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The rise of civil society in Africa: A comparative analysis of Benin and Togo

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ABSTRACT: Civil society organizations are important players on the international stage, and specifically in sub-Saharan African countries. While the place they occupy in the public arena and the influence they exert on political decisions seem to be accepted today, this has not always been the case. Their emergence is the result of a historical process that needs to be contextualized to better understand the role they play today. This article proposes a socio-historical study of this emergence, using two West African countries, Benin and Togo, as a framework for analysis. The analyses are based on a documentary review with data from archival documents, supplemented by a mobilization of scientific literature. A comparison of the emergence of civil society organizations in Benin and Togo illustrates that, despite similarities, from the 1990s onwards these two countries underwent differentiated processes. The success of the democratic transition in Benin was an important factor; whereas in Togo, the socio-political crisis slowed the rise of civil society for almost two decades (1990–2005).

KEYWORDS: Civil society, Benin, Togo, Non-Governmental Organizations, Development.

1 INTRODUCTION

Civil society in general, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in particular, now play a central role in international public decision-making. Although various forms of citizen-based social organization have left their mark on contemporary history, civil society organizations (CSOs) in their current configurations have not always been at the forefront of the world stage. In 1972, only 250 NGOs were present at the first UN World Summit on the Environment in Stockholm; four decades later, at the Rio Summit in 2012, over ten thousand CSO representatives were accredited [1].

In sub-Saharan Africa, the involvement of civil society organizations (CSOs) in decision-making processes now seems to have become a must in development activities, especially when involving foreign partnerships. African CSOs are present in almost every field, although they have been more vocal in recent years in areas such as the fight to protect democratic gains [2], [3], good governance [4], but also in the negotiation process for international agreements [5], [6], conflict resolution [7], [8], corruption [9], or the environment. Despite some reluctance on the part of governments [10], the emergence of CSOs in Africa is very real and has followed a historical process [11]. Indeed, even if analyses must be placed within an international historical framework, the rise of CSOs in Africa must be understood in the context of the countries concerned. To better understand the place of African civil society in the field of development today, it is therefore important to look back at the process of its emergence.

Like many other African countries, Benin and Togo saw the re-emergence of their civil societies in the late 1980s, against a favorable international backdrop. However, despite their geographical proximity, their particular national contexts led to different paths being taken at different times. Benin's relatively successful democratic transition and the ensuing international financial support created a favorable environment for CSOs in the country. In contrast, Togo's laborious democratic process and the suspension of international aid for years slowed the rise of CSOs until the early 2000s. These two countries thus provide an interesting framework for comparison, illustrating the importance of taking local contexts into account when analyzing socio-historical processes on the African continent.

In the following paragraphs, this article will look at the emergence of CSOs in Benin and Togo, taking the year 2000 as a benchmark. A particular focus will be on the socio-political and ideological environment, and on the major orientations in

international development. Prior to the 2000s, the analysis will focus on four periods: the post-World War II era, followed by 1960–1980, 1980–1990 and 1990–2000. The second part focuses on the years 2000 to 2005. In each period, we will first set the scene at international level, before focusing the analysis of the context of the two countries of interest to us, Benin and Togo.

It is important to specify a more or less clear outline of what we mean by "civil society" in this study, without, however, claiming to provide an in-depth review of this concept in just a few lines. Indeed, the literature on the subject is too abundant to be covered exhaustively within the limits of this section. John Keane [12] presents an excellent historical synthesis of the concept's founding literature, including Hobbes, Hegel, Tocqueville, Marx and Gramsci. The most consensual definition that can be drawn from the literature on civil society is that it constitutes that public space between the state and the individual [13], [14]. Other authors go further, pointing out that civil society differs from a simple "mass society" in that its activities take on a collective, organized form, with individuals and groups connected to each other [15]. The key point is that civil society exists independently of and outside the realm of the state. Drawing on some of the seminal writing on the subject, Bratton [16] distinguishes three dimensions of civil society: the material dimension in the Marxist tradition, the organizational dimension in the Tocquevillian tradition, and the ideological dimension in Gramsci's approach [17]. In terms of content, civil society is highly heterogeneous, whether in terms of size (from small local associations to national or international organizations), fields of interest (cultural, social, political, religious, etc.), or aims (profit-making or not) [15]. Civil society in sub-Saharan Africa is an heir to this initially Western vision. It fits into this general definition, albeit with some historical particularities. For the purposes of this study, we have focused on civil society organizations directly involved in development operations.

