Benin: Transport Sector Investment Program

The objectives of this project (1997–2001) using $40 million of IDA funds were to: (i) safeguard the competitiveness of Benin’s transport sector and of its transit corridor through open modal competition; (ii) improve government’s capacity for planning, programming and managing transport sector investments; (iii) boost the allocation of resources to infrastructure maintenance; (iv) boost the recovery of user infrastructure charges; (v) expand private sector participation in public works and maximize its impact on the creation of jobs for unskilled labor; (vi) build capacity in sector institutions and optimize human resource utilization; and (vii) protect the environment and improve safety conditions.

Impact on the ground

• Rehabilitation and periodic maintenance of both paved and unpaved roads have improved. The country is much closer to achieving a sustainable road system, and road conditions have substantially improved accessibility. Maritime transport has been liberalized. The National Shippers Council has been restructured in support of shippers, ceasing its intervention in cargo allocation. Most donors now recognize that Benin has one of the most competitive transport sectors (especially roads) in West Africa.

• An integrated approach for planning expenditure was introduced. Reorganization at the Ministry of Public Works and Transport (MTPT) included a transport information system. A year after the project agreement was signed, road construction was being planned and maintenance was being programmed on a regular basis. In 2001 and 2002, the MTPT and the Roads and Works Department (DROA) were assisted in preparing their budget programs form FY 2001–04, thus maintaining the programming and budgeting system established during project preparation.

• A community-based rural roads management strategy has been tested by implementing some rehabilitation and maintenance works as pilot operations. In 1998, a National Council for Rural Roads was established with a set of procedures and agreements to be used in working with local communities. A study of the Banikoara region, one of the pilot operation area, showed that after road improvement, cotton production rose from about 29,000 t in 1998–99 to 44,700 t in 2001–02 largely due to improved market access for the villages-some of this was also attributable to on-going reforms in the cotton sector. Corn, rice, and sorghum showed significant increases. Access to health centers, schools and water points was also improved. Eighty-five percent of the population expressed satisfaction with the present availability of motorized transport.
The Road Fund has exceeded performance objectives (resource mobilization over 100 percent of targets; settlement of contractors’ bills within fifteen days) over the five years of the project. The Fund was restructured and given independent status while its activities were limited exclusively to road maintenance. Most of its 821 employees were retired or moved to DROA. The road tax was raised, tollbooths were consolidated and collections privatized. The contribution from the national budget rose from CFA 600 million in 1997 to CFA 850 million in 2002—funding was thus guaranteed for recurrent and periodic maintenance.

The DROA was restructured to reform the road maintenance system. Force account work has remained limited at CFA 1,000 million, whatever the total may be, the remainder going to private enterprises. Some 30 contracting firms came into being during the project period; however, efforts to build their capacity were limited by conflicts within the contractors’ association hired to manage the training program. Technical assistance was provided to set up a Road Data Bank. Road rehabilitation and maintenance covered 2,084 km in five sets of contracts, including the upgrading and construction of bridges. Works were carried out by a mix of small- and medium-sized local contractors and large local and international firms.

Lessons learned

• Comprehensive policy analysis, consensus building and sector-wide institution building are important for sustainability.

• Persistence and follow-up is critical to improved management and privatization in the face of vested interests.

• Training of small roads contractors, while important for this type of program, is difficult to achieve. The issue of training private contractors, especially in countries that traditionally lack this expertise, needs to be treated more vigorously from the beginning.

• Mobilizing local counterpart funding for rural road rehabilitation is difficult in the poorest areas. Counterpart contributions are likely to be difficult to collect in areas lacking cash crops.

• Road maintenance systems need to be promoted and assisted in developing. The success of the Urban Works Agency (AGETUR) has demonstrated how small contractors can be helped to develop in urban areas.

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