



## Benin CSI-RA

### Foreword

Civil society organisations (CSOs) are now widely recognised as needing to be full actors in development. They are noted for their capacity to reach, represent and defend the vulnerable and socially excluded. They offer citizens the means to act and emerge as agents of social change.

We must, however, recognise that the full participation of CSOs in different areas of public life depends on several factors that can facilitate or inhibit their actions or initiatives. Because of this, it was important that we support the self-assessment of CSOs in order to enable them to play a fuller role as actors in development.

CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation understood the need for this when it developed the Civil Society Index - Rapid Assessment (CSI-RA): a participatory civil society self-assessment tool. Its implementation enables us to make a diagnosis of civil society. Better still, it gives us necessary information to capture the most significant identified weaknesses in civil society, and leads to the development of an action plan. The implementation of the CSI-RA should help to correct civil society deficiencies.

In Benin, la Maison de la Société Civile (MdSC, the House of Civil Society), given its mission, its status and its experience on the ground, was chosen to coordinate this process. MdSC worked closely on this project with the West African Civil Society Institute (WACSI). A report was produced setting out major findings, challenges and areas for action. The essence of this report is presented in this volume structured around two elements: a synoptic presentation of key findings of the study and the action plan resulting from it. The study calls for a strengthening of efforts aimed at promoting a more conducive environment for CSOs in Benin and an enhancement of their capacities to assist them to play their role more efficiently as independent actors in development.

I would like to seize this opportunity to reiterate the gratitude of MdSC to all the stakeholders who took part in the implementation of the CSI-RA in Benin, and specifically the advisory group, project partners, consultants, colleagues and collaborators. Our gratitude also goes to you, the reader. Your criticisms, comments and other support will help CSOs to better play the role assigned to them.

## **Executive summary**

### ***CSI-RA in Benin***

In a national context where there is democratisation but also economic poverty, Beninese civil society strives to assert itself by initiating various actions. It operates in an environment that enables its activities, and has a capacity strengthening resource in the form of MdSC. MdSC is an association under Beninese law which has the goal of helping to establish a society in which CSOs are more involved in the process of setting, monitoring and assessing development policies and programmes. It strives to empower CSOs through capacity building.

CIVICUS, which works to strengthen citizen action and civil society throughout the world, including through its CSI-RA tool, established a partnership with MdSC and WACSI, a regional capacity building organisation based in Ghana, to adapt the CSI-RA to assess the state of Beninese civil society. This partnership formed part of a broader assessment of the state of civil society in West Africa, encompassing Benin, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal and Sierra Leone.