Beyond a historical review of the rise of CSOs in Africa, this article seeks to illustrate how the place occupied by CSOs in the landscape of these countries has been built up over the years with external and internal influences. The question of the dependence of African CSOs is also addressed, as well as their capacity for autonomy in the face of external financial and internal political influences. This socio-historical analysis is based on a documentary review of newspaper articles and national archives collected from various public administrations in both countries. The analysis also draws on the scientific literature on the two countries over the last three decades.

2 BEFORE 2000: THE GRADUAL EMERGENCE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN BENIN AND TOGO

The emergence of civil society as we know it today began in the 1990s. However, we believe it is important to go back to the post-World War II era (1945–1960) and the 1960s to better understand the national contexts that led to the surge of development NGOs over the last two decades.

2.1 POST-WORLD WAR II AND ANTI-COLONIAL PROTESTS

While most of the African continent was still colonized, the post-World War II decade was marked by a rise in citizen participation in the colonies and a paradigm shift in international development discourse. Indeed, the 2nd World War had a major impact on social and administrative dynamics in colonized African countries. On the one hand, faced with the rise of anti-colonial demands, colonial governments became more open to offering certain social services. During this period, a space was created for the emergence of a number of indigenous solidarity organizations. Attitudes towards these organizations ranged from laissez-faire to antagonistic, depending on the colonial zone [18]. It should be noted that the first modern NGOs in Africa emerged at this time in the form of ethnic welfare groups, separatist churches and professional associations, which spearheaded the early aspirations of the African elite. Some of these organizations later took on a more explicit political role in anti-colonial efforts [19].

2.2 1960–1980: STATE INTERVENTIONISM AND WEAK CIVIL SOCIETY

In 1961, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution to proclaim the 1960s to be the "development decade," with economic growth as the main indicator of development. While the 1960s were dominated by modernization theories influenced by Talcott Parsons's "systems approach" and Rostow's "five stages of growth," there was also a consensus at the time around Keynesian economic theory, which saw the state as the prime engine and actor of national development. It was thus understood that so-called "traditional" societies would have to overcome their obstacles (cultural or structural) to transform themselves into "modern" societies in the image of Western countries. Thus, for the newly independent countries of Africa, whatever their national ideologies, development was seen as a process rooted in the prospects of economic catch-up and a strong state inherited from colonization. In the euphoria of independence, the new leaders aspired, on the one hand, to establish an integral state system that would bring these multi-ethnic, multilingual and multi-religious societies together in

large entities [20]. Despite their differences, most of the development policies implemented on the continent were centralist [21], [22], with a strong state presence at the helm; the examples of Benin and Togo bear witness to this.

On October 26, 1972, following a coup d'état, Mathieu Kérékou became President of Benin [23]. Through a variety of mechanisms succeeded in establishing a more stable and uncontested power, which did not end until 1991. At the end of 1974, he radicalized the country by institutionalizing a revolutionary regime and adopting Marxism-Leninism as its official ideology [23]. In 1975, Kérékou created the "Parti de la Révolution Populaire du Bénin" (People's Revolution Party of Benin, PRPB). The 1977 constitution stipulates that:

> *"In the People's Republic of Benin, the path to development is socialism. Its philosophical foundation is Marxism-Leninism, which must be applied vividly and creatively to Benin's realities. All activities of national social life in the People's Republic of Benin are organized along these lines under the leadership of the Party of the People's Revolution of Benin, the vanguard detachment of the exploited and oppressed masses, the leading nucleus of the entire Benin people and its revolution." [24]*

From then on, the regime discouraged any organization independent of the ruling party.

