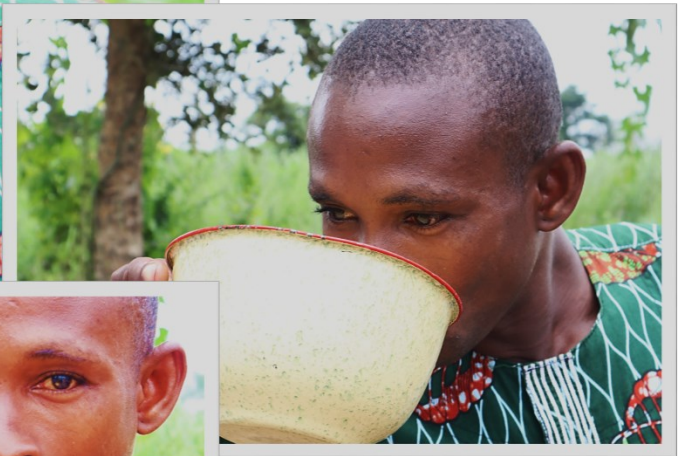


# Benin Report

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# Country Profile

Benin is a country made up out of 63 different people groups. SIM reported that they are still in progress with bible translations in multiple languages.<sup>1</sup> There is evidence that many of the original languages will remain alive. As all official gatherings are translated in at least 1 Beninese dialect, the church services even in the major cities are bilingual. From the outside there is no observable shame or blame in speaking in dialect, rather, the best connections are created when you (try to) communicate in a local dialect.

## The people

The population of Benin is growing, due to the positive improvements in hygiene awareness, and better accessible health care. Over the last 20 years the life expectancy raised from 55 to 62, while the under 5 mortality rates dropped from 14 % in the year 2000 to 9% in 2020.<sup>2</sup> We see over the same 20 years a slight decrease in contraceptive usage, this can be explained by the hope, and the expectation of a better future displayed by the Beninese people. An average family in Benin will have 4.9 children, in 2000 was this number still a 6,<sup>3</sup>

This number: of live births per women has slightly decreased, it can be explained by a major decrease in infant mortalities from 1 on the 12 infants to 1 on the 20 infants. WHO states that breastfeeding contributes to natural family spacing, and reduces the likeness of infants dying from infections and waterborne diseases? The hope of the people, combined with the increased awareness about hygiene needs, results in more children surviving the first year of life. This results naturally in better spaced families and contributes to a growing nation.

## Economics

With just over the half of the people living in rural areas and the rest in urban and suburban setting, this creates micro economic environments, people from the cities need cheap foods and villagers desire cheap goods. With an average income of 120\$ per month (per capita) we must conclude that 40% lives in poverty (the less than 2\$ a day).

Going back the micro economic environments. The 5<sup>th</sup> largest city Parakuo its 'supermarket' was a larger wooding construction with 4 times the inventory that the shop on the corner has. Cotonou the largest city in Benin counts 1 branded supermarket accessible to the people. Due to local microeconomics people who work in the fields can make ends meet with selling 2 buckets of peanuts or by making goat cheese. Cheap employment options can be found a low income starts from 100 dollars a month; this basic income will require growing some food staples yourself. With 107 people on a square km there is non-urban space enough to deploy in growing crops. Due to the lack of major brands invasion into Benin the Balassa-Samuelson effect can provide hard working Beninese people to break through the cycle of poverty. The World bank sees the access to consumer-friendly credit/loans as the next step to stabilize a healthy economic environment.

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<sup>1</sup> Person report- Visit with Lee Phillips SIM Benin/Togo regional director

<sup>2</sup> databank.worldbank.org – All data in this heading is taken from this source unless stated differently

<sup>3</sup> worldometers.info – Country data

## Faith

In Benin there are 4 major streams of religions, First, ethnic/primal religions what include Voodoo and worship of snakes among other native believes. Even though it less visible that the other majority believes, almost 40% of the Beninese feel connect, seek providence and guidance from a spiritual world out of sight.

