**Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations**

POLICY ANALYSIS

# Towards a more sustainable supply and use of evidence in agricultural policy in Benin

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## Evidence-informed policy is a systemic process

The supply and use of evidence is critical to inform effective and efficient agricultural transformation policies, especially in the context of scare resources that characterizes African economies. Evidence-informed policymaking is not a linear process, but instead, a system where dozens of public and private organizations interact to produce, use and broker evidence, often combining these three roles.

Yet, there is limited knowledge on how to map out and analyse such systems, even though it is crucial to fostering their emergence and the later uptake of evidence in policymaking, and sustainability. An ecosystemic approach, drawing on ecological science and social network analysis, can be used to understand evidence-policy systems and identify key entry points for strengthening them.

The FAO Monitoring and Analysing Food and Agricultural Policies (MAFAP) programme filled this gap by developing and testing, in Benin a framework to map agricultural evidence-policy systems and understand their sustainability.

## The Benin evidence-policy ecosystem

The Beninese institutions and incentives system is supportive of the production and use of evidence in agricultural policy. From the "Vision Bénin-2025 Alafia" developed in 2000 to the current National Development Plan (2018–2025), Benin has established implicit rules for evidence use in policy by adopting concepts such as efficient use of resources, and management for development results as fundamental governance principles. There are strong agricultural research institutes, universities and units within the Ministry of Agriculture and the Office of the President that are mandated with the supply and use of agricultural evidence. Since 2008, civil society organizations (CSOs) have been highly involved in agricultural policymaking, increasing government accountability, and pressuring it to use evidence in support of policy decisions. The new government, in 2016, gave high priority to agricultural research and funding
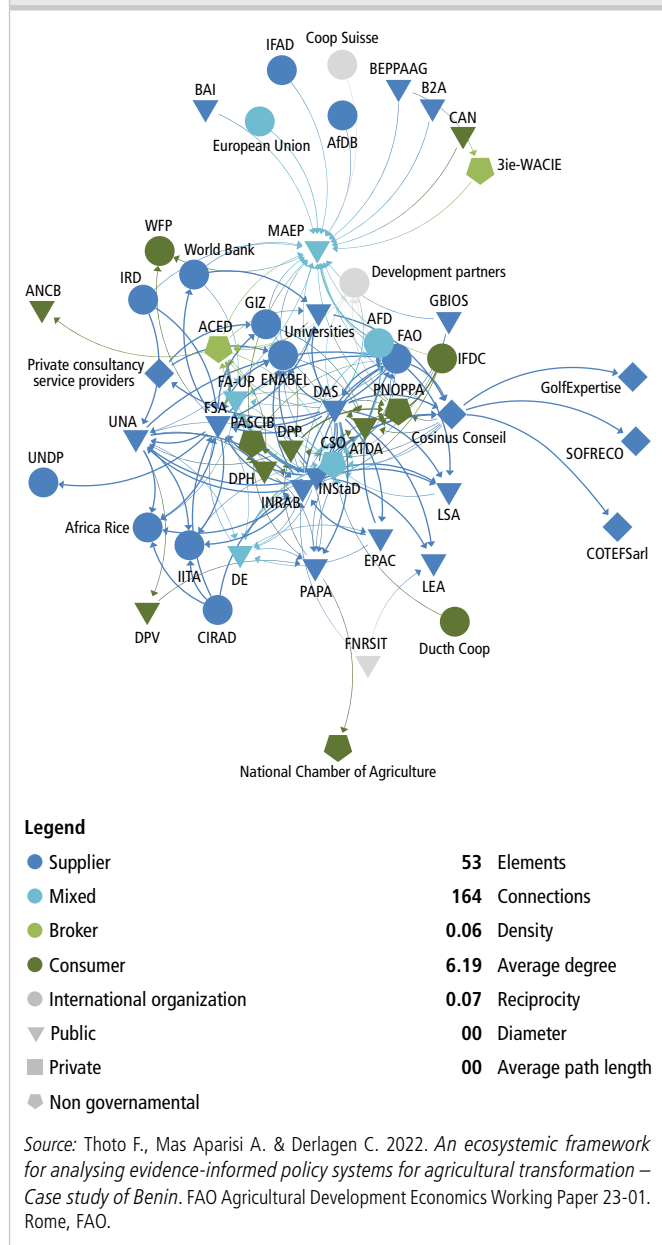
## KEY MESSAGES

▸ Evidence-informed policy for agriculture does not follow a linear flow between researchers and policymakers. In Benin, rather, it involves an ecosystem of several dozen organizations sharing evidence for agricultural transformation.