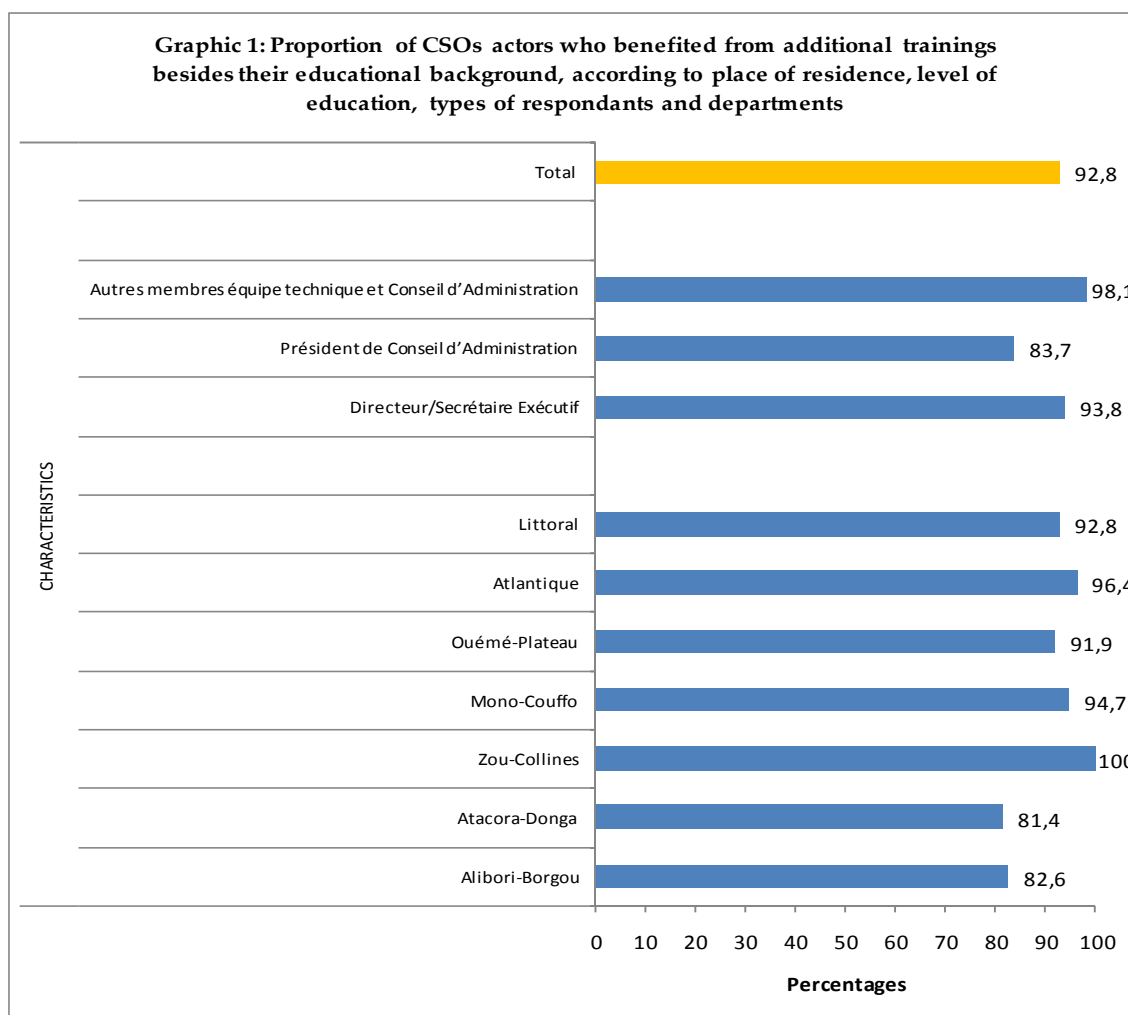
In Benin, following the CSI-RA adaptation workshop, held from 5 to 6 June 2013, CSOs decided to focus the assessment on two key issues: internal governance and CSOs' access to resources. For that purpose, a national study was conducted from 4 to 19 July 2013 in the 12 regions of Benin. The study was both quantitative and qualitative. One half of all CSOs registered in the directory of MdSC were involved in the survey.

### ***Profile of respondents***

Only one respondent in five (19%) is female, suggesting a male bias in CSO staffing. Around three respondents out of five (61.6%) are directors or executive secretaries of CSOs. Less than one respondent out of five (18.6%) is a board chair, with a slightly higher amount (19.8%) being members of a technical team or board of directors. Almost eight respondents in ten (79.4%) are aged 35 or older. Most (73.8%) have a higher education qualification. Most (80%) CSOs surveyed CSOs have been established for at least five years.

The educational background and training of CSO personnel are very diverse. Some of them studied economics, planning, business management, banking, management and project management (15.4%). Others studied law (11.4%), social sciences, psychology and philosophy (7.8%), geography (4.9%) and medicine (3.4%). Nearly 15% of respondents classify themselves in a broad vocationally trained category that included artisans, artists, paramedics or theologians. 6.5% of those questioned received no relevant training. However, almost all CSO personnel (92.8%) have received additional training. This proportion varies according to the location where the CSOs are based, the categories of stakeholders, the level of education, and the seniority of CSOs.