In Togo, Gnassingbé Eyadema took the reins of power on January 13, 1967. Like neighboring Benin, Togo under Eyadema quickly slipped into a socio-political environment hostile to the creation of autonomous associations. To consolidate his power, Eyadema brought together all the country's components in a single party, the "Rassemblement du peuple togolais" (Rally of the Togolese People, RPT). The country adopted a new constitution in 1979, institutionalizing the one-party political system. That constitution states that:

> *"The Togolese institutional system is based on the single-party principle embodied by the Rally of the Togolese People. All political activities, including those contributing to the expression of suffrage, are carried out exclusively within the Rally of the Togolese People [...] The Rally of the Togolese People guides the general policy of the country [...] " (Article 10) [25].*

This marked the end of a civil society that had been very active during the independence years.

In both Benin and Togo, the centrality of the state was reinforced by various politico-economic mechanisms integrated into development strategies, through vertical planning. An archive from the Togolese government attests to this:

> *"In Togo, as in the vast majority of African countries, development cannot be spontaneous. It must be conceived, directed and controlled by the State." (p. 13) [26]*

Backed by the international context of the time, and driven by the lure of undivided power or a messianic vision of development, the leaders of both countries showed little openness to subversive organizing. Political parties, popular associations, trade unions and other groups that had been part of the independence movement were now seen as obstacles to development [27]. Many indigenous solidarity organizations created during decolonization were integrated into large groups (youth, women, students, workers) under the leadership of the unified ruling party. In Benin, this system combined centralization and decentralization. On the one hand, mass organizations were the only ones officially empowered to speak on behalf of the various components of the population. For example, the sole national federation of workers' unions in Benin (*union nationale des syndicats des travailleurs du Bénin, UNSTB*) spoke on behalf of all Benin's workers. On the other hand, even in the remotest villages, experimental socialist agricultural cooperatives (*Coopératives agricoles expérimentales de type socialiste, CAETS*) and local revolutionary committees (*Comités révolutionnaires locaux, CRL*) were created. In this multi-level structure, chosen representatives on the committees were empowered to speak on behalf of their villages, municipalities or regions, depending on the level their committee occupied in the pecking order. It was a highly hierarchical, authoritarian and bureaucratic scheme that left little room for independent initiatives [23]. Similarly, in Togo, there were committees of the Togolese People's Rally (RPT) everywhere. For example, young people were grouped together in the Youth for the Rally of the Togolese People (*Jeunesse pour le rassemblement du peuple togolais, JRPT*), workers in the National Confederation of Togolese Workers (*Confédération nationale des travailleurs du Togo, CNTT*), and all traditional chiefs in the National Union of Traditional Chiefs of Togo (*Union nationale des chefs traditionnels du Togo, UNCTT*); all these groupings being referred to as "marching arms" of the RPT [28], [29].

So, generally speaking, in both countries, the more or less independent NGOs that existed at the time were representatives of foreign organizations based in Europe or North America. In Togo, the only organizations that were not directly linked to the central government were denominational and charitable ones. For example, Togolese Association of Volunteers at Work (*Association togolaise des volontaires au travail, ASTOVOT*), created in 1957, had to return under the auspices of the Evangelical Church and transform itself into the Togolese Association of Christian Volunteers at Work (Association togolaise des volontaires chrétiens au travail (*Association togolaise des volontaires chrétiens au travail, ASTOVOCT*) in order to continue to exist. Other

examples of enduring organizations include the Togolese Association for Family Welfare (*Association Togolaise pour le Bien-Être Familial, ATBEF*), and the Togolese Red Cross. The diversity and independence of local organizations gradually disappeared, and those that survived saw their role reduced to that of legitimizing state authority. The few independent local organizations were small, informal event-based groups (births, weddings, funerals, etc.).

2.3 1980–1990: Failure of the State as the sole driving force behind development, and the rise of the voluntary sector

2.3.1 Structural adjustment and loss of state legitimacy

From the 1980s onwards, a number of international factors began to call into question the role of the State in the nation's socio-economic affairs. Firstly, the end of the 1970s marked the epilogue in the industrialized world of the "thirty glorious years" of economic prosperity that followed the 2nd World War. Secondly, the rise of policies inspired by neo-liberalism in industrialized countries led to a progressive rejection of Keynesian-inspired state interventionism. What's more, post-independence development programs in Africa, financed by substantial loans, failed, leaving these countries over-indebted.

Benin and Togo were no exception. As early as 1983, the Togolese government put an end to its five-year plans.

