin's decentralisation with the **Programme d'Appui au Secteur de la Gouvernance Locale et de la Décentralisation** in the municipalities of the northern departments of Alibori and Borgou.<sup>8</sup> Although the SDC supports similar citizen participation mechanisms than the PDDC – community radio stations, public meetings – there is no overlap because SDC is not active in GIZ partner municipalities.

**GRAIND** is a domestic NGO that supports civil society and municipal administrations in organising reddition de comptes or communicating the Plan Annuel d'Investissement in three municipalities in Southern Benin, amongst others the GIZ partner of Toffo and Allada.<sup>9</sup>

### 3 Analytical framework, research design and methodological approach

The following section sets out the analytical framework, the research design and the methodological approach on which the impact assessment is based.

#### 3.1 Analytical framework

To assess the impact of GIZ support to citizen participation, the analytical framework breaks the causal impact chain into small, empirically verifiable steps. The goal is to analyse the causal relations between the individual factors as accurately as possible. This increases the plausibility of claims to be made about the GIZ contribution to the outcome. The analytical framework differentiates following levels:

**Input level:** The input level refers to the concrete activities by the GIZ to support the citizen participation formats promoted by the PDDC citizen participation component. GIZ input covers instruments from accompaniment, advice and capacity building by development assistants, headquarter staff or domestic partner organisations, to material or financial assistance by the GIZ.

**Output level:** The output level describes the level at which GIZ activities can have a direct influence. GIZ activities can have a direct effect on human, material or financial capacities of the partner municipalities or partner organisations.

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7 For further information on the programme Particip, see the webpage of the NGO network ALCRER/Social Watch at <http://socialwatch-benin.org/index.php/author-login/programmes-en-cours/ben-0114>.

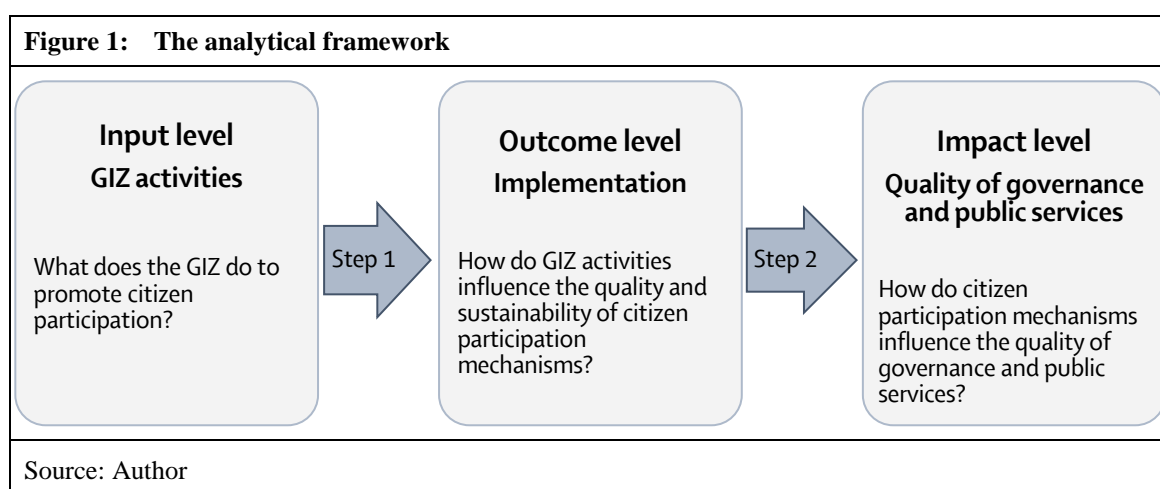
8 For further information of the SDC programme, see <https://www.bundesreisezentrale.admin.ch/deza/fr/home/pays/benin.html/content/dezaprojects/SDC/fr/2007/7F05430/phase3>.

9 For further information on the activities of GRAIND, see <http://www.graindbenin.org/index.html>.

**Outcome level:** The outcome level refers to the quality of the citizen participation formats at the stages of preparation, implementation, and follow-up as well as the degree of institutionalisation of a particular format in terms of regularity or planning.

**Impact level:** The impact level asks in an exemplary manner how a particular citizen participation mechanism contributed to the quality of local governance or public services in the municipality. Yet the study does not measure the quality of local governance or public services at the aggregate level of municipalities because there are too many other factors that might impact on this. However, the study shares the assumption of the GIZ PDDC that citizen participation might have an influence at this level. It has therefore decided to collect examples, where improvements in local governance or public services can be traced back to a particular citizen participation mechanism.

Figure 1 visualises the key categories of the analytical framework.



### 3.2 Research design

The research design follows a structured case comparison in combination with process-tracing (Brady & Collier, 2004) to rigorously measure the causal effects of the GIZ support to citizen participation (Stern et al., 2012). The structured case comparison allows one to compare cases with similar GIZ interventions (in kind and in degree) and cases without GIZ intervention. The process-tracing allows the re-constructing of causal mechanisms through the establishment of chronological orders along the impact chain.

The mix of comparative and qualitative approaches was chosen to accommodate the challenges arising from the heterogeneity of GIZ intervention *within* its 25 partner municipalities. A comparison of partner and non-partner municipalities at an aggregate level, as with quasi-experimental methods, would have required the same kind and the same degree of GIZ intervention in all 25 partner municipalities. Such an approach is not possible due to the high variance of the GIZ intervention across partner municipalities.

In comparative case studies, the logic of causal argumentation is based on contra factual argument (counterfactual), similar to quasi-experimental designs. The guiding question is: **What would the result be if the intervention had not happened?** (thus comparing cases

*with* intervention and *without* intervention). A structured case comparison can cope with the heterogeneity of intervention through a careful selection of municipalities according to pre-defined criteria. The municipalities selected i) received GIZ support for the same citizen participation mechanism (RDC, Suivi-PAI/Suivi-PDC), but ii) varied with regard to degree of intensity of GIZ intervention (2 municipalities with high degree of GIZ intervention, 2 municipalities with medium degree of GIZ intervention, 2 municipalities without GIZ intervention). The variance in the degree of intensity allows one to draw inferences on the impact of the GIZ intervention on the outcome.

In process-tracing, causal links in the impact chain can be detected through the chronological order of events. If, for example, the first *reddition de comptes* in a municipality took place after municipal staff had visited a GIZ workshop, it is plausible to assume that the GIZ intervention contributed to the organisation of the *reddition de comptes*.

The two approaches will be used to isolate the impact of GIZ input.

### *Case selection*

The cases (municipalities) selected for this study show variance in the explaining variable (GIZ input). According to the logic of structured case comparisons, differences in the outcome can then be explained with the differences in the explaining variable, given that other possible explaining factors are held constant.

The research design compares six municipalities that were exposed to varying degree of GIZ input: two partner municipalities with a high degree of GIZ input (8-12 activities), two partner municipalities with a medium degree of GIZ input (4-6 activities), and two non-partner municipalities with no GIZ input (0 activities) (Funk & Leininger, 2016, p. 19). The map in Figure 2 offers an overview of the location of the selected municipalities.

Figure 2: Map of selected municipalities



Source: Nations online project at <http://www.nationsonline.org/>

In addition, the municipalities were ordered according to their previous level of citizen participation before the programme started in 2010 (Heinkele & Kodjogbé, 2011). I distinguished municipalities with a high level (8-12 points) and medium level (3-7 points) of citizen participation prior to GIZ intervention.<sup>10</sup> The data indicates the level of citizen participation in each municipality before GIZ intervention and allows for a more adequate judgement of GIZ influence on observed outcomes. Table 2 provides an overview of the municipalities selected:

<b>Table 2: Overview of case selection</b>			
	<b>High treatment</b> (8-12 activities)	<b>Medium treatment</b> (4-7 activities)	<b>No treatment</b> (0 activities)
Medium citizen participation (rating 3-7)	Kérou	Toffo	Dassa-Zoumè
High citizen participation (rating 8-12)	Natitingou	Lokossa	Copargo

### 3.3 Reconstructing the theory of change

The **theory of change** lays out the causal assumptions of how the international intervention is assumed to change the output, outcome and impact levels. International development programmes usually have a theory of change spelled out in their programme proposal. In this impact assessment, the theory of change was not taken from the programme proposal, but was *re-constructed* based on the activities implemented on the ground. The approach was to re-construct the theory of change based on concrete activities during the project implementation in order to be able to describe a plausible link between GIZ activities and impact level. The theory of change concentrates on two steps of the impact chain detailed above.

#### *Step 1: Input to outcome*

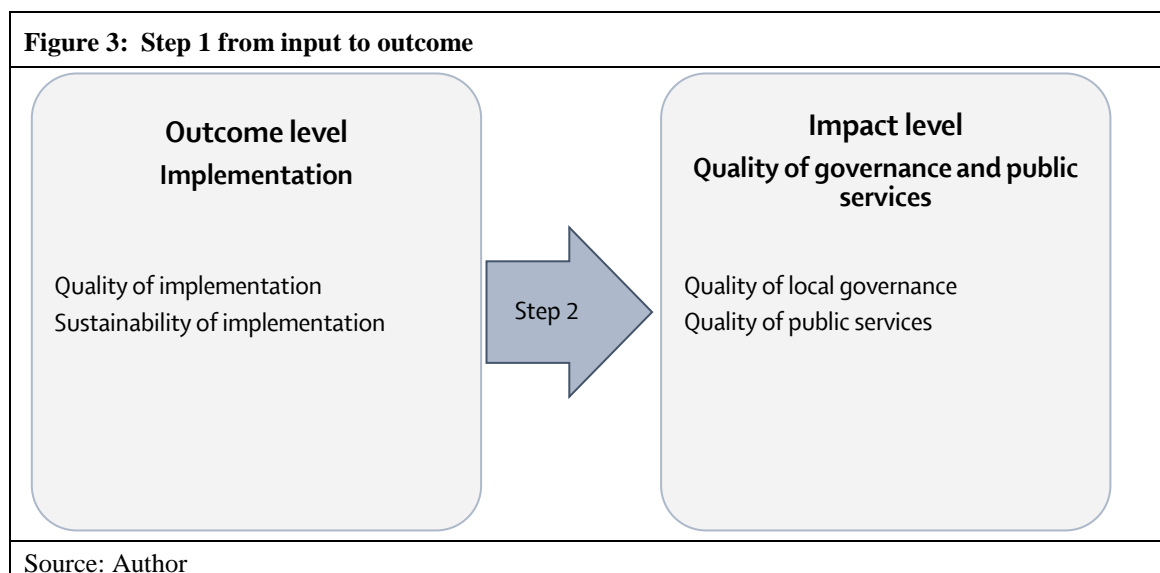
Step 1 of the theory of change relates to the influence of GIZ activities (input) on the quality of citizen participation formats (outcome), mitigated by changes in the human, material, and financial capacities of the partners (output). According to the impact logic, the GIZ activities can only have a direct effect on the output level. As the output level is strongly connected to the outcome level, the relation between input-output-outcome is considered as one step.

The GIZ input refers to a wide range of **instruments** promoting citizen participation. The most important instruments are accompaniment, advice, capacity building, occasional material assistance, and financial assistance. The instruments can be sorted into two causal mechanisms that explain externally induced change: learning and incentives (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005). Learning-based activities include accompaniment, technical advice and

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10 The 2010 study rated the level of citizen participation based on a scale from 0 to 13 points per municipality (Heinkele & Kodjogbé, 2010, p.41). In its assessment, it included the following aspects: i) information of citizens on decisions of the municipal council, ii) participation of citizens, iii) mechanisms to inform citizens about municipal spendings, iv) existence of a civil society network to control municipal actions (Heinkele & Kodjogbé, 2010, p.13).

capacity building. These activities are assumed to lead to learning processes at the individual level and translate into a change of behaviour at the institutional level. Incentive-based activities are material or financial assistance or competitions. These activities are assumed to offer positive material incentives to change behaviour at the institutional level. Theoretically, negative incentives are also possible, such as threats to end the partnership or to withdraw financial support. Figure 3 visualises Step 1 that leads from input to outcome.



The GIZ decentralisation programme applies these instruments in following ways: Accompaniment, advice and capacity building is mainly provided by the four development assistants (*Entwicklungshelfer*) and two local civil society organisations that receive project-related contracts. With regard to accompaniment, the programme has developed several approaches such as coaching, “faire-faire” (monitoring of legal compliance in implementation of joint activities), “prêt-à-porter” (development of targeted accompaniment tools for specific problems), and support upon individual demand from partners. The development assistants are in contact with all 25 partner municipalities and offer accompaniment, advice and capacity building to staff of the municipal administration and civil society. The partner civil society organisations such as RODEL or Maison de la Société Civile receive financial contracts from the GIZ to implement activities to promote citizen participation. GIZ-sponsored activities of partners are treated as GIZ activities here, otherwise the impact chain would become too complex.

#### Impact hypothesis for Step 1:

Step 1.1) The GIZ learning-based activities will lead to a higher quality of implementation of citizen participation formats because human capacities of domestic partners have improved.

Step 1.2) GIZ incentive-based activities will lead to a higher quality of implementation of citizen participation formats because material and financial capacities have improved.