Specific training programmes attended by CSOs personnel dealt with conflict management (83%), community living (48.8%), project management and management tools (45.9%), human resource management (40.2%), strategic planning (36.5%), and monitoring and evaluation (35.7%), with leadership, mobilising resources and self-assessment being less used.



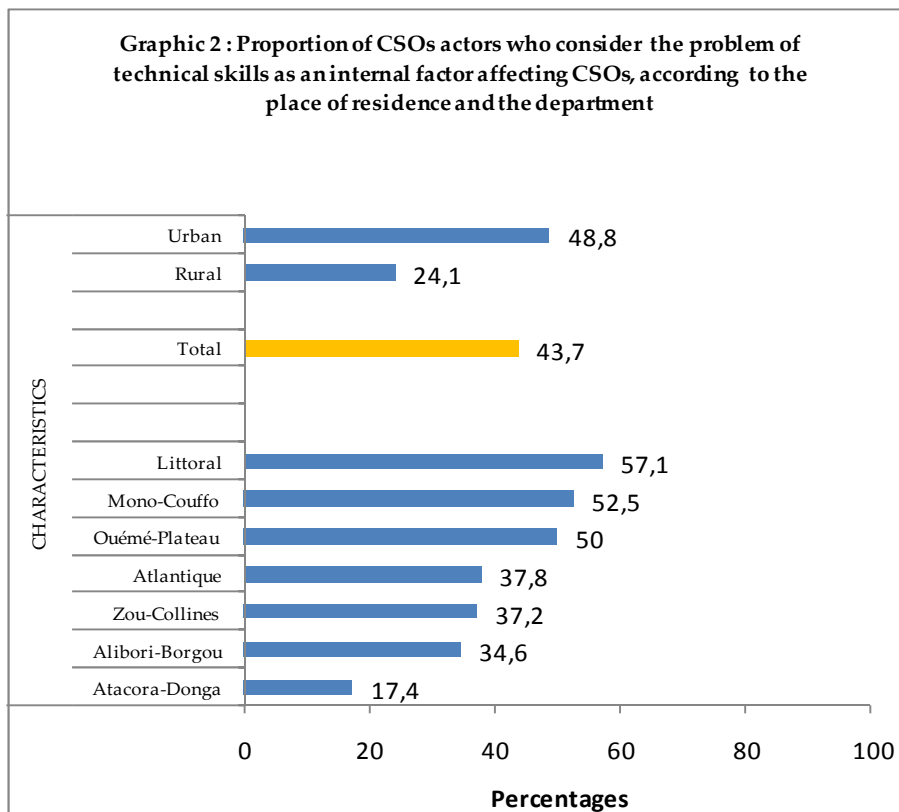
### **Key characteristics of CSOs**

The study revealed that over two thirds (67.3%) of CSOs belong to a network which can offer them institutional and financial support and capacity building opportunities. Further, seven out of ten CSOs (69.6%) have a gender policy. Almost two out of three (63.9%) CSOs are tenants in buildings that house them, rather than owning their headquarters.

Almost all CSOs (90.1%) assert that they are aware of the sources of funding for CSOs in Benin. As far as local partners go, MdSC (77.6%), municipalities (50.2%) and central government (47.5%) were the most cited funding sources. The average term of CSO funding is one year. Partners that funded CSOs in the 18 months preceding the survey are: local partners (such as municipalities and traders) (20.9%), central government (17.8%), MdSC (15.5%), the European Union (14.7%), GIZ (14%), the World Bank (11.6%), USAID (8.5%), Swiss Cooperation (8.5%) and the Belgian Technical Cooperation (7.5%).

However, generally, only 31.9% of CSOs state that they know the assessment criteria of donors. One third (33.3%) find these criteria too strict.

Lack of technical skills (43.7%), poor governance (38%), staff turnover (38.1%), problems of leadership (31.6%), conflicts of jurisdiction between bodies (19.8%), and the non-specialisation of CSOs (17.5%) were identified as the main internal challenges faced by CSOs. Challenges of CSO leadership are more often raised by young people and women.