> *"The fourth Economic and Social Development Plan (1981–1985), [...] did not achieve the objectives set by the 1965 planner in view of the economic take-off scheduled for 1985. [...] The effects of the crisis have been felt all the more as the national economy is heavily dependent on export earnings from a few key products: phosphate, cocoa, coffee and cotton" [30].*

Similarly, in Benin, all economic indicators were in the red as of 1985–1986. The State had to cope with falling revenues, coupled with rising operating expenses. Several authors have also pointed to the negative consequences that inconsistent planning choices and endemic corruption had on the national economy. In addition, debt servicing became unsustainable, with the government running out of capital [31].

Unable to repay their debts and to correct their macroeconomic imbalances, these countries had no other recourse than to turn to international institutions, notably the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB). The IMF and WB conditioned their aid to countries in difficulty on a set of plans grouped together under the now famous name of "Structural Adjustment Programs" (SAPs). Among other conditions, indebted countries were ordered to reduce the role of the state to a minimum, through privatization of public enterprises, deregulation of the economy, cuts in public-sector employment and wages, and a drastic reduction in public investment. As a result, these countries were forced to eliminate many of the social programs that had led to major improvements in the living conditions of African populations, notably in terms of life expectancy and literacy rates [32].

Between 1983 and 1990, Togo signed four SAPs with the Bretton Woods institutions. As for Benin, notwithstanding the crisis, it delayed its recourse to the IMF and WB; but this became unavoidable in 1988. A report by the African Development Bank (ADB) sums up the situation in Benin at the time.

> *Despite the government's attempts at recovery in 1982-83 and 1986-87, the difficulties of the Benin economy were further exacerbated. [...] The financial situation of public enterprises deteriorated further, and the three public banks (CNCA, BBD and BCB) declared bankruptcy (p. 1) [33].*

Against a backdrop of social discontent, the Benin government, on the verge of bankruptcy, signed up to its first structural adjustment program (SAP I) in 1989. Between 1989 and 1999, three successive SAPs were signed by successive governments. Benin and Togo underwent the "shock therapy" of SAPs and financial stabilization programs. Following the SAPs, the subsequent disengagement of the two states from several sectors led to an employment crisis. While new Togolese graduates were guaranteed a job in the civil service, from 1983 onwards, access to the civil service became subject to competitive examination, staff numbers were reduced and retirees not replaced [34]. In its 1987 report on structural adjustment, the Togolese government noted among the most obvious drawbacks of SAPs: "the increase in unemployment, particularly noticeable at graduate level, [with] the modern private sector recruiting little and the public sector having blocked recruitment" (p. 7) [35]. Between 1991 and 1994, in addition to freezing recruitment, the Benin government cut over 4,000 civil service positions [36].

With the implementation of these drastic austerity plans, the Benin and the Togolese states gradually lost their legitimacy, which was largely based on their patronage networks, and thus on their ability to redistribute economic rent. As Banegas [37] notes, "the whole system that ensured the social peace and political stability of the regime was thus called into question" (p. 80). All this undermined the legitimacy of the regimes and weakened the authority of political leaders. In Benin, Kérékou no

longer enjoyed unanimous support, even within his own army. As proof, he escaped six coup attempts between March and October 1988. As early as 1985, students had gone on strike following the government's decision to end the automatic recruitment of new graduates into the civil service. In a gloomy economic climate, shopkeepers, notably the women of UNACOBE, joined the discontent of students and civil servants who had gone for several months without pay from 1988 to 1989. These groups were the driving force behind the protests against the austerity programs, which soon turned into anti-Kérékou protests. Faced with the popular uprising and its inability to respond to the various demands, the regime relented in 1990 and agreed to organize a national conference bringing together all Benin's socio-political and economic stakeholders.

In Togo, too, Eyadema's rule was undergoing an internal crisis. Between the plots against the regime and the economic crisis, protests became increasingly frequent, especially among students and workers. Women also took an active part in the protests, notably the women shopkeepers of Lomé. New associations of shopkeepers were created, for example, the Women's Alliance for Democracy in Togo ("*Alliance des femmes pour la démocratie au Togo*") and the Front of Associations of Shopkeepers' Women for Renewal *("Front des associations des femmes commerçantes pour le renouveau"*). The point of no return was reached on October 5, 1990, when thousands of Togolese took to the streets to demand greater freedom. After weeks of negotiation and internal and external pressure, on March 18, 1991, President Eyadema authorized a multi-party system and agreed to hold a national conference in July 1991.