The second major believe in Benin is Islam, mainly lead out of two streams; Gaddafi brought the Sufism Islamic teachings to Benin. A streaming that better aligned with the primal believes of the citizens of Benin. Besides the humanitarian help Gaddafi offered; poverty seem to be the ultimate worship to Allah, not needing anything more that God in your life. It's said that Gaddafi forced Islamic presence in Benin by existence. In rural and urban areas, you will not pass 10 min driving without encountering a mosque. The mosque stands out because the quality build and in inclusion of a well, a wash-station and often latrines.

The second Islamic major stream in Benin is Wahhabism, this far more orthodox approach to Islam tries to bring believers back to true Islam. High demands are placed on the believer like the daily prayers and to especially women should dress. Wahhabi believers look down on other Islamic streams but a hard on themselves as well.

The third major religion in Benin is Catholic. A Catholic mission that started in the 1860 results today in a widespread stable presence in francophone Africa. Even though 1 out of 4 missionaries died of Malaria or yellow fever. Finally, the church started taking form in 1880 when the sisters started with small schools next to the churches. Today the Catholic churches are often in the news with issues relating to indignation of worship and teaching. Meaning the attending believer want to pray, speak, sing and listing in the local tongue.

The last major religion in Benin is Protestant, once again 2 major streams but not in a hostile way The Union of Evangelical Churches of Benin (UEEB) is the partner church of SIM Benin. The UEEB now consists of almost 500 congregations, the church grows rapidly among the different rural tribes, taking an indigenized approach to start churches. In the cities the sadly the growth is not as visible as churches and pastors are more inward focused. Together with the Assembly of God churches they present the foreground of the Christian faith in Benin.

*Summarizing the faith heading, indigenizing of faith provide opportunities but as well challenges, we see examples of Gaddafi great works, but we know about the two sidedness of his regime. Humanitarians help often was the first step for the church to establish in Bangladesh this still works today. Finally, with the rise of indigenous churches I foresee a discussion between rural and urban church associations about who are we. I pray that the churches observe what is happening right now in the catholic church and realize how damaging it can become when they don't act as one body. I pray like Jesus prayed.*

Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will be done in Heaven and on Earth

# Trip report



# Community Visits – the yellow pin

Djougoua – The first project we visited was the inauguration of a well in Djougoua. The trip takes a 4 hours' drive including 20 min motor ride into the bush. The community was waiting for our arrival and while we were welcomed Hippolite fished the details on the well. The Fulani pastor did most of the talking and we heard about the need for water and the 30-minute walk to the river. We talked about restoring dignity as the pastor pointed out that we people wash their clothes more often.

Then we were greeted with a dance and song by the women and the people of Soleil d'Espoir happily joined in. Then the elder spoke, Honoré spoke, and Hippolite spoke, and I spoke. I shared about the coming together of forces to make this happen and that we need each other. We talked about having that remembrance forever about the group who made this well happen. Not one of us could have done this project alone. I shared it's not a finished project it's a new beginning.

A new beginning to a life that we will be easier, safe, and better. Less sickness a better life. More improvements like handwashing and latrines are needed. I summarized; it's a new day because we came together. I invited them to make another new start with Jesus and to be stronger together, a new start a better life. I asked people to who wanted a new start today. A Fulani man came forward and gave his life to Jesus. The pastor is following up with discipleship, heaven rejoiced!

The well was very well done, structural very solid and nicely detailed. Enough space around the spindle and to put buckets done. The animal feeder is a great addition. I in general appreciated the cleanness around the construction. No heaps of sand and gravel, or rock-hard concrete, and no wooden framework laying around.

After cutting the ribbon we drew water from the well, took a couple of pictures and recorded some testimonies before it was time to eat lots of food! The crew of Soleil d'Espoir followed up with a sketch about defecating near the well, to introduce the hygiene classes that will start next month. On the way back I asked Honoré about the backwards order of doing the well first before the teaching. I came to understand that the community is at that stage is collecting sand and gravel and cannot dedicate time to attend to teaching. Later I gained more insights on the Soleil d'Espoir approach to church planting.

The way back was longer than the way there, but we finished well!



# Training

The next morning it was training time and after a slow start we got going well. The translator Pastor James made the difference.