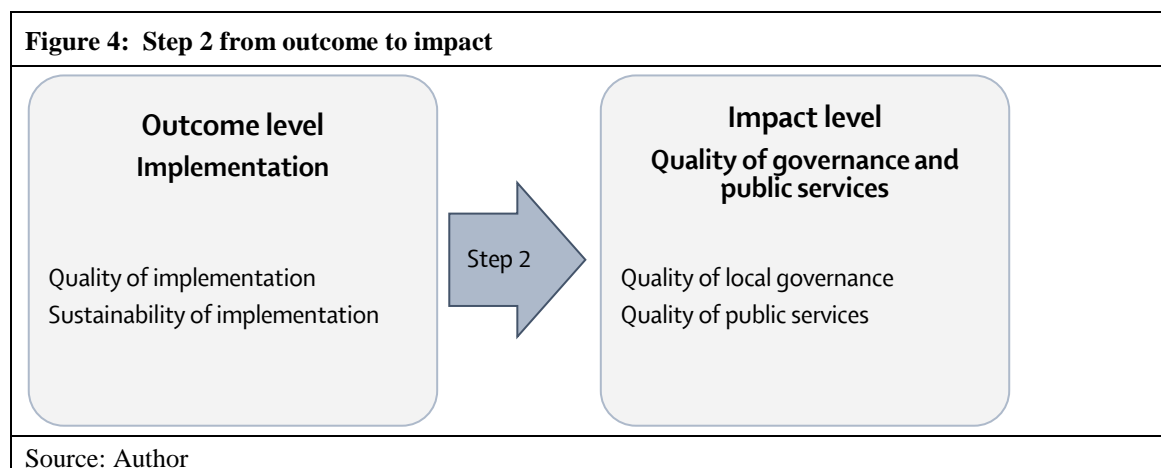
#### *Step 2: Outcome to impact*

Step 2 of the theory of change relates to the broader impact of the promoted citizen participation formats on the quality of local governance or public services at the municipal



level. Analysing change at the impact level is important for the strategic planning of citizen participation programmes. It can provide insights into what kind of changes are initiated by a particular citizen participation mechanism.

The focus is on the question of i) whether the **quality** or **quantity** of the citizen participation mechanism has an additional effect on the **quality of local governance or service provision** in the municipality and ii) whether the quality or quantity of the citizen participation mechanism has an effect on the **sustainability of civil society participation**. Figure 4 visualises the Step 2 leading from outcome to impact.



### Impact hypothesis for Step 2

Step 2.1) The promoted citizen participation formats lead to improvements in the relations between municipality and civil society and thus to a higher degree of inclusiveness of municipal politics (= higher quality of local governance).

Step 2.2) The promoted citizen participation formats lead to greater awareness of the municipal administration for citizens preoccupation with public service and, consequently, to greater commitment of the municipality to improve public services (= higher quality of public services).

These impact hypotheses are located at the end of a long impact chain. It is thus difficult to directly link GIZ activities to changes at the impact level. The research design therefore opts for a detailed, exemplary analysis of changes in form of “success stories” that can be causally linked to a particular citizen participation mechanism.

### 3.4 Methods of data collection and analysis

The study drew on 71 semi-structured interviews, 470 surveys, and document analysis for the data collection. The data was collected during two research trips to Benin with a total 6 weeks. The first research trips took place in November 2016 (2 weeks) and included a visit to the municipalities of Natitingou and Lokossa. The second research trip took place in January 2017 (4 weeks). Visits covered Copargo, Kérou, Natitingou, Dassa and Toffo.

The 71 semi-structured interviews served to gain first-hand information from people directly involved in citizen participation concerning i) the general understanding of the idea

of citizen participation, ii) the citizen participation mechanisms in their municipality, iii) the relations between civil society and municipality, and iv) the role of GIZ and other donors in strengthening citizen participation. Interview partners came either from the civil society (demand side) or the municipal administration (supply side) and had been involved in the citizen participation mechanism under investigation. The interview partners were identified according to the position they held within the municipal political landscape (mayors, municipal councillors), the municipal administration (secretary generals, department heads, communication officers (CCOMs),) and within civil society (presidents of important local civil society associations). The interview partners were identified and contacted by GIZ staff in the respective municipalities or by trusted contacts of GIZ staff on the ground. 37 interviews were held with civil society representatives from NGOs, professional organisations, women's groups, trade unions, traditional authorities or religious leaders. Twenty-three interviews were held with representatives of the municipality, including mayors, members of the technical service, communication officers, councillors and heads of district and villages. The interviews followed pre-scripted guiding questions and were held in French with the occasional help of a translator from French to German.

The 470 surveys gathered additional information on i) the practices of citizen participation, ii) attitudes towards citizen participation, iii) attitudes towards democracy in general, and iv) the perceptions of openness of different actors in the municipality. In each municipality, the survey was distributed by one focal point from the municipal administration to respondents from the municipality and by one focal point from the civil society to civil society members in the municipality. GIZ staff had helped to identify the focal points in the respective municipalities. Civil society and municipalities received different surveys, which covered largely the same questions but were adapted to the target group. In each municipality, 40 surveys were distributed to municipal authorities and 40 surveys to civil society members. Distribution was organised by two local focal points per municipality. The survey results were analysed with descriptive analysis.

Documents used for analysis included the programme proposal and progress reports, operational plans, monitoring reports from partners, and municipal acts and planning documents from municipalities.

Data triangulation was used to verify information from different sources. Statements in interviews were crosschecked with other interviews to achieve the most accurate information.

## **4 Results of the impact assessment**

So what difference can external actors make in supporting citizen participation in Benin? The following section takes a closer look at the situation of citizen participation at local level, and the two case studies for the citizen participation mechanisms public accountability hearings (reddition de comptes/RDC), and monitoring of municipal planning (Suivi-PDC/Suivi-PAI). The results are discussed along the analytical framework, following the steps in the impact chain with following guiding questions: What kind of input was provided by the GIZ? What was the outcome in terms of quality and sustainability of the citizen participation mechanism in partner municipalities and non-partner municipalities? What impact did the selected citizen participation mechanism have on the quality of local governance and public services? What



impact can be observed with regard to civil society engagement as such? The sections present results at the input level, outcome level and impact level separately.

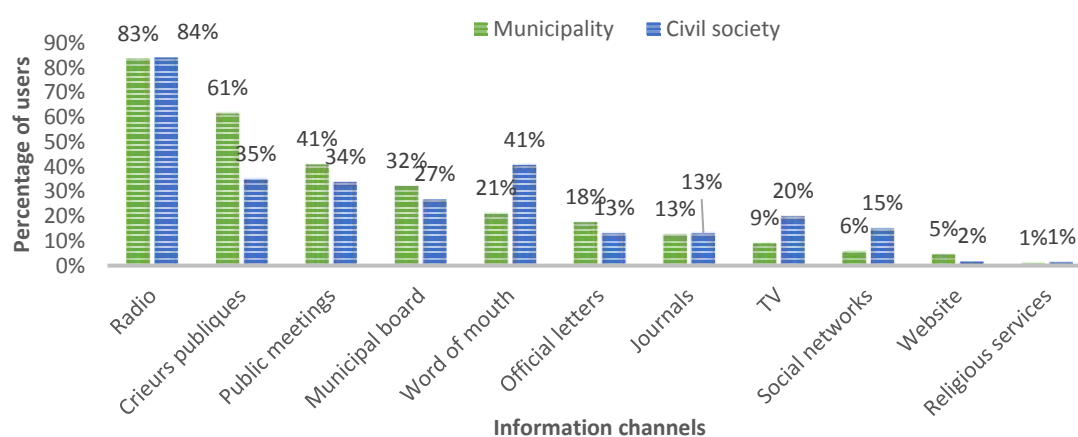
#### 4.1 Citizen participation at municipal level

The following presents some of the results from the survey with municipal authorities and civil society on the practices and ideas on citizen participation in their municipality. The data provides important insights into the practice of citizen participation at municipal level, shows differences in the perception of citizen participation among municipal authorities and civil society as well as differences between partner municipalities and non-partner municipalities.

##### *How civil society is informed about municipal politics*

An important precondition for effective civil society participation is the access to information on municipal politics. The survey asked what type of communication channels municipalities and citizens use to inform or be informed about municipal politics. It shows that the radio remains the top communication channel – both for the municipal administration: (83.4 per cent) as well as for civil society (84.2 per cent). For the municipality, the top five communication strategies are radio (83.4 per cent), *crieurs publiques* (English: public criers) (61.4 per cent), public meetings (40.8 per cent), municipal boards (32.3 per cent), and “word of mouth” (21.8 per cent). The top five information sources of civil society are similar – radio (84.2 per cent), word of mouth (40.6 per cent), *crieurs publiques* (35 per cent), public meetings (33.7 per cent) and municipal board (26.9 per cent). The main difference is that word of mouth communication is much more important to civil society than to the administration. It is important to note that social networks are becoming a more important information source for civil society (15 per cent), but municipal administrations are not yet aware of their potential as only 5.8 per cent name social networks as a communication channel. Websites are irrelevant as a communication channel, with only 1.6 per cent of civil society and 4.5 per cent of municipal administration mentioning them. Figure 5 shows how municipal authorities and civil society differ with regard to their use of information channels.

**Figure 5: Use of information channels by municipal authorities and civil society**



Note: Based on 246 surveys from civil society and 223 surveys from municipal authorities.

Source: Author

If one compares the communication channels used by GIZ partner municipalities and non-partner municipalities, one sees that GIZ partner municipalities use the following more often: TV (+15 per cent), municipal boards (+8.2 per cent), *crieurs publiques* (+6 per cent) and official letters (+4.4); but less often: radio (-18.1 per cent) and social networks such as Facebook, WhatsApp (-18.8 per cent). The more prominent use of TV, municipal boards, and official letters might be related to GIZ financial support and advice in this respect, but the much lower use of social networks – despite GIZ activities to promote Facebook or WhatsApp – is surprising.

Comparing the information strategies of civil society in partner and non-partner municipalities, it is interesting to note that GIZ partner municipalities rely more on word of mouth (+13.7 per cent) and official letters by the municipality (+10.9 per cent) than the non-partner municipalities. The importance of word of mouth might hint to a better exchange between civil society. In turn, the greater use of official invitations hints at a more inclusive invitation policy of partner municipalities and more established working relations between the municipality and civil society.

Regarding the quality of information provided on different subjects, the municipal administrations seem generally satisfied (between 60-70 per cent judge the quality as good or rather good), while the civil society is slightly less satisfied (between 40-60 per cent judge the quality as good or fairly good). The difference between self-conception and outside evaluation of the municipal communication is particularly strong in GIZ partner municipalities.<sup>11</sup> Possibly, partner municipalities tried to rate themselves more positively, while the civil society of partner municipalities have become more critical to the quality of information by the municipality.

### *How civil society participates in municipal politics*

Civil society has different options for participating in municipal politics. According to the municipal authorities, the most prominent citizen participation opportunities are i) the attendance of public meetings by the municipality (88.3 per cent), ii) participation in reddition de comptes (81.2 per cent), iii) contact a municipal councillor (80.7 per cent), iv) attending public meetings of the district or village chief (78 per cent), v) participating in the Plan de Développement (PDC) (76.2 per cent) or (vi) the Plan Annuelle D'Investissement (PAI) (73.5 per cent). The list indicates that the GIZ promoted citizen participation mechanisms, particularly the reddition de comptes, do enjoy a relatively high visibility amongst the municipal administration. Municipalities consider reddition de comptes the most influential mechanism; 51.6 per cent rate it with a “high degree of influence”.

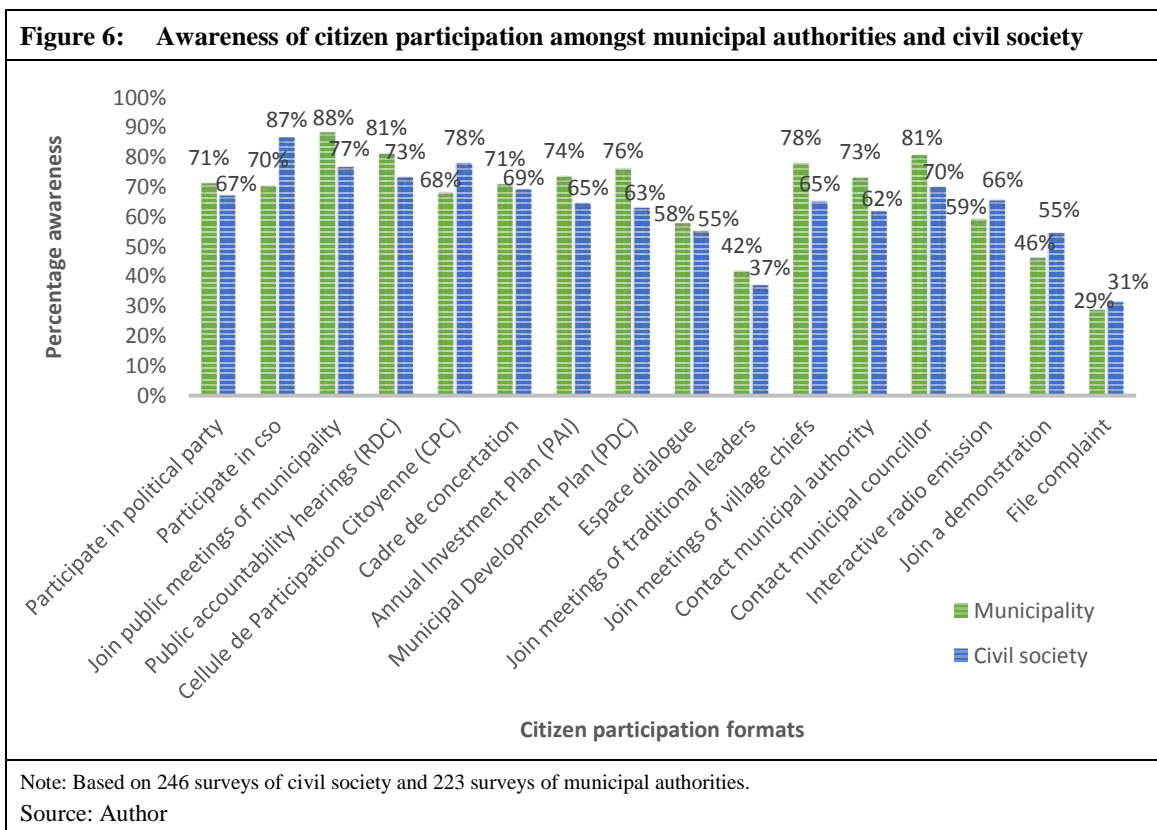
Civil society actors mention and are aware of the following citizen participation options: i) the participation in civil society (86.6 per cent), ii) the participation in a CPC (78 per cent), iii) the attendance of public meetings by the municipality (76.8 per cent), iv) the participation in reddition de comptes (73.2 per cent), and v) to contact a municipal councillor (70.7 per cent). The possibility of participating in the PDC or PAI is not cited as often by civil society

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11 The GIZ “partner administrations” rate the quality of information 6-16 per cent higher than non-partner municipalities, while the partner “civil society” provides lower ratings than the non-partner “civil society”.

compared to municipal authorities (ranks 10/11). This indicates a lower visibility of PDC or PAI among civil society.

