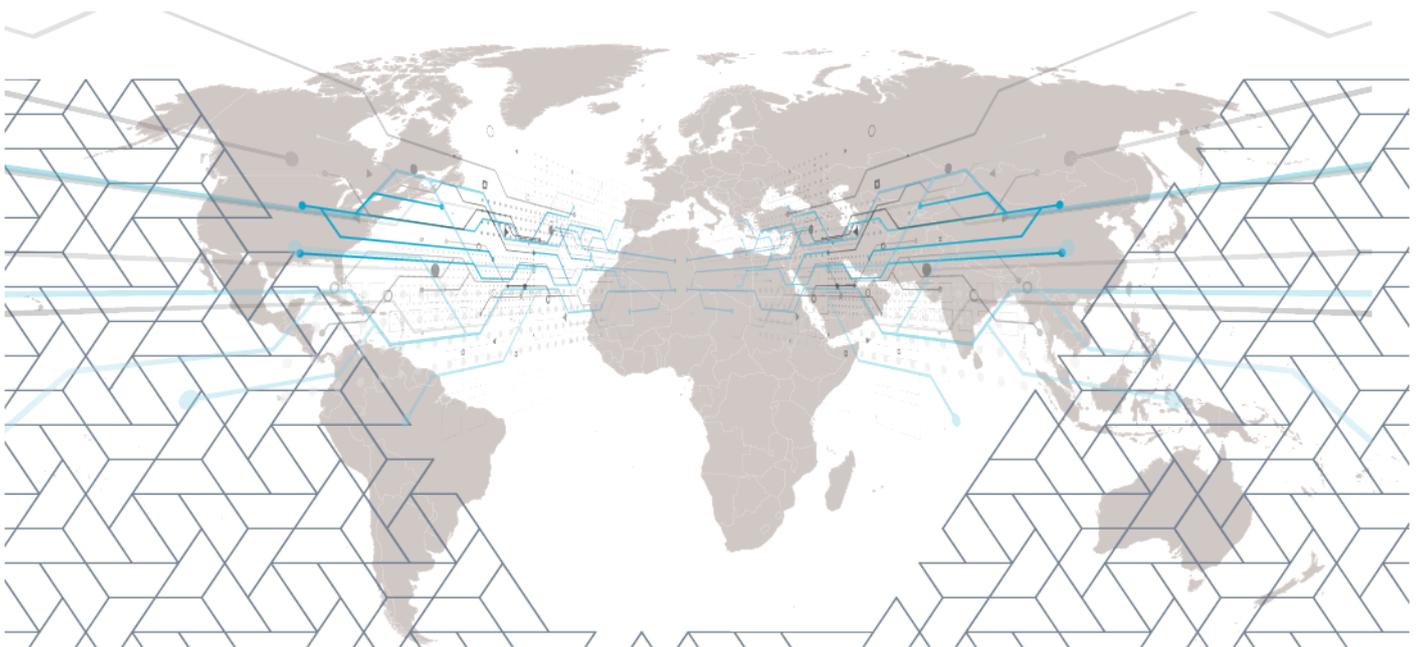


DCAF Geneva Centre
for Security Sector
Governance

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY SECTOR
ADVISORY TEAM (ISSAT)

Case Study - The Creation of a Republican Police in Benin

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ISSAT Case Study Examples

ISSAT’s main role is to provide operational support to reinforce the international community's security and justice reform capacity. Through our case studies, we present our donors and community of practice with contextualized examples of reform processes that could be useful in their areas of priority. This case study is based on the observations and reflections of one of ISSAT SSR expert following a deployment in the country. The case study also aims to work as a conversation starter, and we welcome comments and contributions from our readers.



Background and Introduction

Benin's development relies heavily on its ability to attract foreign investments and on tourism. In a West African region troubled by violent events, the country's security is therefore an essential condition to its future wealth. Benin's security and defence forces have been facing the traditional threats posed by serious and organised crime, road blockages and illegal exploitation of the sea for many years. The extension of terrorism from the Sahel into Benin is an emerging risk for the stability of the country. It became a reality on May 1st, 2019, with the assassination of a guide in the Pendjari Park and the kidnapping of French tourists near the border with Burkina Faso.

National security was already a key issue during the 2016 elections campaign. As new Head of State, Patrice Talon quickly expressed his vision for the transformation of the security sector in the Government Action Programme (GAP) 2016-2021 and the National Development Plan (NDP) 2018-2025. The documents set out the ambition to rationalise the public administration and the government's architecture. The GAP lists eighteen sectoral projects aiming at strengthening public security and national defence, including, risk prevention, civil protection, integrated management of border areas and internal security.

The creation of a single internal security force under the supervision of the Ministry of the Interior and Public Security through merging the police and gendarmerie, was included as a potential measure to improve the security sector's management. The operationalisation of this commitment came on the 1st of January 2018, when the creation of the "Republican Police" was announced. This major initiative, transforming Benin's security sector, only has one recent precedent, being the reform of Belgium's police initiated on the 1st of January 2001. Benin's security apparatus is being redefined, as a result of the disappearance of those two very old structures, which contributed through their culture and traditions to its architecture and governance. The new structure now brings together some 10,000 police officers and is intended to be a hybrid of two organisations with different practices and understandings of internal security.

In reality, regional instability and emerging security threats require Benin's political authorities to implement an effective system for anticipation and response. The creation of the Republican Police is only the first step, and a new National Security Strategy is now expected in the first half of 2020. While the police-gendarmerie merger could define the reform's outlook, it constitutes a major challenge for the country with foreseeable advantages and disadvantages on the structural and functional levels.