We camped out on the difference between charity and relief and development, with the group whiteboard exercise I got a big stuck, going round in a circle. So, I changed gears by giving a participant 20 Euro, without saying anything. We continued the discovery and after 10 minutes we got stuck again so I asked how the man felt about the 20 Euro, a little happy he responded.

Do you think I want it back? I asked, yes, he said. I asked the group if I did something wrong by giving someone 20 Euro. I told him that I would not receive it back that I was upset that he wanted to return the gift. Then we talked about emotions during this transaction, and it dawned on them that I explained the emotional impact of charity and devastating effect it can have different ways. (Fun fact, later that day I found my 20 in my notebook)

We introduced the CD diagram, a framework to evaluate and improve development and we spend all day discussing and practicing with that. Then we talked about the difference in training and empowerment. Once again, I got a bit stuck with the group, I believe they have the understanding and capacity to process the material, but it needs to 'click' first.

So, after introducing the difference between empowering and training, I told Alfred to continue, the lecture because I needed to make a phone call. Without giving him any information and let him suffer for a few minutes. I came back and we debriefed the exercise to evaluate the difference good empowerment and the importance of a foundation of solid training!



We broke for lunch and the host made sure we had a fantastic meal and the partner assured that this a very needed training for his people. I one way more profound other way widely applicable. I believed him, since he brought his laptop to the meeting and after a half an hour, he put it away to lean into the materials more focused. During the break I took Alfred apart and instructed him, to receive feedback and to ask questions to draw out some insights. After he did a good job, I could easily drive the points of **Empowerment** and **Training** home because they had seen the difference.

We finished with some case studies to determinate the 'real need' and how sacrifice and initiative works into that. Rather than me telling stories I had the participants come and present a need or project that the wanted me (the NGO) to support. the first one wanted to start a hospital in a

village; after good questions and critical evaluation the questions we decided that we would look for a midwife that could have consultation twice a month in the church.

The other wanted to build a Christian school because they started classes in a village, and we were well on our way highlighting the need. Until I asked will this ministry stop if we don't provide a school building? No, so I thanked him and showed him the door. We paused the conversation and we talked about 'no' being a good answer as well.

After the day Alfred and I debriefed, and we made plans for the next day and we agreed to do some parts together. At dinner time we debriefed more about the training with our host. His summary sometimes I feel that a 'project' is not right for us, know I can tell why. Before it was just a feeling, now we tool to test it and be confident to continue or walk away!

*Normally I teach this way, introduce concept 1, concept 2 and 3 and start using it to explore how it works practically. In this African culture I feel it needs to go the Lencioni way, tell/demonstrate the story first, highlight the element and finally introduce the concept, and return to demonstration.*



# Training day 2

I wanted to return to the process of development and had 3 groups do the same role play as I did, to respond to request from communities. Alfred guided this exercise so I could focus on the role plays the translation and details that I could highlight.

I discovered once given the change the Africans can be brutal in feedback to each other, it surprised me a little bit. The group found the exercise helpful. We spend some time to talk about adaptive approaches following the patron Aware >> Knowledge >> Strategy >> Action. I asked Honoré examples to provide practical applicable scenarios to learn from.

We had an amazing break again with loads of good food, and coffee always with snacks!

After lunch we spend time preparing the WASH materials in pairs, they all prepared a topic and we delivered them in one sitting. They have a sufficient understanding to successfully any of those materials.

In this report (for readability) I have not included, all little training rabbit trails to leadership, personal development or spiritual development or evangelism, the last day we looked at Jesus feeding the 5000. You probably have seen me share that message along the way.

We finished on time, until I decided to affirm each other and pray a blessing over each person attending the training. 15 participants, 30 min will do (so I thought), 2 hours later we were done, and we prayed and blessed, and it was powerful. By ending the training and step back and let the spirit take over.

So, we did not end early, meaning that we had to hurry to church, where we attended the bible study where I shared some. To end up with a late diner at my favorite ice-cream shop in Parakou.



## FM transmitters – grey pin

The Saturday morning, we left at 6 to travel to the grey pin, since I was the Honored guest, I got the drive shotgun, and I started the conversation with Honoré about his vision and future. It was a great conversation, and I learned a lot about the organization Soleil d’Espoir and their calling.