Figure 6 provides an overview of how municipal authorities and civil society vary with regard to their awareness of different citizen participation options in the municipality.



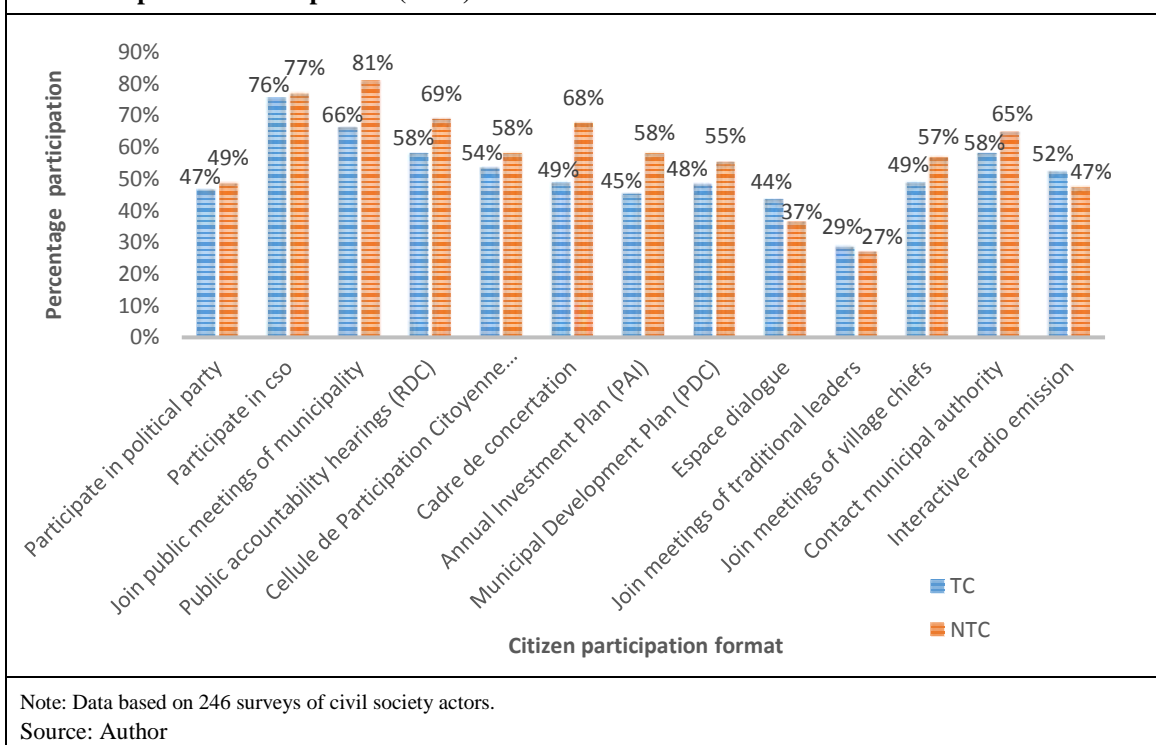
For civil society, the most influential form of citizen participation is i) to participate in a political party (51.5 per cent), ii) to participate in a Cadre de Concertation (51.4 per cent), iii) to participate in a CPC (49.6 per cent), iv) to go to a reddition de comptes (46.7 per cent) and v) to participate in a civil society organisation (46.1 per cent). The ranking points to the fact that civil society considers its engagement as a generally relevant strategy to influence municipal politics. The most influential citizen participation mechanism offered by the municipality is the reddition de comptes. This means that RDCs are accepted by both sides as important mechanisms for civil society participation in Benin.

If one asks civil society members which civil society participation mechanisms they actually *use*, the top five strategies are i) to participate in civil society (76.2 per cent), ii) to go to public meetings by the municipality (70.7 per cent), iii) to contact a municipal councillor (66.2 per cent), iv) to join a reddition de comptes (61.3 per cent) and v) to contact the municipality (mayor, chefs de services, and so on) (60.2 per cent). The two other citizen participation mechanisms promoted by the GIZ, Suivi PAI and Suivi PDC, are to be found in the lower ranks with the Suivi PDC at Position 11 and Suivi PAI on Position 12. This might be an indication that Suivi PAI/Suivi PDC are not as open and inclusive, so that less individuals were able to take part.

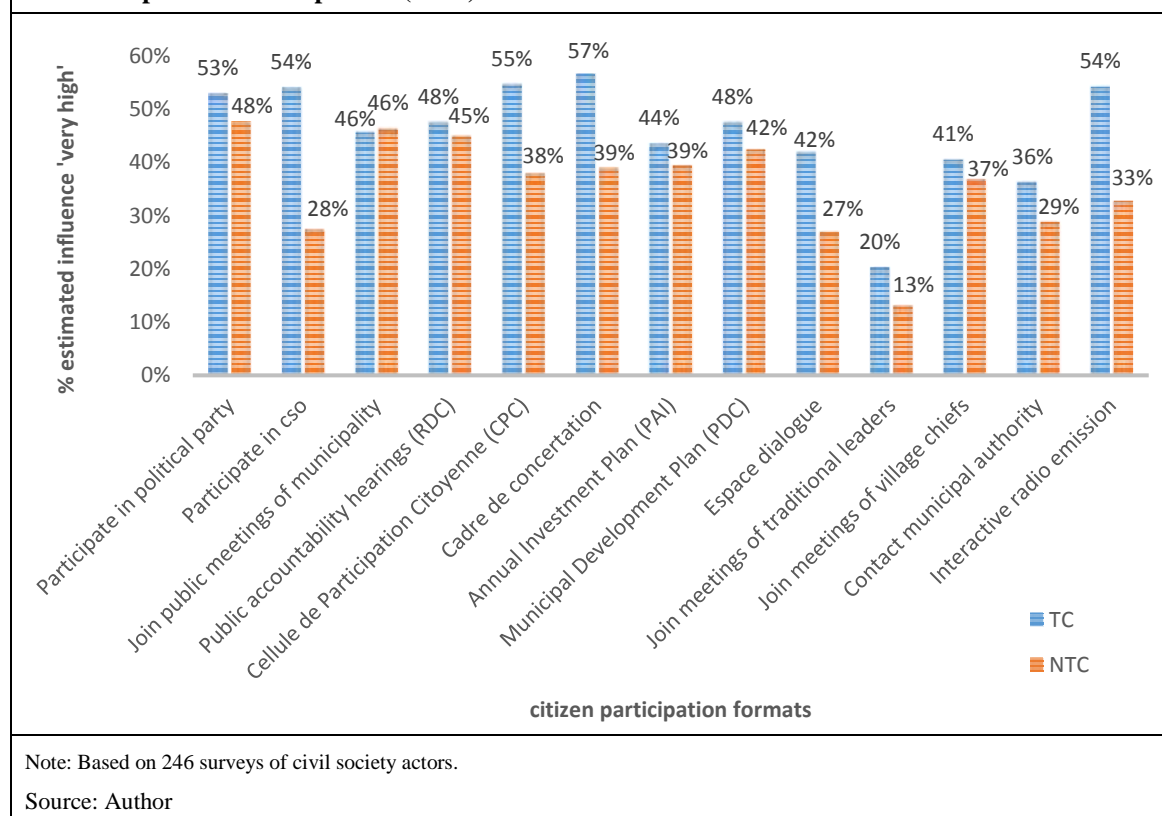
However, as Figure 7 shows, civil society in partner municipalities portray a *lower* participation rate throughout all of the citizen participation options. Particularly strong

differences exist in relation to the participation in Cadres de Concertation (-18.7 per cent), the participation in public meetings of the municipality (-14.8 per cent) and even the GIZ promoted mechanisms of reddition de comptes (-10.8 per cent) as well as participation at Suivi-PAI (-12.76 per cent). Given the greater awareness of GIZ partner municipalities for existing citizen participation options, it seems counterintuitive that civil society members of partner municipalities make *less use* of the citizen participation options existing in their municipality.

**Figure 7: Participation in citizen participation formats in the past year in partner (TC) and non-partner municipalities (NTC)**

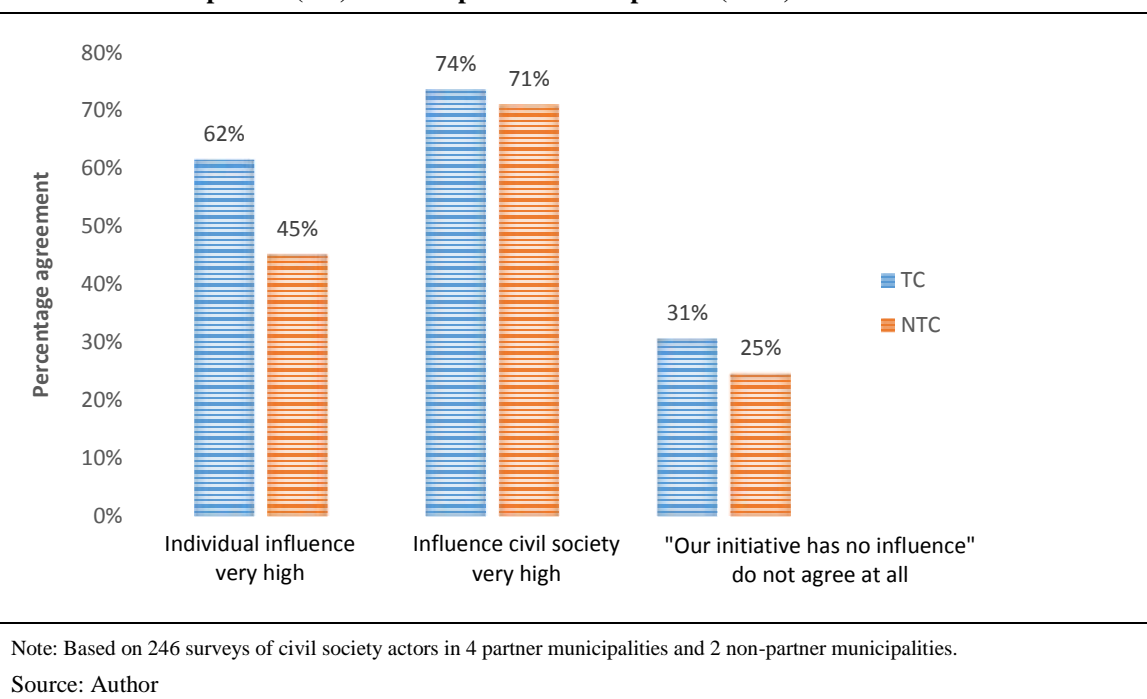


Despite the fact that civil society in GIZ partner municipalities seems to be characterised by a lower participation rate, partner municipalities attribute a higher degree of influence to these. Figure 8 shows that the differences are particularly strong when it comes to the influence of civil society as such: Civil society in partner communities was more likely to find a “high degree of influence” for i) participation in civil society (+26.5 per cent), ii) participate in a CPC (+16.57 per cent) or iii) participate in Cadre de Concertation (+17.5 per cent). Also with regard to the GIZ supported mechanisms, the civil society of partner municipalities was slightly more likely to attribute a “high degree of influence” to i) reddition de comptes (+2.5 per cent), ii) Suivi PDC (+5.1 per cent) and Suivi-PAI (+5.1 per cent) – although these small differences cannot be counted as significant.

**Figure 8: Estimated influence of citizen participation formats “very high” in partner (TC) and non-partner municipalities (NTC)**

Members of the civil society of GIZ partner municipalities also show a much higher sense of self-efficacy than their colleagues in non-partner municipalities, as Figure 9 shows. A total of 61.5 per cent of civil society actors in partner municipalities judge their personal influence on public affairs in their municipality to be “very high” compared to 45.2 per cent of non-partner municipalities (+16.3 per cent). A total of 73.7 per cent of civil society actors in partner municipalities judge the influence of civil society initiatives on public affairs in their municipality to be “very high” on public affairs of their municipality compared to 71.2 per cent of non-partner municipalities (+2.5 per cent). When asked to judge the influence of different citizen participation formats, 54 per cent of civil society actors in partner municipalities think that participating in civil society organisations has a “very high” influence, but only 27.5 per cent of non-partner municipalities. 30.7 per cent of partner municipalities “do not agree at all” with the statement that initiatives like theirs do not have any influence on what the municipal council or the municipality does compared to 24.6 per cent of non-partner municipalities (+6.1 per cent).