2.3.2 THE EMERGING ASSOCIATIVE SECTOR

With the withdrawal of the welfare state and the gradual disappearance of social, health and education services, and against a backdrop of budgetary austerity, an informal, community-based sector gradually took shape. The diminishing capacity of the governments of Benin and Togo to provide for the well-being of their populations prompted citizens to organize outside the state to take their destiny into their own hands [38]. This contributed to the emergence of numerous grassroots initiatives in the form of local associations and cooperatives in the towns and villages of both countries. Faced with wage cuts and the elimination of social services, trade unions became more active. With the end of state assistance, village communities began to organize themselves again. Faced with male unemployment, women did not remain passive, organizing themselves into self-help groups and tontines. With the rise of poverty, feminist activists from both academia and civil society rallied to bring gender issues to the forefront, specifically in the design of development programs. By the 1980s, activists were no longer calling for the integration of women into development as previously advocated, but for structural change that would affect gender relations in all spheres of society [39]. To conclude this decade, it should be noted that, in general, although support from Western organizations had increased, local initiatives were far from being able to fill the void left by the withdrawal of the state. What's more, local solidarity organizations received little or no support from their governments.

2.4 1990–2000: THE REVIVAL OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN CONTRASTING CONTEXTS

2.4.1 NATIONAL CONFERENCES AND DIFFERENTIATED POLITICAL TRANSITIONS

The end of the Cold War, marked by the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989) and the implosion of the USSR (1991), enabled the major powers to cease their unconditional support for certain authoritarian regimes in Africa. The La Baule speech delivered by French President François Mitterrand in June 1990 was a notable illustration of this change of tone in international relations, particularly Franco-African relations. After the "economic conditionalities" of the 1980s came the "democratic conditionalities" of the 1990s [15], requiring countries seeking donor support to respect certain principles of political liberalization.

These international demands, in addition to internal socio-economic and political crises, prompted Kérékou in Benin and subsequently Eyadema in Togo to agree to the organization of national conferences, the aim of which was to bring together all the socio-political and economic components in order to decide on new political orientations. The Beninese National Conference lasted three days (February 19–28, 1990) and was an important turning point in political and social liberalization. In the wake of the Conference, numerous associations were formed to represent various social groups in the democratic process. One example is the Association of Women Jurists of Benin (AFJB), founded in January 1990. In December 1990, the people of Benin adopted a new constitution that clearly spelled out freedom of association.

> *"The State recognizes and guarantees, under the conditions laid down by law, freedom of movement, freedom of association, assembly, processions and demonstrations." (Article 25)*

As in Benin, the National Conference in Togo (July-August 1991) had a liberating effect in terms of opportunities to create associations. This liberalization was endorsed by a new Togolese constitution adopted in October 1992, in which freedom of association is recognized:

"The State recognizes and guarantees, under the conditions laid down by law, the exercise of the freedoms of association, assembly and peaceful demonstrations without instruments of violence." (Article 30)

2.4.2 THE EMERGENCE OF INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY

From the 1990s onwards, international institutions could no longer remain aloof from the criticism leveled at SAPs. Many voices, both inside and outside these institutions, criticized the failure and negative effects of SAPs, in particular the rise in unemployment and the accentuation of inequalities in the countries concerned [32], [34]. In response to these criticisms, international institutions introduced a "social dimension" to SAPs, encouraging not a return of the state to the social sphere, but rather its circumvention through funding that went directly to non-state organizations.