I think Honoré found it very important that I understood the niche where they work. They work with unreached communities, prepare the ground get a gathering started and are out. The well projects are community opener for them. We talked about the role of the church, Honoré; when a church is started our job is done.

Slowly I start to put the picture together how Soleil d’Espoir works and how significant of a role they play in enabling the church.

It takes us a full 6 hours to arrive at our destination close to Togo border, and they did it, they installed a FM station with a 500-meter reach loaded with Christian content. No radio will reach into that place now they have Christian content been transmitted during the day.

The installation was a bit crude, but it works soon we had music blasting from the car and portable radios. While we drive of Honoré thought me 2 things; his (African?) positive outlook on timing, believing that we can return in half the time that it took us to get there.

The second thing was profound, he stated installing the radio is the easiest part, now we need to train the pastor to go around and share about the radio station and about knock on doors to follow up. We follow-up with the pastor, the pastor harvest new believers, he looked at me again, and repeated training the pastors is the hard work!

We skipped diner this day, since we stopped for cheese, BBQ, peanuts, cookies, pop, and I don’t know what else.



# Fulani Church – Blue pin

Sunday morning, we started late, at 9 we gathered to go to church, and we took off to visit the community that received a well in 2015 and 2016. The desire to reach the community by car was greater than the motor bike path but we made it!

The church was in full swing with outside 2 groups of kids and teenagers of about 50 each and church was stuffed with 150 people. Of course, we got upfront and spoke to the church, and we spend time with the leader of the Fulani association over 600 Fulani churches exist. Not all of them with a building they thanked Soleil d'Espoir for that specifically.

The number are staggering! No believers in 2016, now 4 wells later 30 churches exist in that area, 6 with a building the rest house churches! From first village where Reach Beyond did the first well with Soleil d'Espoir, 1 Fulani is in seminary to become pastor! What a return on investment. Fulani church is currently paying their own pastors.

The conditions of the 3 wells we found was average, cracked concrete and one the lid was missing, and some had no rope. I will conclude the report with a suggestion about maintenance plan. However, all 3 wells still used and function and kept clean. It's important to note that the community wasn't informed about our visit, Honoré was proud to point out every tippy tap that after 15 years still is being used, usage of lids on water containers and drying racks been used. We looked at the local mini-FM transmitter and it needed maintenance after 6 years.

The Muslim community witnessed the rapid growth of the church and provided a brand-new building a mosque with and offered those who attend a financial benefit and only one person goes and opens the building no one worships there. They inaugurated a well not 500 meters apart from the one build in 2015 by RB and Soleil d'Espoir and at the day of the inauguration it was dry and never had water. God clearly spoke in that community!

The same day, we visited a new possible well site. When I asked Honoré if he was going to do the project, he said no. There was no pastor attached to the community. Again, a puzzle piece fell in place in the puzzle what does Soleil d'Espoir do.



# The not yet finished well- yellow pin

Monday, we visited the not yet finished well and it was helpful to see a well in progress Honoré want me to visit while they are building a well to discuss some design improvements. They work that is done is solid and yes, they can do with some beauty improvements overall technically they are very well build!

Even though this was not an inauguration there was some dancing and speeches and let Alfred speak in name of RB. We blasted out of the community to return quickly to the headquarters to have a goodbye party at the office. We did have a party.

Almost everyone spoke at the party and there were photos. There is fun and I had the group pray over Honoré and his family. We got a gift and many compliments; it was like we had known them for a long time. Alfred was so adapted into the Soleil d'Espoir community that they did not want to let him go!



# The Soleil d'Espoir way

The best way to describe the Soleil d'Espoir way is.

## ***Enabling the church to establish among the unreached!***

How all the different ministries of Soleil d'Espoir fit into this model I am not sure, but the parts that I know I have included in this model.

## ***Create and provide a voice in the desert***

The local FM transmitters, the 3-day video showing events are examples of ministries that Soleil d'Espoir embarks on to provide a Christian sound into the communities. However, all ways in conjunction with local evangelist or pastor. The radio content is often created by Soleil d'Espoir.

## ***Loving God by loving others***

With 25 well projects under their belt it's their signature project, but they don't shy away for doing some veterinarian work or something with agriculture. This is done with a proper developmental mindset.