**Figure 9: Dimensions of individual and organisational efficacy amongst civil society in partner municipalities (TC) and non-partner municipalities (NTC)**



An explanation for the higher sense of self-efficacy of civil society in partner municipalities might be that the effectiveness of civil society participation is greater although the circle of active civil society members is smaller in GIZ partner municipalities.

## 4.2 The case of public accountability hearings

Public accountability hearings – called RDCs here following the French acronym for *reddition de comptes* – are public hearings where the mayor informs the citizens about the work of the municipality. It is a chance for direct dialogue between municipal authorities and citizens and gives citizens the opportunity to ask questions, to raise complaints, or provide recommendations on how to solve particular situations. The main idea is that municipal authorities report to citizens about a particular topic concerning the municipality, including the budget, the state of ongoing projects, and future plans. The mechanism has the potential to strengthen citizen participation, transparency and the accountability of municipal politics.

At the time of research, RDCs were not a legal requirement within the framework of decentralisation. Municipalities are not obliged to hold public accountability hearings and there are also no legally binding procedures on how to organise RDCs. This leaves less leverage to donors who wish to support RDCs and means that there are no official standards against which to judge the quality of public accountability hearings. Even so, RDCs are the most advanced citizen participation mechanism in Benin in terms of *institutionalisation* at national level: In 2015, RDCs were included into the FADEC performance criteria which decide upon the amount of performance-based financial transfer to a municipality. In 2016, all mayors were invited to sign the “Charte de Reddition de Comptes”, in which municipalities take the pledge to organise public RDCs. Both initiatives increased the municipalities’ awareness and the feeling of obligation to organise RDCs.

Assessing the impact of GIZ intervention to promote RDCs faces similar **challenges** to other governance interventions in terms of complexity and multi-causality: First, RDCs interfere with the balance of power at municipal level and there needs to be **political will** to engage with this citizen participation mechanism. A key question is whether municipal politicians have an own interest for conducting RDCs. In the municipalities visited, one major motivation for RDCs was the FADEC rating and the prospect of improving the tax collection rate by informing citizens on how the municipality uses collected funds for development. If, however, municipal politicians considered RDCs as a tool for the opposition to criticise and expose the mayor, the political will was much less apparent and implementing RDCs was difficult. Second, RDCs are part of a **multi-level system** of governance and national-level changes (FADEC criteria, Charte de Reddition de Comptes) and do impact on the mechanism at municipal level. Third, RDCs require a **multi-stakeholder approach** (top-down and bottom-up) because both municipal administrations *and* civil society have to engage in the mechanism. Fourth, RDCs require municipal administrations to follow new rules and regulations, and thus require a **change in behaviour**, and, possibly, attitude. Fifth, there is **overlap of donor interventions** in some of the GIZ partner municipalities. Donors fund different local NGOs to promote RDCs: GIZ funds RODEL and Maison de la Société Civile; the EU (European Union) funds Maison de la Société Civile; and Particip funds ALCRER/Social Watch. Donors have also funded parallel projects to develop best practice guidelines for RDCs: GIZ collaborated with civil society organisations Particip, RODEL and Grain to develop the RDC guidelines “Les Bonnes Pratiques de Reddition de Comptes”. The EU-financed Maison de la Société Civileto develop RDC guidelines in collaboration with the Ministry of Decentralisation. Although the guidelines are largely identical, a few differences remain and might create confusion at municipal level. In addition, even though GIZ and Particip have developed common guidelines, they pursue different approaches: GIZ works with the municipal administration and channels RDC funding through the administration, while Particip works with civil society and channels RDC funding through the CPCs. Municipalities with GIZ and Particip programmes thus speak of “two types of RDCs”. Lastly, the GIZ intervention to support RDCs is **heterogeneous**. For example, the northern municipalities, where GIZ collaborated up with RODEL, received more support for RDCs in the past years, than some partner municipalities in the South.

The following sections analyse Step 1 from the input level (GIZ activities) to the outcome level (quality and quantity of implementation) and Step 2 from the outcome level to the impact level (quality of local governance and public services) to follow the logic of the impact chain in the case of RDCs.

### **Step 1: from input to outcome**

#### *Input level*

The GIZ instruments to support RDCs are accompaniment, technical advice, capacity building, and small amounts of financial assistance in partner municipalities.

- **Accompaniment and technical advice:** Between 2012 and 2016, GIZ headquarter staff, development assistants and – through financing contracts – civil society partners such as RODEL have continuously offered accompaniment and technical advice on how to implement. The main contact is the Chargé de Communication (CCOM); occasional

contact exists to other municipal authorities and, less regularly, to civil society. RODEL only supports the administrations and civil society in the Northern partner municipalities.

- **Capacity building workshops:** GIZ has offered several capacity building workshops for municipal administrations and civil society in selected municipalities. GIZ civil society partners have organised several RDC capacity building workshops for civil society in 2013 (GIZ, 2013b, p. 1). RODEL continued to build capacity amongst civil society in the Northern partner municipalities in 2014 (RODEL, 2014a, p. 23).<sup>12</sup>
- **Financial assistance:** GIZ occasionally provides small amounts of financial assistance for the organisation of the public accountability hearings upon the request of partner municipalities. Municipalities use this financial support to pay the rent for the location, canvas, chairs, or sound system, for catering, or for radio or TV broadcasting.<sup>13</sup>

*Outcome level: quality and sustainability of implementation*

Did the GIZ input to RDCs make a difference to the quality of implementation? The comparison of partner and non-partner municipalities shows the following: Partner municipalities are slightly **more professional** and **more inclusive** in the organisation of RDCs than non-partner municipalities. Partner municipalities are slightly better in engaging in **following-up activities** on RDCs, although there is room for improvement on both sides. GIZ partner municipalities seem to portray a higher degree of sustainability. First, they have already organised public RDCs for several years, while non-partner municipalities have mainly organised non-public events. Secondly, partner municipalities have clearly divided responsibilities, and RDCs form part of the communication plan, which is missing in non-partner municipalities.

**Quality:** The quality of implementation was judged against the GIZ standards in the RDC best practices guidelines “Les Bonnes Pratiques des Reddition de Comptes”. The best practice guidelines propose that, in order to *institutionalise* RDCs in municipal practices, i) there should be at least two RDCs per year, ii) RDCs should be part of the *plan de communication* of the municipality and iii) have an own budget line. For *preparation*, it is recommended that i) the RDC be organised by the Cellule de Communication, including civil society representatives, ii) a topic related to municipal sectors, the PAI and/or the budget is chosen, iii) the topic is either chosen by decision of the municipality or from demands of civil society, or popular complaints, iv) the presentation of the RDC is prepared on the basis of factual data, covering activities implemented, planned activities, costs and problems, v) the presentation is validated by the Cellule de Communication, including civil society, vi) inclusive invitation channels are used, reaching out to political opponents and marginalised groups such as women, the handicapped, or youth. For implementation, the guide recommends that i) the mayor hold the presentation, together with the Chefs de Services, and that ii) the public discussion is organised in an open and inclusive manner. As a *follow-up*, recommendations include i) organising an evaluation of the RDC; ii) writing a protocol with commitments of the mayor (to be published), and iii) discussing the commitments in the municipal council.

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<sup>12</sup> See Annex 1.

<sup>13</sup> Interview development assistant, Natitingou.



**Sustainability:** Will partner municipalities organise public accountability hearings even after the departure of the GIZ? To check for the sustainability of public accountability hearings in the municipalities, several dimensions were taken into account: i) the regularity of RDCs, ii) the relevance of the national-level framework for municipal authorities (FADEC, Charte de Reddition de Comptes), the integration in municipal planning documents (municipal acts, communication plan, budget line), and whether RDCs took place without GIZ financial support.

The integration of public accountability hearings into the FADEC criteria in 2015 was an important step in increasing sustainability. The fact that RDCs are now part of the municipalities' performance measurement, deciding on the amount of performance-based transfers from the national level, is an important motivation for most municipal interview partners to organise RDCs. The GIZ programme lobbied consistently at national level to make RDCs part of the FADEC criteria and has thus significantly contributed to the institutionalisation of RDCs in Benin.

#### *Implementation in partner municipalities*

GIZ partner municipalities have generally embraced the idea of RDCs in their municipality. Compared to non-partner municipalities, RDCs take place in a more professional and inclusive manner and put more emphasis on follow-up. Most partner municipalities started to organise RDCs between 2012 or 2013 due to GIZ engagement<sup>14</sup> and have continued to organise RDCs every year, except for the election year of 2015.<sup>15</sup> Partner municipalities are aware of the GIZ guidelines, although they are not always followed through. Below is a brief overview of how partner municipalities implemented RDCs in their communities at the stages of preparations, implementation and follow up.

**Preparation:** Partner municipalities prepared the RDC with higher *professionalism* than non-partner municipalities: There was a fixed group, the Cellule de Communication, responsible for the preparation, starting preparation a few weeks in advance. The presentations were aimed to be based on facts, with the heads of technical services gathering the required data and the CCOM compiling the presentation. Room for improvement remains: The preparatory team often only met without representatives from civil society and councillors and there were complaints from civil society in Natitingou and Lokossa that RDC presentations were used as campaign event for the mayor. The preparation also took place with a higher *inclusiveness* of civil society: Three of the partner municipalities had at least one civil society representative included in the preparation of the RDC to consult on the topic, participate in the preparation team, and/or give feedback on the presentation of the municipality. Room for improvement remains here as well: In some municipalities, the municipality decided alone on the topic (Natitingou, Kérou), or involved civil society ad hoc one week before for the preparation team or presentation feedback (Kérou). In Lokossa, civil society was not involved at all. The mobilisation for the RDCs also has also become increasingly inclusive in the past years. Partner municipalities generally used a variety of channels – radio, *crieurs publiques*, municipal notice boards, banderoles on the street (Kérou)

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14 Kérou already started in 2009 in the context of a local governance project with the Swiss development agency (Interview, municipal administration, Kérou).

15 The municipality of Toffo saw some delay in the RDC for 2016, having started preparations in 2016 but postponing it till May 2017.

or social media (Natitingou) – to reach out to the population. The most effective mobilisation strategy for civil society, however, are personal invitations. GIZ partner municipalities not only distributed personal invitations to a wide range of civil society actors but also to official authorities such as the heads of deconcentrated services, the brigades, the Centre de Promotion Sociale, the Circonscription Scolaire, the district heads and village heads as well as village councillors. Sending invitations only to government-friendly civil society to garner further patronage relationships was an exception in Kérou.

**Implementation:** Partner municipalities implemented RDCs with a slightly higher degree of *professionality*. All mayors showed commitment and presented the municipal activities during RDCs. In Natitingou, the mayor was even involved in the preparatory meetings. RDCs of partner municipalities take place with a high degree of *inclusivity* because they are public and open to all citizens.<sup>16</sup> RDCs tend to have between 90 and 200 participants. Kérou, Lokossa and Toffo even decided to organise RDCs at central as well as district level to increase the outreach to citizens. The debates during RDCs are generally described by municipal authorities and civil society alike as open and inclusive. Only during the first RDCs, did some interview partners described situations where RDCs were felt to be “hijacked” by political opposition parties to expose the mayor (Natitingou) or by government parties to silence criticism (Toffo, Kérou).

**Follow-up:** Partner municipalities show higher engagement in follow-up activities than non-partner municipalities, but at a low level. Several follow-up options exist: evaluation meetings, publishment of protocols; follow-up in the municipal council or even setting up a follow-up committee. Yet, partner municipalities have not explored these options in depth so far, despite the emphasis from GIZ and RODEL. There have been evaluation meetings in Natitingou and Kérou, facilitated by RODEL. RDC protocols are not easily available for the civil society. None of the partner municipalities organised a formal follow-up by the municipal council. The follow-up committee setup in Natitingou in 2016 is not functional.

**Sustainability:** There are positive signs of sustainability of RDCs in partner municipalities as regards regularity, relevance, and integration in planning documents. Since 2012, partner municipalities have organised RDCs every year, with the exception of the election year 2015.<sup>17</sup> The national-level framework, particularly the FADEC criteria, seems to be an important reason for municipal administrations to organise RDCs. The fact that mayors had signed the Charte de Reddition de Comptes does not seem to play such an important role. Partner municipalities also have municipal planning documents that mention the RDC. RDCs are usually included in the communication plan. This led CCOMs to feel more responsible for RDCs. Yet, none of the municipalities studied has passed a municipal act that would formally institutionalise RDCs at municipal level, nor have they created a budget line for RDCs. Partner municipalities tend to rely heavily on external financing for RDCs.

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16 The only exception are the Particip-financed RDCs in Lokossa where only experts in the thematic area are invited. Particip has to restrict the number of participants because they only have limited financial means to provide for food and drinks at the event.

17 Toffo also failed to organise an RDC in 2016.

### *Implementation in non-partner municipalities*

The non-partner municipalities Copargo and Dassa have also held public accountability hearings for several years. Copargo held its first RDC in 2013 and Dassa in 2012. In Dassa, however, it is questionable whether one can speak of an RDC: The municipality uses the occasion of the mayors' New Year's Speech to hold a *Reddition de Compte*. This means that the event is not open to citizens and that there is only limited room for critical discussion of the mayors' achievements. The following provides a brief overview of how non-partner municipalities handle the preparation, implementation and follow-up of RDCs.