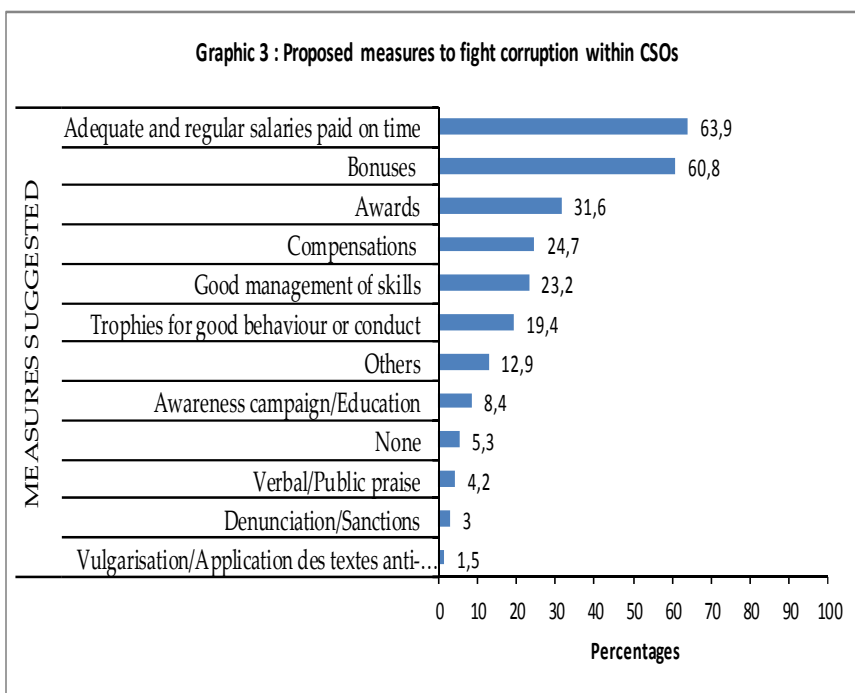
The main external challenges for CSOs were identified as the global economic crisis, the lack of resources and the political environment, which is not motivating.

In Benin, eight out of ten CSOs (81.7%) assert that they hold their general assemblies on time, according to their constitutions. Almost all stated that they had held a general assembly within the last year. Around three quarters (76.8%) of CSOs stated that their

statutory bodies function properly, while the proportion of CSOs producing annual reports is 87.5%.

The majority of CSOs (84%) stated that corruption exists within Beninese civil society. Measures currently taken to avoid corruption include public recognition and verbal praise. The three main proposed measures to fight corruption are paying regular and adequate salaries (63.9%), paying bonuses and allowances (60.8%) and awards (31.6%).