## ***Be present***

Be present in the community with the health and hygiene classes. Together with the pastor/evangelist. Hygiene classes are followed up with home visits, this leads to the start of a bible study so a church will form.

## ***Enable the pastor***

Soleil d'Espoir pays a 3<sup>rd</sup> of the salary of the evangelist or pastor to ensure he will continue to do his work in the community and provides training for him. Soli in conjunction with the overseen church.

## ***Create awareness in churches***

Soleil d'Espoir encourages churches to be outreaching and proactive looking for missionaries. One example is the yearly pastors meeting, but also helping bible college students with recourses and students with internships.

*So, to conclude this heading Soleil d'Espoir seeks to enable the church to be responsible and reaching the unreached, they will not do a project if not a young or new pastor is connected to the place. The wells are an image of Jesus love but just a small link in this powerful church planning initiative!*



# Conclusions

*From our visit we can summarize that Soleil d'Espoir is a solid partner for Reach Beyond, with a clear vision and capability to execute set goals aligned with Reach Beyond purposes without losing sight of their own vision and strategy.*

## Reproducibility

It was encouraging the notice that the responsibilities of the local organization are shared and there are multiple key individuals in Soleil d'Espoir that take role in carrying the missions forward. Even though that Honoré displays clear leadership and vision there is sufficient evidence that individual growth and own initiatives are encouraged and supported!

I will give an 80% change if Reach Beyond would stop supporting the well ministry Soleil d'Espoir would find a way to continue that branch of ministry. With the same certainty I can say that funds are a significant challenge and stopping to support the well project will have direct impact on the reach of Soleil de Espoir.

## Sustainability

This is a challenge when looking at the wells technically. However, if you look at the impact aka the evangelistic opportunity, I think its Soleil d'Espoir strong suit. The plan to maintain impact is currently solo focused on the Christian message.

The technical intervention (the well) is just a tool a major one but not the goal of Soleil d'Espoir. However, during the visit we got started on the conversation that wells need attention. Especially the ones over 10 years age need revisiting and need a plan for maintenance. This can provide a great opportunity, (if done well) Community Development wise to ensure longevity with the community involvement.

I recommend that a development worker leads the maintenance project, especially the phases of inventory, planning and budgeting to ensure proper community involvement. The risk of maintenance being done by a `contractor` may defeat the opportunity to develop the communities and/or re-engaging the non-believers.



# Maintanaince plan

*This is suggestion, not the only way to go.*

## Awareness

Canvas all the completed projects with specific questions about the impact and usage. In this stage we gather data, not only technical data like what is broken and need fixing. Also, what impact does the well had on the community and how is the Kingdom impact through this project. Did they continue with the learned new behaviors regarding the health and hygiene teaching?

## Knowledge

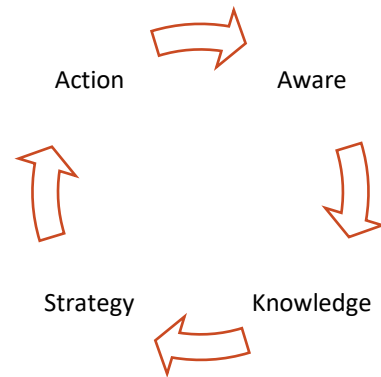
From the data we can pull certain information but as well timelines in  $x$  number of years  $y$  will fail or need every  $z$  year this subject needs to be rethought. Besides we can enquire budgets for improvements and repairs in quantity. If we have gathered the right information, we know what we can expect from the community involvement and take that up in the plans.

## Strategy

The well is owned by the community, but we are entitled to do follow up. Community involvement is key in deciding what needs to be done we can set perimeters about the how we are going to do it. In conjunction we can help with keeping up our first investment but with a clear development mindset and strategy.

## Action

Even though action will be determinate by what we know, and strategy chosen on the awareness and understanding. I believe gathering sufficient data and recording of the finding is the first action before `doing` something even if `doing something` seems too simple. Like to repair a few blocks on the walls or to repaint the construction and install a new rope and bucket



*I am willing to write a project proposal for the maintenance of existing wells and happily present it to the Dutch office seeking some funding opportunities.*