▸ This ecosystem is sustained by a high diversity of organizations, strong incentives, institutions and funding for evidence-informed policymaking.

▸ Key weaknesses are the dependence on donor funding, lack of broker organizations and low capabilities to produce data.

to research went from an average FCFA 2 billion per year (2012–2016) to FCFA 13 billion in 2017.

The ecosystem is vibrant with at least 48 major organizations identified that supply, broker, or demand agricultural policy evidence (Figure 1). Key organizations include the Office of the President, the Department of Planning and technical departments of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, the National Institute for Agricultural Research (INRAB), the Department of Agricultural Statistics (DAS), the National Institute of Statistics and Demography (INStaD), universities, international research organizations, private consultancy service providers, CSOs and development partners.

However, there are strong silos within the network, the 48 organizations registering 164 connections, which means a network density of 0.06. Organizations do not leverage all possible connections that could help circulate evidence, which is further hindered by the lack of brokering organizations in the network. Brokering organizations support research organizations in making evidence more accessible, and they also help governments understand and use evidence, for instance through online platforms and dissemination events.

FIGURE 1. Evidence policy ecosystem in the agricultural sector in Benin

**Legend**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ● Supplier | **53** | Elements |
| ● Mixed | **164** | Connections |
| ● Broker | **0.06** | Density |
| ● Consumer | **6.19** | Average degree |
| ● International organization | **0.07** | Reciprocity |
| ▼ Public | **00** | Diameter |
| ■ Private | **00** | Average path length |
| ◗ Non governmental | | |

The average reported contribution to the supplier, consumer and brokering roles was 55 percent, 37 percent, and 7 percent, respectively. A notable exception is Actions pour l'Environnement et le Développement Durable (ACED), a think-and-do-tank that supports evidence use exclusively in the agricultural sector through brokering and ecosystem building activities.

## Signs of sustainability but over-reliance on external funding and limited data

Overall, the Benin policy-evidence ecosystem shows signs of sustainability, with a conducive and robust institutional framework that incentivizes producing and using evidence. These formal rules and regulations are translating into a growing practice of evidence-informed policymaking, mainly pushed by the government, with CSOs holding it accountable.

However, the system's overdependence on funding from development partners is a point of concern that may jeopardize its resilience. The CSOs and agricultural research organizations are very dependent on this funding, which threatens both supply and brokerage dimensions of the ecosystem, should it diminish.

Another major weakness is the disconnect between data demand and production in the ecosystem. Over 65 percent of respondents in the ecosystem highlighted data as their preferred source of evidence, whereas only 17 percent indicated they prioritized data production. Much of it is underpinned by two institutions, the National Institute of Statistics and Demography and the Department of Agricultural Statistics of the Ministry of Agriculture, which both report a serious lack of financial and human resources.

## Aligning incentives and institutions for research, data and brokerage efficiency

To increase the performance of Benin's agricultural evidence-policy ecosystem, it is recommended that the government, donors, and policy stakeholders take the following actions:

▲ **Develop and implement a strategic vision for agricultural research.** Through this strategy, increase funding for agricultural research, and create an incentive framework for researchers to produce policy-relevant evidence – for instance through remuneration related to performance in that domain.

▲ **Strengthen the agricultural data system.** Fund and encourage systematic and harmonized agricultural data collection mechanisms. This involves reinforcing the Department of Agricultural Statistics and making data and research more open, accessible, and intelligible to all policy stakeholders, including at the decentralized level.

▲ **Institutionalize evidence use.** Review and reinforce existing institutional rules for evidence use, support the emergence of think tanks that can conduct socioeconomic and policy-related research over pure agronomic research, and support stakeholders that can play a helpdesk role in increasing access to and use of evidence.