



PRÉSIDENCE
DE LA RÉPUBLIQUE
DU BENIN



Secrétariat Technique à la Coordination

PROJET DE COHESION SOCIALE DES REGIONS NORD DU GOLFE DE GUINEE (COSO)

PROGRAMME D'APPUI AUX INITIATIVES DANS LE SECTEUR DE L'ELEVAGE ET A LA COHESION SOCIALE (PAIE)

Quartier « Les Cocotiers », Rue 12.253, Lot 665 Porte 13 Cotonou

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International Conference

"Fragility, Conflict, Violence, and Social Cohesion Mechanisms in the Border Regions
and
Communities of Northern Benin"

1. The context of the COSO project

The Government of Benin has opted for a new social cohesion initiative, with support from the World Bank through the Social Cohesion Project for the Northern Gulf of Guinea Regions (COSO), which includes Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Togo. It is under the supervision of the General Secretariat of the Presidency of the Republic.

The development objective is to improve regional collaboration and the socio-economic and climate resilience of border communities in the target regions of the northern Gulf of Guinea countries exposed to conflicts and climate risks and is in line with the specific objectives of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2018-2025 relating to the following axes: a) developing healthy, competent and competitive human capital; b) sustainably increasing economic productivity and competitiveness; c) ensuring sustainable management of the livelihoods, of the environment and the emergence of regional development hubs; and d) consolidating the rule of law and good governance. The project is also in line with the objective of achieving the objectives of the Government Action Program (2021-2026) through its three pillars: a) strengthening democracy, the rule of law and good governance; b) pursuing the structural transformation of the economy; and c) sustainably increasing the social well-being of populations.

The current phase of the project has a duration of five (05) years and will be implemented through five (5) components, namely:

Component 1: Investing in community resilience and inclusion by financing local investments to promote community resilience and inclusion in border areas, based on a shared medium-term territorial vision between the countries.

Component 2: Strengthening the foundations and capacities for inclusive and resilient communities through financing training and capacity-building activities that can lay the foundations and strengthen the capacities of local stakeholders in the Gulf of Guinea countries.

Component 3: Regional Coordination and Dialogue Platform aiming to strengthen regional collaboration between the four target countries in order to support a coherent response that prevents the risks of Fragility, Conflict, and Violence (FCV) and manage climate and disaster risks in the Gulf of Guinea.

Component 4: Project Management supports project management and coordination at the regional, national, and subnational levels for the effective implementation of project activities.

Component 5: Emergency Response Component will serve as a contingent emergency funding mechanism that could be triggered in the event of a natural or man-made disaster and/or health crisis such as pandemics through the official declaration of a national emergency, or upon official request from the respective governments.

2. The social cohesion

An analysis of the existing body of knowledge reveals that **social cohesion** is a complex concept, introduced by Émile Durkheim, who links it to solidarity and social ties in societies. According to him, in societies he describes as traditional, mechanical solidarity is based on the similarity between individuals, while in societies he describes as modern, the division of labour generates organic solidarity with weaker ties. Other sociologists such as Max Weber, Pierre Bourdieu, and Francis Akindès have enriched this reflection by highlighting the relationships between, on the one hand, values, institutions, social inequalities and, on the other, the construction of social ties and cohesion within human societies. They explain how levels of differences in economic, cultural, or social capital can either promote or harm the integration of individuals and the stability of societies. Ultimately, social cohesion is based on a balance between individual integration and collective solidarity, and it requires harmonious relationships and mutual trust. It constitutes a key factor in

harmony within societies, in particular for managing diversity, containing inequalities within reasonable limits for all and thus promoting equity.

In Africa, **social cohesion** is undermined by inter- and intra-community tensions, nowadays exacerbated by climate change, social, political, and economic crises, growing inequalities between livelihoods, and violence of all kinds. These crises weaken social ties and hinder the development of many countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. Thus, restoring social cohesion, through trust, dialogue, and solidarity between groups, is becoming imperative for the future of African societies. Yet, as such, the phenomenon has received little attention in social science research and development studies in the region. It is also noted that the achievements of public policies and development projects in this field have rarely been systematically documented. Therefore, it becomes necessary for researchers, experts and development actors to launch a process of producing a catalogue that reflects the state of research and development work relating to the various phenomena of fragility and social cohesion within communities and throughout the Gulf of Guinea region, with particular attention to its border with the Sahel region. This catalogue of recent and ongoing (research and development) work would serve as a basis for identifying knowledge needs that could lead to a research agenda whose products could inform public action for the benefit of cohesion and development of communities and the region.