**Preparation:** Non-partner municipalities show a slightly lower degree of professionalism in the preparation of RDCs. Non-partner municipalities seem to have less structures in place for the preparation of the RDC: there are no fixed preparatory committees and preparation rests with either Chef for General Affairs (CSAG) or the Chef for Planification (CST), which then have to coordinate the preparations. The presentations for the audience are fact-based, but provide only a brief overview of municipal activities, which limits the room for discussion. In Dassa, RDCs consist of general overviews in the framework of the New Year's Speech, unless the CPC requests a thematic RDC. In Copargo, it was the mayor's decision to focus on three topics to provide for more profound discussions in 2016. There is also a slightly lower degree of *inclusiveness*. Non-partner municipalities do not include civil society in the preparation of RDCs, either in the preparatory team, or to comment on the presentation. Civil society was consulted on the topic of the RDC in few occasions. In Dassa, civil society decided on the topic if it was an RDC that was initiated by the Particip-financed CPC. In Copargo, the CPC president was consulted once in an informal manner by the mayor on whether the topic was considered relevant. Yet there was no formal consultation. Non-partner municipalities use the same mobilisation channels as partner municipalities, but mobilisation is less inclusive because most RDCs have not been open to the public. In Dassa, the municipality either invites municipal authorities – municipal councillors, local councillors, village heads, deconcentrated services, brigades – and some civil society members to the RDC at New Year's, or a list of thematic experts for the Particip-sponsored RDC. In Copargo, RDCs were more open, particularly the RDC in 2016, where citizens were officially invited by radio, *crieurs publiques* and municipal billboards to join the RDC.

**Implementation:** In both municipalities, the mayor dedicates time to give the presentation and answer questions from the audience. There are between 50-80 participants in the RDCs of Dassa and up to 400 participants in the RDC of Copargo. Copargo seems to be more open than Dassa: In 2016 the RDC was public and the mayor went to central as well as district level, while Dassa continued with the closed event at central level. In terms of openness and inclusiveness of the discussions, the quality of discussions again seems to be better in Copargo than in Dassa. In Dassa, members of civil society complained about the limited space to discuss problems in one sector as the municipal presentation covered a broad range of subjects.

**Follow-up:** Regarding the follow-up, non-partner municipalities do not take particular actions. It seems that non-partner municipalities prepare minutes of the public accountability hearings but that the minutes are mostly not made publicly available. There are also no evaluation meetings, municipal council debates or committees that would follow up on the commitments made by the mayor during the public accountability hearings. The lack of follow-up institutions makes it more difficult to create impact from the RDC.

**Sustainability:** The two non-partner municipalities claim to regularly organise RDCs, but the majority of RDCs organised so far have not been public events. Dassa has seen no fully public RDC so far, while Copargo organised its first public RDC in 2016. The number of public RDCs thus raises questions with regard to the prospects of institutionalisation. The national-level framework might make a difference in the future though, as the FADEC criteria and the Charte de Reddition de Comptes are serious points of reference, at least in Copargo. The mayor of Copargo, for example, feels an obligation to organise RDCs due to the FADEC criteria and the Charte de Reddition de Comptes:

Ah là, la reddition de compte je peux dire que c'est devenu une exigence des textes sur la décentralisation, je vous ai dit il y a environ 7 mois on s'est retrouvé à Cotonou, tous les maires, pour signer ce qu'on nous appelions la charte de reddition de compte [Ah, the public accountability hearings, I can tell you, this has become a legal requirement of decentralisation. I told you we met about 7 months ago in Cotonou, all the mayors, to sign what they call the Charta of public accountability hearings]. (Interview 18, municipal leader, Copargo)

Dassa, however, does not seem to take the national-level framework as an obligation to organise RDCs. A Chef de Service claimed that there were many public events that could be counted as RDCs in the FADEC criteria, the mayor's speech on 1 August, amongst others. The degree of sustainability at the level of *organisational planning* is also lower, as neither municipality passed a municipal act on RDCs, nor do they have a communication plan. There is no own budget line for RDCs (which has been lacking in GIZ municipalities as well). Yet, both municipalities were ready to find the financial means to organise RDCs. It thus seems possible to organise RDCs without external financial support. The most important question with regard to the financial sustainability is whether municipal administrations develop their own motivation to organise RDCs.

Table 3: Outcomes in the implementation of public accountability hearings by municipality																														
Outcome	Natitingou					Kérou					Lokossa					Toffo					Dassa					Copargo				
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
<i>Evaluation PDC II</i>																														
Evaluation with CSOs																														
Evaluation with citizens																														
<i>Elaboration PDC III</i>																														
Comité Pilotage with CSOs																														
Needs assessment at village																														
Needs assessment with CSOs																														
Needs assessment with citizens																														
<i>Evaluation-Elaboration PAI</i>																														
<i>Comité Élaboration with CSOs</i>																														
Workshop with CSOs																														
Documents to CSOs																														
<i>Evaluation PAI</i>																														
Evaluation with CSOs																														
Evaluation with citizens																														
<i>Follow-Up PAI</i>																														
Awareness raising PAI																														
Monitoring PAI by CSOs						MAEP					CPC					MAEP					CPC									
Source: Author																														

### *Summary of results and contributions of GIZ*

So what has been the contribution of GIZ input in terms of advice, capacity building, and financial assistance to these outcomes? It seems that the advice from GIZ and RODEL had an impact on how RDCs were organised in the municipality, particularly with regard to i) organising RDCs at the district level, ii) establishing the Cellule the Communication as a preparatory committee, iii) including civil society in the preparation, at least at the end, iv) choosing a concrete topic for the presentation, v) presenting detailed information to citizens and not reducing RDC to mere campaign/awareness-raising event, and vi) organising an evaluation meeting and other follow-up activities.

The capacity building also improved the understanding of RDCs as a tool to enter into dialogue with citizens and to be held accountable by citizens. The Chargé de Communication, the main interlocutor for GIZ, had a good understanding of the function of RDCs for democratic governance, as the following quote shows:

Au meeting on vient mentir, on vient faire des promesses et dire des choses qu'on va surement faire mais on donne pas de faits et de preuves. La RDC c'est des faits, des preuves et des chiffres et on ne peut pas changer les chiffres [In normal meetings they come to lie, to make promises, and to say things they will do for sure, but without giving any facts or proofs. The public accountability hearings are about facts, about proof, and about numbers and you cannot change numbers]. (Interview 04, municipal administration, Natitingou)

On the contrary, the communications officers in the two non-partner communities saw their role as broadcasting, explaining, and defending the position of the mayor to citizens in a uni-directional way.

### **Step 2: from outcome to impact**

It is a big step to get from outcome to impact – from public accountability hearings to improvements in the quality of local governance and public services: Municipal councils have to take decisions, heads of technical services have to take action, while deconcentrated services might be involved or even the central level. The main challenge for impact assessment is to establish a plausible proof between the taking place of a reddition de compte and actual change in the quality of local governance or public services. The approach adopted here was to collect concrete examples of “success stories”: improvements in municipal affairs that could be – at least partially – traced back to debates in public accountability hearings. The public accountability hearings are, of course, only one of several factors that ultimately contribute to the observed changes – other decisive factors might be whether the subject falls into the competencies of the municipality, availability of financial means, support by other authorities, or the degree of flexibility in planning.

Still, there are reasons to expect that public accountability hearings can contribute to municipal development: Criticism raised by the population can help municipal authorities to identify problems. Recommendations by citizens can help municipal authorities to find new solutions. Lastly, the public space provided for citizens to raise their preoccupations and voice demands in front of the authorities creates pressure for the municipality to act. An active member of civil society in Copargo described the dynamics of RDCs as follows:

Pourquoi je dis que ça me réjouit, parce que le maire lui-même, il a pris certains engagements. Donc une fois qu'il a pris des engagements, il est obligé maintenant, d'honorer ces engagements-là [Why do I say that I am happy about it? Because the mayor himself, he made commitments. So once he has made a commitment, he is obliged to realise his commitments]. (Interview 30, civil society, Copargo)

Municipal authorities also feel that RDCs create a certain pressure on municipalities to act. The following quote from the municipal administration in Natitingou shows that the municipality increased its efforts to clean the garbage after being hassled by citizens:

Oui par exemple au niveau des ordures quand ils attaquent trop nous sommes obligés. Surtout de 2015 à 2016, je sais qu'on a vidé le dépotoir qui est au niveau du marché quatre fois. Donc quand ils mettent la pression, on est obligé d'aller négocier [Yes, for example with the garbage, when they criticise us, we are forced to do something. Above all from 2015 to 2014, I know we cleaned the garbage depository at the market four times. So when they put us under pressure, we are forced to negotiate]. (Interview 46, municipal administration, Natitingou)

### *Impact level*

Despite the lack of organised follow-up, public accountability hearings seem to generate a certain impact on municipal development. The results need to be treated with caution, however, as the number of examples might change easily depending on whether a few individuals provide comprehensive information. In addition, the answer did not always indicate clearly whether the proposals were de facto implemented or not.

The success stories resulting from RDCs show improvements in the following areas:

**i) Awareness raising:** Municipal authorities use RDCs for awareness raising among the population with regard to particular problems, for example, the need to pay taxes, the civil registry, the importance of schooling, or disputes between nomadic people and landowners.

**ii) Participation:** RDCs can lead to an increase in opportunities for citizen participation. As a result of debates during RDCs, municipalities, for example, started to provide information on the budget in districts and villages, included a civil society representative in the budget planning process, or gave civil society access to the PAI.

**iii) Process optimisation:** Citizens' criticism during RDCs often uncover shortcomings in administrative processes and lead municipalities to review procedures. RDCs thus promote process optimisation, for example, the introduction of committees to collect market fees, partnerships with professional organisations in tax collection, review of the municipal tax collection strategy, improvements in administrative processes in the civil registry, or reviewing municipal land-parcelling practices.

**iv) Adjusting planning to local needs:** RDCs compel municipalities to re-adjust their planning documents (budget, PAI, PDC) according to local needs for drinking water or school rooms.

**v) Construction/renovation:** RDCs can lead to the launch of new infrastructure projects, such as the building of a market or toilet facilities.

**vi) Management of public services:** RDC debates can initiate improvements in the management of public services, such as garbage collection at the market in Natitingou.

There are also critical voices with regard to the effectiveness of RDCs. RODEL frequently demands a more organised and structured follow-up of the commitments made by the mayor during RDCs. Also, CSOs and citizens do not always see the impact of RDCs:

Les populations vont poser leur préoccupation. Mais après, ils notent les suggestions, mais on ne sent pas le concret sur le terrain [The population will talk about their problems. But then, they note the suggestions, but you don't see anything concrete happening in the field]. (Interview 30, civil society, Kérou)

Comparing the impact results of GIZ partner municipalities and non-partner municipalities yields interesting insights as to the quantity and quality of impact achieved.

#### *Impact in partner municipalities*

In general, GIZ partner municipalities do cite more examples of how RDCs led to improvements in local governance or public services. The two municipalities with high GIZ input (Natitingou and Kérou) cite the highest number of examples for impact (9 to 12). The two municipalities with medium GIZ input also cite a considerable number of examples (6 to 7). Although it is not possible to establish a direct link between high GIZ input and observed impact, one explanation might be that the continuous emphasis of RODEL and GIZ development assistants on the follow-up on commitments made during RDCs did have an influence on municipal behaviour.

#### *Impact in non-partner municipalities*

The non-partner municipalities have less success stories resulting from RDCs. Dassa mentioned only three, while Copargo mentioned six. There might be several reasons for the lower responsiveness of non-partner municipalities to the demands voiced by citizens during RDCs: First, there is no partner that emphasises the importance of follow-up on issues raised during the RDC. Second, non-public RDCs – as in Dassa, and previously also in Copargo – create less pressure on the municipalities to take action because the municipal administration is then not confronted with citizens' concerns but only with a small circle of municipal officials and civil society.

Table 4: Number of success stories from public accountability hearings																														
Impact	Natitingou					Kérou					Lokossa					Toffo					Dassa					Copargo				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Awareness raising																														
Participation																														
Process optimisation																														
Adjustment to local needs																														
Construction/renovation																														
Public services																														
Source: Author																														

### 4.3 The case of monitoring municipal planning

The citizen participation mechanism of Suivi-PAI and Suivi-PDC are both based on the idea that citizens should have a voice in the evaluation and the elaboration of the key municipal planning documents, that is the Plan Annuelle d'Investissement (PAI) and the five-year Plan du Développement Communal (PDC). In 2014, the GIZ cooperated with RODEL to develop guidelines for a Suivi-PAI to be piloted in the Northern GIZ partner municipalities. In 2016, the third Plan du Développement Communal had to be evaluated and elaborated by municipal authorities in the course of 2016. GIZ and RODEL started the project "Evaluation Sociale PDC" in 10 of the partner municipalities, amongst others Natitingou, Kérou and Lokossa, to include citizens at village and district level into the process. This was an additional opportunity to anchor citizen participation in municipal practices.

Suivi-PAI and Suivi-PDC give citizens and civil society the opportunity to get involved in the evaluation and elaboration of key planning documents of the municipality. This gives them the chance to voice demands and to make recommendations on the municipal projects in different sectors and different localities. Suivi-PAI/Suivi-PDC are also an occasion for citizens and civil society at the district and village level to make their demands heard in front of the mayor and municipal authorities.

The inclusion of citizens or civil society in the PAI/PDC is not part of the decentralisation framework, though. This means that municipalities are not legally bound to invite citizens to their planning sessions or to take note of their demands and recommendations. As in the case of public accountability hearings, the lack of *de jure* institutionalisation complicates donors' attempts to promote that citizen participation mechanism and there are no objective standards on how to organise citizen participation in the PAI or PDC. This has led to a variety of practices for citizen participation: some municipalities invite 2-3 civil society members to the elaboration session of the PAI or PDC; others invite up to 40. Some municipalities have the current PAI or PDC evaluated by a research agency; others hold additional workshops with citizens and civil society at district or even village level. There are, however, steps towards the institutionalisation of citizen participation in the evaluation and elaboration of the PAI and PDC. The official manual of procedures for the PDC (Guide d'Élaboration du PDC), for example, requires municipalities to invite civil society representatives at all steps of the PDC elaboration process. Municipalities have to follow these guidelines in order to get approval for their PDC by the prefecture. Civil society participation thus needs to be taken seriously.