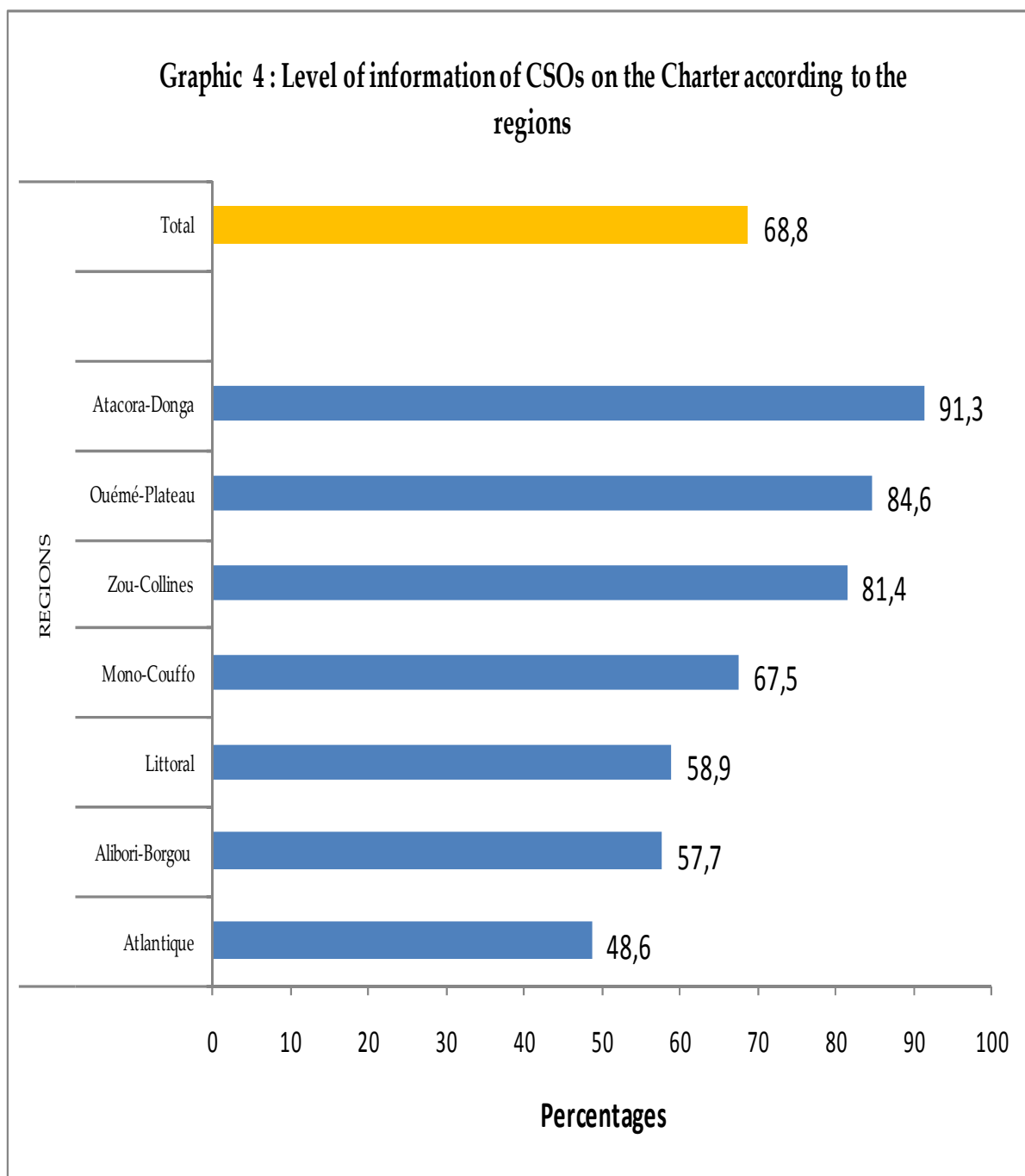
The quality of governance within CSOs partly depends on their management tools. The survey reveals that about three quarters of CSOs (71.1%) have a cashbook, 61.2% a log of programme operations and 58.9% a bank book and procedures manual. However, only one CSO in five (19.8%) uses accounting software.



Almost seven CSOs out of 10 (68.8%) have heard of the Benin CSO Charter, and of these, more than three quarters (77.9%) assert that they apply it. However, some of the people who have heard of the CSO Charter do not have the document.

*"We have heard of it, but I have never*

received a copy.” [Man, 54 years old, southern Benin]



Almost all of the surveyed CSOs expressed a need to be trained in writing project proposals. More specifically, respondents want to be trained on aspects such as writing styles, budget proposals, and how to elaborate a logical framework and problem tree.

#### ***Key areas for action***

The most serious perceived challenges for Beninese CSOs are mobilising resources (95%), capacity building (59.1%) and the governance climate (12.5%).

Recommendations were therefore made in three main areas by CSO representatives and members of the CSI-RA advisory group:

- Contributing to the improvement of internal governance of CSOs.
- Increasing the intervention capacities of CSOs at a technical level with regard to mobilising resources.
- Improving the external environment for CSOs.

These recommendations were translated into an action plan.