In addition to the economic liberalization of the 1980s, political liberalization in the 1990s accentuated the "affirmation of the individual citizen" [40]. The vacuum created by the withdrawal of the state thus opened the way for the growth of independent development organizations in Benin, and even in Togo, despite the failure of its democratic transition. In this international and national context, the field of development became a more opportune space for the emergence of a local civil society. In order to solve the social problems resulting from SAPs, huge funds were released by international institutions. As states had withdrawn from the provision of most social services, it was civil society, and specifically NGOs, that benefited [27]. In 1998, almost half of all projects approved by the World Bank involved NGOs, compared with just 6% in 1973 [41]. The involvement of international NGOs in Africa boomed, accompanied by an explosion in the number of local NGOs. In just a few years, the number of registered organizations multiplied exponentially. The explosion of NGOs in Africa was not confined to numbers alone, but also extended to the range of their fields of interest. As a result, there was a greater diversification of espoused causes, most of which were inspired by the availability of financial manna. New organizations are now active in the fight against AIDS, education, the environment, democracy, the fight against torture, the emancipation of women, and an infinite number of other causes.

During this decade, the influence of NGOs grew at the expense of that of the state, and with the support of interests that were sometimes opposed. They included people from diverse backgrounds, mainly former civil servants and unemployed graduates who took advantage of the opportunities offered by increased funding for civil society [19]. Thus, with the gradual promotion of more decentralized development, social groups that had previously occupied a position of "aid recipients" " (women, young people, the elderly, the disabled, the unemployed, the marginalized, ethnic minorities) gained importance, as interlocutors, on the cooperation scene" [42]. Although it touches on practices that are far from new, "participatory development" thus became the new motto in the development configuration. African states lost control over a large proportion of aid flows between North and South, to the benefit of new types of intermediaries.

2.4.3 TOGO AND BENIN: CONTRASTING PATHS

Despite this favorable international context for CSOs in general and development NGOs in particular, Togo's internal socio-political environment prevented Togolese organizations from benefiting as much as their Benin counterparts. Indeed, unlike the success of Benin's National Conference, which led to a successful democratic transition, the failure of Togo's conference, which lasted almost two months, was the prelude to a dark period in the country's history. The analysis here will not dwell on the causes of the success or failure of these national conferences; other authors have already done so. Rather, our aim is to highlight how the differentiated political context that follows has influenced the activities of local development organizations in both countries.

After the National Conference in Benin, the cohabitation between Nicéphore Soglo, one of the opposition leaders who became Prime Minister, and President Kérékou went relatively smoothly until the presidential elections in April 1991. Successful changeovers at the helm of the country between Kérékou and Soglo in 1991, and then between Soglo and Kérékou in 1996, maintained a positive socio-political climate conducive to the emergence of a vibrant civil society. In Togo, on the other hand, political transition failed, and Eyadema remained in power, declaring himself the winner of the 1993 and 1998 presidential elections. Following popular protests and army interventions, the country went through an unprecedented period of violence, creating an environment not conducive to a dynamic civil society. The international community expressed serious concerns about the political repression and fraud that marked Togo's various elections, and reduced its cooperation and hence its development aid from 1992 onwards [43]. In 1993, the European Union, Togo's main development partner, interrupted its cooperation until 2007, citing a "democratic deficit". Most other partners followed suit. As a result, official development assistance fell sharply from $258 million in 1990 to $46 million in 2001 (ocde.org). Over the same period, Benin received substantial support from its international partners. The US government, for example, canceled all Benin's debt to the United States [44]. When we look at the evolution of official development aid received by the two countries from 1990 to 2012, the

gap widened steadily over the years until 2007, when cooperation between Togo and its international partners resumed. Whereas the two countries were receiving almost similar amounts in 1990, the difference in the amount of aid was over 200 million dollars in 2001.