3. The Conference

Thus, the project opted to resort to the existing scientific knowledge and information on the phenomenon of social cohesion, but chiefly to community of development practitioners and social science researchers working on the issues of social cohesion. In addition to the establishment of a scientific committee, it was decided to organize a conference to take stock of the knowledge mobilized on the theme of social cohesion at the national and regional levels. This conference will also provide an opportunity to discuss practical actions affecting social cohesion in the specific context of the Gulf of Guinea and the Sahel, with a view to promoting sustainable solutions that guarantee stability, social cohesion within communities and the survival of societies.

OBJECTIVES

The objective of this conference is to engage researchers, experts, and development practitioners on the contributions their research and practical experiences could make to building social cohesion and sustainable development in Benin and the Gulf of Guinea region, in order to contribute to research and a research agenda on this issue. Specifically, the objectives are to:

- Bring together the national and regional scientific and development practitioners' communities around the theme of social cohesion;
- Assess the contribution of recent or ongoing research and development work on social cohesion to a better understanding of the phenomenon for the benefit of community and regional development;
- Create a space for exchanges between researchers and development practitioners on field feedback on actions to strengthen social cohesion;
- Provide a framework for reflection on the opportunities to be seized by projects, decision-makers, civil society, and other development stakeholders to transform scientific knowledge into genuine tools for sustainable development.

EVENTS

The main activities that will mark the conference are:

- ✓ An inaugural conference;
- ✓ Plenary and parallel sessions;

- ✓ A roundtable discussion;
- ✓ Various types of presentations on research results;
- ✓ Exhibitions stands for research products and public actions outputs;
- ✓ A press conference.

3.1. THEMATIC AXES OF THE CONFERENCE

The conference will focus on four (4) themes, with social cohesion as a cross-cutting theme:

➤ **Axis 1: Local Governance and Social Cohesion**

Local governance plays a crucial role in the construction of contemporary societies. In its ideal form, it enables transparent resource management and promotes inclusive and responsible citizen participation. In its various forms of practice, local governance induces political, economic, and social reforms, the various implementation modalities of which influence social cohesion, with the effects being felt differently by different social categories. This theme provides an opportunity to take stock of research on the forms of local governance currently underway in the region, the reforms implemented, and the links between all of this and the state of social cohesion in the Gulf of Guinea and Sahel region. Papers in this theme will primarily, but not exclusively, address the following questions:

- What are the recent or current forms of local governance, and what influence do they have on social cohesion within the region's communities?
- What can we learn from and what are the prospects for Community-Led Development (CDD) projects, particularly with regard to inclusion and social cohesion?
- What are the recent or current institutional reforms, and to what extent do they contribute to reducing or exacerbating inequalities and strengthening the inclusion or worsen the exclusion of marginalized communities?

➤ **Axis 2: Climate Change and Social Cohesion**

Climate disruptions in the form of extreme events have profound effects on the health, food security, water resources, and livelihoods of vulnerable communities. They lead to migration and forced displacement of populations, transforming them into ecological refugees. These populations, victims of climate change, find themselves struggling to integrate host communities and are subjected to major socioeconomic challenges of insecurity and survival. These situations affect social cohesion within and between communities. Faced with these disruptions, the adaptive capacity of communities relies as much on basic infrastructure as on solidarity among their members and the material and institutional resources of public actions. This thematic axe provides opportunity for an overview of research on climate change phenomena, forms of community vulnerability and resilience, and adaptation processes, all in relation to social cohesion in the Gulf of Guinea and Sahel region. The axis addresses, among other things, the following questions:

- What are the forms of vulnerability/fragility experienced by local communities in the Gulf of Guinea and the Sahel in the face of climate change?
- To what extent does climate change constitute a social problem in this region and how does it affect social cohesion?
- What are the responses of the communities themselves to climate disruptions?
- What responses are the states of this region and the international community providing to these challenges, with what public policy instruments, and with what results?

➤ **Axis 3: Regional Integration and Social Cohesion**

This theme covers integration both at the regional and intra-country (national) levels. It will focus on cohesion between different regions, ethnic groups, or communities, with a view to greater social inclusion. Elements to be considered in this theme include territorial and social cohesion within a country, internal regional integration, strengthening internal ties between regions within a country,

national solidarity, and balanced territorial development. The links between social inclusion, equity, and social cohesion, on the one hand, and the reduction of internal divides/inequalities and poverty, on the other, are of particular interest. Within this theme, conference participants will make an overview of research on these phenomena as related to the dynamics of regional integration and social cohesion in a context of violent extremism, fragility, and social conflicts of all kinds. Papers will address the following questions, among others:

- What types and forms of violence mark the daily lives of communities in the Gulf of Guinea and Sahel region? How do stakeholders explain these phenomena, and what are their causes and consequences?
- How do internal migratory movements (rural-rural and rural-urban) fuel or result from these violent phenomena, and how do they affect social cohesion and the integration of individuals within communities?
- What forms of conflicts (ethnic, linguistic, religious, cultural, economic, etc.) emerge during these processes of migration and regional or national dis-integration?
- What public policy instruments address the issues of fragility and the integration of ethnic minorities and marginalized groups within national or regional communities, and what are their outcomes?