The challenges in assessing the impact of the GIZ intervention to promote monitoring municipal planning faces similar **challenges** to other governance interventions: First, the success of monitoring municipal planning is also dependent on the **political environment** and political willingness to engage citizens in the planning process. Second, monitoring municipal planning takes place in a **multi-level system** where national-level changes (new national guidelines for PDC or PAI) have an impact at municipal level. Third, monitoring of municipal planning requires a **multi-stakeholder approach** because municipal administrations *and* civil society have to engage in the mechanism (top-down and bottom-up). Fourth, the mechanism requires a **change in behaviour and**, possibly, **attitude** because municipal administrations need to establish new routines to follow new rules. Fifth, the fact that **donor interventions overlap** makes it difficult to isolate the exact impact of the GIZ intervention. Donors have promoted various ways of citizen participation in the monitoring



or the elaboration of municipal projects from/for the PAI/PDC. Social Watch has used mechanisms such as the *suivi budgétaire* or the *fiche d'évaluation citoyenne*; ALCRER uses the Cellules de Participation Citoyenne to conduct *visites de terrain* to monitor public infrastructure project, the Observatoire du Changement Social (OCS) has implemented the *Suivi d'Impact Local Participatif* (SILP) to elaborate municipal projects in the sector of education and health (GIZ, 2013, p. 12). In addition, there are the field visits of MAEP to monitor the state and quality of construction works of municipal infrastructure projects. Municipalities might not see a difference between MAEP, CPC or any other group of citizens approaching the municipality to inform them about observed shortcomings in municipal infrastructure projects.

The next section follows the logic of the impact chain to analyse Step 1 from the input level (GIZ activities) to the outcome level (quality and quantity of implementation) and Step 2 from the outcome level to the impact level (quality of local governance and public services).

### Step 1: from input to outcome

#### *Input level*

GIZ uses a mix of instruments from accompaniment and technical advice to capacity building to support citizen participation in the planning of PAI and/or PDC.

- **Accompaniment and technical advice:** The GIZ provides accompaniment and technical advice to partner municipalities through its development assistants and, via financing contracts, through civil society partners such as RODEL. The development assistants' main contact remains the Chargé de Communication; occasional contact exists to civil society, mostly during workshops. In selected partner municipalities, RODEL advises the municipal administration on how to include civil society in the planning process and explains to civil society how municipal planning documents work.
- **Capacity building workshops:** GIZ financed several capacity building workshops, conducted by RODEL, with the goal to empower civil society to contribute to the PDC and/or PAI planning processes. Between 2013 and 2014, RODEL organised a series of workshops to promote civil society participation in the PAI and a capacity building workshop on the municipal budget in five northern partner municipalities. In 2016, RODEL organised a series of workshops focusing on the evaluation of the PDC II with the goal of raising civil society participation in the evaluation of the PDC III (RODEL, 2016).

The following are the main activities of the GIZ in support of citizens' participation in municipal planning documents.

#### *Outcome level: quality and sustainability of implementation*

How did municipalities actually include citizens in the PAI and the PDC? The following analyses the quality of implementation of monitoring of municipal planning and how citizen participation in the municipal planning documents PAI and PDC worked. The presentation first discusses the outcomes in GIZ partner municipalities and then the outcomes in non-partner municipalities. As the planning of the PAI and the PDC are two distinct processes, I will start with the municipalities' practices related to the PDC and then take a closer look

at the municipalities' citizen participation practices regarding the PAI, particularly preparation, implementation and follow-up of these processes.

The quality of implementation of the Suivi-PAI and the Suivi-PDC is judged against the standards developed by GIZ and RODEL: For the Suivi-PAI, there should be i) an evaluation of previous PAI by district heads, civil society and citizens, ii) CSOs participate in workshop on evaluation / elaboration of PAI to monitor if preoccupations from the evaluation at district level are taken into account, iii) CSOs observe the municipal council session on the adoption of the PAI, iv) CSOs organise awareness raising on new PAI amongst the broader civil society at central and at district level, v) CSOs monitor the implementation of the new PAI. For the Suivi-PDC, civil society is included in the evaluation and elaboration of the PDC at several steps. Civil society and citizens participate in the i) analysis and summary of the previous PDC, ii) evaluation of the stage of project implementation in the PDC, iii) formulation of recommendations for the next PDC (RODEL, 2016).

The evaluation shows that citizen participation in municipal planning documents is rather poor if measured against the GIZ standards. The only widely practiced form of citizen participation in the PAI and PDC is the inclusion of civil society representatives in the "PAI evaluation and elaboration workshops" and the "Comité d'élaboration du PDC III". Other forms of citizen participation can be traced back to GIZ-sponsored interventions by RODEL. Yet they do not seem to have been established in a sustainable way so far. The following discussion of the findings and the comparison of GIZ partner and non-partner municipalities will further elaborate these claims.

### *Implementation in partner communities*

The GIZ partner municipalities showed a slightly higher degree of citizen participation in municipal planning of the PAI and PDC than the non-partner municipalities. Many of the more participative practices can be linked directly to the intervention of RODEL, but were not sustained in the following years.

Where citizen participation in the PDC is concerned, civil society had the opportunity to participate in the evaluation and the elaboration of the PDC in most partner municipalities. In three municipalities, civil society conducted an evaluation of the PDC II and presented its recommendations and demands for the PDC III to the municipal authorities. These evaluations took place in Natitingou, Kérou and Lokossa, and were part of RODEL's project "Evaluation Sociale PDC II". The evaluation of the PDC II was organised at central level, and, in most cases, involved only civil society organisations (Natitingou, Lokossa). In Kérou also some "lay citizens" took part. In Toffo, which was not covered by RODEL, no such evaluation by civil society or citizens took place. The RODEL-guided evaluation helped civil society to become familiar with the PDC document, as most civil society members had only limited knowledge of its function and its content. It also enabled civil society to formulate concrete demands to the municipal authorities and strengthened the stance of civil society as a competent partner for the municipality to be included in questions of municipal development. Given that some members of the municipal administrations are sceptical of the competency of civil society when it comes to its ability to contribute to municipal planning, capacity building of the civil society in this field was important to build trust and to increase

municipalities' readiness to include civil society. One municipal employee notes in that regard:

Si, ils participaient à la discussion parce qu'il s'agissait de dire, la mairie dit, nous avons prévu telle action dans telle localité que nous avons réalisé. Et il s'agissait à la population, c'est à dire il s'agissait à ceux-là qui étaient là de dire c'est vrai. Vous l'avez réalisé mais nous avons remarqué telle, telle chose. Donc c'était un débat ouvert [Yes, they participate in the discussion, because the municipality says "We have planned this project in that locality and we have implemented it". And it is up to the population to say if this is true or not. "You have implemented it, but we have noticed this or that thing." So it is an open debate]. (Municipal administration Toffo)

For the elaboration of PDC III, all GIZ partner municipalities followed the procedural manual for the elaboration of the PDC in terms of civil society participation and had created a "Comité de Pilotage PDC III" with the official participation of civil society. The number of civil society organisations included differed between one (Kérou) and eight (Lokossa). The actors most commonly invited were CPC, MAEP, Cadre de Concertation des OSC, Association des Artisans, or Association des Producteurs. At the time of research, most of the Comité de Pilotage had just started its work on the development plan and it was not entirely clear how inclusive the elaboration process would be. Three of the partner municipalities had decided to conduct a needs assessment at the village level (Natitingou, Lokossa, Toffo). Kérou opted for the district level – due to financial constraints according to the municipal authorities – despite civil society having campaigned to go to the village level. Civil society supports the idea:

Les gens ont compris que c'est nous-mêmes qui allons élaborer notre PAI compte tenu de la réalité de chacun de notre milieu à travers les villages à travers les arrondissements c'est ça, on ne peut plus dire que c'est les experts qui viendront à notre place [The people understood that it is us ourselves who will develop the Annual Investment Plan, taking into account the reality of everybody from our milieu from the villages to the districts. That's it, you can't say anymore that the experts take part instead of us]. (MAEP, Toffo)

The needs assessment itself, then, was not as inclusive as the PDDC AA 4–through RODEL – had proposed: Only in Natitingou did the needs assessment take into account civil society and citizens; the other partner municipalities relied on technical experts and the opinion of officials such as the district chief, village chief, and village councillors. Having said that, civil society was able to monitor the process through its presence in the Comité de Pilotage.

When it comes to citizen participation in the annual PAI, partner municipalities have developed a well-established routine of inviting CSOs to their annual "PAI evaluation-elaboration workshop", together with municipal councillors, heads of technical services and deconcentrated services. Yet, civil society is usually not part of the more official "Comité d'Elaboration du PAI" that exists in many municipalities.<sup>18</sup> Only in Lokossa, have eight civil society members been included in the committee since 2016. For the workshops, civil society representatives receive personal invitations from the municipality which makes many feel more obliged to go. At these workshops, municipal authorities present the achievements of the current PAI and make a proposal for the next PAI, which is then discussed within the group. Most civil society actors appreciate the fact that they can participate in the discussions:

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18 For example, in Natitingou (Conversation, civil society, Natitingou).

C'est bien puisque tout le monde participe. Il faut la participation de tout le monde, puisque toutes les couches ont leur problème. Que ce soit les jeunes, que ce soit les femmes, que ce soit les vieux, les artisans, il faut les inviter, que tout le monde participe [It is good because everybody participates. You need the participation of everybody because all social classes have their particular problems. Be it the young, the women, the old, the craftsmen, you need to invite them, so that everybody participates]. (Interview 38, civil society, Kérou)

It depends, however, how well prepared civil society is for these discussions: Only few partner municipalities regularly provide the draft of the PAI to the workshop participants for preparation (Toffo). Civil society members in Kérou and Natitingou, for example, complained they could not prepare properly due to the lack of information material.<sup>19</sup> There are also a few civil society members that are sceptical as they feel that critical topics are not discussed:

Mais c'est qu'ils traînent les pas sur les sujets sensibles, l'essentiel. Ils ne viennent pas vite sur ce qui est essentiel, donc ils tournent sur des trucs inutiles, ils perdent tout le temps. [...] Histoire de vous décourager [But the thing is that they go over the sensitive subjects, the essentials. They do not touch the essential issues quickly, so they turn to useless things, they lose all the time. [...] It's to discourage you]. (Interview 48b, civil society, Natitingou)

Others felt that they did not have much room to influence decisions, as the PAI could only include projects that were already part of the PDC.<sup>20</sup> Some also criticised that they did not know what happened to their proposition in the final document, as the municipal council decided the final PAI sometime later.

Although the “PAI evaluation-elaboration workshops” are well established in GIZ partner municipalities, the other forms of citizen participation foreseen in the GIZ approach are much less regular practice. For example, the evaluation of the PAI by citizens and civil society at district level has only taken place in Natitingou and Kérou and only in the year of the “Suivi-PAI” project by RODEL. In the following years, civil society did not have the resources – and perhaps not the energy – to pursue the initiative further. A similar development took place with regard to the awareness raising on the PAI and the monitoring of PAI projects. These activities only took place in 2014 in Natitingou and Kérou, which were the two municipalities with RODEL activities under study. A civil society member of Kérou, the poorest of the 6 municipalities, tried to explain why activities slowed down after RODEL and why GIZ did not continue to support the PAI at district level:

C'est eux (RODEL) qui font que ça marche un peu, sinon, si c'est nous là, ça ne marche pas. Parfois aussi on manque de moyen pour pouvoir faire ça et on n'est pas bien organiser quoi; parce que ce n'est même pas manque de moyen, c'est bien organiser; si on est bien organiser, on va cotiser nous-même; puisque ceux qui nous aide aussi c'est les cotisations [It is RODEL which takes care that things work a bit, if not, if it is us here, it doesn't work. Sometimes we lack the means; and we are not well organised. But it is not even about a lack of means, it is about good organisation. If you are well organised, you collect the money among yourself, because these collections help us as well]. (Interview 33, civil society, Kérou)

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19 Interview 33, civil society, Kérou, and Interview 48, civil society, Natitingou.

20 Interview 40, civil society, Kérou.

Also with regard to the follow-up on the PAI, GIZ partner municipalities have not regularly engaged in outreach to citizens or in systematic monitoring of the PAI infrastructure projects. Concerning awareness raising for the PAI, RODEL and civil society organised an outreach campaign in 2014 for interest groups and the wider civil society at district level in Natitingou and Kérou, but no similar activities took place in the years after. Toffo was the only partner municipality where civil society started outreach activities on the PAI, independent of GIZ, but in close exchange with the NGO Grain: Under the lead of the NGO Bénin Action, civil society started to distribute a summary of the PAI to local councillors and civil society at district level. When it comes to the monitoring of the PAI through field visits, most GIZ partner municipalities did not follow the GIZ approach promoted by RODEL strictly. In fact, the GIZ approach to monitoring the PAI was only implemented in 2014 in Kérou and Natitingou in the context of RODEL's project. However, the PAI was followed up in four partner municipalities through the field visits of MAEP and CPC. Independently of the PAI, MAEP and CPC were mandated to conduct visits of infrastructure projects in their municipality and did so mostly upon citizen complaints. There was, however, an interesting synergy: As MAEP and CPC usually participated in the PAI workshops, they were familiar with the PAI document and could relate the information gathered during field visits to the PAI. This information helped civil society actors to approach the municipality in an informed manner.