The Challenges of the Merger

Strategic Challenges

Fundamentally transforming the organisation of a security institution requires national security policies and strategies that identify priority objectives and the capabilities required to achieve them. Throughout 2017, the committee set up to prepare for the merger of the National Police and the National Gendarmerie has worked without a national security sector strategy or a national security policy. With no political or strategic guidance at its disposal, the committee based its work solely on the will of the Head of State.

Ideally, national authorities generally set the framework for security sector reform (SSR) through a security policy document and a transformation plan that reconciles aspirations and means. Experience shows that it is important that these key documents integrate internal security, defence and justice and are the product of a truly comprehensive and inclusive dialogue, resulting in a widely shared vision. The Head of State' political will, while crucial to reform, is not sufficient on its own to set priorities and bridge the gap between divergent views on the technical aspects of a difficult transformation. The lack of long-term planning has also led to fears of an unpredictable process and a foreseeable difficulty for the State to meet costs not previously assessed.

Structural Challenges

The first structural challenge concerned the human resources and economies of scale that needed to be achieved as units and functions were streamlined into a single organisation, avoiding duplication. As a result of two hierarchical structures merging into a single structure, many officers found themselves without command responsibilities. The merger affected the employment of nearly three hundred officers. Some were placed at the disposal of the General Directorate of the Republican Police while others remained without operational assignments. To improve the situation of these officers and in order to avoid an excessive number of idle officers, a temporary solution was found by deploying several of them to peacekeeping operations under the umbrella of multilateral organisations.

On the positive side, the merger has improved security coverage by rationalising the distribution of security forces throughout the country. The density of the security network in Benin was insufficient by international standards, particularly in the border areas and in the north of the country where the risk of religious radicalisation is greater. Localities that used to have both a police station and gendarmerie barracks are now under the jurisdiction of a single police station, thus avoiding conflicts between bodies, ambiguity of responsibilities and wasted resources. The financial savings generated as a result of the merger have made it possible to set up units in localities where there



was no police presence. In spite of the police-population ratio remaining unchanged, the security service has come closer to the population with nearly 85% of the territory being covered, compared to 55% before the merger.

Functional Challenges

The aim of the merger is to have an integrated internal security force, with a hybrid functioning system, retaining some aspects particular to the gendarmerie, such as military police whilst operating both in cities and isolated rural areas. A complete functional harmonisation will be a long-term process due to the deep divergences between the two institutions. For example, the gendarmerie was organised with officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers, whereas the national police had a four-corps structure of peacekeepers, peace officers, inspectors and commissioners. The gendarmes were subject to availability requirements as per the military regime, while the police benefited from a human resources management system, closer to the rest of the civil service administrations. The Chain of Command among the gendarmes was inspired by the military system, which uses a staff-type structure consisting of functional offices (B1 to B9), whereas the command structure of the national police was a mixture of administrative and paramilitary aspects with technical directorates, central directorates, etc. As a result, many challenges arose when the staff of the two former institutions were transferred and reclassified into the new corps and ranks. A key opportunity and enabler for the merger was the previous internal police reform process which adopted a two-corps organisation (non-commissioned officers and officers), which facilitated the transfer and reclassification for the merger.

On the operational level, gendarmes and police officers do not have the same approach for conducting their work. For example, the use of warning shots for law enforcement was not authorised for police officers, whereas gendarmes were allowed to revert to this measure. In May 2019, violent clashes in Cotonou pitted demonstrators against the republican police and the army, who were accused of firing live ammunition. This incident illustrates operational difficulties for the police that remain to be addressed.

Whilst the police has performed its duties in urban areas, the gendarmerie has been perceived as an institution representing the State in the countryside. In addition, public space, public order and safety are concepts with different meanings and interpretations in rural and urban areas. For example, the function of local intelligence gathering occupies an important place in the police function and is highly organised, whereas the gendarmerie engages in terrain surveillance and practices mobility of units for operational defence of the territory.

Beyond these initial differences, a major challenge is to bring together very different institutional cultures and individual perceptions of their role in Beninese society. The personnel of the two



institutions did not have the same codes, nor the same social representations of the service they render to the population. The gendarmerie emphasized its republican character as the protector of State institutions, while the police demanded greater proximity to the population, to whom it provided a public service of security and protection of citizens' rights.

Conclusion and Way Forward

The medium and long-term success of the merger process requires the establishment of a rigorous monitoring and evaluation system. The creation of a single internal security organisation should in theory strengthen its effectiveness by allowing pooling means and resources and covering more localities. It is nevertheless crucial to be able to monitor the merger and its long-term effects. Clear benchmarks for performance have yet to be established. Without a roadmap it is unlikely that there will be any tracking to evaluate the effectiveness of the new institution.

After the launch of the eighteen security sector reform projects included in the GAP, the decision was taken in 2019 to draft a National Security Strategy (NSS), integrating the vision of the Armed Forces General Staff and the General Directorate of the Republican Police. This initiative will have to consider key cross-cutting themes, such as the prevention of violent extremism, democratic control of the security sector, gender equality and human rights. If those topics are not mainstreamed in a sensible and sustainable manner, the risk will be that they will be subject to divergent interpretations and left to the discretion of officials at various levels.

The political vigour with which behavioural changes have been imposed on police personnel, particularly in terms of reducing harassment and petty corruption, has led to a perceived improvement in the security situation for the population on the country's main routes and in major cities. The question now arises as to the extension, viability and sustainability of the reform process, which depends largely on the State's ability to finance it and on the combined support of Benin's citizens and police officers.

Security reform processes must be backed by social and economic development programmes. The National Security Strategy currently being drawn up should fill the gaps by bringing clarity and coherence to the entire SSR process.