➤ **Axis 4: Institutions and social cohesion**

Social cohesion is guaranteed by the stability of social ties between the actors that form a society. This stability is created, maintained, and reproduced through both formal and informal institutions within each society. Institutions such as the family, school, the state, and religions are considered the basis for socialization and the promotion of the values of social justice, equity, solidarity, and integration, as well as for learning and formal or alternative education. Beyond these traditional social institutions, this theme will need to be extended to social economy organizations and various mutuality and solidarity groups through which communities create and reproduce bonds of living together. This theme provides an opportunity to take stock of research on the phenomena of local institutional dynamics in the Gulf of Guinea and Sahel region, and the resulting forms of social cohesion or disorganization. The expected papers for this theme revolve around the following main, non-exclusive, questions:

- What is the current state of these institutions in this region, and following what changes and transformations?
- How do these local institutions in the Gulf of Guinea and the Sahel react, particularly in situations of violence, fragility, or conflict, and what are the explanatory factors and the socio-cultural and political implications?
- What are the effects of the functioning of these institutions in these contexts on social cohesion?

3.2. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

The conference is open to all research and development actors interested in the issue of social cohesion in the nationally or regionally (researchers, teachers, doctoral students, development stakeholders, project managers, civil society leaders, etc.) and who have empirical research results or development experiences in this area to share.

The deadline for submitting abstracts is July 2, 2025.

Proposals for research papers should be presented using the following structure:

- The title of the abstract **in French and English**
- The first and last name(s) of the author(s), their affiliation, and email address(es), with the (*) symbol preceding the name of the corresponding author.
- The axis concerned by the abstract

- The type of presentation (oral presentation or poster)
- The abstract itself must include: a) background information, b) the objectives, c) the theoretical and methodological framework of the research, d) the results obtained, e) implications for action to promote social cohesion, f) keywords (maximum 5)

Proposals for papers on development project experiences should be presented using the following structure:

- The title of the abstract **in French and English**
- The first and last name(s) of the author(s), their affiliation, and email address(es), with the (*) symbol preceding the name of the corresponding author.
- The axis concerned by the abstract
- The type of presentation (oral presentation or poster)
- The abstract itself must include: a) background information, b) the objectives, c) the theory of change underlying the project d) the stakeholders and the results obtained, e) the achievements and challenges of the project for social cohesion, f) keywords (maximum 5)

The abstract text must be written in French or English in A4 format, portrait, Times News Roman font, size 12 pts, line spacing 1.5 and contain 300 words maximum. Abstracts must be submitted exclusively in electronic format (Word format) specifying the axis (in the subject) of the submitter's choice in relation to his/her disciplinary field, to the conference website address:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScWjgb_RTIDVeHVIL3ZbrlL2Al3kVS8-wg5OVVUea1Yi3e36g/viewform?usp=sharing

NB:

- Any submission that does not meet the above requirements will be rejected.
- All contributors whose abstract is accepted are required to submit the full text of their presentation no later than two weeks before the conference.

KEY DATES

- Call launch date: April 7, 2025
- Call relaunch date: May 8, 2025
- Reminder date: June 6, 2025
- Deadline for receipt of abstracts: July 2, 2025
- Date of notification of abstract acceptance and invitation: August 11, 2025
- Deadline for receipt of papers: September 19, 2025
- Conference schedule: October 2-4, 2025

3.3. GENERAL INFORMATION

- Venue: Cotonou *Palais des Congrès* (Benin)
- Languages of communication: French and English
- COVID-19 health measures: will be in line with current recommendations

CONTACT INFORMATION

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PARTICIPATION FEES

- Faculty members and Researchers: 40,000 CFA francs
- Young Researchers awaiting recruitment: 20,000 CFA francs
- Doctoral and Master Students: 10,000 CFA francs

EXHIBITION FEES AT THE STANDS

- Young Researchers/Inventors: 30,000 FCFA
- Non-Governmental Development Organizations: 200,000 FCFA
- Private Companies: 1,000,000 FCFA
- International Organizations: 1,500,000 FCFA

Registration fees are payable by MTN mobile money transfer as follows:

***880*41*444410*Amount#** Or by Money gram, Western Union, RIA in the name of :
Yessifou AMIDOU Or at the conference venue, Palais des congrès, Cotonou, Benin.

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