#### *Implementation in non-partner municipalities*

Non-partner municipalities showed a slightly lower quality of citizen participation at the outcome level. Unlike in GIZ municipalities, there were no donors that supported municipal authorities or civil society to further engage with the PAI or the PDC. However, there *was* civil society participation in the planning of these documents. In both municipalities, civil society representatives were included in the Comité de Pilotage du PDC III and regularly invited to PAI evaluation and elaboration workshops. This seems to be a long-established practice that is also part of national-level manuals.

In respect to citizen participation in the PDC, non-partner municipalities offered fewer opportunities to citizens or civil society. There were no district-level evaluation workshops of the PDC II similar to those organised by RODEL, either with/by civil society or with citizens. However, for the elaboration of the PDC III, the municipality invited 2-4 civil society representatives to the Comité de Pilotage. It seems that the national level as well as the regional level played an important role in this. Firstly, the inclusion of civil society was a requirement in the procedural manual for the PDC III from the ministry. The planning director in Dassa, for example, emphasised they were following the manual when organising the PDC III process. Secondly, the regional association of municipalities visited all partner *and* non-partner municipalities to explain the PDC III elaboration process, mentioning the importance of the inclusion of all stakeholders in the municipality at every step of the planning process.<sup>21</sup> There was hence a clear guideline from the national-level that civil society needed to be included in the planning committee of the PDC. Inviting civil society to such meetings is, however, no guarantee for *de facto* civil society participation. Several municipal interview partners from partner and non-partner complained that civil society did not appear at meetings although they were invited. In Copargo, for example, the presidents

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21 I participated in such a workshop by the ACAD in Copargo on 13 January 2017.

of MAEP and CPC joined the planning meeting while other civil society organisations invited did not attend. Such incidents challenge the credibility of civil society's demands for more inclusion in municipal politics. When it comes to the needs assessment for the PDC, the non-partner municipalities took a less participative approach than most GIZ municipalities. The municipalities both hired technical experts who limited the needs assessment to the district level. In addition, neither civil society nor citizen's opinions were included in a substantial manner; the main interlocutors for the assessment were the village chiefs, village council and some elders.

Civil society of non-partner municipalities was also included in the planning of the PAI. Here, the most important form of participation are the two-day "PAI evaluation and elaboration workshops". Similar to partner municipalities, non-partner municipalities invite municipal councillors, heads of technical services, deconcentrated services, village chiefs and some members of the civil society. In Copargo, resource persons – individuals who have specific knowledge due to their previous positions – are also invited. The following quotes show how the mayor – a former radio *grogneur* and thus close to civil society – and civil society understand the role of civil society in the PAI:

Notre objectif c'est la transparence et aussi pour voir qu'on puisse répondre aux vrais aspirations de la population, il ne faut pas aller planifier quelque chose dont la population n'a pas besoin, mais lorsque vous les invitez à ces séances-là, la société civile est censée de défendre les populations [Our goal is transparency and to see if we can respond to the wishes of the people. You don't need to plan something that the population does not need, but if you invite them at these meetings, the civil society is in charge of defending the people]. (Interview 18, municipal leadership, Copargo)

Nous venons en tant que société civile pour voir qu'est-ce qui a été fait. Et lorsqu'on nous dit ce qui a été fait, on dit mais pourquoi cela a été comme ça? Et on nous explique [We come as civil society to see what has been done. And if they tell us what was achieved, we ask "Why was that like this?" And they explain to us]. (Interview 28, civil society, Copargo)

Similar to partner municipalities, civil society has often problems to access the municipal documents on the PAI. In Dassa, the municipal administration seems to be closed and members of the CPC had difficulty accessing the PAI to prepare for the evaluation meeting or to conduct further monitoring.<sup>22</sup> In Copargo, the municipal administration seemed to share the drafts of the PAI during the evaluation and elaboration session with all participants. However, when it came to more intensive accompaniment of the PAI, civil society in non-partner municipalities did not take further action. There was, for example, no evaluation of the PAI by civil society or citizens, either at the municipal or at the district level. There was also no follow-up in terms of awareness raising campaigns. However, similar to the partner municipalities, there was indirect monitoring of the PAI because of the field visits conducted by CPC and MAEP. The CPC in Dassa, for example, has been conducting regular field visits since 2012 to monitor infrastructure projects as part of their set of CPC activities. As the CPC in Dassa receives regular funding from Particip, these field visits take place on a regular, almost monthly, basis and are well documented.<sup>23</sup> Yet, when I asked the president of the CPC in Dassa, whether there had been any successes from these

22 Interview 49, civil society, Dassa.

23 I have accessed the Particip documentation for the CPC in Dassa.

field visits, he told me the CPC wrote reports to the mayor but never received a response from the municipality. CPC members also never tried to follow up on any of the issues. Apparently, activism seems to stop once the letter is sent out and the documentation has been handed in to the Particip regional bureau. In Copargo, the small circle of active individuals around CPC and MAEP also conduct field visits on municipal infrastructure projects that might, or might not, be linked to the PAI. Findings are then discussed with the municipality. Individuals seem to be more engaged to follow up on impact and even risked heated discussions with the municipal council, although the CPC does not receive any guidance or financial backing from Particip. Both non-partner municipalities do have a form of PAI monitoring, although this is not strictly tied to the PAI and seems to be conducted with a distinct level of success.

## **Step 2: from outcome to impact**

In the case of the Suivi-PAI or Suivi-PDC, the step from outcome to impact is smaller in comparison to the public accountability hearings. The citizen participation mechanisms of Suivi-PAI/Suivi-PDC thus provide for a more direct link to local governance and quality of public services in the municipality. To establish the link between outcome (Suivi-PAI/Suivi-PDC) and impact (local governance and public service provision) in an exemplary manner, I used the same approach as in the case of public accountability hearings: I collected concrete examples of improvements in local governance or public services that could – at least partially – be traced back to the Suivi-PAI or the Suivi-PDC. The Suivi-PAI/Suivi-PDC are, of course, only one factor amongst several that lead to improvements at impact level: the availability of financial means, the administrative complexity of the project, or the quality of construction works all contribute to the final result.

Suivi-PAI or Suivi-PDC make a contribution to improvements at the impact level of local governance and public services in similar ways as public accountability hearings: Citizens and civil society have an opportunity to point out problems otherwise neglected by the municipal administration, and can propose new solutions. They do so at a very concrete step of the municipal planning process, and can thus directly follow up on the effect. However, Suivi-PAI or Suivi-PDC do not provide for the same mass mobilisation as public accountability hearings, and thus create less pressure for the mayor to take action.

The success stories collected in point to improvements in the following areas:

- i) Awareness raising:** Suivi-PAI/Suivi-PDC were able to initiate awareness raising campaigns, for instance, on the importance of school attendance or tax payments.
- ii) Participation:** Suivi-PAI/Suivi-PDC were able to increase the quality of participation. Citizens were for example better equipped to provide input to the PDC III or the budget plan, and particular groups, such as youth, were given the opportunity to voice demands.
- ii) Transparency:** Citizen participation led to an increase in transparency, for example, by uncovering the misappropriation of funds or corruption at the construction site.
- iv) Adjusting planning to local needs:** Suivi-PAI/Suivi-PDC ensured that municipalities re-adjusted the PAI and PDC according to local needs, for example, where to construct a school or provide water access, or whether to include unfinished projects from previous plans.

**v) Construction/renovation:** The construction or renovation of municipal sites (schools, water pumps, roads, market storage, market halls) was probably the most common output of Suivi-PAI/Suivi-PDC.

**vi) Management of public services:** Suivi-PAI/Suivi-PDC improved the management of public services such as garbage collection.

**vi) Public space:** There were improvements in public space such as the maintenance of tourist sites.

**viii) Anti-discrimination:** Monitoring municipal planning led to anti-discrimination measures, for instance, making public buildings accessible for disabled people.

**ix) Dialogue/conflict resolution:** Citizen participation also initiated dialogue, for example in connection with poor reception at the health centre or conflicts between cattle farmers and other farmers.

The following subsections compare the examples from GIZ partner municipalities and non-partner municipalities. Again, the results need to be treated with caution, as the numbers of examples are not based on a systematic and complete collection. Furthermore, in some instances, it was difficult to ascertain whether civil society really played a role in the impact achieved or whether the project had simply been part of the PAI/PDC. I used the colour yellow to indicate examples, where the role of civil society was not clear. Table 5 provides an overview.

Table 5: Success stories from participatory municipal planning																														
Impact	TC																				NTC									
	Natitingou					Kérou					Lokossa					Toffo					Copargo					Dassa				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Awareness raising																														
Participation																														
Transparency																														
Process optimisation																														
Adjustment to local needs																														
Construction/renovation																														
Public services																														
Public space																														
Anti-discrimination																														
Dialogue/conflict																														
Source: Author																														

### *Impact in partner municipalities*

Taken together, the GIZ partner municipalities seem to have generated slightly more examples of improvements in local governance or public services through Suivi-PAI or Suivi-PDC. Again, the two municipalities with high GIZ input (Natitingou and Kérou) provide the most examples of impact achieved. Natitingou offered 10-11 examples of concrete results, Kérou



8-11 examples.<sup>24</sup> Most of the examples named by Natitingou and Kérou fall into the category of construction or renovation. The two municipalities with medium GIZ input, Lokossa and Toffo, also name some examples, with Toffo between 6-7 and Lokossa only 4-6.

#### *Impact in non-partner municipalities*

Similar to the public accountability hearings, the non-partner municipalities differ with regard to the impact achieved by civil society through participating at PAI and/or PDC. While civil society in Copargo seems to have made quite a few contributions to the PAI and/or PDC, naming 6-9 examples, the influence of civil society in Dassa seems to be more limited, with only 3-4 examples mentioned. The examples named do not fall as heavily into the category of construction or renovation. Concrete contributions were made by adjusting municipal plans to local needs (Copargo) and by initiating awareness raising and conflict resolution actions.

#### 4.4 Further results on the effectiveness of citizen participation mechanisms

Regarding the perceived impact of the various different citizen participation mechanisms, there are slight differences between municipal authorities and civil society, and between partner and non-partner municipalities. Municipal authorities consider public accountability hearings the most effective mechanism. A total of 38.9 per cent of partner municipalities and 36.6 per cent of non-partner municipalities know of a concrete improvement as a result of a public accountability hearing. This is followed by Suivi-PAI (25.7 per cent partner municipalities, 29.5 per cent non-partner municipalities) and Suivi-PDC (18 per cent partner municipalities, 28.2 per cent non-partner municipalities). It is interesting to note that the municipal authorities of non-partner municipalities had a more positive estimation of the impact of the Suivi-PAI (+3.9 per cent) and the Suivi-PDC (+9.6 per cent) than GIZ partner municipalities. This relation is turned upside down, when looking at the civil society.

<b>Table 6: Percentage of respondents from municipal authorities remembering a success story as a result of a given citizen participation mechanism</b>			
<b>Participation mechanisms</b>	<b>TC</b>	<b>NTC</b>	<b>Difference between TC and NTC</b>
Public accountability hearings	38.8	36.6	2.2
Suivi Plan Annuelle d'Investissement (PAI)	25.7	29.6	-3.9
Suivi Plan de Développement Communal (PDC)	18.4	28.2	-9.7
Notes: The total number of valid responses for TC was 152, and for NTC 71. There were no cases of non-response. Source: Author			

Civil society members of GIZ partner municipalities consider Suivi-PAI the most effective mechanism. 29.0 per cent know of an improvement as a result of Suivi-PAI, closely followed by Suivi-PDC and public accountability hearings (both at 26.7 per cent). Civil society in non-partner municipalities, in turn, have the same ranking as their municipal

24 The number of success stories is given as a range because it was hard to establish for all of the examples whether civil society participation was the main driver of the change or not.

counterpart, considering public accountability hearings as most effective (29.7 per cent), followed by Suivi-PAI and Suivi-PDC (both at 21.6 per cent).

<b>Table 7: Percentage of respondents from civil society remembering a success story as result of a given citizen participation mechanism</b>			
<b>Participation mechanisms</b>	<b>TC</b>	<b>NTC</b>	<b>Difference</b>
Public accountability hearings	26.7	29.7	-3.0
Suivi Plan Annuelle d'Investissement (PAI)	29.1	21.6	7.4
Suivi Plan de Développement Communal (PDC)	26.7	21.6	5.1
Notes: The total valid responses for TC was 172, and for NTC 74. There were no cases of non-response.			
Source: Author			

Interestingly, the type of Suivi-PAI and the Suivi-PDC in GIZ partner municipalities seems to be more appreciated by the civil society than by the municipal authorities: While Suivi-PAI and Suivi-PDC are judged between 3.9 and 9.6 per cent *less* effective by GIZ partner municipal authorities compared to non-partner municipalities, they are judged between 5.1 and 7.5 per cent *more* effective by the civil society of partner municipalities compared to their non-partner colleagues.

One possibility of interpreting these differences might be to assume that the authorities of the partner municipalities find it more difficult to come to a decision in the PAI or PDC planning process due to more substantial civil society participation. Civil society of partner municipalities, in turn, feels more empowered in the process and therefore gives higher ratings than the non-partner civil society. The fact that municipal authorities tend to judge public accountability hearings as by far the most effective mechanism points to the important effects of mass mobilisation – the municipality can reach a high number of people (this means that awareness raising is highly effective) but the municipality is also under greater pressure to make commitments and take action.