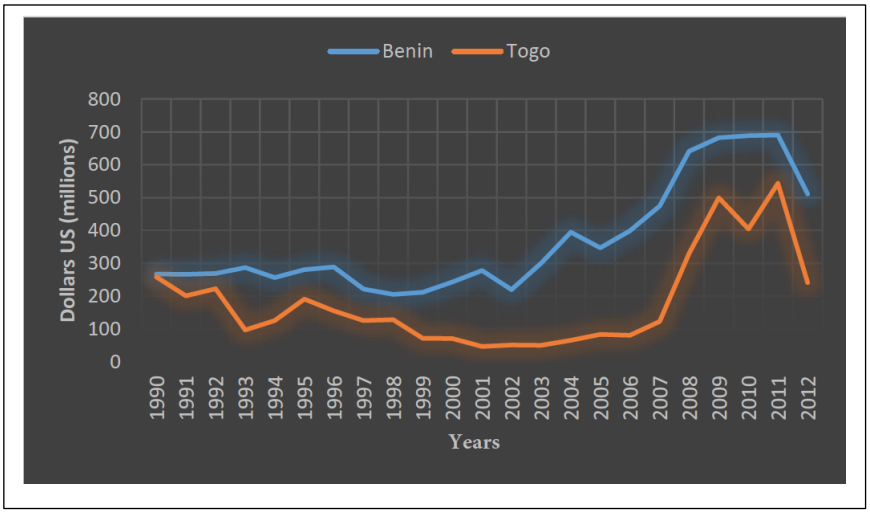

Fig. 1. Trends in official development assistance to Benin and Togo (1990–2012)

Although the suspension of cooperation with Togo began in 1993 and was reconfirmed by the EU in 1998, CSOs only felt the effects at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of 2000, when projects that had covered several years were no longer renewed.

3 POST-2000: INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF CSO PARTICIPATION

3.1 AN INTERNATIONAL CLIMATE INCREASINGLY FRIENDLY TOWARD CSOS

At the turn of the 2000s, international institutions, notably the WB and IMF, recognized the inadequacy of the "social dimensions" of SAPs and their inability to reduce the many social problems, especially in the privatized education and health sectors. What's more, "choices based on liberal dogma" came up against "indigenous logic," with the manipulation by governments and populations who did not always align themselves with the measures prescribed by the IMF [45]. As a result, international institutions, with the support of major donors, decided to reorient their structural adjustment strategies towards policies focused on the fight against poverty. The United Nations Millennium Summit in September 2000 endorsed this reorientation with the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals. This is underlined in point 17 of the report of the 65th UN General Assembly:

> *"We call on civil society—that is, non-governmental organizations, voluntary associations and foundations, the private sector and other relevant stakeholders at the local, national, regional and global levels—to increase its contribution to countries' development efforts and to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, and, as governments, we commit ourselves to involving these stakeholders in our action." (United Nations General Assembly, 2010).*

In order to be supported, the poorest countries are now required to set up national anti-poverty programs, with the involvement of their civil societies. These programs, presented in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), should be "the product of a consensus among local actors around development strategies" [13].

Apart from the Millennium Summit, in the late 1990s and early 2000s onwards, various international meetings and agreements helped to make the national environments of African countries more conducive to the activities of development NGOs. Without attempting to list them all, we'll just mention a few examples. Firstly, the ACP-EU Cotonou Agreement of June 2000 repeatedly stressed the importance of an "active and organized civil society":

> *"Participation: in addition to the State as the main partner, the partnership is open to ACP parliaments, local authorities of ACP1 States and various types of other actors, with a view to fostering the participation of all strata of society, the private sector and civil society organizations in political, economic and social life." (Article 2, p. 17 June 2000)*

The 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, signed by more than 135 countries and several international organizations, emphasizes "ownership of development" by all stakeholders:

> *"Partner countries commit to [...] ensure leadership in the coordination of aid at all levels and other resources allocated to development, in consultation with donors and encouraging the participation of civil society and the private sector." (Point 14, p. 4)*

Moreover, the Accra Action Plan in 2008 and the Busan Forum in 2011 confirmed the centrality of CSO involvement in development activities in the eyes of donors and signatory countries.

> *"We will strengthen our commitment to CSOs as truly independent actors in development, producing efforts that complement those of public authorities and the private sector. We have a common interest in ensuring that the potential contribution of CSOs to development is fully mobilized" (Accra Agenda for Action, 2005, point 20, p. 5).*

Within these various agreements, women's participation in the definition and implementation of policies was given a special place.

Thus, to the "good governance" of the 1990s was added the "co-governance" of the 2000s (Pirotte, 2007). As Atlani-Duault [46], so aptly reminds us, after the "myth of the State" of the 1970s, and the "myth of the State plus the market" of the 1980s, we are now in the "myth of the State, the market and civil society." This new international context imposed a constraint on the involvement of CSOs in countries wishing to benefit from development aid; a constraint which, at local level, provided an opportunity from the 2000s onwards to consolidate the influence of CSOs.

3.2 INTERNAL CONTEXTS IN BENIN AND TOGO

In Benin, in keeping with the well-oiled machinery of democracy, President Kérékou was succeeded by Yayi Boni in 2006, after two further terms as head of state. In Togo, after amending the constitution in 2002, President Eyadema retained power for a third consecutive term in the 2003 elections. In February 2005, after 38 years in power, President Eyadema Gnassingbé died. After a new period of political uncertainty and contestation, Eyadema was replaced by his son, the current President Faure Gnassingbé.

In terms of national development policies, based on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and on the recommendation of donors and international institutions, Benin adopted its first Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) for the period 2003–2005, followed by a Growth Strategy for Poverty Reduction (GSPR) for the period 2007–2009 and then for the period 2011–2015. As the current GPRS notes, civil society participation is central to the design of new policies.

> *"The present strategy (CPRS 2011–2015), which covers the five-year period 2011–2015, is the result of a broad participatory process that closely involved in the public administration, economic operators and civil society at every stage." (Republic of Benin, 2010, CPRS Benin, p. 13)*

After the death of Eyadema, Togo gradually re-engaged with the international community. With this new support from international institutions, the country adopted an interim PRSP in 2008, prior to the adoption of the full PRSP for the period 2009–2011, then for the period 2013–2017, the PRSP II known as the Strategy for Accelerated Growth and Employment Promotion. Among other things, it is mentioned in the document that:

> *"The government also attaches importance to promoting participatory development as a means of involving all development stakeholders in the management of public affairs. It is for this reason that civil society organizations are represented at all levels of the Institutional Mechanism for Coordination, Monitoring and Evaluation of Development Policies [...] 17." (République du Togo, 2013, SCAPE Togo, p.94)*

[1] African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP)

With these changes, civil society players were encouraged, at least officially and legally, to become involved in the design and implementation of national development, with particular focus on certain issues.

3.3 CIVIL SOCIETY PLAYERS AT THE HEART OF DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

Today, in most African countries, civil society—including its most visible component, NGOs—has been given the role of representing poor populations, and has become "an indispensable cog in the wheel of development policies" (Pirotte, 2007, p. 70). CSOs are supposed to be more attuned to the needs of populations, especially the poorest. This has given rise to a "new type of leader" outside the traditional circuits of power, who is legitimized by the main donors as capable of carrying out development activities with local populations. This actor claims to have a better knowledge and understanding of the needs of the populations he represents. In the "donors/beneficiary populations" scheme, CSOs have thus positioned themselves as links between two culturally, geographically and linguistically different worlds [48]. Actors in these organizations articulate the voices of the "voiceless" and convey their needs to donors and other decision makers within national and international institutions.

4 CONCLUSION

This article has presented a socio-historical analysis of the rise of civil society organizations in Benin and Togo. As this analysis shows, their emergence in Africa from the 1990s onwards is closely linked to international development injunctions. After taking formal shape in the 1990s, these organizations saw their position consolidated with the Millennium Development Goals in the 2000s. However, this emergence is not limited to this single factor. Indeed, the factors behind the rise of civil society players on the development scene in the region are as much political as economic and societal, and depend on both national and international dynamics. It is therefore important to note that, despite this common international history, there are national differences and the heterogeneity of local situations. Beyond the major international development policies, national particularities such as colonization, independence and differences in democratic processes have led to variations across the continent [19]. To understand these particularities, we need to take into account the socio-political and historical situations that have shaped associative and social life in each country. This is precisely what the present study has attempted to do, by focusing specifically on civil society actors working in the field of development in Benin and Togo. This historical review and the comparison between Benin and Togo illustrate that, despite the important place these organizations occupy in the African landscape, their emergence follows differentiated historical processes that it is important to contextualize.

With the explosion in their numbers, accompanied by an "Africanization" of the sector [49], CSOs have seen their influence grow enormously on the socio-political scene of the countries concerned. Driven not only by this financial support, but also by people's frustration with their governments and the democratic openings of recent decades, actors within African development organizations have become an important counterweight to African states, resulting in a reorganization of power relations in the region [50]. Despite criticism of their legitimacy [42], [51], [52], civil society organizations in Africa have become a force to be reckoned with by all development stakeholders. One of the questions that arises today concerns the capacity of these organizations to be autonomous from Western funding and ideological orientations.

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