In sum, when analysing success stories collected from the various different citizen participation mechanisms, there is only a small difference in the *effectiveness* of the mechanism in terms of impact: RDC and Suivi-PAI/Suivi-PDC portray a similar number of success stories. If at all, there is a *qualitative* difference in the *kind* of changes brought about by these mechanisms: Public accountability hearings often lead to initiatives of process optimisation, an increase in participation opportunities, as well as adjustments in planning documents (PAI, budget), while Suivi-PAI/Suivi-PDC lead to adjustments in planning documents and are more directly linked to renovation or construction projects and improvements in public services. This might not be surprising, given that RDCs as such provide an open space for debate, where fundamental issues of participation and transparency as well as administrative processes can be discussed. Suivi-PAI/Suivi-PDC, in turn, are more focused on the particular planning documents, where infrastructure projects play an important role.

## 5 Conclusions

The GIZ programme “Programme d’appui à la Décentralisation et au Développement Communal” has provided long-term support to Benin’s municipalities within the framework of decentralisation. In this context, the PDDC promotes the participation of citizens and civil society in municipal decision-making and management of public affairs with the goal of strengthening the voice of citizens in municipal politics and increasing the accountability and transparency of the municipal administration. Ultimately, the idea is that citizen participation contributes positively to the development of the municipality.

The goal of this study was to analyse the effect of GIZ support to citizen participation at the municipal level. To do so, the study used a structured case comparison and contrasted four GIZ partner municipalities (treatment communities) and two non-partner municipalities (non-treatment communities). It focused on three citizen participation mechanisms in particular: Public accountability hearings, Suivi-PAI and Suivi-PDC. All three mechanisms receive support from the GIZ in the partner municipalities but not in the non-partner municipalities. The effect of GIZ support was analysed as two steps of the impact chain: In the first step, the influence of GIZ activities (input level) on the quality of the citizen participation format (outcome level) was observed. In the second step, the influence of the citizen participation format (outcome level) on the quality of local governance/public services (impact level) was recorded in an exemplary manner. Data collection methods were semi-structured interviews and surveys handed out to municipal authorities and civil society members of the municipalities under study.

The citizen participation mechanisms investigated in this study are also used by other donors in Benin. For example, the programmes of Particip also supports public accountability hearings and the local NGO GRAIND supports the monitoring of municipal documents, both using a similar approach to the GIZ. Thus the results of the study can possibly be transferred to other donors who apply similar instruments of citizen participation in Benin.

*The key findings of the study are as follows:*

In the case of Benin, the multi-level approach – support to national, departmental, and municipal level – helped to institutionalise citizen participation practices beyond partner municipalities. **Citizen participation practices enshrined in national-level procedures or guidelines are more likely to be taken up by non-partner municipalities and more likely to be sustainable.** The case of the public accountability hearings underlines this point. The fact that public accountability hearings were included into the FADEC criteria at national level ensured that partner as well as non-partner municipalities were more likely to engage in this citizen participation mechanism, although RDCs are not part of the legislative framework. Yet, including the RDCs – and other concrete mechanisms of citizen participation – into the legislative framework remains an important goal in order to advance the institutionalisation of citizen participation at local level. The current initiative of the MDGLAAT to pass a decree that requires mayors to hold RDCs at municipal level is a further important step towards institutionalisation and sustainability. The GIZ approach to include civil society and citizens in the evaluation and planning of the PAI at district level, on the other hand, is less likely to institutionalisation beyond partner municipalities due to the current lack of national-level guidance.

**The multi-stakeholder approach has increased the impact of the GIZ interventions regarding the quality of implementation of citizen participation mechanisms.** The combination of a top-down (municipalities) and bottom-up (civil society) approach is highly relevant to ensure the success of citizen participation at municipal level. The top-down strategy increases the openness and capacity of municipal administrations to offer citizen participation opportunities, while the bottom-up approach increases the engagement of civil society actors in citizen participation mechanisms. However, GIZ support focuses mainly on the supply side (municipalities) while providing only marginal support to the demand side (civil society). A comparative advantage for municipalities with a combination of civil society support by other donors and municipality support by GIZ such as in Lokossa or Toffo, where the presence of the programme Particip was felt strongly, was observed.

**Long-term commitment and the more intensive accompaniment from external actors is likely to increase the sustainability of citizen participation.** Citizen participation practices that have been supported for several years are more likely to be kept up by partner municipalities, while practices with one-time support are less likely to be repeated. While partner municipalities received support for public accountability hearings every year, they only received one-off support for the evaluation and planning of the PAI at district level. Thus partner municipalities continued to organise RDCs although they did not continue broader engagement of citizens and civil society in the PAI. The one-time support also did not increase demands from citizens to be part of the PAI.

**At the outcome level, the comparison of partner and non-partner municipalities shows that partner municipalities are slightly more professional, and more inclusive in the organisation of citizen participation formats.** In partner municipalities, citizen participation was organised slightly more professionally: Partner municipalities were more likely to implement citizen participation mechanisms according to national-level guidelines, fix responsibilities clearly and invest more time in a fact-based presentation to citizens. Partner municipalities were also more inclusive in their practice of citizen participation: They are more likely to include civil society at the preparation stage, and more likely to open up events to the public, as was the case in the public accountability hearings. While all RDCs organised by partner communities were open to the public, four out of five RDCs in the non-partner communities were limited to a specific target group of civil society organisations. This difference can be traced back to the advice provided by development advisors as well as RODEL. Lastly, partner municipalities are slightly better in organising follow-up on commitments made to civil society and citizens: They were more likely to organise evaluation meetings after RDCs to discuss next steps; some even discussed the establishment of follow-up committees. The emphasis on follow up is connected to the engagement of RODEL, as in particular in the municipalities with strong RODEL activities such as Natitingou and Kérou.

**At the impact level, differences between partner and non-partner municipalities could be observed with regard to the effectiveness of citizen participation.** Citizen participation mechanisms in partner municipalities were more likely to result in measures to improve the quality of public services and governance: Apparently, partner municipalities were more responsive to citizen requests raised in the context of public accountability hearings, Suivi-PAI, and Suivi-PDC, given that partner municipalities exhibited more success stories than non-partner municipalities. The number of success stories was particularly high in the two GIZ partner municipalities with high treatment intensity

(Natitingou, Kérou). It is likely that the emphasis of GIZ and its civil society partner RODEL on the follow-up on citizen requests led to greater responsiveness by the municipal administration and therefore to greater impact. This means that the quality of citizen participation is higher in partner municipalities, although the level of mobilisation of citizens might be even lower.

In addition, **civil society actors in partner municipalities have a higher sense of self-efficacy with regard to the degree of influence they can have on municipal politics** (at individual level, at the level of their own organisation, as well as civil society in general). Considering the impact of citizen participation in partner municipalities is also higher, the higher sense of self-efficacy can be considered as rooted in real experiences. It is also interesting to note that civil society in partner municipalities rely more on word of mouth (+13.7 per cent) and on official letters from the municipality (+10.9 per cent) than the non-partner municipalities. The greater significance of word of mouth hints to a better exchange between civil society and the higher importance of official invitations might hint at more established working relations between the municipality and civil society.

There were, however, **also a few counterintuitive findings** that need to be explored further: As mentioned above, civil society members of partner municipalities make *less* use of the citizen participation options existing in their municipality compared to non-partner municipalities (lower awareness of participation options, lower active participation). The numbers of participants in the public accountability hearings or the planning of the PAI or PDC is slightly higher in non-partner municipalities than in partner municipalities. One explanation might be that the circle of active civil society members is smaller in GIZ partner municipalities than in non-partner municipalities. It could be explored further whether the GIZ concentration on the top-down offer of citizen participation (municipal administration) instead of bottom-up demand (civil society) has led to the build-up of a civil society elite that participates in municipal politics, while the broader civil society group is left out.

Furthermore, **it is important to be aware of the different understandings of citizen participation in Benin**. Civil society and municipalities understand the role of civil society not only as checks and balances for municipal authorities, but also as a help for the municipality in the development of the community. When planning citizen participation programmes, both dimensions should be kept in mind.

Lastly, **the financial sustainability of citizen participation mechanisms should be addressed**. There is a worry amongst donors that citizen participation mechanisms that are promoted do not take place if no financial support is provided to municipalities. However, the study shows that non-partner communities were able to organise citizen participation formats without financial support of GIZ. Donors need to be aware that partners conceive a partnership *also* as a transactional relationship and will likely demand financial support for common activities, particularly against the backdrop of tight municipal budgets. Yet this does not mean that the mechanisms cannot be sustainable upon the end of donor engagement if donors choose a strategy of gradual phasing out and if municipal actors continue to consider citizen participation useful to their own work.

The study shows that impact assessments can yield important insights into the workings of external interventions in the field of governance, providing information on potential effects and limits of the programmes as well as identifying room for improvements. Integrating

impact assessments in a more routine manner into governance programmes might provide important opportunities for learning and the developing of the governance portfolio of aid organisations.

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## Appendix

### Appendix 1: Capacity building workshops to promote RDCs

Year	Title	Implementation	Target group	Municipalities
2013	Workshop RDC	COA/MdSC	Civil society	Toffo, Lokossa,
2013	Workshop RDC	RODEL	Civil society	Natitingou, Kérou
2013	Workshop RDC	GIZ	Municipality	Toffo, Lokossa
2014	Advocacy for RDCs	RODEL	Civil society	Natitingou, Kérou
2014	Workshop municipal budget	RODEL	Civil society	Natitingou, Kérou
Source: GIZ documentation, RODEL, 2014b				

## Appendix 2: List of interview partners

No.	Organisation	Date	Location
01	Municipal Council	24/10/2016	Natitingou
02	GIZ	25/10/2016	Natitingou
03a	Civil society/democracy + human rights	25/10/2016	Natitingou
03b	Civil society/democracy + human rights	25/10/2016	Natitingou
04	Municipal administration	25/10/2016	Natitingou
05	Civil society/media	25/10/2016	Natitingou
06	Municipal leadership	26/10/2016	Natitingou
07	Municipal leadership	26/10/2016	Natitingou
08	Civil society/democracy + human rights	26/10/2016	Natitingou
09	Civil society/youth, parents, women, disabled	26/10/2016	Natitingou
10	Municipal administration	27/10/2016	Lokossa
11	Municipal leadership	28/10/2016	Lokossa
12	Civil society/development	28/10/2016	Lokossa
13	Civil society/democracy + human rights	28/10/2016	Lokossa
14	Civil society/democracy + human rights	28/10/2016	Lokossa
15	Civil society/youth, parents, women, disabled	29/10/2016	Lokossa
16	Civil society/youth, parents, women, disabled	29/10/2016	Lokossa
17	Civil society/democracy + human rights	10/01/2017	Copargo
18	Municipal leadership	11/01/2017	Copargo
19	Municipal administration	11/01/2017	Copargo
20	Civil society/ democracy + human rights	11/01/2017	Copargo
21	Municipal administration	11/01/2017	Copargo
22	Municipal leadership	12/01/2017	Copargo
23	Civil society/democracy + human rights	12/01/2017	Copargo
24	Civil society/youth, parents, women, disabled	12/01/2017	Copargo
25	Civil society/professional, trade unions	13/01/2017	Copargo
26	Municipal leadership/ local	13/01/2017	Copargo
27	Municipal leadership	13/01/2017	Copargo
28	Civil society/democracy + human rights	13/01/2017	Copargo
29	Municipal leadership	16/01/2017	Kérou
30	Civil society/democracy + human rights	16/01/2017	Kérou
32	Municipal administration	16/01/2017	Kérou
33	Civil society/democracy + human rights	16/01/2017	Kérou
34	Civil society/professional, trade unions	17/01/2017	Kérou
35	Civil society/democracy + human rights	17/01/2017	Kérou
36	Civil society/professional, trade unions	17/01/2017	Kérou
37	Municipal leadership/local	17/01/2017	Kérou
38	Civil society/youth, parents, women, disabled	18/01/2017	Kérou
39	Municipal administration	18/01/2017	Kérou

40	Civil society/democracy + human rights	18/01/2017	Kérou
41	Municipal administration	18/01/2017	Kérou
42	Municipal council	19/01/2017	Kérou
43	Civil society/religion	19/01/2017	Kérou
44	Civil society/royalty	19/01/2017	Kérou
45	Civil society/youth, parents, women, disabled	22/01/2017	Natitingou
46	Municipal administration	23/01/2017	Natitingou
47	Civil society/lders	23/01/2017	Natitingou
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50	Civil society/democracy + human rights	25/01/2017	Dassa
51	Municipal administration	26/01/2017	Dassa
52	Municipal administration	26/01/2017	Dassa
53	Civil society/youth, parents, women, disabled	26/01/2017	Dassa
54	Civil society/development	26/01/2017	Dassa
55	Civil society/youth, parents, women, disabled	27/01/2017	Toffo
56	Civil society/democracy + human rights	27/01/2017	Toffo
57	Civil society/democracy + human rights	27/01/2017	Toffo
58	Civil society/professional, trade unions	28/01/2017	Toffo
59	Civil society/youth, parents, women, disabled	28/01/2017	Toffo
60	Civil society/professional, trade unions	28/01/2017	Toffo
61	Civil society/democracy + human rights	28/01/2017	Toffo
62	Civil society /democracy + human rights	28/01/2017	Toffo
63	Municipal administration	30/01/2017	Toffo
64	Municipal council	30/01/2017	Toffo
65	Municipal leadership/local	30/01/2017	Toffo
66	Municipal administration	30/01/2017	Toffo
67	Civil society/religion	30/01/2017	Toffo
68	Municipal leadership	31/01/2017	Toffo
69	Civil society/elders	31/01/2017	Toffo

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